

Corn bunting *Miliaria calandra*

STATUS

*Increasingly scarce, breeding passerine of lowland arable areas,
National red list (RSPB 1996),
UK Steering Group medium list*



WHAT IS THE CORN BUNTING ?

The corn bunting is a small, dumpy, grey/brown bird. One of the characteristic species of lowland arable farmland, corn buntings are one of the few British species largely dependent on cropped land. Their diet is of seeds and plant material and this is supplemented by insects during the breeding season.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

The UK distribution of the corn bunting is fragmented, with the bulk of the population found across southern and eastern England but with small outlying groups as far away as Cornwall, the outer Hebrides and north-east Scotland.

WHY IS THE CORN BUNTING OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Both the distribution and population of corn buntings have been decreasing since the beginning of the twentieth century, a trend that seems to have accelerated in recent years. There was a decrease in range of 32% between 1968 and 1991. A Farmland Bunting Survey by the British Trust for Ornithology in 1993 estimated a national population of 20,000 territories. The species remains common and widespread in Europe.

THE CORN BUNTING IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE LOCAL POPULATIONS OF THE CORN BUNTING?

The corn bunting is a scarce and localised resident with an estimated population of 120 – 150 'pairs'.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE CORN BUNTING IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The Durham Bird Club targeted this species in 1992 in a request for records of the species. The BTO Atlas showed a contraction in range to the east of the Plan area between 1968 and 1991.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The main stronghold for corn buntings in the Plan area is a belt from the Houghton-le-Spring area to the coastal strip bounded by Ryhope to the north and Hawthorn village to the south. Smaller concentrations are found around Whitburn and Sedgfield with scattered records from elsewhere. Recently there have been records from Hedleyhope and Waldrige Fells and at Sacriston and Lamesley. Any increase in range may be due to the presence of set-aside grasslands providing a winter food supply.

CORN BUNTING ARE AT RISK FROM:

Loss of winter food – the BTO winter corn bunting survey in 1992-1993 showed that winter stubble fields were the most important feeding habitat during the winter. The area of winter stubbles has greatly reduced in recent decades with the switch from spring sown to autumn sown crops.

Increased use of herbicides and pesticides – herbicides reduce the amount of available weed seed throughout the year, pesticides reduce the number of available insects, which is particularly important during the breeding season. Corn bunting chicks have a largely insectivorous diet for the first few weeks of life.

Early harvesting – corn buntings nest relatively late and the earlier harvesting dates achievable through autumn sowing may destroy nests and young.

CORN BUNTING BENEFITS FROM:

Use of set aside – both permanent and rotational.

Over wintered stubbles and other extensification schemes including under sown grass leys.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE CORN BUNTING:

<i>Arable land</i>	*
<i>Improved grassland</i>	*
<i>Hedgerows</i>	**

OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS RELEVANT TO THE CORN BUNTING:

<i>Brown hare</i>	**
<i>Grey partridge</i>	**
<i>Skylark</i>	**
<i>Linnet</i>	*
<i>Tree sparrow</i>	*
<i>Lapwing</i>	*
<i>Reed bunting</i>	**

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.

* indicates action plan produced in 2000.

THE CORN BUNTING AND THE LAW

The corn bunting is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

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TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CORN BUNTING IN THE DURHAM AREA:

DATE

Target 1 *Halt the decline in range and population of corn bunting.*

ONGOING

Target 2 *Restore corn bunting to its pre-1968 range.*

2010

CORN BUNTING ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek opportunities to extend the Arable Stewardship Scheme to the Plan area.	2002	MAFF, EN, RSPB, FWAG	1, 2
2. Seek opportunities to extend the Organic Aid Scheme.	2004	MAFF, EN, RSPB, FWAG	1, 2
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
3. Identify demonstration sites as examples of best practice.	2004	DBAP, FWAG, RSPB	1, 2
4. Promote provision of set aside and uncut grass margins.	2004	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
5. Promote retention of overwintered stubbles in species core Durham range.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
6. Seek opportunities to increase uptake of Countryside Stewardship and Organic Aid Scheme.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
7. Develop monitoring schemes as part of Lowland Farmland Bird Monitoring Scheme.	2004	DBC, RSPB, DBAP, BTO	1
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
8. Work through the Agriculture and Biodiversity Advisory Group to provide information on positive management for farmland birds.	ONGOING	FWAG, ABAG, DBAP	1, 2
9. Provide training and advice for agri-environment project officers.	2004	RSPB, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
10. Raise awareness of the decline in farmland birds and possible solutions.	ONGOING	DBAP, RSPB, DBC, CA	1, 2