

Spotted flycatcher *Muscicupa striata*

STATUS

Widely distributed summer visitor, declining nationally.
National Red List RSPB (1996),
UK Steering Group Report medium list (1995).

WHAT IS THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER ?

The spotted flycatcher could be described as a rather dull, brown bird with an unremarkable, thin, squeaky song. However, this would be to ignore its eye-catching aerial displays in the pursuit of invertebrate prey. Originally a bird of woodland edge the species has adapted to the opportunities provided by parkland and gardens.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

The spotted flycatcher is found throughout the UK although it is scarcer in the north and west and almost absent from the Northern and Western Isles. Whilst the range occupied by this species has remained much the same, the density of breeding birds has declined since the 1960s. 'The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland' estimated the breeding population to be about 120,000 territories, this has probably now declined to less than 100,000 pairs. The species is common and widespread across most of Europe, where populations have been fluctuating.

WHY IS THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Spotted flycatchers have been in long-term decline since the 1960's and it is believed that the population may have declined to less than 20% of what they were 30 years ago. It is one of our most rapidly declining song-bird species.

THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE POPULATIONS OF SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS?

Data from the BTO suggests a 62% decline in woodland populations and a 70% decline in farmland populations between 1968 and 1991.

Local populations of birds declined considerably during the 1990s. The species was lost from some established breeding areas (e.g. some parts of the lower Derwent Valley) during the latter part of that decade.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The local distribution of the spotted flycatcher is relatively well known and understood, courtesy of the mapping work of the Durham Bird Club. Local population studies by bird ringers and their associates during the 1980s and early 1990s, established data from

which the level of local declines could be recognised.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Spotted flycatchers are a common summer visitor and passage migrant throughout the Plan area. High concentrations of breeding birds occur in upper Teesdale and the dales to the south west, and in some parts of the Derwent valley. Populations occur in fairly good numbers in most of the rest of the North Pennine Dales and the coastal denes with smaller numbers in the lowlands and the extreme west of the area. Between 1968 and 1991 there was a small increase in distribution in the west and a small decrease in the south of Durham.

Some of the highest density populations can be found along the River Tees, upstream of Croft and as far west as Forest-in-Teesdale although it is not uncommon in other areas, despite recent declines.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Poor summer weather – breeding success appears to be adversely affected by cool wet summers, with larger clutch sizes occurring in years with more sunshine.

Drought in the Sahel region – major declines in breeding populations occurred in years when the rains failed in the Sahel region of Africa. It is not known why this should so adversely affect the species as spotted flycatchers only use this area on passage.

Loss of suitable nest sites – traditional nest sites were large trees in hedgerows, parks and woodland, the number of which has decreased significantly.

Use of insecticides – spotted flycatchers feed on invertebrates and is directly affected by inappropriate or over-use of insecticides.

SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS BENEFIT FROM:

Opportunities to maintain and enhance existing broad-leaved woodland with 'over-mature' trees.

The promotion of wildlife-friendly management techniques for hedgerows and gardens.

Opportunities to increase the area of new broadleaved woodland.

The provision of open-fronted nest boxes in gardens and other suitable habitats.

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IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER:

Broad-leaved woodland
Parks & Amenity grassland
Suburban and rural gardens

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OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER:

Bullfinch
Lemon slug
Ash black slug

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N.B ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.
 * indicates action plan produced in 2000

THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER AND THE LAW:

Like all wild bird species the spotted flycatcher is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS IN THE DURHAM AREA:

DATE

Target 1 *Maintain/ expand distribution and increase population of species in Plan area.*

ONGOING

Target 2 *Provide 500 artificial nest sites across the Plan area.*

2003

Target 3 *Encourage species into suitable new areas by the provision of artificial nest sites.*

2003

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION</u>			
1. In targeted areas for the species make available to the public and appropriate organisations suitable nest boxes.	2003	LAs, DBAP, NWL	1, 2, 3
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
2. Provide suitable nest boxes in all STW's across Plan area.	2003	DBC, NWL, DBAP, FWAG	2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
3. Monitor populations in nest boxes at a number of locations.	ONGOING	DBC, DDRG, DRG	1
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
4. Produce spotted flycatcher fact sheet to accompany 'Spot the Flycatcher' campaign.	2001	DBAP	1, 2, 3
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
5. Launch 'Spot the Flycatcher' campaign in one district of the Plan area.	2001	LAs, DBC, DBAP, Local specialists	1