

Nottinghamshire's Birds of Conservation Concern!

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Introduction

This list stems from the [Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Group's](#) (BAG) review of plants and animals whose status gives cause for concern in the Nottinghamshire Biodiversity Action Plan. Furthermore, in an attempt to raise the level of protection to habitats for birds, a panel of experts is developing a set of criteria from which Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) can be identified. The Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers (NBW) were invited to assist this 'SINC Panel' with both actions, and it rapidly became clear that an important first step was to highlight those birds whose status is a cause for concern to the county's conservationists (the 'Nottinghamshire Birds of Conservation Concern'). So, a group of NBW members spent the winter of 2003-4 attempting to identify those species that occur in the county on a more or less regular basis, and are of special concern, either nationally or locally. A starting point was the national Red and Amber Lists.

Species are 'red listed' if:

They are globally threatened.

Their UK populations have declined since 1800.

Their UK populations show a decline of more than 50% in numbers or range over the last 25 years.

'Amber listed' species are less threatened. To be included in this list, they must fit one of the following:

A moderate (25-49%) decline in UK breeding population or range over last 25 years.

Species with unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

Five-year mean of 1-300 breeding pairs in UK.

≥ 50% of UK breeding or non-breeding population occurs in 10 or fewer sites.

≥ 20% of European breeding population in UK.

≥ 20% of NW European (wildfowl), East Atlantic Flyway (waders) or European (others) non-breeding populations in UK.

Species to be included

There are thus several national criteria for red-listing birds. First, those that the [International Union for Nature Conservation](#) regard as globally threatened (e.g. Corncrake); we have none of these species in Nottinghamshire. Secondly, those that have shown a historical decline in abundance over the last 200 years (e.g. Bittern, Red-backed Shrike); again, we have none of these breeding in Nottinghamshire, though we included Hen Harrier and Bittern since these occur in winter. Thirdly, species that have shown a decline of more than 50% in either breeding numbers or breeding range in the last 25 years. These include Bittern, Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Nightjar, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Skylark, Song Thrush, Grasshopper Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Marsh Tit, Willow Tit, Starling, House

Sparrow, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Bullfinch, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting and Corn Bunting. Many of these are (or used to be!) familiar birds, but we included them all, omitting only species such as Black-tailed Godwit, Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Savi's Warbler, etc. that are either scarce passage migrant or frankly are too rare for us to be able to do anything about.

The criteria for amber-listing include species that have shown a moderate decline (25-49%) in breeding numbers, breeding range or non-breeding numbers over the last 25 years. The species relevant to Nottinghamshire include Kestrel, Water Rail, Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Snipe, Woodcock, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Cuckoo, Barn Owl, House Martin, Tree Pipit, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Dunnock, Nightingale, Mistle Thrush, Wood Warbler, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Lesser Redpoll and Hawfinch. Again, we excluded species that are locally rare and show no signs of breeding (e.g. Montagu's Harrier) or predominantly passage migrants or winter visitors (Dunlin, Common Gull, Arctic Tern).

A further Amber List criterion covers species with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; representatives in Nottinghamshire include Bewick's Swan, Gadwall, Garganey, Kestrel, Peregrine, Woodcock, Curlew, Redshank, Barn Owl, Short-eared Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Sand Martin, Swallow, Redstart and Stonechat. We omitted species such as Red-throated Diver, Brent Goose, Pintail, Bar-tailed Godwit, and other scarce passage migrants through Nottinghamshire.

The next group of amber birds are those currently with less than 300 breeding pairs in Britain. The species most relevant to Nottinghamshire are Black-necked Grebe, Garganey, Honey Buzzard and Black Redstart. We left out seabirds, winter species like Pintail, Goldeneye, Fieldfare and Redwing, and passage migrants such as Wood and Green Sandpipers.

Two further criteria relate to the number of sites at which birds occur. Birds are amber listed if the species is common, but more than half of the UK breeding population occurs at 10 or fewer sites. Cormorant and Gadwall are the only regular Nottinghamshire breeders that fall into this category. Species are also listed if 10 or fewer sites hold more than half of the wintering population. In Nottinghamshire, regular wintering birds include Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Shelduck, Wigeon, Oystercatcher.

The last two categories include species for which the UK holds more than 20% of the European population either as breeding birds (Nottinghamshire: Mute Swan, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Stock Dove, Lesser Redpoll) or in winter (Nottinghamshire: Cormorant, Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Teal, Shoveler, Pochard, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler, Pochard, Goldeneye, Oystercatcher, Lapwing).

We also included a series of species that we believed to be realistic colonists. With the creation of reedbeds, the management of riverine habitat for wading birds, and a more sympathetic attitude to raptors, several species, that are nationally red or amber listed, may return to Nottinghamshire for breeding. These include Bittern, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit and Bearded Tit. We decided that all of these should be included, including the godwit despite it not being Red or Amber listed.

This gave a total of 76 species from the national Red and Amber Lists that occur in Nottinghamshire other than as occasional vagrants or on passage. However, there are other criteria besides these listings that we believe are important. There are several species that are rare or declining in Nottinghamshire, but are not on the Red or Amber Lists, that we think should also be included on our list of birds for which there is concern. Grey Heron, Mallard, Goshawk, Hobby, Quail, Little Ringed Plover, Common Tern, Tawny Owl, Long-eared Owl, Swift, Whinchat, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Nuthatch and Common Crossbill are all birds that are locally declining or rare. English Nature and the JNCC along with the RSPB, WWT and BTO regard a site as important if more than 1% of the national population of any species occurs there. This way of evaluating bird populations has been applied particularly to waterfowl and waders: wetland birds. The [Wetlands Bird Survey](#) (WeBS) records wetland birds across the UK, and we have been able to identify those species that reach this level in Nottinghamshire. In addition to birds already on the list, more than 1% of the national winter flock of Little Grebe, Great-crested Grebe, Coot, and Golden Plover occur in Nottinghamshire; so we included these. The final three birds that we added are Jack Snipe, Waxwing and Brambling. These are all scarce wintering birds with special ecological requirements that are actually or potentially at risk. The inclusion of these species brings the list of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) to a round 100. The full list follows, with additional columns showing the criteria used in their identification.

	Species	Red or Amber	Breeding		Winter	
			Target species	Rare or declining	>1% national	Scarce or rare
1	Little Grebe				Yes	
2	Great Crested Grebe				Yes	
3	Black-necked Grebe	Amber		Yes		
4	Cormorant	Amber			Yes	
5	Bittern	Red	Yes			
6	Grey Heron			Yes		
7	Tundra (Bewick's) Swan	Amber				Yes
8	Mute Swan	Amber				
9	Whooper Swan	Amber				Yes
10	Shelduck	Amber		Yes		
11	Wigeon	Amber			Yes	
12	Gadwall	Amber			Yes	
13	Teal	Amber			Yes	
14	Mallard			Yes		
15	Garganey	Amber		Yes		
16	Shoveler	Amber		Yes	Yes	
17	Pochard	Amber			Yes	
18	Goldeneye	Amber				
19	Honey Buzzard	Amber		Yes		
20	Red Kite	Amber	Yes			
21	Marsh Harrier	Amber	Yes			
22	Hen Harrier	Red				Yes
23	Goshawk			Yes		
24	Osprey	Amber	Yes			
25	Kestrel	Amber				
26	Hobby			Yes		
27	Peregrine	Amber				Yes
28	Grey Partridge	Red		Yes		
29	Quail			Yes		
30	Water Rail	Amber		Yes		
31	Coot				Yes	
32	Oystercatcher	Amber		Yes		
33	Little Ringed Plover			Yes		
34	Ringed Plover	Amber		Yes		
35	Golden Plover				Yes	
36	Lapwing	Amber		Yes		
37	Ruff	Amber	Yes			
38	Jack Snipe					Yes
39	Snipe	Amber		Yes		
40	Woodcock	Amber				
41	Black-tailed Godwit		Yes			
42	Curlew	Amber		Yes		
43	Redshank	Amber		Yes		
44	Black-headed Gull	Amber		Yes		
45	Common Tern			Yes		
46	Stock Dove	Amber				
47	Turtle Dove	Red		Yes		
48	Cuckoo	Amber				
49	Barn Owl	Amber		Yes		
50	Tawny Owl			Yes		

	Species	Red or Amber	Breeding		Winter	
			Target species	Rare or declining	>1% national	Scarce or rare
51	Long-eared Owl			Yes		Yes
52	Short-eared Owl	Amber		Yes		Yes
53	Nightjar	Red		Yes		
54	Swift			Yes		
55	Kingfisher	Amber		Yes		
56	Green Woodpecker	Amber				
57	Lesser-spotted Woodpecker	Red		Yes		
58	Woodlark	Red		Yes		
59	Skylark	Red		Yes		
60	Sand Martin	Amber		Yes		
61	Swallow	Amber				
62	House Martin	Amber		Yes		
63	Tree Pipit	Amber		Yes		
64	Meadow Pipit	Amber		Yes		
65	Yellow Wagtail	Amber		Yes		
66	Grey Wagtail	Amber		Yes		
67	Waxwing					Yes
68	Dunnock	Amber				
69	Nightingale	Amber				
70	Black Redstart	Amber		Yes		
71	Redstart	Amber		Yes		
72	Whinchat			Yes		
73	Stonechat	Amber		Yes		
74	Song Thrush	Red		Yes		
75	Mistle Thrush	Amber				
76	Grasshopper Warbler	Red				
77	Sedge Warbler			Yes		
78	Reed Warbler			Yes		
79	Lesser Whitethroat			Yes		
80	Garden Warbler			Yes		
81	Wood Warbler	Amber				
82	Willow Warbler	Amber				
83	Goldcrest	Amber				
84	Spotted Flycatcher	Red				
85	Bearded Tit	Amber	Yes			
86	Marsh Tit	Red				
87	Willow Tit	Red		Yes		
88	Nuthatch			Yes		
89	Starling	Red				
90	House Sparrow	Red				
91	Tree Sparrow	Red		Yes		
92	Linnet	Red		Yes		
93	Lesser Redpoll	Amber				
94	Common Crossbill			Yes		
95	Brambling					Yes
96	Bullfinch	Red		Yes		
97	Hawfinch	Amber		Yes		
98	Yellowhammer	Red		Yes		
99	Reed Bunting	Red		Yes		
100	Corn Bunting	Red		Yes		

What use is this list?

Clearly, there is no point in producing a list of birds just for the sake of it - we have to use it. National and local conservation agencies are now beginning to designate 'Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation' (SINCs); in Nottinghamshire, this is being co-ordinated by the Biological and Geological Records Centre at Wollaton Hall. The exercise is well underway for plants, and has now begun for bats, reptiles,

amphibia, butterflies and birds. The basis for the designation of 'Bird SINCs' is the Biodiversity Action Group's list of BoCC, and this has now adopted the Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers' List as its standard.

However, there is another use for this list. If it purports to include those birds for which we have concern, surely we can use it as the basis for identifying the problems that they face, and should suggest how they might be helped, especially in terms of habitat protection or enhancement. There are several species here that require similar habitat protection; not necessarily at the same time of year. What follows are our thoughts on this, and relate to individual species or groups of species in the Table above.

Black-necked Grebe is a nationally rare species that requires quiet reed-fringed lakes and pools. It often breeds in association with Black-headed Gulls, but one site in south Nottinghamshire has no gulls. The location is private, but may be viewed from roads and paths. It is a significant wintering area for ducks and would probably justify SSSI status on this alone. Designation as an SSSI might provide greater security, especially since there are periodic threats from wind-surfing and power-boat interests. Fishing might impact negatively, due to destruction of emergent/shore vegetation to provide access to the bank. However, viewing at this site is difficult without trespass, and there might be a need to examine the possibility of access, especially if becomes an SSSI. Egg collecting poses a threat to the Nottinghamshire' population.

Bitterns winter regularly, but are not known to breed. The new RSPB Reserve at Langford may eventually provide sufficient reeds for breeding, and one or two other sites (Attenborough Nature Reserve and West Burton Power Station) are also possible, but likely to depend upon expansion of the national population as a source of birds. These habitats are also important for Reed Warblers, and potentially for Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit.

Riverine wet grasslands are a critically endangered habitat along the Trent floodplain, and also in the Idle and Erewash valleys. Their protection is very important for a variety of species, both as breeding habitat and wintering sites. Most conservation agencies are aware of this, and are pressing for protection and/or re-creation of this habitat. In Nottinghamshire, breeding birds reliant upon unimproved riverine grasslands include Snipe, Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Yellow Wagtail, Meadow Pipit; in winter, these can provide feeding areas for Wigeon, Whooper and Bewick's Swans, Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl. Other threatened species such as Skylark and Reed Bunting also use these habitats. Even strips of rank grass headland alongside ditches can provide feeding and/or nesting sites for Grey Partridge, Skylark, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Reed Bunting, etc.

Riverine gravel pits also provide a safe haven for a range of species throughout the year. Restoration proposals can bring competition for the final use of the quarries, with conflicting recreational uses such as wind-surfing, sailing and angling. While not necessarily a direct threat, disturbance, especially to banks, margins and islands, can pose a serious threat to wildlife. Species such as Shoveler, Gadwall and Teal

winter in considerable numbers, and also breed in these places; Garganey breed occasionally; Common Tern, Great and Little Ringed Plovers and Oystercatcher will all breed on islands. Recent experiments in the creation of islands or floating platforms have been very successful, both locally and nationally. This could be attempted elsewhere in the Trent Valley, as could clearing scrub from existing islands (e.g. at Hallcroft Gravel Pits).

Some birds of prey seem to be limited by the availability of nesting sites: the loss of barns and old trees has reduced the availability of holes for breeding. Provision of nest boxes or nest platforms (e.g. wicker baskets) has been shown to be successful both locally and nationally and should be explored further. Species that could benefit in the short term include Kestrel, Hobby, Peregrine (on anthropogenic sites such as power stations and high rise buildings), Tawny, Long-eared, Little and Barn Owls. Peregrines breeding in inner cities would have the added benefit of reducing the feral pigeon population – much more cheaply than by other means. Red Kite and Osprey are both likely to colonise Nottinghamshire within the next 10 years, from successful re-introduction programmes elsewhere in the Midlands, or even, in the case of the Osprey, naturally.

Several species that are dependent upon agricultural land have shown parallel and serious declines over the past 20-30 years. These include Skylark, Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and, to a lesser extent, Reed Bunting. They require weedy fields, stubbles and weed rich field margins for feeding, especially outside the breeding season, and some need hedgerows with scattered trees for nesting sites. We should encourage the [Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group](#) (FWAG) to inform and educate managers as to the importance of more sympathetic management of field habitats: e.g. retention of some stubble through the winter; careful timing of cutting/mowing schedules for hedges and the creation of wetlands. The new [Environmental Stewardship Scheme](#) (to be launched in January 2005) will provide funds for a number of ‘bird friendly’ measures including wetting-up grassland, promoting spring sown arable crops, providing wild bird cover crops and managing grassland in an environmentally sensitive way. Of course the new ESS is a voluntary scheme, but, if farmers want to claim their [Single Farm Payment](#) (the only farm subsidy payment available after CAP reform), they will have to carry out certain measures aimed at bringing environmental benefits – this is known as Cross Compliance. Good for birds, the measures include: no hedges to be cut between the 1st March and the 31st July; a two metre protection zone to be left from the centre of hedges, ditches and water courses; with 8% of the arable landholding on a farm to be designated as set aside, farmers can include targeted strips near river banks, woodlands, SSSI’s and hedges. Replacement of hedges should be carefully monitored: this is not always the best option: for example, they might break up larger areas needed as winter grazing for ducks, geese and swans. The old Countryside Stewardship Scheme targeted farms where red and amber birds occurred: for example, an application for wild bird cover crops was more likely to be successful if it could be shown tree sparrows, linnets and reed buntings occurred on a farm. The new Environmental Stewardship Scheme will be targeted in a similar way, making our local bird records even more useful. The NBW could offer assistance by providing skilled personnel to help with bird-surveys for farms and similar sites – as

they are doing already at Beckingham.

Nightjar and Woodlark are species that occur in similar habitat in Nottinghamshire. The former requires areas of open heathland and woodland edge for feeding, with adjacent cover for nesting. A [Management Plan](#) has been produced for the Nightjar, and efforts are underway to improve the quality of some sites, but we need to monitor the impact of grazing, and adjust regimes to minimise any negative impacts (e.g. at present grazing on Budby may be having a deleterious impact on breeding). Areas of clear-fell are especially attractive, and forest enterprises should be encouraged to continue with relatively extensive clearance of timber, to provide areas of sufficient size for feeding territories. We should explore Nightjar distribution in alternative sites such as golf courses, which also provide open areas, and may just need quiet woodland edges before successful colonisation can occur. Woodlarks also breed in heathland, but are now expanding into parkland, such as Clumber; the suitability of golf courses also needs to be explored for this bird. Relatively little management (e.g. rotational creation of disturbed soil) may be required to provide suitable habitat and allow the continued recovery of this bird. Woodlarks also occur on brownfield sites, previously developed land that can be good for a variety of birds but often may face threats from further development.

Swallows, Swifts and House Martins face similar problems: the loss of suitable nesting sites following changes in house construction. All three use buildings, but contemporary design has reduced the availability of holes, ledges and crevices for nest sites. Builders and Architects should be encouraged to provide these as part of their design: whether it will have any effect is moot! Sand Martins also require holes. Extraction companies should be required to leave one vertical bank undisturbed from March to September in every quarry each year. Maybe Environment Agency, British Waterways and Internal Drainage Boards could be persuaded to routinely create suitable banks during their normal management work?

Waxwings are colourful and popular winter visitors, especially in invasion years. Nottingham's tree-lined boulevards are an important food resource, and the Councils should be encouraged to continue to provide [Sorbus](#) in inner city parks and gardens.

There are several woodland birds that all require habitat management, although this differs among species. Nightingales have virtually gone from Nottinghamshire, but there is no obvious reason why. Coppicing of damp woodlands together with dense patches of blackthorn and bramble provides suitable habitat, and no doubt they will return at some stage. Redstart clings on in parts of the Dukeries. It requires mature oak with suitable holes for nesting, and the current vogue for removing old dead wood before it falls and causes injury is certainly hampering the provision of natural nest sites. In some areas, it has taken to nest boxes, and this might be explored locally. Garden and Wood Warblers both require mature woodland, but have different habitat preferences: the former requires thick undergrowth, the latter more open understorey. These habitats are both present in Nottinghamshire, though the latter tends to occur more in sites with high human recreational use. Sympathetic woodland management may be key: perhaps experiments could be undertaken in Nottinghamshire WT reserves? Minimising human disturbance and keeping dogs on leads during the breeding season might help, but Wood Warbler will be difficult.

Spotted Flycatcher is very threatened, both locally and nationally. Many parks and churchyards provide suitable habitat of shaded woodland with open clearings. Again, the selective removal of dead limbs from trees may be limiting nesting sites: the nest box scheme initiated by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust in 2004 should be extended with help from NBW. Marsh and Willow Tits are red list species, and the latter seems to be in serious decline in many parts of Britain. Yet again, the retention of dead and decaying wood will provide suitable nest sites, especially along hedgerows and woodland edges. Starlings need nest holes of suitable size, and Hawfinches require suitable food species, such as wild cherry and hornbeam, although nest predation by grey squirrels and jays could also be a factor in their decline. Dense scrub of blackthorn, elderberry and bramble provide feeding and nesting sites for Nightingales, Bullfinches and Garden Warblers.

Black Redstart is a rare breeding bird of inner cities. There is little that we can do to encourage it, although there seems to have been some success elsewhere with rooftop gardens. The provision of nest boxes in 'traditional' sites might prepare a location for the arrival of these birds, although, in 2003, it seems that the sole pair known in Nottingham avoided the box provided and selected a natural site!

Whinchat and Stonechat ebb and flow. We do not really know why. Ensuring retention of some scrub, especially gorse thickets, on heathlands might help; the coppice management of gorse stands to prevent their becoming leggy and rank should be explored.

Reed Bunting and Grasshopper Warbler both require thick, damp herbage for nesting. Clearance of encroaching scrub from traditional sites might be encouraged, leaving scattered rather than continuous hawthorn. Reed Buntings also require suitable winter food and shelter, and their roosts should be protected. Linked with this, the retention of hedgerows and weedy verges by cutting in late winter rather than late summer or autumn would provide a food source during hard weather. This is a relatively simple strategy that might help these and other granivorous species.

A severely threatened (and much neglected) habitat is established, rank grassland – at least four years old. To non-naturalists, it looks messy and unsightly, and even among conservationists, the understandable enthusiasm for the re-creation of flower and butterfly rich meadowland, by encouraging grazing to increase floral diversity, is resulting in the loss of this habitat. It is, however, one that contains many invertebrates, grass seeds and small mammals and so is important to many of Nottinghamshire's threatened birds: at various seasons, Kestrel, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Meadow Pipit, Grasshopper Warbler, Reed Bunting. Even small patches are valuable, and their retention should be a high priority.

Finally, when we discussed this list at a special committee meeting of the Nottinghamshire Birdwatchers, it became evident that our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of many of these species is limited. The NBW has access to a group of fairly to very experienced observers who could provide just these data if asked to do so. Three levels of survey are possible. Firstly, to record every individual seen; this is particularly appropriate for scarce and/or conspicuous birds, such as Barn Owl, Kingfisher, Spotted Flycatcher, Hawfinch, Crossbill. Secondly, to record the occurrence of birds at a locality, without necessarily counting them all.

This would give an idea of the contemporary distribution of birds that may be increasing or decreasing; examples might be Nightjar, Woodlark, Willow Tit. Thirdly, co-ordinated surveys of particular species, either county-wide or in sample areas. This would provide detailed data of the abundance of some of the more serious birds such as Shelduck, Redshank, Common Tern, Kestrel, Grey Partridge. Commoner 'amber list' species such as Willow Warbler, Goldcrest, Dunnock, etc. might be included in specially chosen survey plots. This will be discussed by the Committee, with the possibility of a general 'open meeting' to discuss this with the active members during 2005. There is always the possibility of obtaining funding for a co-ordinator of these surveys, but we need to show a need for the work and enthusiasm for the task.

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