

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan



Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)



The song thrush is a resident and widespread bird in the UK. Its preferred habitats include areas of mixed farming with well-developed hedges and woodland, and also parks and gardens. Numbers in Britain increase during the winter as birds from the continent arrive to escape harsher weather elsewhere in Europe. Some British birds also migrate south to Europe for the winter.

Song thrushes nest in low bushes, small trees and hedges and need open ground to forage for invertebrates. A major part of their diet is snails that are expertly opened using a stone as an anvil on which to smash the shell. They also feed on fruits and berries of various shrubs and trees, particularly yew, hawthorn and blackthorn.

Song thrushes are the familiar 'garden thrush' and generally perceived as being both widespread and common. However data suggests that the population has declined dramatically.

The Shropshire Targets for 2005 set in the previous edition of the BAP (2002) have not been achieved, and many of the Actions were not implemented, so concerted action is needed to achieve the targets set for 2010.

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. In the short term, maintain the current song thrush population in Shropshire.
- B. In the longer term, increase numbers of song thrush in Shropshire to their early 1970s level.
- C. Establish and maintain a comprehensive understanding of song thrush distribution, status and ecological requirements in Shropshire through research, survey and monitoring.
- D. Promote communication, education and awareness of the status and needs of the song thrush.

1.2 Target

- Increase the current population in Shropshire by 50% by 2010
- Increase the population in Shropshire by a further 50% by 2015

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2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

The song thrush is a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Programme and a national species action plan has been written. It is also 'Red Listed' in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*. Song thrushes are familiar and popular garden birds throughout Britain.

2.2 Trends

Numbers of breeding song thrush on farmland in Britain declined by an estimated 66% between 1972 and 1996. The *Atlas of Breeding Birds in Shropshire (1992)* confirmed that a similar decline also took place in Shropshire. The national Breeding Bird Survey indicates that the population has not recovered in the last 10 years (only a 14% increase between 1994 and 2004).

2.3 Population and Distribution

In the early 1990s the population of song thrushes in Shropshire was estimated at 17,500 to 35,000 breeding pairs, based on national population trends data and density estimates produced by the British Trust for Ornithology. However in line with national trends, population levels have likely declined further since this date. Nevertheless the song thrush remains a species that is distributed throughout Shropshire.

(Add Shropshire figures from BBS, when provided by BTO)

3 Current Factors Affecting the Species

The underlying causes of the decline in song thrush numbers are not well understood, but the following are generally agreed to be the principle causes:

- Loss of mixed farming:
 - Grassland rich in invertebrates such as earthworms is vital for song thrushes in arable areas;
 - Loss of rough grassland and field margins in arable areas. These are preferred by song thrush because they support a high density of snails and worms;
 - Reduction in area of spring tillage. This has reduced available foraging areas during the critical early spring breeding season.
- Indirect effect of the increased use of pesticides generally, but also specifically the use of molluscicides. This reduces the available food supply for song thrushes.
- Loss of nesting habitat through removal and inappropriate management of hedgerows.
- Song thrushes suffer considerable mortality during severe winters. However this is not the cause of long-term decline.
- Predation by magpies is not a significant cause for decline as often suggested.

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4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- A national species action plan has been produced for song thrush under the UK Biodiversity Programme. The RSPB has also produced a species action plan.
- Several Shropshire Habitat Action Plans will deliver benefits for song thrush.

4.2 Management, Survey and Research

- Defra / RDS Environmental Stewardship has both Entry Level and Higher level schemes which encourage farmers to manage their land to provide environmental benefits, including habitat enhancement for these birds. This includes options such as winter stubbles, spring-sown cereals and undersown grass leys, all of which can benefit song thrushes by reintroducing mixed farm habitats.
- Many farms still have Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements, which include measures such as management of hedgerows and arable field margins, provision of beetle banks, reversion of arable land to grassland, extensive management of pasture and provision of fenced grass margins within intensive grasslands. Areas of set-aside of high conservation status can also be managed under the Scheme. Elements of the pilot Arable Stewardship are also included within some CSS agreements.
- Under the set-aside scheme, land can be managed to provide rotational stubbles, or permanent rough grass cover, and other options are available.
- The national Breeding Bird Survey, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), supported by RSPB and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), monitors the population index of many UK birds, including song thrush. Currently, 50 to 60 1- km squares in Shropshire are covered as part of this survey.
- The RSPB is carrying out national research into the breeding and wintering ecology of song thrush, and the reasons for their decline.
- The RSPB is also carrying out research into the use of dry grasslands by farmland birds such as song thrush. A significant proportion of this work is being done in Shropshire.

5 Key Habitats

- Field margins
- Hedgerows
- Woodlands
- Parks and gardens

6 Complementary Plans

- UK Song Thrush SAP
- UK Ancient and/or species-rich hedgerows
- Shropshire Arable Field Margins HAP
- Shropshire Hedgerows HAP

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Habitat / Species	Action Code	Action text	Location of action	Start Date	End Date	Lead	Assisting
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 02	Establish monitoring arrangements to record the population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP and PSA Target Bird Species on all farms covered by any Agri-environment scheme in Shropshire, and measure the effectiveness of such schemes.	Shropshire	2006	2007	NE	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 03	Monitor population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP priority bird species on all CSS & ESA Farms in Shropshire until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	NE	FWAG, RS, AONB, SOS, SWT, UOWG
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD FR 06	Seek the necessary resources to implement all the above actions.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SC	SWT
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 01	Promote better management of all hedgerows to all landowners until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	FWAG	RDS, SWT, SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 02	Actively encourage farmers to maintain and increase the area of suitable habitat, including good quality hedges, creative use of Set-aside, extensive field margins along ditches and hedges, planting of "Wild Bird Cover" crops, and reintroduction of mixed-farming and organic systems and spring-sown cereals, through all agri-environment schemes, particularly the targeting of Environmental Stewardship; and monitor progress.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	RDS, FWAG, RS, UOWG, SOS, LSP
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 03	Encourage Local Authorities to review hedgerow management to improve their wildlife value until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 04	Encourage Local Authorities to plant shrubs and trees that produce fruits and berries and manage areas of rough grassland in public parks, schools etc. for wildlife until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 05	Encourage Local Authorities to review and aim to reduce the use of molluscicides in gardens, public parks, schools and other council-owned land until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC

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Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 06	Encourage Local Authorities to review allotment agreements with a view to banning the use of molluscicides by 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 07	Encourage farmers to reduce the use of molluscicides until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH CA 08	Campaign for Defra to discourage the use of molluscicides in agriculture by 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH PL 01	Encourage Local Authorities to ensure that the Hedgerow Regulations are fully enforced until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SWT	SC
Song Thrush	SHR STH SU 01	Ensure adequate coverage of the Breeding Bird Survey in Shropshire to monitor song thrush annually until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	BTO	SOS

N.B.

1. The above Actions are specific to this species. In addition, the "Actions For All Bird Species", listed in a separate Table of Actions, also have to be undertaken for this species.
2. Implementation of the Actions listed under the final Action, "Seek resources", is conditional on the resources being secured, and BARS Reporting by some organisations is conditional partly on these further resources being secured, and partly on the continuing availability of trained volunteers.

Key to Organisations

SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
SC	Shropshire Council
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society
RDS	Rural Development Service
FWAG	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
UOWG	Upper Onny Wildlife Group
NE	Natural England
RS	RuralScapes

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Plan last revised: November 2008 by Fran Lancaster (Biodiversity Support Officer, Shropshire Council).

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