

The population status of birds in Wales

2



The population status of birds in Wales **2**

- The leading bird conservation organisations in Wales have revised the population status of the birds that are regularly found in the country, updating the review published in 2002.
- A total of 213 species were assessed using strict criteria and each placed on one of three lists. These criteria have been revised since 2002 in line with the UK-level assessment. The red list is for globally threatened species, and species that have historically or recently shown large declines. The amber list is for species showing recoveries or moderate declines, and for species that are localised, rare or internationally important. The green list is for other species, including those showing further recoveries.
- Forty-six species (22%) were placed on the red list: an increase of 19. Ninety-seven (45%) were placed on the amber list, which is an increase of 28. Seventy (33%) were placed on the green list, representing a fall of 55.
- Nine species moved to lists of lower conservation concern, while 61 species moved to higher lists. Seven species moved straight from green to red. Seven species were assessed for the first time and, of these, one was placed on the red list.
- The most frequent reason for moving to a list of higher conservation concern was evidence of population decline. In a few cases a move was due to the changes in the criteria. Reasons for moving to a lower list include improved status in Europe and successful colonisation.

¹ Welsh Records Panel

² Welsh Ornithological Society



Pochard

Species assessed

This reassessment covered all species on the WRP¹ list of birds recorded in Wales, excluding those that occur solely as vagrants, rare and scarce migrants (as assessed by WOS² and www.scarce-migrants.org.uk) and those considered extinct by the first assessment in 2002. However, we have included globally threatened species that have occurred in Wales during the past 20 years. We have also included previously red-listed species whose breeding populations could now be considered extinct. We did not assess non-native species.

Data sources

This review uses information from a range of sources on the status of birds in Wales, the UK, Europe and internationally, up to 2006 in most cases.

- The annual BTO³/JNCC⁴/RSPB⁵ Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) provides trends for widespread breeding birds in Wales since 1994. The UK status is used for species not reported on by BBS in Wales, if there is no evidence that Welsh trends differ to those of the UK.
- The annual JNCC/RSPB/SOTEAG⁶ Seabird Monitoring Programme provides trends for seabirds.

- The annual BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey provides trends and local population sizes for wintering waterbirds.
- The Statutory Conservation Agencies and RSPB Annual Breeding Bird Scheme, along with the Seabird 2000 census, and RSPB and CCW⁷ surveys in Wales provide data on population sizes and trends for some species.

- National surveys of birds in particular habitats, such as the Repeat Upland and Repeat Woodland surveys, provide data on a range of species not reported by other schemes in Wales. These surveys have been used where they are considered representative of national populations.
- The County Bird Reports and the Rare Breeding Bird Panel Reports provide annual information for rare breeding and non-breeding birds.

- Trends in geographic distribution are obtained for some species by comparing the results of recent surveys with the BTO/IWC⁸ 1968-72 and BTO/SOC⁹/IWC 1988-91 breeding bird atlases.
- Global and European information comes from BirdLife International's *Threatened Birds of the World 2004*, and *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*.

³ British Trust for Ornithology

⁴ Joint Nature Conservation Committee

⁵ The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

⁶ Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group

⁷ Countryside Council for Wales

⁸ Irish Wildbird Conservancy

⁹ Scottish Ornithologists' Club

Black grouse





The criteria

This review is based on the same eight broad criteria used in the first assessment. While it would be preferable to retain the assessment method in successive reviews, we have made some changes since 2002 that include those made at the UK level¹⁰. These changes include a longer time period over which to assess recent population change in addition to the 25-year period (1981-2006). This longer period runs from 1969 to 2006, and prevents species that have made no recovery from declines since 1969 but have been stable in the last 25 years from moving to lower lists. We have introduced a new rare non-breeding criterion (WR), which is equivalent to the one for breeding (BR). Wales may have a particular responsibility for the populations of some UK species. Consequently there are new criteria to show when Wales has 50% or more of the UK population of a species, and 10% or more of a UK rare wintering or breeding species (excluding those that are not established as breeding species in Wales).

The criteria that must be met to qualify for the red, amber or green lists are shown opposite. Species were assessed under as many criteria as data availability allowed, and ordered following the Gill and Wright (2006) classification¹¹.

¹⁰Eaton *et al* (2009). *British Birds*, 102, pp296-341.

¹¹Gill, F and Wright, M (2006). *Birds of the World Recommended English Names*. Princeton University Press.

The red list criteria

IUCN Global Importance: globally threatened using IUCN criteria.

HD Severe historical decline 1800-1994 with no recovery.

BDp¹ and **BDp²** At least 50% decline in breeding population (25 years and longer term).

WDp¹ and **WDp²** At least 50% decline in wintering population (25 years and longer term).

BDr¹ and **BDr²** At least 50% decline in breeding range (BDP¹ over 25 years and BDP² over longer term).

The amber list criteria

SPEC European Importance: Species of European Conservation Concern 1, 2 or 3.

HDrec¹ Recovery from HD: at least 100% increase in numbers or range in the last 25 years.

BDMp¹ and **BDMp²** At least 25% but less than 50% decline in breeding population (25 years and longer term).

WDMp¹ and **WDMp²** At least 25% but less than 50% decline in wintering population (25 years and longer term).

BDMr¹ and **BDMr²** At least 25% but less than 50% decline in breeding range (25 years and longer term).

BR and **WR** Mean of less than 30 breeding pairs or 90 individuals outside breeding during the most recent five-year period with data.

UKred UK importance: red-listed at UK level, excluding those that qualify under breeding categories but are not established breeders in Wales.

UK 50 50% or more of the UK population of a species in Wales.

BRUK and **WRUK** At least 10% of the population of a UK rare breeding or wintering species (breeding and non-breeding) in Wales.

BL and **WL** At least 50% of population occurs at one site, but not a rare breeder (breeding and non-breeding).

BI and **WI** At least 2% of the European or East Atlantic Flyway population (breeding and non-breeding).

The green list criteria

All species that do not qualify under the above, with the addition of:

HDrec² Further recovery from HDrec¹ is at least 20% increase since last assessment.

Wales' new red list

Species	Previous population status	IUCN Global Conservation Status	HD Historic decline	BDp ¹ Breeding decline 25 years	BDp ² Breeding decline longer term	WDp ¹ Non-breeding decline 25 years	WDp ² Non-breeding decline longer term	BDr ¹ Range decline 25 years	BDr ² Range decline longer term	SPEC European conservation status	HDrec ¹ Recovering historical decline	BDMp ¹ Breeding decline 25 years	BDMp ² Breeding decline longer term	WDMp ¹ Non-breeding decline 25 years	WDMp ² Non-breeding decline longer term	BDMr ¹ Range decline 25 years	BDMr ² Range decline longer term	BR Breeding rarity	WR Non-breeding rarity	BL Breeding localised	WL Non-breeding localised	UKred UK red list	UK 50 At least 50% UK population in Wales	BRUK At least 10% of UK rare breeders' pop in Wales	WRUK At least 10% of UK rare non-breeders' in Wales	BI Breeding internationally important	WI Non-breeding internationally important	HDrec ² Further recovery from historical decline	
White-fronted goose	R					■																							
Pochard	G						■											■											
Red grouse	R		■									■	■																
Black grouse	R		■					■	■																				
Grey partridge	R		■	■	■																								
Balearic shearwater	NA	■																											
Bittern	R		■	■	■				■											■									
Hen harrier	R			■	■															■									
Kestrel	A				■																								
Corncrake	R	■	■	■	■																								
Golden plover	R			■	■				■							■													
Grey plover	A					■								■							■								
Lapwing	R			■	■																								
Dunlin	A					■	■																						
Bar-tailed godwit	R					■	■											■											
Curlew	R			■																	■								
Black-headed gull	A				■	■		■	■			■																	
Common gull	G					■	■																						
Herring gull	A				■	■																							
Great black-backed gull	A				■	■																							
Roseate tern	R			■	■			■																					
Common tern	A								■							■													
Arctic tern	A								■																				
Little tern	R							■	■																				
Puffin	R		■																										■

NA – Not addressed



Hen harrier

Wales' new red list

Species	Previous population status	IUCN Global Conservation Status	HD Historic decline	BDp ¹ Breeding decline 25 years	BDp ² Breeding decline longer term	WDp ¹ Non-breeding decline 25 years	WDp ² Non-breeding decline longer term	BDr ¹ Range decline 25 years	BDr ² Range decline longer term	SPEC European conservation status	HDrec ¹ Recovering historical decline	BDMp ¹ Breeding decline 25 years	BDMp ² Breeding decline longer term	WDMp ¹ Non-breeding decline 25 years	WDMp ² Non-breeding decline longer term	BDMr ¹ Range decline 25 years	BDMr ² Range decline longer term	BR Breeding rarity	WR Non-breeding rarity	BL Breeding localised	WL Non-breeding localised	UKred UK red list	UK 50 At least 50% UK population in Wales	BRUK At least 10% of UK rare breeders' pop in Wales	WRUK At least 10% of UK rare non-breeders' in Wales	BI Breeding internationally important	WI Non-breeding internationally important	HDrec ² Further recovery from historical decline	
Turtle dove	R			■	■			■	■	■																			
Cuckoo	G			■	■							■																	
Short-eared owl	A			■	■													■	■										
Lesser spotted woodpecker	R			■	■																								
Yellow wagtail	A			■	■																								
Ring ouzel	R			■	■																								
Grasshopper warbler	R			■	■																								
Wood warbler	G			■	■																								
Willow warbler	G			■	■																								
Spotted flycatcher	A			■	■																								
Pied flycatcher	G			■	■																								
Marsh tit	R			■	■																								
Willow tit	R			■	■																								
Starling	R			■	■																								
Tree sparrow	R			■	■																								
Linnet	A			■	■																								
Twite	A			■	■																								
Lesser redpoll	G			■	■																								
Bullfinch	R			■	■																								
Yellowhammer	R			■	■																								
Corn bunting	R		■	■	■																								



Yellow wagtail



Sandwich terns

Wales' new red and amber lists: themes and messages

These lists should be seen as a tool for identifying conservation priorities among the range of birds in Wales and the life-stages of individual species. They are not, however, intended for use in isolation. Many other factors, such as current threats, feasibility of action and likelihood of success, must be taken into account when identifying conservation priorities. The red and amber lists are a starting point for such decisions.

Importantly, the major bird conservation organisations in Wales endorse the lists (see last page).

The increase in length of both red and amber lists since the first assessment indicates marked changes in the population status of many species. Nine species moved to a lower list: the ringed plover and knot from red to amber, and the red-throated diver, little egret, peregrine falcon, water rail, kittiwake, stock dove and stonechat from amber to green. Sixty one species moved to a higher list, with seven moving straight from green to red: the pochard, common gull,

cuckoo, wood warbler, willow warbler, pied flycatcher and lesser redpoll. Seven species were assessed for the first time and one, the Balearic shearwater, was placed on the red list. A few species have changed lists because of changes to the criteria.

Birds of farmed habitats

None of the birds of farmed habitats¹² red-listed in 2002 have moved to lower lists, which indicates that measures put in place to help them, such as agri-environment schemes, have yet to be successful. Four birds of farmed habitats are new to the red list: the kestrel, yellow wagtail, linnet and twite.

Woodland birds

Recent woodland surveys have provided vital data, and resulted in five woodland species moving to the red list: the wood warbler, willow warbler, pied flycatcher and lesser redpoll from green to red, and the spotted flycatcher from amber to red.

Seabirds

This review shows that the numbers of some of Wales' seabirds continue to be

¹²Birds typical of lowland farmland are pooled with upland birds into a single group called birds of farmed habitats.

healthy, in contrast to other parts of the UK. Indeed the kittiwake moved from the amber to the green list and guillemot numbers are now internationally important. However, four species moved to the red list – the herring gull and great black-backed gull because of declines in breeding numbers, and the common tern and Arctic tern because of longer term declines in range. Causes of these declines are likely to include change in food supplies, more disturbance and milder climate, which influences where birds spend the winter.

Wading birds

Breeding and non-breeding wading birds feature strongly on the red and amber lists (21 species). Some are red-listed because of declines in breeding numbers: the lapwing, golden plover and curlew.

Others are red-listed because of declines on their estuarine wintering sites: the grey plover, dunlin and bar-tailed godwit. For some this decline could be the result of eastwards range shifts, while for others there could be problems on Arctic breeding grounds.

Recovery

It is important to understand that assigning to lists in this way can mask divergent changes in fortune. For

example, Arctic terns moved to the red list because of a longer term severe decline in the number of their nesting colonies, despite their overall population increasing sufficiently for them to be considered for the green list. Similarly, following successful nest protection, red kites have continued their recovery in numbers, which qualifies this species for the green list, but the Welsh population is now internationally important so it qualifies as amber.

Differences to the UK

Of the species assessed in Wales, 151 (71%) are on the same list as in the wider UK. There are, however, some important differences. For example, although the nightjar, skylark, house sparrow and song thrush are on the UK red list, they are on the Wales amber list. This is because they have not declined here. However, of these, only the song thrush is amber-listed in Wales solely because of its UK red list status. The remaining three species are important in Europe. Nineteen species are red-listed in Wales but not in the UK, including breeding and wintering waders, seabirds and woodland birds.

Further details

A detailed report of the revised population status of birds in Wales is available from the RSPB.



Red kite

Designed and published by the RSPB on behalf of



Welsh Ornithological Society

Secretary – Ian Spence
43 Blackbrook
Sychdyn
Mold
Flintshire CF7 6LT
E-mail: ianspence@btinternet.com



Welsh Assembly Government

Cathays Park
Cardiff CF10 3NQ
www.wales.gov.uk



The Countryside Council for Wales

Maes Y Ffynnon
Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor
Gwynedd LL57 2DN
Tel: 0845 130 6229
www.ccw.gov.uk



The BTO

The Nunnery
Thetford
Norfolk IP24 2PU
www.bto.org



The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

National Wetlands Centre Wales
Penclacwydd, Llwynhendy
Llanelli SA14 9SH
www.wwt.org.uk

RSPB Cymru

Sutherland House
Castlebridge
Cowbridge Road East
Cardiff CF11 9AB
Tel: 029 2035 3000

www.rspb.org.uk



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654 830-1669-08-09

Cover image

Kestrel by Richard Revels (rspb-images.com)