

# **UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Song Thrush (*Turdus philomelos*)**

## **Current status**

This is a common and widespread species which is declining throughout the UK. It is a partial migrant with large numbers of Continental breeders overwintering in the UK and with many of the birds which breed in the UK wintering further south in Europe. Following the winter of 1962/63, the population declined but recovered to a stable level within three to four years. The numbers subsequently remained stable until the mid 1970s after which they declined steadily, with an estimated reduction of 73% in farmland and 49% in woodland habitats. These birds are generally more abundant in the east than the west of the country, although the decline in numbers shows a north to south bias. The status of the song thrush in Northern Ireland is uncertain.

The song thrush is protected under the EC Birds Directive; the WCA 1981, and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

## **Current factors causing loss or decline**

Reasons for the decline are poorly understood but may relate to the following factors:

Changes in farming affecting food supply and the availability of nest sites, particularly the switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals, and possibly the increased use of pesticides.

Severe winter weather and dry soil conditions affecting food supply.

Predation by corvids and foxes.

Competition with blackbirds.

Hunting in southern France.

## **Current action**

Little action was taken for the species until British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) census work highlighted its decline. Current work now includes survey, research on the species' ecology, and investigation of the causes of the decline.

A species action plan has been prepared by the RSPB, in collaboration with JNCC and the country agencies.

## **Action plan objectives and targets**

Halt the decline in numbers of song thrush in the UK by the year 2000.

Maintain the UK geographical range of the song thrush at the 1995 level as measured by the frequency of occupation of BBS squares.

Maintain the UK population size of the song thrush at or above the 1995 level as measured by the BBS index.

By 2010, increase the geographical range at least to the 1968/72 range.

By 2010, increase the population size at least to the 1970 level as measured by the CBC/BBS index.

## **Proposed actions with lead agencies**

### **Policy and legislation**

Ensure that the results of ongoing research on the causes of decline are taken into account in agriculture schemes, woodland schemes and policy. (ACTION: DANI, FA, FE, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD)

Promote the uptake of sensitive farming options under existing incentive schemes to benefit song thrush. (ACTION: DANI, MAFF, SOAEFD, WOAD)

Consider persuading the European Commission to ban or discourage hunting in France. (ACTION: DOE, FO)

### **Site safeguard and management**

No action proposed.

### **Species management and protection**

No action proposed.

### **Advisory**

Ensure landowners and managers are aware of the presence, legal status and conservation requirements of this species, and appropriate methods of habitat management. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, FA, SNH)

### **Future Research and Monitoring**

Investigate the relationship between agricultural changes and the use of agrochemicals with the decline of this species, using information collected by the BTO and other sources. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH, JNCC)

Promote research on the effects of woodland design and the management of woodland margins, especially on farmland, in aiding the successful breeding of song thrush. (ACTION: FA)

Encourage adequate monitoring annually of national breeding song thrush populations through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH)

Encourage research on the ecological requirements of this species to help identify the causes of the population decline. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, JNCC, SNH)

### **Communications and Publicity**

Produce publicity material and information for the general public to raise awareness of the song thrush and the possible links between population changes and human activities. (ACTION: CCW, DoE(NI), EN, SNH, JNCC)