

Birds of conservation concern

**11-57**

3



2009

## Birds of conservation concern 3

- The UK's leading bird conservation organisations have worked together on the third quantitative review of the status of the birds that occur regularly here<sup>1</sup>, updating the last review in 2002.
- A total of 246 species have been assessed against a set of objective criteria to place each on one of three lists – green, amber and red – indicating an increasing level of conservation concern.
- There are 52 species on the red list, 126 on the amber list and 68 on the green list. The red list has increased by 12 since 2002, with 18 species added but six moved from red to amber. Eleven species are now on the red list due to an important change in criteria since the last assessment.
- Many farmland and woodland species have failed to recover from declines that led to red listing in the past, with some declining further still.
- Amongst the species with increased conservation concern are a number of long-distance migrants such as the cuckoo, tree pipit, yellow wagtail, wood warbler, and three seabirds: the Balearic shearwater, herring gull and Arctic skua (the latter being the only species to move straight from green to red).
- A small number of species have shown signs of recovery, with woodlark and stone-curlew moving from the red list to amber in response to targeted conservation action.

The yellow wagtail (below) and the dunlin (below right) are both species of increased conservation concern.



## Data sources

This review used the most up-to-date information on the status of birds in the UK and elsewhere within their ranges. The global and European conservation status assessments come from BirdLife International's *Threatened Birds of the World 2004* and subsequent updates, and *Birds in Europe: population estimates, trends and conservation status*. The latter also provided European population estimates. UK population estimates come from the Avian Population Estimates Panel or recent targeted surveys.

Information on trends in population sizes and ranges is from a wide range of sources, most notably:

- The BTO<sup>2</sup>/JNCC<sup>3</sup> Common Birds Census and the BTO/JNCC/RSPB<sup>4</sup> Breeding Bird Survey (which provide trends in common breeding birds).
- The JNCC/RSPB/SOTEAG<sup>5</sup> Seabird Monitoring Programme and Seabird 2000 (seabird trends and population estimates).

- BTO/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey and the WWT<sup>6</sup>/JNCC Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (trends and population estimates for wintering waterbirds).
- The Rare Breeding Birds Panel and single-species surveys, mostly as part of the Statutory Conservation Agencies and the RSPB Annual Breeding Bird Scheme (trends and population estimates for scarce and rare breeding birds).
- Trends in range come from single-species surveys, Seabird 2000, and the BTO/IWC<sup>7</sup> 1968–72 and BTO/SOC<sup>8</sup>/IWC 1988–91 breeding bird atlases. Due to the lack of recent range data, relatively few species have been assessed against the range change criteria.

Information on distribution comes from the JNCC's *The UK SPA Network*, and BirdLife International's *Important Bird Areas Database*.



<sup>1</sup> This review covers the UK, Channel Isles and Isle of Man

<sup>2</sup> British Trust for Ornithology

<sup>3</sup> Joint Nature Conservation Committee

<sup>4</sup> The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

<sup>5</sup> Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group

<sup>6</sup> Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

<sup>7</sup> Irish Wildbird Conservancy

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Ornithologists' Club

## The criteria

The criteria used in assessments are intended to ensure that Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) listings reflect each species' global and European status as well as that within the UK, and additionally measure the importance of the UK population in international terms.

### The red list criteria

Species that meet any of the following criteria are red listed:

**IUCN** Global Conservation Status. Species listed by BirdLife International as being Globally Threatened using IUCN criteria.

**HD** Historical Decline. A severe decline in the UK between 1800 and 1995, without substantial recent recovery.

**BDp** Breeding Population Decline. Severe decline in the UK breeding population size, of more than 50%, over 25 years (BDp<sup>1</sup>) or the entire period used for assessments since the first BoCC review, starting in 1969 ("longer-term") (BDp<sup>2</sup>).

**WDp** Non-breeding Population Decline. Severe decline in the UK non-breeding population size, of more than 50%, over 25 years (WDp<sup>1</sup>) or the longer-term (WDp<sup>2</sup>).

**BDr** Breeding Range Decline. Severe decline in the UK range, of more than 50%, as measured by number of 10 km squares occupied by breeding birds, over 25 years (BDr<sup>1</sup>) or the longer-term (BDr<sup>2</sup>).

### The amber list criteria

Species that meet any of the following criteria, but none of the red list criteria, are amber listed:

**SPEC** European Conservation status. Categorised as a Species of European Conservation Concern (SPEC 1, 2 or 3).

**HDrec** Historical Decline – Recovery. Red listed for Historical Decline in a previous review but with substantial recent recovery (more than doubled in the last 25 years).

**BDMp** Breeding Population Decline. As for red list criteria BDp<sup>1</sup> and BDp<sup>2</sup>, but with moderate decline (by more than 25% but less than 50%).

**WDMp** Non-breeding Population Decline. As for red list criteria WDp<sup>1</sup> and WDp<sup>2</sup>, but with moderate decline (by more than 25% but less than 50%).

**BDMr** Breeding Range Decline. As for red list criteria BDr<sup>1</sup> and BDr<sup>2</sup>, but with moderate decline (by more than 25% but less than 50%).

**BR** and **WR** Rarity. UK breeding population of less than 300 pairs (BR), or non-breeding population of less than 900 individuals (WR).

**BL** and **WL** Localisation. At least 50% of the UK breeding (BL) or non-breeding (WL) population found in 10 or fewer sites.

**BI** and **WI** International Importance. At least 20% of the European breeding (BI) or non-breeding<sup>a</sup> (WI) population found in the UK.

### The green list criteria

All regularly occurring species that do not qualify under any of the red or amber criteria are green listed. The green list also includes those species listed as recovering from Historical Decline in the last review that have continued to recover<sup>b</sup> and do not qualify under any of the other criteria.

## Changes in criteria since the last review

Whilst it is preferable to keep the assessment procedure the same between reviews to ensure comparability, we have made some changes since 2002 which affect the listing of species. Most notably, we have introduced a longer time period over which we assess population size and range trends of both breeding and non-breeding populations, in addition to the existing 25 year period. This longer-term period runs from 1969, the beginning of the 25 year time period used by the first BoCC assessment, over the entire period of review. This was felt necessary to avoid the inappropriate down-grading (from red to amber or even green) of species which no longer show severe declines over the most recent 25 years but have made no recovery (or have declined even further). Additionally, we have introduced a new rare non-breeder criterion to mirror the breeding criterion.

<sup>a</sup> Population estimates for NW Europe and East Atlantic Flyway used for non-breeding wildfowl and waders respectively.  
<sup>b</sup> By showing at least a 20% increase since the previous review.



The Arctic skua has gone straight from the green list to the red list because of a severe decline in the breeding population.

The red list

Names in italics indicate species new to the red list.

	IUCN Global Conservation Status		IUCN Global Conservation Status
<i>Balearic shearwater</i>	■	HD Historical decline	HD2 Historical decline
Bittern	■	BDp <sup>1</sup> Breeding decline 25 year	BDp <sup>1</sup> Breeding decline 25 year
<i>Scaup</i>		BDp <sup>2</sup> Breeding decline longer-term	BDp <sup>2</sup> Breeding decline longer-term
Common scoter		WDp <sup>1</sup> Non-breeding decline 25 year	WDp <sup>1</sup> Non-breeding decline 25 year
White-tailed eagle		WDp <sup>2</sup> Non-breeding decline longer-term	WDp <sup>2</sup> Non-breeding decline longer-term
Hen harrier		BDr <sup>1</sup> Range decline 25 year	BDr <sup>1</sup> Range decline 25 year
Black grouse		BDr <sup>2</sup> Range decline longer-term	BDr <sup>2</sup> Range decline longer-term
Capercaillie		SPEC SPEC status	SPEC SPEC status
Grey partridge		HDRec Recovering Historical Decliner	HDRec Recovering Historical Decliner
Corncrake		BDMp <sup>1</sup> Breeding decline 25 year	BDMp <sup>1</sup> Breeding decline 25 year
<i>Lapwing</i>		BDMp <sup>2</sup> Breeding decline longer-term	BDMp <sup>2</sup> Breeding decline longer-term
<i>Temminck's stint</i>		WDMp <sup>1</sup> Non-breeding decline 25 year	WDMp <sup>1</sup> Non-breeding decline 25 year
<i>Dunlin</i>		WDMp <sup>2</sup> Non-breeding decline longer-term	WDMp <sup>2</sup> Non-breeding decline longer-term
<i>Ruff</i>		BDMr <sup>1</sup> Range decline 25 year	BDMr <sup>1</sup> Range decline 25 year
Black-tailed godwit		BDMr <sup>2</sup> Range decline longer-term	BDMr <sup>2</sup> Range decline longer-term
<i>Whimbrel</i>		BR Breeding rarity	BR Breeding rarity
Red-necked phalarope		WR Non-breeding rarity	WR Non-breeding rarity
<i>Arctic skua</i>		BL Breeding localised	BL Breeding localised
<i>Herring gull</i>		WL Non-breeding localised	WL Non-breeding localised
Roseate tern		BI Breeding internationally important	BI Breeding internationally important
Turtle dove		WI Non-breeding internationally important	WI Non-breeding internationally important
<i>Cuckoo</i>			
Nightjar			
Wryneck			
Lesser spotted woodpecker			
Skylark			
<i>Tree pipit</i>			
<i>Yellow wagtail</i>			
Ring ouzel			
<i>Fieldfare</i>			
Song thrush			
<i>Redwing</i>			
Grasshopper warbler			
Savi's warbler			
Aquatic warbler	■		
Marsh warbler			
<i>Wood warbler</i>			
Spotted flycatcher			
Marsh tit			
Willow tit			
<i>Golden oriole</i>			
Red-backed shrike	■		
Starling			
House sparrow			
Tree sparrow			
Linnet			
Twite	■		
<i>Lesser redpoll</i>			
<i>Hawfinch</i>			
Yellowhammer			
Chil bunting			
Corn bunting	■		

## The amber list

see previous pages for criteria codes

	SPEC	HDrec	BDMp <sup>1</sup>	BDMp <sup>2</sup>	WDMp <sup>1</sup>	WDMp <sup>2</sup>	BDMr <sup>1</sup>	BDMr <sup>2</sup>	BR	WR	BL	WL	BI	WI
Red-throated diver	■													
Black-throated diver	■								■	■				
Great northern diver														■
Little grebe			■	■										
Red-necked grebe				■						■				
Slavonian grebe	■		■	■					■	■				
Black-necked grebe									■	■				
Fulmar			■								■			
Sooty shearwater	■													
Manx shearwater	■							■			■		■	
European storm-petrel											■			
Leach's storm-petrel	■										■		■	
Gannet											■		■	
Shag			■	■							■		■	
Little egret											■			
Spoonbill	■									■				
Bewick's swan	■								■			■		■
Whooper swan										■		■		
Bean goose										■				
Pink-footed goose											■		■	
Greylag goose											■		■	
Barnacle goose											■		■	
Brent goose	■										■		■	
Shelduck											■		■	
Wigeon											■		■	
Gadwall	■										■		■	
Teal											■		■	
Mallard				■	■								■	
Pintail	■								■				■	
Garganey	■								■					
Shoveler	■												■	
Pochard	■			■	■									■
Tufted duck	■													
Eider				■										
Velvet scoter	■										■			
Goldeneye									■					
Smew	■									■				
Honey-buzzard									■					

	SPEC	HDrec	BDMp <sup>1</sup>	BDMp <sup>2</sup>	WDMp <sup>1</sup>	WDMp <sup>2</sup>	BDMr <sup>1</sup>	BDMr <sup>2</sup>	BR	WR	BL	WL	BI	WI
Red kite	■													
Marsh harrier										■	■			
Montagu's harrier										■				
Golden eagle	■													
Osprey	■									■				
Kestrel	■													
Merlin		■												
Red grouse			■	■										
Quail	■	■		■										
Spotted crane										■				
Crane	■									■				
Oystercatcher										■			■	■
Avocet											■	■		
Stone-curlew	■							■			■			
Ringed plover			■											■
Dotterel											■			
Golden plover														■
Grey plover												■		■
Knot	■											■		■
Purple sandpiper					■					■				■
Jack snipe	■													■
Snipe	■													■
Woodcock	■													■
Bartailed godwit												■		■
Curlew	■		■	■									■	■
Spotted redshank	■										■			■
Redshank	■		■	■										■
Green sandpiper										■				
Wood sandpiper	■									■	■			
Common sandpiper	■		■											
Turnstone														■
Great skua											■		■	
Mediterranean gull										■				
Little gull	■													
Black-headed gull					■									■
Common gull	■													■
Lesser black-backed gull											■		■	
Yellow-legged gull										■				

The amber list

	SPEC	HDrec	BDMp <sup>1</sup>	BDMp <sup>2</sup>	WDMp <sup>1</sup>	WDMp <sup>2</sup>	BDMr <sup>1</sup>	BDMr <sup>2</sup>	BR	WR	BL	WL	BI	WI
Iceland gull										■				
Glaucous gull										■				
Great black-backed gull					■									
Kittiwake			■								■			
Sandwich tern	■						■				■			
Common tern											■			
Arctic tern							■							
Little tern	■						■						■	
Black tern	■													
Guillemot											■		■	
Razorbill											■			
Black guillemot	■										■			
Puffin	■										■			
Stock dove													■	
Barn owl	■													
Short-eared owl	■													
Swift		■												
Kingfisher	■													
Green woodpecker	■													
Woodlark	■						■				■			
Shorelark										■				
Sand martin	■													
Swallow	■													
House martin	■		■	■										
Meadow pipit			■	■										
Water pipit										■				
Grey wagtail					■									
Duncock					■									
Nightingale			■											
Black redstart			■	■					■					
Common redstart	■													
Whinchat			■											
Wheatear	■													
Mistle thrush			■	■										
Dartford warbler	■										■			
Common whitethroat				■										
Willow warbler			■	■										
Firecrest									■					

	SPEC	HDrec	BDMp <sup>1</sup>	BDMp <sup>2</sup>	WDMp <sup>1</sup>	WDMp <sup>2</sup>	BDMr <sup>1</sup>	BDMr <sup>2</sup>	BR	WR	BL	WL	BI	WI
Pied flycatcher			■											
Bearded tit							■				■			
Crested tit	■													
Short-toed treecreeper									■					
Chough	■													
Serín			■						■					
Scottish crossbill	■												■	
Parrot crossbill									■					
Bullfinch			■	■										
Lapland bunting										■				
Snow bunting									■					
Reed bunting				■										



Swift: amber listed as a declining breeding species



White-fronted geese of the Greenland race *flavirostris*

## A new approach: red and amber lists for races

In some cases, it may be appropriate to focus conservation attention below the level of species: at races (subspecies). Such an approach allows the recognition of the importance of the UK for endemic races, to distinguish between races of the same species that face different pressures, to protect genetic diversity and to allow conservation action to be targeted efficiently.

For the first time in the UK, we have assessed the status of regularly occurring races. The same data sources and criteria were used as for species, although there were instances where data were unavailable or were of poor quality. In a few cases there is even doubt about the validity of races.

The complete race-level assessment can be found in the June 2009 issue of the journal *British Birds* or online at [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk). Here, we give the red listed races for which we have a higher degree of concern than we do for their parent species.

### Races that have a higher conservation concern than their parent species: **red listed races**

British name	Scientific name for race
Taiga bean goose	<i>fabalis</i>
European white-fronted goose	<i>albifrons</i>
Greenland white-fronted goose	<i>flavirostris</i>
Dark-bellied brent goose	<i>bernicla</i>
Eider	<i>mollissima</i>
Stone-curlew	<i>oedicnemus</i>
Fair Isle wren	<i>fridariensis</i>
St Kilda wren	<i>hirtensis</i>



Eider: the race *mollissima* is on the race red list

## The new red and amber lists: themes and messages

The BoCC3 red, amber and green lists provide a tool for guiding conservation action for birds in the UK and setting priorities for action on individual species. They are not, however, intended to do that in isolation. Many other factors, such as feasibility, likelihood of success, and collateral benefits for other species must be considered in setting conservation priorities and strategies. The BoCC3 lists should be the starting point for such decisions, not the end point.

Importantly, all the major bird conservation organisations, both governmental and non-governmental, endorse the BoCC3 lists (see back cover).

The growth of the red list since the last assessment is a cause for concern. Whilst few species have moved off the red list (34 of the 40 species red listed by the previous assessment remain), 18 species have been red listed for the first time. Eleven species are now on the red list because of a change in criteria: trends are assessed over a long-term period as well as a 25-year window. In addition, 23 species have moved from green to amber. Examining the new lists, some clear themes emerge:

### Farmland birds

Both the previous BoCC reviews have highlighted the plight of many of our farmland birds, which declined rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s due to the impacts of agricultural intensification. Although much research has been conducted to identify how to help red listed farmland birds such as skylark, grey partridge and corn bunting, and government agri-environment schemes have been devised to deliver this help, we are yet to see substantial recovery related to this action. Reed bunting is the only widespread farmland bird to have moved off the red list, and yellow wagtail and lapwing have moved from amber to red.

### Woodland birds

The last BoCC review identified woodland birds as a new area of concern. BoCC3 reinforces this, with a further four species – tree pipit, wood warbler, lesser redpoll and hawfinch – moving from amber to join lesser spotted woodpecker and willow and marsh tits on the red list. Further research is urgently needed to identify what is driving these declines.

### Seabirds

Recent widespread breeding failures have raised the profile of the UK's internationally important seabird populations, and such concerns are backed up by the arrival of three seabirds on the red list in addition to roseate tern. Arctic skua is the only species to move from green straight to red, as the result of a severe decline, and it is joined on the red list by herring gull and Balearic shearwater.

### Long distance migrants

Four of the birds new to the red list – cuckoo, yellow wagtail, tree pipit and wood warbler – are sub-Saharan migrants. Although it is not yet possible to disentangle the effects of a range of pressures on the breeding grounds, migration routes and wintering grounds, the increasing concern afforded to a number of long-distance migrants hints at potential issues outside the UK.

### Edge-of-range breeders

Predictions suggest that bird ranges in Europe might move north and east in response to climate change, and there is good evidence that this is already happening. While a causal relationship has not been demonstrated, the addition to the red list of five species – Temminck's stint, ruff, whimbrel, redwing and fieldfare – for which the UK lies at the southern edge of the range may be evidence of such range shifts. These

species have had only a toehold in the UK in recent decades, and now that appears to be slipping.

### Recovery

We should use the new BoCC list to recognise that not all is doom and gloom, as conservation action is delivering results. Both stone-curlew and woodlark have moved from red to amber since the 2002 review as a result of targeted conservation action. This demonstrates that given the understanding and resources it is possible to turn around the fortunes of threatened species. We hope that future reviews may see more species benefit from such action.

### Races

The assessment at race level highlights the conservation and biodiversity significance of the UK's endemic and near-endemic races. It also allows us to target conservation prioritisation more precisely; for example, the wintering *islandica* race of black-tailed godwit is flourishing and green listed: the *limosa* race (which breeds in England) is declining and red-listed. Although most bird conservation work in the UK is targeted at species, this new approach may prove a valuable tool.



Wood warbler: now on the red list.





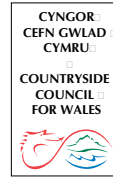
[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)



[www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)



[www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org)



[www.ccw.gov.uk](http://www.ccw.gov.uk)



[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)



[www.hawkandowl.org](http://www.hawkandowl.org)



[www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)



[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)



[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)



[www.ni-environment.gov.uk](http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk)



[www.rbbp.org.uk](http://www.rbbp.org.uk)



[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)



Scottish Natural Heritage  
All of nature for all of Scotland

[www.snh.org.uk](http://www.snh.org.uk)



THE SCOTTISH  
ORNITHOLOGISTS' CLUB

[www.the-soc.org.uk](http://www.the-soc.org.uk)



[www.seabirdgroup.org.uk](http://www.seabirdgroup.org.uk)



Welsh Ornithological  
Society

[www.welshos.org.uk](http://www.welshos.org.uk)



[www.wwt.org.uk](http://www.wwt.org.uk)

For more details, please see:

Eaton MA, Brown AF, Noble DG, Musgrove AJ, Hearn R, Aebischer NJ, Gibbons DW, Evans A and Gregory RD (2009) Birds of Conservation Concern 3: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. *British Birds* 102, pp296–341.

Photographs: (cover) cuckoo (now red listed) by Mark Hamblin, yellow wagtail by Steve Round, dunlin by Danny Green, Arctic skua by Graham Eaton, swift by David Tipling, Greenland white-fronted geese by Andy Hay, eider by Mike Read, wood warbler by Steve Round (all rspb-images.com)

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654  
210-1392-08-09