

# Essex Biodiversity Action Plan

*A Wild Future for Essex*



# BITTERN (*Botaurus stellaris*)



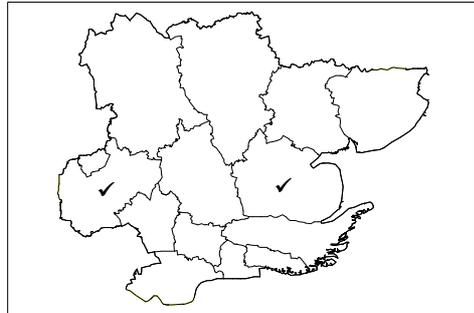
**National Lead Partner:** RSPB  
**County Lead Partner:** RSPB (01603 660066)  
**Associated Plans:** Reedbeds

## 1. CURRENT STATUS IN THE UK

- 1.1 The bittern is a large, brown, secretive heron which inhabits dense reedbeds feeding on fish and amphibians. It is rarely seen, but its presence can be recorded by the characteristic booming of the male birds.
- 1.2 It is a rare, declining and highly localised breeding species almost entirely confined to lowland reedbeds in Norfolk, Suffolk and Lancashire. The UK breeding population has declined from a peak of 70 pairs in eight counties in the late 1960s to only 11 booming males in 1997. The breeding population is boosted in the winter by continental migrants.
- 1.2 It is listed on Annex 1 of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix III of the Bern Convention. It is protected in the UK under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

## 2. CURRENT STATUS IN ESSEX

- 2.1 The bittern has bred once in Essex (at Old Hall Marshes c.1944) and summered regularly at Old Hall Marshes until 1962. The species regularly winters in the county in the Lee Valley at Fishers Green and at Old Hall Marshes.



## 3. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

- 3.1 Loss of suitable large reedbeds through seral succession, inappropriate management (particularly drainage and water abstraction) and fragmentation.
  - 3.2 Degradation of habitat through eutrophication, pesticide and heavy metal pollution.
  - 3.3 Food availability, especially of eels, affected by inappropriate habitat management and pollution.
  - 3.4 Salt water intrusion into coastal reedbeds.
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3.5 Problems due to small population size.

#### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

- 4.2 A high proportion of remaining national bittern sites are protected as nature reserves.
- 4.3 Detailed studies on bittern ecology have been carried out by the RSPB leading to a greater understanding of habitat requirements.
- 4.4 Management work has been carried out by statutory agencies and NGOs to restore and re-create suitable reedbed habitat for bitterns.
- 4.5 English Nature launched its Bittern Recovery Project, with funding available to landowners and NGOs for reedbed management and restoration.
- 4.6 Improved monitoring of populations has been achieved through voice pattern analysis.
- 4.7 Ongoing reedbed restoration, protection and creation work at Old Hall Marshes RSPB reserve as part of EU LIFE project. This site is thought to have the potential to hold a single breeding pair.
- 4.8 Reedbed work planned as outlined in Essex Reedbed Action Plan.
- 4.9 Implementation and promotion of water abstraction policies by the EA which give priority to nature conservation sites of national and international importance.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

- 5.1 Encourage bitterns to breed in Essex.
- 5.2 Provide suitable bittern wintering sites.
- 5.3 Create 10 ha of new reedbed at Cheshunt Gravel Pits in Lee Valley, with a view to providing suitable wintering habitat, and encouraging breeding of at least a single pair within 10 years.

#### **6. PROPOSED ACTIONS WITH LEAD AGENCIES**

The bittern has not bred in the county since the 1940s, and occurrence of individuals has declined at all times of the year since then. The actions proposed are concentrated on recreating suitable bittern breeding and wintering habitats. This should not only benefit the bittern, but also the status of other, less publicised, species. See also county reedbed action plan.

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## **6.1 Policy and legislation**

- 6.1.1 Implement initiatives for the creation and management of large scale reedbeds on agricultural land. (ACTION: EN, EA, RSPB, MAFF, FRCA).
- 6.1.2 Ensure adequate protection of freshwater reedbeds of high conservation importance from sea water incursion in line with Essex Shoreline Management Plan. Target = All freshwater reedbeds protected from sea water incursion where economically feasible and desirable by 2005. (ACTION: EA, EN, RSPB, EWT).
- 6.1.3 Promote, in development plans, appropriate conditions of after-use for sand and gravel extraction sites which would favour reedbed development, ensuring that equal or greater priority is given to conservation as is currently afforded to recreation after-use. Target = All development plans in Essex to promote reedbed creation as a mineral extraction after use. (ACTION: EN, ECC, LAs, EWT, RSPB).
- 6.1.4 Consider developing environmental land management schemes to include prescriptions and incentives for reedbed restoration and management. (ACTION: EN, ECC, LAs, EA).
- 6.1.5 Promote the development and enhancement of suitable bittern habitats in relevant LEAPs and Water Level Management Plans. Target = All relevant LEAPs and WLMPs to contain action to create or enhance suitable bittern habitat. (ACTION: EA, RSPB, EN).
- 6.1.6 Support SPA status for the Lee Valley. Target = Lee Valley to be designated as SPA by 2001. (ACTION: All BAP partners, LVRPA)

## **6.2 Site safeguard and management**

- 6.2.1 Manage and restore existing reedbeds in order to encourage bitterns to breed. Target = All reedbeds >10ha in size in suitable condition for breeding bittern by 2005. (ACTION: RSPB, EWT, EN, Private Owners, LVRPA).
- 6.2.2 Promote and facilitate reedbed creation on surplus agricultural land, mineral extraction sites etc. (ACTION: EN, ECC, LAs, RSPB, EWT, Landfill Trusts).
- 6.2.3 Protect any sites which are important for bitterns, having regard to the significance of formal and informal site designations when considering any proposed developments. (ACTION: EN, RSPB, LAs).

## **6.3 Species management and protection**

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6.3.1 Consider supplementary feeding in severe winters. Target = the need for a supplementary feeding programme to be assessed and if adopted the programme to be designed and in place by 2000. (ACTION: RSPB, EBS, EFC).

6.3.2 Determine current food supply on key sites and manage accordingly. Target = food supplies on key sites known and management mechanisms implemented by 2001. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EA, EBS, EFC).

#### **6.4 Advisory**

6.4.1. Advise reedbed owners and managers of bittern requirements in order to promote appropriate management for this species using currently managed sites (e.g. Old Hall Marshes) as examples. Target: mechanism for giving advice on reedbed management in place by 2000. (ACTION: EN, RSPB, EA, EWT, Lee Valley Conservation Group).

#### **6.5 Future research and monitoring**

6.5.1 Use results of national research to ensure that reedbeds in Essex are managed optimally for bitterns Target: all reedbed sites in Essex to have agreed management plan by 2002 (ACTION: EN, RSPB, EWT, MoD, Lee Valley Conservation Group).

6.5.2 Monitor all reedbed sites for bittern activity Target = all reedbed sites monitored regularly by 2000. (ACTION: EN, RSPB, EWT, EBS, EFC).

6.5.3 If feasible, colour-ring and radio-tag bitterns in Lee Valley to investigate their movements and use of sites within the Lee Valley. Target = Feasibility study completed by 2000 (check with LVRPA). (ACTION: RMRG, RSPB).

6.5.4 Ensure that any bittern corpses or addled eggs are analysed for heavy metals and pesticides. Target = Protocol for dealing with any addled eggs or dead birds designed and in place by 2000. (ACTION: RSPB, EN).

6.5.5 Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to JNCC, BRC and BirdLife International so that it can be incorporated in national databases and an up-to-date global red list. Target = Data to be submitted to JNCC, BRC and BirdLife International on an annual basis. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EBS, EFC, EWT).

#### **6.6 Communications and publicity**

6.6.1 Use this species to promote the importance of reedbeds and their conservation. Target = ongoing. (ACTION: EN, EWT, RSPB, LAs).

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6.6.2 Maintain the bittern watch point at Cheshunt Pits. (ACTION: LVRPA, RSPB).

# GREY PARTRIDGE (*Perdix perdix*)



**National Lead Partner:** TGCT  
**County Lead Partner:** RSPB (01603  
660066)

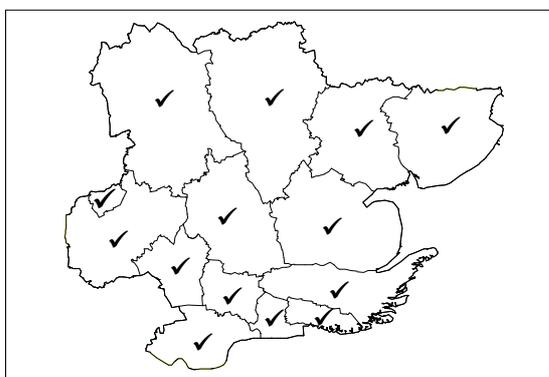
**Associated Plans:** Cereal field margins,  
ancient and species rich hedgerows, skylark,  
brown hare.

## 1. CURRENT STATUS IN THE UK

- 1.1 This is the only native partridge in the British Isles. It occurs in arable fields, rough pasture, heaths and moorland. It is a widespread species with an estimated national population of 150,000 pairs. However, the population has declined by over 50% between 1969 and 1990.
- 1.2 This species is protected in the close season under the Game Acts. It is listed on Annex III/I of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix III of the Bern Convention.

## 2. CURRENT STATUS IN ESSEX

- 2.1 The grey partridge is patchily distributed through all the Essex districts with strongholds along the Thames estuary, Colne and Hamford Water and the Dengie area and inland in the Epping Forest district. Population trends are unclear, but it appears to have steadily declined since the 1940s with some stabilisation over the past few years (Dennis, 1996).



## 3. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

- 3.1 Loss of nest sites (such as hedge bottoms) as a result of farm intensification.
  - 3.2 Reduced food supplies and sources for chick food through the use of pesticides and herbicides, as well as the loss of winter stubble used as a food source by adults.
  - 3.3 Vulnerability of nests to predators in farmland with poor cover.
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3.4 Nest destruction caused by early mowing and other farm operations.

#### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

4.1 The Game Conservancy Trust (TGCT) encourages land managers to create suitable conditions for grey partridges, including suitable nest sites and cover, summer and winter feeding areas (e.g. conservation headlands and winter stubbles), and control of predators and shooting.

4.2 Some suitable habitat is also provided on some land under CSS and the pilot ASS scheme.

4.3 A species action plan has been prepared for this species by the RSPB, the country agencies and the TGCT.

4.4 Arable margins are being promoted via the ESA review.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

5.1 Halt and reverse the decline of the grey partridge in Essex

5.2 Maintain, and where possible enlarge, the range of the species in Essex.

#### **6. PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES**

##### **6.1 Policy and legislation**

6.1.1 Encourage the uptake of agri-environmental schemes taking the needs of this species into account. Target = agri-environment schemes to have grey partridge prescriptions by 2003. (ACTION: MAFF, FWAG, NFU, EN, EWT).

6.1.2 Promote appropriate set aside management. Target = 50% set-aside in Essex managed to benefit grey partridge by 2003. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, MAFF).

6.1.3 Encourage the targeted use of pesticides on farmland. Target = Guidance material produced by 2000. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, EN).

##### **6.2 Site safeguard and management**

6.2.1 Review management of land owned or managed by BAP partner bodies for grey partridge and other farmland wildlife. Target = management practices reviewed considering grey partridge requirements by 2001. (ACTION: ECC, LAs, RSPB, EWT, NT)

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### **6.3 Species management and protection**

6.3.1 No action proposed.

### **6.4 Advisory**

6.4.1 Continue to provide information and advice on field margins, set-aside management etc. through TGCT, FWAG and other advisors. Target = ongoing. (ACTION: TGCT, FWAG, EN).

6.4.2 Promote field margins as wildlife habitat. Target = ongoing. (ACTION: FWAG, EN, EWT, NFU).

### **6.5 Future research and monitoring**

6.5.1 Encourage local research and survey, especially when linked to farmland management for grey partridge. Target = a greater understanding of grey partridge habitat requirements in Essex by 2003. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, FWAG, EBS, EFC).

6.5.2 Pass information gathered during survey and monitoring of this species to JNCC, BRC and BirdLife International so that it can be incorporated in national databases and contribute to the maintenance of an up-to-date global red-list. Target = Data to be submitted on an annual basis. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EBS, EFC).

### **6.6 Communications and publicity**

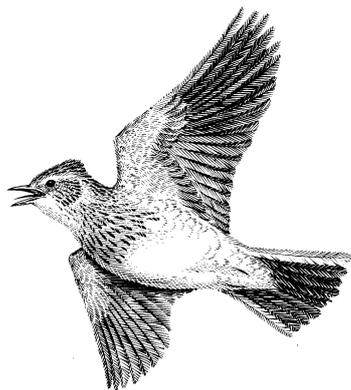
6.6.1 Use the grey partridge with other farmland species to illustrate the impact farm management may have on wildlife. Target = at least one grey partridge story in the local media annually. See also targets for skylark and brown hare. (ACTION: EN, EWT, RSPB, FWAG, NFU).

## **7. REFERENCES**

Dennis, M.K. (1996). *Tetrad Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Essex*. The Essex Birdwatching Society.

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# SKYLARK (*Alauda arvensis*)



**National Lead Partner:** RSPB

**County Lead Partner:** RSPB (01603 660066)

**Associated Plans:** Cereal field margins, grey partridge, brown hare.

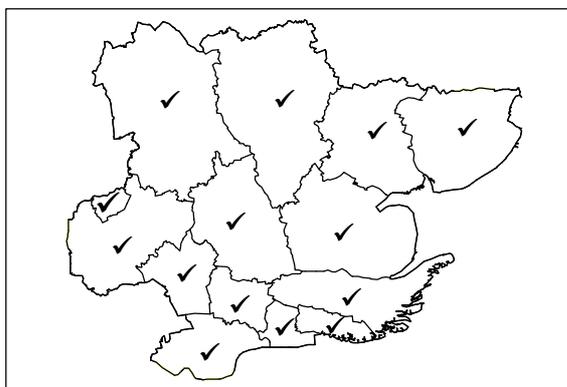
## 1. CURRENT STATUS IN THE UK

- 1.1 The skylark is a common and widespread ground dwelling bird which occurs in a wide variety of habitat types. It is heavily streaked with a noticeable crest and is most often seen during its characteristic escalating song flight in spring and early summer.
- 1.2 The estimated breeding population in Britain is approximately 2 million pairs. In winter a large number of continental immigrants have been noted (e.g. Cramp, 1988), but the number which settle is debatable.
- 1.3 The Skylark is a UK Red-listed species (BTO et al 1996) as a consequence of a 54% decline in the breeding Skylark population on lowland farmland in the UK between 1969 and 1991 and of having an unfavourable European conservation status (SPEC 3).
- 1.4 The Skylark is protected under the 1979 EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

## 2. CURRENT STATUS IN ESSEX

2.1 Common and widespread throughout Essex although breeding population has apparently declined steadily and significantly in recent years mirroring the national trend (Dennis, 1996).

2.2 Rainham Marsh has supported around 100 breeding pairs for the last 5 years, which demonstrates the importance of habitats other than farmland within the county.



### **3. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE**

- 3.1 Intensification of farming practices on lowland arable land has led to a reduction in available food for the skylark. The routine use of herbicides and insecticides have eliminated most ephemeral weeds and insect prey and the trend towards autumn-sown crops has also caused a loss of winter stubble fields.
- 3.2 Autumn-sown crops and intensively managed grassland create unsuitable nesting habitat for skylarks. The move from hay cropping to silage cutting on grasslands is destructive to nesting birds due to earlier and more frequent cutting.
- 3.3 High densities of skylarks are recorded on saltmarsh (Sharrock 1976), and are amongst the most widespread species found breeding and wintering on British saltmarsh (Fuller 1982). Inundation by high spring tides during the breeding season can result in almost complete nesting failure on some sites.

### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

- 4.1 Since the decline in Skylark numbers has only recently been identified little action has so far taken place. A national species action plan has been prepared by RSPB and agreed by the country agencies.
- 4.2 Research and survey work is in progress to identify the relative importance of the causes of the population decline, especially with respect to habitat change.
- 4.3 Skylark counts are carried out annually in Essex as part of the Common Bird Census and more recently the Breeding Bird Survey (1995 onwards). Specific skylark counts were also carried out on selected 1 km squares during the breeding season (1997) and again in the winter (1997/98), co-ordinated by BTO. These recent surveys will help ascertain the most important areas and habitats within the county for skylarks.
- 4.4 EWT and RSPB are currently monitoring farmland bird species in the Maldon district, including the skylark.
- 4.5 Arable margins are being promoted via the ESA review, and one of the pilot Arable Stewardship Scheme incorporates part of Essex. This legislation should aid the species, together with other farmland species.

### **5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

- 5.1 To maintain, and where possible, enlarge the population of skylarks in Essex.
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## **6. PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES**

### **6.1 Policy and legislation**

- 6.1.1 Lobby for the expansion of arable incentive scheme if pilot Arable Stewardship Scheme proves to be beneficial to the skylark. Target = towards the end of the ASS. (ACTION: FWAG, RSPB, MAFF, EN).
- 6.1.2 Promote appropriate set-aside management. Target = 50% of suitable set-aside in Essex managed to benefit skylark by 2003. (ACTION: FWAG, EN, RSPB, NFU).
- 6.1.3 Encourage targeted and more cautious use of pesticides on farmland. Target = Guidance material produced by 2000. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, MAFF, EN).

### **6.2 Site safeguard and management**

- 6.2.1 Review management of land owned by BAP partner bodies for Skylarks. Target = management practices on land owned by BAP partner reviewed in terms of skylark requirements by 2001. (ACTION: LAs, RSPB, EWT, NT, ECC).
- 6.2.2 Produce best practice land management guidelines, e.g. how best to manage land when weed treatment needs to take place in the presence of breeding birds. (ACTION: EN, RSPB, EWT, FWAG, NFU).

### **6.3 Species management and protection**

- 6.3.1 No action proposed.

### **6.4 Advisory**

- 6.4.1 Disseminate information on good management practices for skylarks throughout the region. Target = good practice guide for land management for skylarks to be produced and circulated by 2000. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, EN, EWT, RSPB).

### **6.5 Future research and monitoring**

- 6.5.1 Monitor the effect of ELMS on the numbers of skylark and other farmland species. (ACTION: FRCA, FWAG, local farmers).
  - 6.5.2 Continue local research and survey programmes, especially in relation to land use and farmland management. Target = ongoing. (ACTION: RSPB, EBS, BTO, EN, EWT).
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6.5.3 Encourage volunteer involvement in breeding and wintering bird survey, to ensure their continuation. Target = 50% more volunteer involvement in wintering and breeding bird surveys by 2001. (ACTION: RSPB, EWT, BTO, EBS).

6.5.4 Pass all survey and monitoring results to JNCC or BRC for incorporation into national databases. Provide information annually to BirdLife International for inclusion in an up to date Global red list. Target = Data to be submitted on an annual basis. (ACTION: RSPB, EBS, BTO, EWT).

## **6.6 Communications and publicity**

6.6.1 Ensure that farmland bird decline has a high profile using the skylark as one of the flagship species. Target = at least one skylark story in the local media annually. (ACTION: RSPB, FWAG, EWT, EN, NFU).

## **7. REFERENCES**

Cramp, S (ed.) (1988) *Handbook of the birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Vol. 5: Tyrant flycatchers to thrushes*. OUP, Oxford, UK.

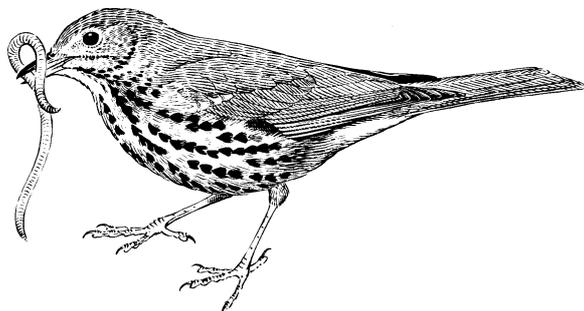
Dennis, M.K. (1996). *The Tetrads Atlas of Breeding Birds in Essex*. The Essex Birdwatching Society.

Fuller, R.J. (1982) *Bird habitats in Britain*. Calton.

(Sharrock J.T.R. (1976) *The atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland*. Tring

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## SONG THRUSH (*Turdus philomelus*)



**National Lead Partner:** RSPB

**County Lead Partner:** RSPB

(01603 660066)

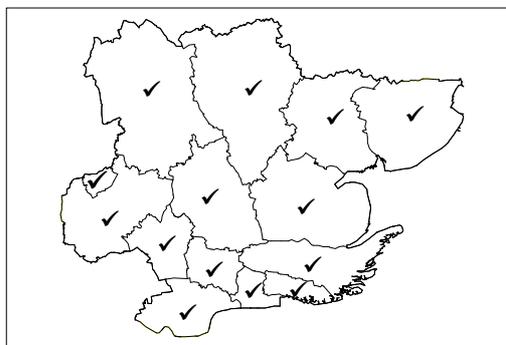
**Associated Plans:** Urban, ancient and species rich hedgerows, cereal field margins, ancient woodland.

### 1. CURRENT STATUS IN THE UK

- 1.1 The song thrush is a neat, medium sized thrush which is common and widespread and is found in a variety of habitats including woods, fields and gardens. It is currently declining throughout the UK - there has been an estimated population decline of 73% in farmland and 49% in woodland since the mid 1970s.
- 1.2 This species is protected under the EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

### 2. CURRENT STATUS IN ESSEX

- 2.1 Common and widespread throughout the county. Local population trend has mirrored national trend with a steady decline over recent years (Dennis, 1996).



### 3. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Reasons for decline are poorly known but could relate to the following:

- 3.1 Changes in farming affecting food supply and the availability of nest sites, particularly the switch from spring to autumn-sown cereals and possibly the increased use of molluscicides.
  - 3.2 Severe winter weather and dry soil conditions (especially during drier summers - possible effect of climate change) affecting food availability.
  - 3.3 Predation.
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3.4 Competition with blackbirds.

3.5 Hunting in southern France.

#### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

4.1 Little action has yet been taken as the decline in song thrush numbers has only recently been identified. A national species action plan has been prepared by RSPB and agreed by the country agencies.

4.2 Research and survey work is now in progress to identify the causes of the population decline. Research so far has identified mortality of juvenile birds as being a key factor in the population decline. The causes of this mortality are being investigated.

4.3 In Essex there is ongoing RSPB research at Ongar.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

5.1 Halt the decline in song thrush numbers in the county.

5.2 Continue RSPB research programme in Essex.

#### **6. PROPOSED ACTIONS WITH LEAD AGENCIES**

##### **6.1 Policy and Legislation**

6.1.1 Promote the uptake of sensitive farming options under existing agri-environment incentive schemes over the whole county to benefit song thrush. Target = 50% agri-environment applications to contain options to benefit song thrush by 2005. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, EN, FRCA).

6.1.2 Promote uptake and extension of the Arable Stewardship scheme in relevant areas with options to encourage song thrushes. Target = ensure options that will benefit song thrush are incorporated into Arable Stewardship by 2002. (ACTION: FRCA, NFU, FWAG, RSPB, EWT).

##### **6.2 Site safeguard and management**

6.2.1 No action proposed.

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### **6.3 Species management and protection**

6.3.1 No action proposed.

### **6.4 Advisory**

6.4.1 Ensure local authorities, landowners and managers are aware of the presence, legal status and conservation requirements of this species, and appropriate methods of habitat management. Target = disseminate information on song thrush habitat requirements and appropriate methods of habitat management. (ACTION: FRCA, FWAG, EWT, EN, LAs).

6.4.2 Promote careful and limited use of molluscicides in farming and in gardens. Target = literature explaining environmental dangers of using molluscicides produced by 2000. (ACTION: FWAG, ADAS, NFU, RSPB, EWT).

### **6.5 Future research and monitoring**

6.5.1 Promote local research or survey on the song thrush, especially when linked to habitat/management changes. Target = Habitat requirements of song thrush in Essex known by 2003. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EWT, EBS, EFC).

6.5.2 Continue annual monitoring of breeding birds through the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Birds Survey. Target = breeding birds monitored annually in Essex. (ACTION: RSPB, EBS, EFC, EWT).

6.5.3 Promote volunteer participation in Breeding Bird Survey. Target = 50% more volunteers participating in Breeding Bird Survey by 2001. (ACTION: EWT, RSPB, EBS, EFC).

### **6.6 Communication and publicity**

6.6.1 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, and actions being taken. Target = at least one song thrush story in local media annually. (ACTION: EWT, EN, RSPB, NFU).

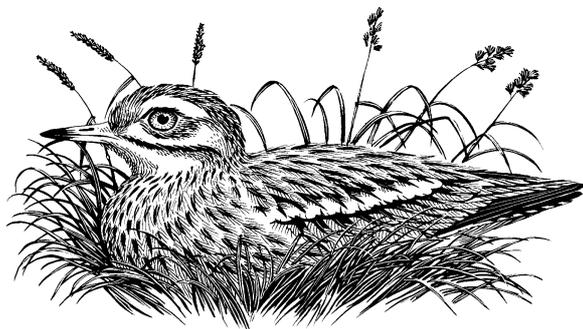
6.6.2 Encourage schools and people with gardens to put out food during cold winter spells as food for song thrushes. Target = publicity material to be distributed to local media and local authorities during cold winter spells. (ACTION: RSPB, EWT, LAs, EBS, EFC).

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## **7. REFERENCES**

Dennis, M.K. (1996). *The Tetrads Atlas of Breeding Birds in Essex*. The Essex Birdwatching Society.

## STONE CURLEW (*Burhinus oedicnemus*)



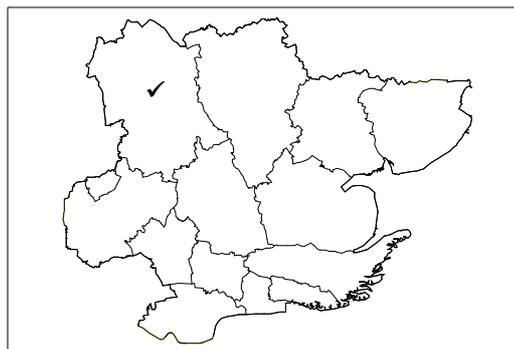
**National Lead Partner:** RSPB  
**County Lead Partner:** RSPB (01603  
660066)  
**Associated Plans:** Cereal field margin

### 1. CURRENT STATUS IN THE UK

- 1.1 The stone curlew is a large plover-like bird which inhabits stony and/or sparsely vegetated habitats. It is a rare and localised species, now largely confined to The Brecks (Norfolk/Suffolk) and Wessex (Hampshire/Wiltshire). The population has declined by 85% since 1940s and by over 50% since 1960.
- 1.2 The stone curlew is included as a UK red-listed species (RSPB *et al* 1996) under three categories: as having declined by over 50% within the last 25 years; as being a rare breeder and as having an unfavourable European conservation status (SPEC 3).
- 1.3 The stone curlew is protected under Schedule 1 of the 1981 WCA, Annex 1 of the 1979 EC Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

### 2. CURRENT STATUS IN ESSEX

- 2.1 There is a very small and declining population on chalk downland bordering NW Essex and SE Cambridgeshire. Last confirmed breeding in Essex was in 1992. Recent records probably refer to birds crossing county boundary from Cambridgeshire. Current estimates suggest that this population will be extinct in the very short term.



### 3. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

- 3.1 **Loss of semi-natural grasslands.** The conversion of semi-natural grasslands, especially chalk and heath grasslands, to arable farmland and forestry is thought to have been the main reason behind the decline in stone curlew numbers and distribution in the UK.
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**3.2 Reduction in grazing by rabbits and livestock.** There has been a decline in the area of short, grazed vegetation suitable for stone curlew due to reductions in grazing by rabbits and other livestock. Food availability has also declined through the loss of invertebrates associated with animal droppings.

**3.3 Changes in farming systems.** Stone curlews have adapted to breeding on arable fields preferring spring-sown crops which retain their open structure until June/July. A move towards winter-sown crops and agricultural intensification has resulted in a decline in suitability of much arable land for stone-curlews. Mechanical farm operations also destroy nests on arable land. In Essex, stone-curlews have been observed to breed exclusively on arable land.

**3.4 Predation.** Fox, crow and possibly stoat predation is a particular problem on grassland sites.

**3.5 Disturbance.**

**3.6 Egg collecting.**

**3.7 Others.** Other causes may include pesticide use and collisions with fences and utility lines.

#### **4. CURRENT ACTION**

4.1 A national Species Action Plan has been prepared and agreed by RSPB and English Nature.

4.2 RSPB is running an intensive species recovery programme based in the Brecks and Wessex.

4.3 RSPB monitors the south Cambridgeshire/Essex chalklands stone-curlew population and liaises with land-owners to promote management for stone curlew and to protect any nests from destruction by agricultural activities.

#### **5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

5.1 To encourage stone curlew to re-colonise NW Essex.

5.2 To increase the area of land managed appropriately for stone curlew (grazed grassland, spring-sown crops) through liaison with land owners, and through agri-environmental schemes.

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## **6. PROPOSED ACTION WITH LEAD AGENCIES**

### **6.1 Policy and legislation**

- 6.1.1 Promote the uptake of agri-environment schemes taking into account the habitat requirements of the stone curlew. Target = agri-environment schemes to have stone curlew prescriptions by 2003. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, EN, MAFF, RSPB).
- 6.1.2 Promote appropriate set-aside management for the species. Target = set-aside in NW Essex to be managed in a condition suitable for stone curlews by 2003. (ACTION: FWAG, NFU, MAFF, EN).

### **6.2 Site safeguard and management**

- 6.2.1 Implement appropriate management of sites should stone curlew nest in Essex in the future. Target = Contingency plan in place by 2000. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, FWAG).

### **6.3 Species management and protection**

- 6.3.1 Implement appropriate protection programme should stone curlew nest in Essex in the future. Target = Contingency plan in place by 2000. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, FWAG, EBS, EFC).

### **6.4 Advisory**

- 6.4.1 Disseminate information and advice on stone curlew conservation to landowners. Target = 1999 onwards. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, FWAG).

### **6.5 Future research and monitoring**

- 6.5.1 Continue monitoring of north Essex/south Cambridgeshire stone curlew population. Target = Stone curlew activity to be monitored annually. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EBS, EFC).
- 6.5.2 Provide data on a regular basis to JNCC or BRC and to BirdLife International for inclusion in up to date databases and red lists. Target = Data to be submitted on an annual basis. (ACTION: RSPB, EWT, EBS, EFC).

### **6.6 Communications and publicity**

- 6.6.1 Promote stone curlew conservation through media and education. Target = at least one stone curlew story in the local media annually. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EWT).
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6.6. 2 Encourage bird watchers to visit Norfolk Wildlife Trust's reserve at Weeting Heath to avoid disturbing breeding stone curlew if and when there are present in Essex. Target = No disturbance to breeding stone curlew in Essex from bird watchers. (ACTION: RSPB, EN, EWT, EBS, EFC).

## **7. REFERENCES**

RSPB, BirdLife International, WWT, BTO, The Hawk and Owl Trust, The Wildlife Trusts & The National Trust (1996). *Birds of conservation concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man*. RSPB, Sandy.

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