1. INTRODUCTION

The song thrush is one of our better known song birds, occurring in woodlands, hedgerows with abundant trees, parks and gardens throughout the sub-region. The song, which usually involves the repetition of phrases three times, gives a good indication of breeding densities and allows easy distinction from the rather similar mistle thrush.

It is a partial migrant, with some UK birds moving further south in Europe for the winter, while many continental birds winter in Britain. Earthworms and snails are important components of its diet. The song thrush is a good indicator of gardens that support abundant wildlife and now have a relatively large proportion of their populations in urban and suburban areas.

2. OBJECTIVES


PLEASE CONSULT THE ‘GENERIC SPECIES’ ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR OBJECTIVES COMMON TO ALL SPECIES PLANS

| A.   | To increase the breeding range to its 1988-91 extent. | 2015 |
| B.   | To increase the size of the breeding population to its estimated 1990 level. | 2020 |

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

The song thrush is on the current UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species list published in 2007 (Joint Nature Conservation Committee). The targets and objectives for the Song Thrush BAP, updated in 2010, may be seen online.

4. CURRENT STATUS

Over 75% of the world’s song thrushes breed and winter within Europe, where the species is protected under the EC Birds Directive. Between 4% and 10% of these are believed to be in Britain. Within the UK, it is on the Red Alert list of birds whose numbers have declined by more than 50% over the past 25 years (Gregory et al 2002).
British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) data show a national decline of 54% between 1970-2010 but an encouraging increase of 13% since 1995, with an increase for the West Midlands of 43% between 1994–2012. Figures from the Breeding Bird Survey suggest that the decline had temporarily levelled off, with confirmed breeding in 93% of 10km² (Smith 2014).

In Warwickshire, the breeding bird surveys of 1966-68, 1968-72 and 1988-91 all revealed song thrushes in every 10km square, with an estimated population around 1990 of 7,000-15,000 pairs. Distribution was monitored until 2006 by the Warwickshire Tetrad Breeding Survey and now by the Breeding Bird Survey. After initial declines between 1994 and 1995 the survey has shown a 52% growth for this species. At all regional levels the song thrush has increased in density with Warwickshire doing especially well. This increase may not have reversed early declines prior to 1994 but does show a positive response the only passerine that does so (Smith, 2014).

### 4.1 Legal and Policy Status

A wide range of species and habitats are protected under international and domestic laws, including the Wild Birds Directive (1979), the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), the Conservation Regulations (1994) and EC Habitats Directive (1992). Protection of sites is afforded nationally through Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designation, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) statutory status. Other sites are offered recognition of their value through Local Wildlife Site status (LWS), Local Character Areas and identified Landscape Scale Areas. The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) chapter/section 11 states conditions with regard to any development negatively affecting biodiversity, including protected sites, ancient woodland and other irreplaceable habitats (paragraph 118). The Wildlife & Countryside Act and schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations (2010) make it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, take, possess, sell, buy or transport a range of species.
The song thrush is protected under the EC Birds Directive and the Wildlife & Countryside Act.

4.2 Current Factors Affecting the Species

On intensive arable land, there is evidence that the nesting attempts made are insufficient to maintain a stable population. BTO data from the Nest Record Scheme indicate that breeding performance since the 1970s has improved; it was more likely that overwinter survival of juveniles was poor and resulted in the observed decline (Thompson et al 1997; Siriwardena et al. 1998). The reasons for the decline are still only partially understood, but recent research has identified some likely factors, including:

- **Current threats to conservation status:**
  - Land drainage and dry soil conditions have increased difficulty in accessing soil invertebrates, particularly during spring.
  - The switch to autumn-sown crops has led to a reduction in spring cultivation, reducing feeding areas during the early part of the breeding season.
  - Loss of large hedgerows, scrub and birch woodlands as a result of removal, succession and over management reducing suitable nesting and feeding habitat.
  - The use of pesticides has reduced invertebrate abundance.

- **Constraints to delivery of conservation action:**
  - Lack of knowledge of the impacts of climate change on song thrush as species is vulnerable to severe weather conditions and dry soil conditions.
  - Poor uptake and variable quality of agri-environment scheme (AES) prescriptions.
  - Public spending cuts may result in a lack of resource to deliver high-quality broad and shallow AES agreements (which compensate farmers for carrying out a range of cheap and simple measures across their farm) due to staff cuts, and also reduced funding for the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
  - Lack of targeting of agri-environment schemes for the options which benefit song thrush, so implementation is piecemeal and probably not effective at a landscape scale.

5. LOCAL ACTION
• Survey work nationally by the BTO includes sample plots within Warwickshire.

• The RSPB has produced advisory sheets in association with the GWCT for farmers, land-managers and advisors providing research-based information on the ecological needs of song thrush and practical methods of farming that will benefit them.

• In the Leam Catchment, reduction and management of the level of use of slug pellets is being undertaken by Severn Rivers Trust.

• In Rugby Borough Council and Warwick District Council the use of any type of slug pellets has been discontinued.

• Where applicable, the advisory work of the RSPB with farmers for song thrush is focused on the following Environmental Stewardship options (2013):
  ▪ retention and creation of wet features - HLS options HQ1: maintenance of ponds of high wildlife value (less than 100 m²) and HQ2: maintenance of ponds of high wildlife value (more than 100 m²)
  ▪ management of hedgerows, especially ELS options EB3: hedgerow management for landscape and wildlife and EB10: combined hedge and ditch management (incorporating EB3) and HLS options HB11: management of hedgerows of very high environmental value (both sides) and HB12: management of hedgerows of very high environmental value (one side).
  ▪ management of woodland, especially ELS option EC4: management of woodland edges and HLS options HC12: maintenance of wood pasture and parkland, HC13: restoration of wood pasture and parkland, HC14: creation of wood pasture, HC7: maintenance of woodland, HC8: restoration of woodland, HC15: maintenance of successional areas and scrub, HC16: restoration of successional areas and scrub and HC17: creation of successional areas and scrub.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

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<td><strong>Policy, Legislation &amp; Protection</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PL1. Promote the adoption of a policy to discontinue the use of all chemical slug repellents on land controlled by all local authorities.</strong></td>
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Site / Species Safeguard & Management

**SM1.** Actively propose management prescriptions under agri-environment schemes which are sympathetic to the song thrush’s requirements.

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**SM2.** Fulfil the requirements of nesting and wintering song thrushes through developing and implementing site management plans for woodland sites, targeting Princethorpe Woodlands landscape area initially.

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Advisory

**A1.** Continue to promote take-up of agri-environment schemes for sensitive farming options that will benefit song thrushes.

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Research & Monitoring

**RM1.** Implement effective monitoring of the population by the BTO Breeding Bird Survey.

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Communication, Education & Publicity

**CP1.** Actively encourage engagement in the BTO bird surveys for gardens and schools.

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7. **PROGRESS WITH ACTIONS**

From 2015–2020 there will be a rolling programme of reporting on progress, of 10 action plans per year with an annual summary of results. Results will be entered onto the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System BARS. Progress with this plan up to 2008 can be seen at [www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP2014](http://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP2014).

8. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


RSPB (2009) *Birds of Conservation Concern*


Natural England (2013) *Entry Level Stewardship handbook*


BTO (2013) *Bird Atlas 2007-11*: The Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland - a comprehensive overview of bird distribution and change in Britain and Ireland, giving national level trends which will place local issues in the national context.


9. FURTHER INFORMATION

Garden Organic (Henry Doubleday Research Association), Ryton, Coventry, Warwickshire, CV8 3LG. Tel: 024 76 303517
West Midlands Bird Club - serves birdwatchers and ornithologists in the four English counties of Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the Metropolitan West Midlands

RSPB Bird surveys: Garden Birdwatch and Big Schools’ Birdwatch

Natural England: Booklets on Wildlife Gardening, Wildlife Gardening Forum


Homes for Wildlife – the song thrush is a target species for this RSPB project which is engaging the public in managing their gardens for wildlife.

10. CONTACT

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Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Tel. 024 7630 2912