



REVISED PLAN JULY 2021

SONG THRUSH

Turdus philomelos

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.



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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	TARGETS
Associated Action Plans are: 'Woodland', 'Churchyards & Cemeteries', 'Gardens', 'Allotments', 'Traditional Orchards', 'Hedgerows' and 'Parks & Public Open Spaces'		
PLEASE CONSULT THE ' GENERIC SPECIES ' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR OBJECTIVES COMMON TO ALL SPECIES PLANS		
A.	To maintain the current breeding range of presence in every 10km square.	ongoing
B.	To increase the size of the breeding population to its estimated 1990 level of 7000-15000 pairs.	2030

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

The song thrush is on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species list published in 2007 ([Joint Nature Conservation Committee](#)). The Song Thrush BAP was updated in 2010.

4. CURRENT STATUS

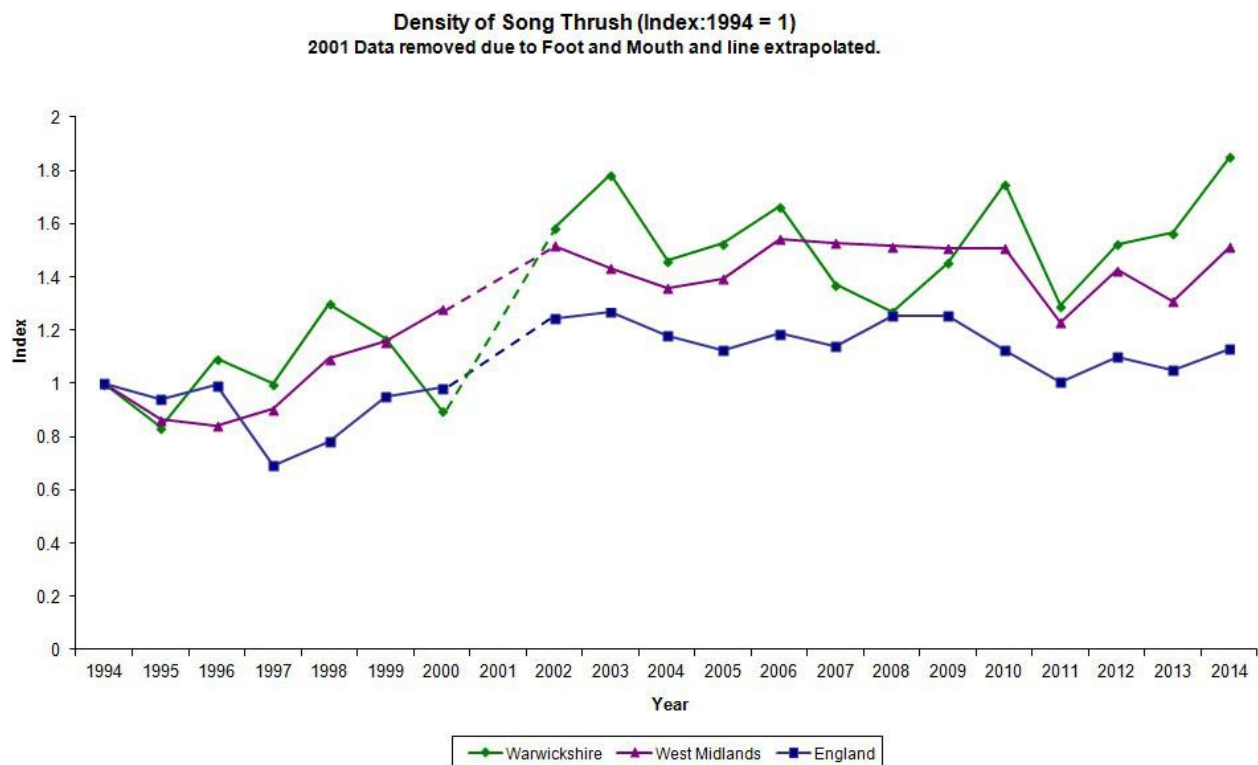
Over 75% of the world's song thrushes breed and winter within Europe, where the species is protected under the [EC Birds Directive](#). Between 4% and 10% of these are believed to be in Britain. Within the UK, it is on the Birds of Conservation Concern [Red List](#), birds whose numbers have declined by more than 50% over the past 25 years (Gregory *et al* 2002).

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A study of England's farmland has found key earthworm types are rare or absent in two out of five fields and has led to the majority of farmers affected vowing to change the way they farm. The results indicate widespread, historical over-cultivation, and may explain observed declines in the song thrush that feeds on these worms (Rothamstead, 2019).

The [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).

Numbers have consistently increased over the 20-year period 1994-2014, with Warwickshire outperforming both the regional and national picture; due to a lack of data it was not mapped in 2016 (see graph below, Smith, 2016). 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 is now monitored 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). It is suspected that the species must now be breeding in every 10km square in the county (County Bird Recorder, 2021)



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

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[Conservation Regulations](#) (1994) and [EC Habitats Directive](#) (1992). Protection of sites is afforded nationally through [Sites 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 are:**
 - 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 are:**
 - 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 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 [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#) (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.
- **Natural England:** where applicable, the [advisory work of the RSPB with farmers for song thrush](#) is focused on the following Environmental Stewardship options (2013); in 2020 implementation of these was reported as piecemeal and uptake poor (J.Bowley, pers.comm.)
 - **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.*
- **Use of chemical slug pellets:**
 - the promotion of a policy to discontinue the use of these on land controlled by all Local Authorities was achieved by Rugby Borough Council (RBC) in 2016
 - by 2020 only in Local Authorities Rugby Borough Council (RBC), Warwick District Council and North Warwickshire Borough Council has the use of any type has been discontinued. Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council does not use any within their grounds maintenance contract.
 - in the Leam Catchment, reduction and management of the level of use of slug pellets is being undertaken by [Severn Rivers Trust](#).
- The [Arden Farm Network](#) encourages its farmers to carry out the Big Farmland Bird Count.

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6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By
PLEASE CONSULT THE 'GENERIC SPECIES' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR ACTIONS COMMON TO ALL SPECIES PLANS			
Policy, Legislation & Protection			
PL1. Promote the adoption of a policy to discontinue the use of all chemical slug repellents on land controlled by all local authorities.	RBC	NE WCC WWT LAs	ongoing
Site / Species Safeguard & Management			
SM1. Actively propose management prescriptions under agri-environment schemes which are sympathetic to the song thrush's requirements.	NE	WWT WCC RSPB	ongoing
SM2. Fulfil the requirements of nesting and wintering song thrushes through developing and implementing site management plans for woodland sites, targeting the Dunsmore Woodlands landscape area initially.	WWT	RSPB FC	ongoing
Advisory			
A1. Continue to promote take-up of agri-environment schemes for sensitive farming options that will benefit song thrushes.	RSPB	NE WWT	ongoing
Research & Monitoring			
RM1. Implement effective monitoring of the population by the BTO Breeding Bird Survey.	BTO	WWT CRec RSPB WMBC	ongoing

Abbreviations: CRec – County Recorder, BTO – British Trust for Ornithology, FC – Forestry Commission, LAs – Local Authorities, NE – Natural England, RBC – Rugby Borough Council, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WCC – Warwickshire County Council, WMBC - West Midlands Bird Club, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

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. Progress with this plan up to 2020 can be seen at <https://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP>.

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Natural England (2013) [Entry Level Stewardship Handbook](#)

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RSPB (2016) [State of Nature](#) – a stocktake of all our native wildlife by over 50 wildlife organisations.

Natural England (2016) [Conservation Strategy for the 21st Century](#). Sets out how NE will help deliver DEFRA's ambitions for the environment to reverse biodiversity loss, sustain distinctive landscapes and enhance engagement with nature.

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Rothamstead Research (2019) The results of Britain's [first farmland worm survey](#) suggest that the observed decline in the song thrush may be explained by widespread historical over- cultivation, resulting in poor earthworm biodiversity.

RSPB, BTO & Wildlife & Wetland Trust (2020) [The State of the UK's birds](#) - highlights the continuing poor fortunes of the UK's woodland birds.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

[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](#)

Royal Horticultural Society & The Wildlife Trusts '[Wild About Gardens](#)' Project and 'Wildlife Gardening for Everyone' Question & Answer book.

[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.

BTO [Bird Trends](#) reports, bringing together the latest BTO survey data for 120 breeding bird species across Britain & Ireland.

10. CONTACT

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