

Sand Martin Action Plan

Current Status

The UK sand martin population suffered major declines in the late 1960s and early 1970s and 80s, due in large part to drought conditions in the Sahel region of Africa. While the UK sand martin population has shown a slow recovery it continues to be a species of European Conservation Concern.

At the moment there is only one breeding colony known for certain in the Falkirk Council area, however others are believed to occur at places along the River Carron. Sand martins have been known to occur in sand and gravel quarries to the east of Polmont and throughout the area from Polmont running southeast into midlothian, an area with numerous quarries. Though continued quarrying operations periodically disturb old nesting sites, it appears that sand martins still return to the area and, when necessary, find new nest sites in the less disturbed quarries. Sand martins have recently been recorded at Bonnyfield Quarry, although it is unclear whether this site supports a breeding colony.

Trends in the local sand martin population are currently unknown.

Ecology

Sand martins are migrants that return from wintering in Africa to breed in the UK. The birds return at the end of March. Sand martins are the only small brown and white birds that regularly feed by hawking over water for flying insects. They are very gregarious, feeding and nesting in groups. They nest colonially in excavated tunnels in exposed vertical faces of sand or fine gravel which are over water or relatively high. The tunnels are 60-90cm long with enlarged nest chambers that are lined with plant material and feathers. Suitable breeding sites may be used for many years with new tunnels dug as old ones collapse. Four to five eggs are laid in May and hatch after 2 weeks. The young stay in the nest for 3 weeks before fledging. There can be two broods before their departure in August, when they gather in large flocks to migrate south.

Current Factors Affecting the Species

The main threats to sand martins are:

- Droughts in wintering grounds in Africa

SPECIES PROFILE



Angus Smith

Common name: Sand Martin
Scientific name: *Riparia riparia*
Status: Conservation concern

Protection:
Protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981).
Additional protection afforded under the Bern Convention.

Associated Habitat and Species Action Plans

Habitats:
Rivers and streams
Standing open water
Bings

- Loss of nesting sites (e.g. due to disturbance of sand piles/embankments at industrial workings)
- Loss of nesting sites and young broods as a result of flooding.
- Damage or destruction of nest sites due to dredging or bank stabilisation work along rivers.
- Loss of nest sites as a result of landfill developments utilising the void left by sand and gravel quarries.

Current Action and Opportunities

Although several recent records of sand martins are held by the CARSE local records centre, there has been no comprehensive survey of sand martins in the Falkirk area.

There would be considerable value in using existing records and local knowledge, and potentially survey work, to identify local sand martin colonies, thus helping to target conservation measures where they will have most impact.

Objectives and Targets

Objective 1

Maintain and where possible encourage an increase in sand martin colonies in the Falkirk area.

Target 1.1

- Identify all breeding colonies and potential breeding sites (by 2004).

Target 1.2

Monitor known sand martin colonies (2005 onwards).

Target 1.3

- Provide appropriate advice and guidance to owners and managers of sites with sand martins, where their actions might impact on the colony (including industrial and agricultural sites) (by 2005 and as new sites are identified).

Target 1.4

- Promote the protection of sand martin colonies likely to be negatively affected by development activity or insensitive land management, and the mitigation of these impacts where they cannot be avoided. (Ongoing).

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
A. Policy and Legislation									
1. Ensure that this species is afforded adequate consideration and where possible its associated habitats are protected from damaging development through the planning process by: a) developing appropriate policies within local and structure plans and other strategies as they are written or revised.	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Ensure that this species is afforded adequate consideration and where possible its associated habitats are protected from damaging development through the planning process by: b) production of supplementary planning guidance	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓						1
3. Incorporate, within planning conditions a requirement for sand martin nest site conservation measures wherever appropriate from 2003. (To be detailed in the SPG, see A2 above).	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
4. Promote a requirement for nest site conservation into quarry site and river bank management wherever possible and appropriate by 2003. (To be detailed in the SPG, see A2 above).	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
B. Site Safeguard and Management									
1. Investigate management/protection work required at all identified nest sites. Reporting findings for consideration by 2005.	UAG			✓	✓				1
C. Species Management and Protection									
1. Via action A2 promote the practice that quarry excavations or landfill should not begin between April and August, where this could impact on bird colonies at the site.	Falk C (DS)	SNH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
D. Advisory									
1. Provide guidance and a copy of this action plan to owners and managers of sites known to support sand martin colonies on appropriate protection, management and sources of advice. (especially those identified in E2 as interested in sand martin conservation measures).	UAG				✓				1
E. Research and Monitoring									
1. Identify and encourage volunteers to search for and record local sand martin colonies, focusing the search on the Rivers Carron and Avon and the known sand and gravel quarry sites. (River Carron by 2004, River Avon by 2005, Quarries by 2005).	UAG	JN, SOC, RSPB		✓	✓				1

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
2. Contact known sand and gravel quarry site owners in an attempt to determine whether the sites support sand martins and whether the owners/operators would be interested in involvement in sand martin conservation measures.	UAG	JN, SOC, RSPB							1
3. Encourage and train volunteers to monitor the sand martin nest sites identified within the Falkirk area. Visiting each site at least once annually.	UAG	JN, SOC, RSB			✓	✓	✓	✓	1
4. Encourage the submission of public records of sand martins to determine local distribution. Focusing on key groups such as river users.	UAG	SOC	✓	✓					1
5. Encourage ongoing collection of sand martin records to allow assessment of population trends and success of this plan.	UAG	SOC		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
F. Communication and Publicity									
1. Include this species in local biodiversity awareness raising and education strategy to be developed by 2003 and implemented thereafter.	EARAG		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
G. Plan Monitoring and Review									
1. Monitor the implementation of actions in this plan annually.	UAG	All partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Monitor the completion and effectiveness of the actions in detail and review this plan every 5 years to ensure continued effectiveness, starting in 2007.	UAG	All partners					✓	✓	1

Abbreviations

EARAG	- Education and Awareness Raising Action Group	SNH	- Scottish Natural Heritage
Falk C (DS)	- Falkirk Council Development Services	SOC	- Scottish Ornithologists' Club
JN	- John Nimmo	UAG	- Urban Action Group
RSPB	- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds		

Key contacts

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John Nimmo

Bibliography

Sand Martin Species Action Plan - Edinburgh LBAP www.sandmartintrust.org.uk