

Song Thrush Action Plan

Current Status

The song thrush is a bird of woodland edge habitats occupying a range of environments including woodland policies, conifer plantations, agricultural land, hedgerows, parkland and gardens. They avoid treeless habitats and open moorland, and are scarce or absent from hill country. They generally migrate fairly short distances during winter when the ground is hard or frozen. Ringing recoveries demonstrate there is a south-westerly movement in autumn. Many Scottish birds are in Ireland between October and January while a few go as far south as Portugal. In midwinter these birds are thinly scattered on low ground areas and they may, in fact, be birds from Scandinavia. The species has declined by some 66% since the early 1970's, when the UK population was reckoned to be between 1,000,000 and 3,500,000 pairs, largely due to changes in farming practices. This is borne out to some extent by the fact that a Countryside Stewardship agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) in 1993 at the Allerton Research and Educational Trust's 800 acre farm at Loddington, Leicestershire, showed an increase in song thrush territories from a low point of 14 to 48 in a six year period. Some slight recovery in species numbers in recent years is probably due to the mild winters.

Ecology

The song thrush is perhaps best known for its melodious song during spring and early summer. When feeding it hops or runs in a characteristic manner, pausing in an upright stance with its head on one side as if listening. Their diet depends largely on invertebrates, mainly earthworms, for which they compete with blackbirds, and berries. They have a liking for slugs and snails, particularly during periods of drought and the thrushes 'anvil', usually a flat stone, can often be found surrounded by broken snail shells. The nest is usually well hidden in a shady spot and consists of a cup made from small twigs and grasses in a bush or tree. Ivy often provides such a spot. The female lays 4 to 6 eggs, which are then incubated for 11 to 15 days and the young fledge after a further 12 to 16 days and very soon moult into adult plumage. The adult birds may have two or three broods between March and June. The

SPECIES PROFILE



Chris Gomersall/RSPB Images

Common name: Song Thrush
Scientific name: *Turdus philomelos*
Status: Priority

Protection:
Protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981).

**Associated Habitat and Species
Action Plans**

Habitats:
Arable
Broadleaved and mixed woodland
Gardens
Urban greenspace
Urban wildlife corridors
Wood pasture and parkland

species is fairly widely distributed in the Falkirk area, but it is under recorded and the number of breeding pairs in the area is unknown. The song thrush may possibly be confused with the mistle thrush throughout the year or fieldfare and redwing in the autumn and winter months.

Current Factors Affecting the Species

Factors affecting this species are poorly understood but may include the following:

- Reduced availability of nest sites due to the loss of woodland and hedgerows in agricultural areas, particularly the removal of hedges to enlarge fields for cereal and other monoculture crops.
- Changes in agriculture affecting food supply, particularly a switch from spring to autumn sowing of crops, and possibly the increased use of pesticides.
- Severe winter weather and dry soil conditions affecting food supply.
- Predation by crow species and foxes.
- Competition with blackbirds.
- Hunting in southern France.

Current Action and Opportunities

Agri-environment schemes (CPS and RSS) currently include prescriptions for hedge planting and management and the creation and management of field margins for wildlife, which should benefit the song thrush and other species in farming areas.

Local habitat action plans for boundary features, arable habitats and gardens have been produced and many of the targets and actions within these plans will help in conserving the song thrush by protecting and creating appropriate habitats. (Where relevant habitat management actions are detailed in other plans they will not be repeated in this plan.)

Objectives and Targets

Objective 1

Maintain and where possible increase the current song thrush population in the Falkirk area.

Target 1.1

- Carry out surveys in the Falkirk area to establish species abundance, particularly during the breeding season.

Target 1.2

- Encourage hedgerow planting in rural parts of the Falkirk area.

Target 1.3

- Encourage management of field margins and adoption of other agricultural practices to benefit wildlife, including song thrushes.

Target 1.4

- Raise awareness of actions that can be taken by gardeners to encourage song thrushes.

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, it and 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 reviewed. (Ongoing).	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Ensure that this species is afforded adequate consideration and, where possible, it and its associated habitats are protected from damaging development through the planning process by: b) Production of supplementary planning guidance. (By 2003).	Falk C (DS)	UAG	✓						1
3. Support implementation of the Boundary Features action plan, ensuring that song thrush requirements are taken into account in any hedgerow/boundary feature creation and management that it generates.	UAG	FGAG	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
B. Site Safeguard and Management									
1. Encourage hedgerow planting to benefit song thrushes via actions in the Boundary Features action plan.	FGAG		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
2. Encourage suitable management of field margins to benefit song thrushes via the Boundary Features and Arable action plans.	FGAG		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
C. Species Management and Protection									
D. Advisory									
1. Provide advice to garden owners regarding the measures they can take to benefit song thrushes, with reference to the '10 steps for garden biodiversity'. (Also see the Garden action plan).	UAG		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1
E. Research and Monitoring									
1. Investigate the possibility of establishing a survey programme or extending an existing survey programme including song thrushes, covering key sites or a number of 1km squares in the Falkirk area.	RSPB	UAG, CARSE		✓					1
2. Promote the recording of song thrushes in gardens, where possible using existing national and local survey schemes.	UAG			✓					1
3. Continue to encourage submission of records of song thrushes from members of the public.	UAG	CARSE			✓	✓	✓	✓	1

Action	Potential Deliverers		Year to be completed or in place						Meets objective
	Lead	Partners	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2012	
F. Communication and Publicity									
1. Raise awareness of actions people can take in their gardens to help song thrushes, basing this on promotion of the '10 steps'.	UAG	EARAG	✓	✓					1
2. Include this species in a local biodiversity awareness raising and education strategy to be developed by 2002 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

CARSE	- CARSE Wildlife Records Centre	RSPB	- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
EARAG	- Education and Awareness Raising Action Group	SOC	- Scottish Ornithologists' Club
Falk C (DS)	- Falkirk Council Development Services	UAG	- Urban Action Group
FGAG	- Farming and Grassland Action Group		

Key contacts

Angus Smith, SOC

Plan author

Angus Smith, SOC