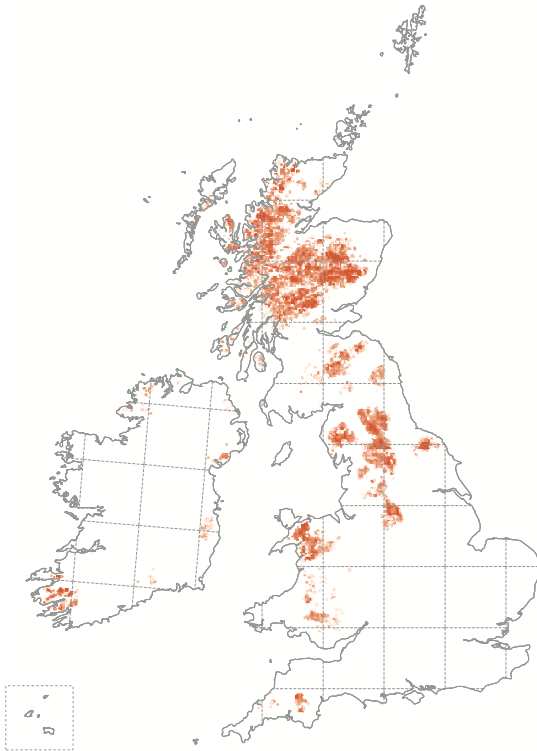




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LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

RING OUZEL (*Turdus torquatus*)



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

The ring ouzel typically breeds on steeper sloping ground on open (or sparsely wooded) moorland, often where there is a mixture of heather, grassland and rocky areas (such as crags, scree slopes and cliffs). They winter largely in the Atlas Mountains of North Africa. A species of highest conservation concern as the numbers of Ring Ouzels breeding in the UK has more than halved over recent decades. The reasons for this decline are not well understood, but possible causes include loss of heather-grass mosaics, climate change, increased predation, localised afforestation and disturbance. Also, ring ouzels may be experiencing problems on migration and in their wintering grounds.

WHAT DO RING OUZEL NEED?

Tall vegetation or bare rock for nesting

Ring ouzels nest on crags or on the ground in amongst rocks and under mature heather, bilberry, or occasionally bracken, mainly on steep slopes.

Short-grazed grassland for feeding

A mix of heather and grass provides the best feeding conditions for ring ouzels. They may fly down to grassland on

enclosed farmland to feed if there is insufficient short sward on the nearby hills. They feed on earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles and other invertebrates. Moorland berries – such as bilberry, crowberry and rowan – become a more important part of the diet in late summer and autumn. In winter they feed almost exclusively on juniper berries.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
In the wintering grounds	■	■	■									
Return to breeding grounds			■	■	■							
Main breeding season with one or two broods				■	■	■	■	■				
Post breeding - moorland berries are important							■	■	■	■		
Migration to southern Spain or north-west Africa										■	■	■

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE RING OUZEL?

NESTING HABITAT

- Provide tall mature heath on steeper slopes, in gullies and rocky areas by excluding such areas from burning and preventing heavy livestock grazing.
- Exclude stock along a burn side or steep slope to encourage taller vegetation for nest sites.
- Retain small areas of bracken as potential nest sites.
- Avoid planting forest blocks near suitable nesting habitat on crags and steep slopes. Ring ouzels may benefit from the planting or re-generation of scattered native broad-leaved trees, in particular rowan and hawthorn, but avoid planting trees in high densities.

FEEDING HABITAT

- A mosaic of vegetation types and heights provides a range of foraging opportunities through the breeding season
- Ring Ouzel regularly use enclosed grassland near nesting sites for feeding. Ideally, these would be grazed through the spring so soil invertebrates remain easily accessible. Areas of damp, unimproved grassland are likely to provide the best feeding habitats.
- Retain wet flushes and damp areas.

KEY POINTS

- **Allow taller heath vegetation to develop on steeper slopes**
- **Avoid intensive tree planting near breeding areas**
- **Short grass within the mix of vegetation types helps with feeding**
- **Avoid overgrazing and the loss of heather and bilberry.**

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