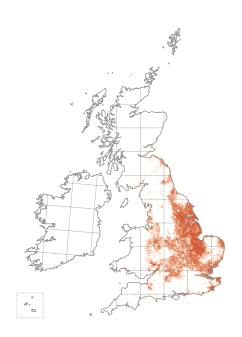


LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

YELLOW WAGTAIL (Motacilla flava)



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



The yellow wagtail is a summer visitor to the UK, arriving in April and leaving in September to winter in sub-Saharan Africa. The subspecies found in the UK is virtually endemic to the British Isles, and the population has fallen by an estimated 73% between 1967 and 2012. Research into ways in which farmland management can improve the status of the yellow wagtail is ongoing, but the following management advice should help yellow wagtails on your farm, as well as other farmland wildlife.

Yellow wagtails produce two broods per year where suitable habitat exists. They nest on the ground, usually in large arable fields, well away from tall boundaries. They also nest in wet grassland and hay meadows.

WHAT DO YELLOW WAGTAIL NEED?

Nesting habitat

Yellow wagtails need an open sward for nesting. They breed in a variety of arable crops, including cereals, potatoes, peas and field beans and in some vegetable crops, as well as on the fringes of wetlands, wet grassland, salt marshes and hay meadows. Vegetation must be open enough to give the birds easy access to the ground.

Summer food

Yellow wagtails need a good supply of insects and spiders throughout the summer, particularly flying insects in sparse vegetation and open ground. Grazed pasture is a favourite foraging habitat for them, as are in-field manure heaps, ponds and wet areas.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Arrives in UK to feed and build up reserves												
Main breeding season					1st bro	od 2n	d brood					
Builds up reserves for migration												
Winters in sub-Saharan Africa												

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE YELLOW WAGTAIL?

Wet features

- Creation, restoration or maintenance of wet features such as open wet ditches, ponds and scrapes will boost numbers of flying insects on which yellow wagtails feed on all types of farmland.
- For the greatest benefit to yellow wagtails, these wet areas should be open and free from shading by hedges and trees.
- Yellow wagtails cannot forage in thick swards, so bare ground or short vegetation at the waters edge is important for them.

On arable land

- A wide crop diversity will generally provide more nesting and foraging opportunities for yellow wagtails throughout the breeding season. Winter wheat is commonly used throughout the breeding season, but where available, birds will often relocate to legumes and potatoes for later broods.
- Creation of a network of insect-rich habitats

- around arable farmland will provide plenty of food open, weedy habitats, such as annually cultivated margins, fallow plots and organic or low-input crops, are ideal, allowing access to the ground for feeding and nesting.
- Try to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides after 15 March to protect beneficial insects.

On grassland

- Maintain water levels and extensive grazing to provide some nesting cover on wet grasslands and grazing marsh.
- Low-input, cattle-grazed pasture is likely to provide good all-round habitat for yellow wagtails.
- Maintain areas of unimproved grassland with low inputs to boost insect numbers and provide high-quality feeding habitat.
- Delaying cutting of silage and hay crops used by nesting yellow wagtails until after 15 July will allow most first broods to successfully fledge prior to management.

KEY POINTS

- Increase the range of crops in your rotation, to boost both feeding and nesting opportunities.
- Create, restore or maintain wet features such as open wet ditches, ponds and scrapes to boost insect food.
- Maintain areas of unimproved grassland, or manage grassland with lowinputs to boost insect food
- Annually cultivated fallow plots can provide a good food source ensure that they are positioned away from tall boundaries.

Contact Conservation Management Advice at:

Post: The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL

Tel: 01767 693308

E-mail: conservation-advice@rspb.org.uk

rspb.org.uk/conservationadvice

