

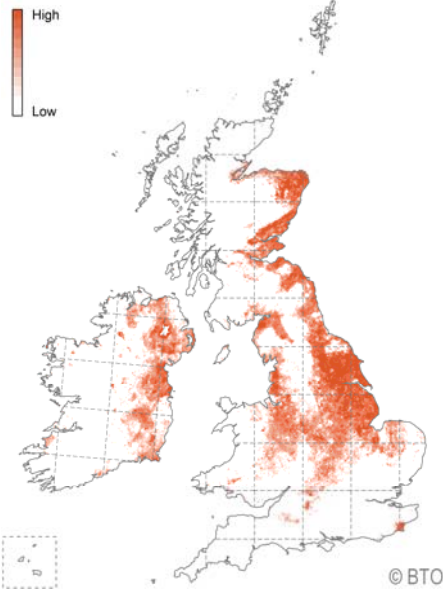


giving nature a home

LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

Tree sparrow (*Passer Montana*)

Breeding Relative Abundance 2008-11



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



Amy Hay (rspb-images.com)

This scarce relative of the house sparrow is best distinguished by the chestnut crown and the black patch on its cheek. The tree sparrow is generally found on lowland farmland with arable or mixed farming systems. The UK population of the tree sparrow declined by 94% between 1970 and 2013. This is probably because fewer seed and insect food sources are available to them on farmland, and the loss of suitable nesting sites

WHAT DO TREE SPARROW NEED?

Insects and spiders to feed to their young in spring and summer.

Tree sparrow chicks are fed on insects for the first two weeks of life. These insects come from a wide range of habitats including hedges, crops and waterside vegetation.

Lots of seeds all year round.

Adult tree sparrows feed mainly on seeds. They look for places where they can find lots of seed food. Such areas include rotational set-aside, winter stubble, root crops, wild bird cover, weeds

in the crop margins or areas of spilt grain.

Holes for nesting.

Tree sparrows nest in colonies in holes in trees, farm buildings and nestboxes. Occasionally they build nests in dense bushes. It would be easy to remove or destroy vital nesting habitats inadvertently without being aware of a colony.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Feeding in flocks on seed and grains	■	■	■									
Pairs feeding on seed and insects				■								
Pairs nesting in colonies					■	■	■	■				
Feeding in flocks on seed and grains								■	■	■	■	■

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE TREE SPARROW?

Nesting habitat

- You could ask a local bird expert or your county bird club to find the nesting area of your tree sparrow colony. This will ensure the colony is safe from accidental damage.
- Retain any old bushes, trees or farm buildings that may contain nesting holes. Maintain tall thick hedges on the farm.
- Continue to manage old pollard trees and re-pollard neglected trees, as these may provide nest sites.
- Use nestboxes to supplement the number of nest sites. Boxes should have at least 2.8 cm diameter entrance holes and an internal box depth of at least 20 cm. Tree sparrows nest in colonies, so place several boxes on each tree, close together and above head height.

Summer Food

- Delay the use of broad-spectrum herbicides for as long as possible to provide weed seeds in the hungry gap.
- Try to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides after 15 March, as tree sparrows feed their chicks on insects.
- Adopt conservation headlands or low-input cereal management on cereal crops where its appropriate to encourage insects and arable plants.
- Create buffer strips on cultivated land using a tussocky grass mix or uncropped cultivated margins to provide .

- Leave buffer strips on grassland next to thick hedges uncut, unfertilised and, if possible, ungrazed to boost insect abundance. Graze or cut in September every two or three years.
- Create wetland features such as ponds or scrapes, or if its appropriate, sluices to maintain high summer water levels in ditches. These features will encourage aquatic invertebrates and provide food for chicks.

Winter Food

- Allow weeds to develop in stubbles on light soils to provide seeds, or where the spoils are heavier try broadcasting small seeded crops like mustard into the stubbles to give a green cover and provide seeds
- Create plots of wild bird seed mixture including crops such as kale, linseed and quinoa to provide a source of small seeds during the winter.
- Leave over-wintered stubble unsprayed and uncultivated for as long as possible – stubble following low-input cereals or conservation headlands are particularly beneficial.
- Introduce arable crops (except maize) on livestock farms, such as low-input cereals, to provide stubbles and seed sources in the winter.

KEY POINTS

- Ensure there are nesting holes available in trees and farm buildings, or use nestboxes.
- Use low-input crop management, field margins or wetland features to create insect-rich habitats.
- Use over-wintered stubble or wild bird seed mixtures to provide seed food throughout winter.

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