

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SONG THRUSH?

Providing winter food

- On farmland, create small plots (eg 0.5ha) of wild bird cover. Establish a mix of kale and at least one other crop type in the spring and maintain for two years.
- In parks, a small plot of Wildbird seed mix (eg: 0.05ha) may be created. Song thrushes are likely to make most use of such plots especially during winter and when located close to woodland edge, thick hedgerows or shrubs.

Pesticides

- Using pesticides to control slugs and soil invertebrates will reduce food supplies for song thrushes.
- They may also poison thrushes if accidentally ingested on dead or dying prey. Avoid or reduce the need for chemical control.



KEY POINTS

- Maintain or restore damp areas of grazed pasture or woodland – damp habitats are essential sources of soil invertebrates as food, especially for chick during spring and summer.
- Avoid management of hedgerows, scrub and shrubby areas between March and August to protect nesting birds – January or February are the ideal months for hedge trimming, after the berry crop has been eaten.
- In urban areas maintain dense shrub beds and woody copses
- Encouraging long grass to grow in front of shrub beds to help reduce drying and maintain humidity beneath the shrub canopy
- Adjacent areas of shorter grass, particularly in damp areas of parks and close to cover will provide suitable foraging habitat.

Contact Conservation Management Advice at:

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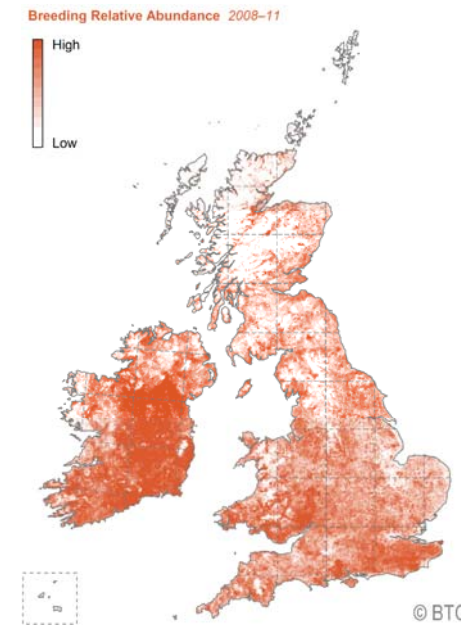
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LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

Song thrush *Turdus philomelos*



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



In rural areas, the song thrush is associated with thick hedges, scrub, woods and damp ground, especially grazed pasture. These preferences extend in urban areas to well wooded parks and gardens with dense scrub, hedges and mown grassland.

Although widespread throughout much of lowland Britain, their population fell by 57% between 1967 and 2013, across both rural and urban landscapes.

CAUSES OF DECLINE

Changes in survival of first winter birds and during the post-fledging period have probably led to the population decline.

The environmental factors causing this are not clearly understood but are likely to include loss or degradation of food rich habitats, changes in farming practice, particularly land drainage, pesticides and loss of grazed pasture in arable regions reducing food availability, making it harder for females to reach and maintain breeding condition. This leads to few breeding attempts and reduced productivity.

Declines in woodland management, drainage of damp ground, depletion of woodland scrub layers through canopy closure and deer browsing may also have an effect. Dry summers and pressure from increased predation may also be having an effect.

Causes of long-term declines in urban and suburban areas are unknown and require further research.



WHAT DO SONG THRUSH NEED?

BREEDING HABITAT

Song thrushes will nest in wooded areas with a thick understory of shrubs or bramble, as well as in tall, thick hedgerows and scrub.

They start nesting early, so woodland, hedgerow and scrub management should be completed by the beginning of March to benefit this species.

NON-BREEDING HABITAT

Outside of the breeding season they may be encountered more frequently in their preferred habitats as birds from northern Europe arrive in autumn to spend winter in the UK.

Simultaneously, many of our breeding population will move to southern Europe for winter, returning early in the following spring

DIET

The bulk of the song thrush diet is earthworms and snails, particularly when insect larvae and berry crops are not available. Therefore, damp ground where these food sources are readily available is essential.

Using pesticide treatments that are active against ground invertebrates will reduce this food supply and might poison the thrushes.

Throughout autumn and winter, fruit such as hawthorn, blackthorn and yew are an important part of their diet.

Sympathetic hedge, scrub and shrub management will ensure a supply of berries into the winter.



Chris Gommersall (rspb-images.com)

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Feeding on invertebrates												
Feeding on fruits												
Establishes breeding territory												
Breeding (3-5 attempts)												

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE SONG THRUSH?

Hedgerow management

- Provide hedgerows of differing sizes across farms, urban parks and green space. Song thrushes favour tall, thick hedgerows with trees.
- The ideal time for management is January and February. All hedge, ditch and field margin management should be avoided between March and August because of nesting birds.
- Trim hedgerows only once every two to three years. Avoid trimming all hedges in the same year.
- On farmland, do not plough too close or allow drift of pesticides into the hedge base. This will help provide good quality nesting habitat.
- Do not mow up to hedges, leaving a 1-3m wide strip of long grass in front to reduce drying, maintain humidity and provide a source of invertebrate food.
- Maintain a thick base to hedgerows. Management such as laying or coppicing can restore a dense structure at the base of a hedge.
- Avoid laying or coppicing all hedges in the same year. Undertake management on a long rotation.

Woodland, scrub and shrub bed management

- Keep areas of damp woodland. However, do not plant trees on open wet areas, as this may reduce the quality of this wetland habitat.
- Encourage a scrub understory to develop in wooded areas and leave fallen trees as a habitat for deadwood insects.

- Deer browsing can have a negative effect on scrub and they may need exclusion or control.
- Planting small native woodland patches will provide habitat for song thrushes in areas where this is lacking.
- Avoid planting trees on land with existing wildlife or amenity interest, for example: On farmland, species such as lapwings and corn buntings need open landscapes and so trees should not be planted in their breeding areas.
- Avoid planting trees on flower rich and or damp grassland in rural and urban areas.
- In urban areas consider how parks and green spaces are used by the public before undertaking planting. Look for opportunities in existing tree and shrub areas.

Wet feature management

- Maintain a network of wet ditches around the farm to retain water through the summer. Use sluices if necessary.
- In urban parks, maintain existing ditches and maximise their value by adding check dams and sluices.
- Look to maximise the wildlife benefits of SuDS features such as swales, the margins of detention basins and balancing ponds
- Do not drain damp grasslands or plant trees there. Keep or create areas of damp grassland adjacent to woodland, thick hedges, scrub or shrub beds.
- In rural areas grazing would be the preferred grassland management, while in urban parks mowing may be the only option.



John Day (RSPB)