

# NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

## TURTLE DOVE (*Streptopelia turtur*)

The turtle dove is much more rufous on its back and wings than other doves and has a distinctive black tail with a white edge which can be seen in flight.

Ref 2/S13	Tranche 2	Species Action Plan 13
Plan Author:	RSPB	
Plan Co-ordinator:	Farmland BAP Topic Group	
Plan Leader:	RSPB	
Date: January 2006	Stage: Final draft	

## 1. CURRENT STATUS

### National Status

- The turtle dove is a summer migrant that breeds at the northern edge of its range in the UK. It is confined largely to the south and east of England and is associated with fertile arable farmland in warm, dry situations.
- The population was at a high at the time of the first breeding atlas (1968-72). However, the Common Bird Census index has indicated a fall of around 60% in the population since this time, and the new breeding atlas (1988-91) shows a marked decrease in range of around 25%. The latest population estimate, taken from the new atlas, is approximately 75,000 territories. More information about trends in both distribution and numbers can be found at [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends).
- The turtle dove is declining in many parts of Europe although it is still common and widespread in the lowlands of central and southern Europe. It generally occurs below 350 m in a variety of fairly dry, sunny, sheltered habitats.
- The turtle dove is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985. It is a traditional quarry species in Mediterranean countries and, as such, is listed on Annex II of the EC Birds Directive.

### Norfolk Status

- Widespread (recorded in 81% of tetrads between 1980 and 1985) but has undoubtedly declined in range and population since in line with national trend.
- Core areas for the species in Norfolk are the Brecks, north west, mid and central Norfolk and the Fens (RSPB/EN/BTO/Defra Farmland Bird Database).

## 2. CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE IN NORFOLK

- The decline of the turtle dove has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or range of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass and weed seeds. Research suggests that the decline is due, at least in part, to an overall degradation of habitat quality, including the loss of tall, overgrown thorny hedges and suitable seed food.
- Compared to the 1960s, turtle doves today have a shorter breeding season and produce approximately half the number of clutches and young per pair than formerly.
- Turtle doves nest in large hedges and mature scrub, and also retreat to the safety of this dense vegetation when disturbed. The loss of features such as overgrown

hedgerows and hawthorn thickets on farmland is likely to have had an adverse effect on the population.

- As a long-distance migrant, the turtle dove faces threats, particularly from hunting, outside the UK. It is heavily shot in France and the Iberian peninsula. Tens of thousands of birds are also shot in their wintering areas, mainly Senegal, and many more are killed on migration through Morocco. It is therefore possible that some factors contributing towards the species decline lie outside the UK.
- Little is known of the effects of habitat or climatic changes in the wintering grounds of the species. Turtle doves spend part of the year, particularly February and March, in acacia scrub in the Sahel region, and recent drought conditions and habitat destruction there have coincided with a steep decline in numbers.

### **3. CURRENT ACTION IN NORFOLK**

- Little direct conservation work has been carried out specifically for turtle doves in Norfolk.
- Rotational set-aside will have benefited the species, although this has been significantly reduced in area in recent years.
- Turtle dove has been targeted by the arable options in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, encouraging the growth of spring-sown cereals and conservation headlands.
- The Environmental Stewardship schemes will continue to provide management options that will be promoted and targeted in support of this species.
- Hedge management and two metre field margins will be required under the cross compliance regulations from July 2005. These are likely to benefit turtle dove.

### **4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

#### **National**

- In the short term, halt or reverse the decline in numbers of the turtle dove by the year 2003 so that the Breeding Bird Survey index is at least at 1996 levels.
- In the long term, see a sustained recovery in numbers so that the BBS index is at least 50% higher than 1996 levels by 2008.

#### **Norfolk**

- Maintain the current distribution of turtle dove in Norfolk and by 2010 restore to any parts of the county that have lost breeding turtle dove since 1986.

## Turtle Dove - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Policy and Legislation</b>			
<b>5.1.1</b>	Take account of the need to recover turtle dove and other farmland bird populations when developing agricultural policy and CAP reform; consider how to extend the Arable Stewardship Scheme if the pilot is successful, and how to substitute for the benefits of set-aside, if this is further reduced or abolished. Retention of appropriately managed hedgerow trees and farm woodland should be encouraged.	Target Environmental Stewardship options which will benefit turtle dove within the species core range in Norfolk	NE	RSPB, FWAG
<b>5.1.2</b>	Where appropriate, incorporate new management prescriptions when reviewing agri-environment schemes....in order to reverse some of the recent changes in farm management....	None proposed		
<b>5.1.3</b>	Seek uptake of a more cautious and targeted use of pesticides and fertilisers on farmland to reduce the impacts on potential food sources for the turtle dove.	Promote the Voluntary Initiative to reducing the environmental effects of pesticides	NE	
<b>5.1.4</b>	Support the European Commission in its efforts to enforce Article 7 of the Birds Directive on the hunting of the turtle dove.	None proposed.		

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NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Site Safeguard and Management</b>			
<b>5.2.1</b>	Ensure appropriate management of areas of scrub on protected sites (incl. nature reserves) within the existing and former range of the turtle dove.	Review the management of land owned/managed by BAP partners for its suitability for turtle doves (and other farmland birds).  Ensure effective implementation of the Hedgerow Regulations, TPOs etc	BAP Partners  District Councils	
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Species Management and Protection</b>			
<b>5.3.1</b>	None proposed.			
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Advisory</b>			
<b>5.4.1</b>	Promote further advice to land managers on management for the turtle dove as one of a suite of farmland birds, and update that advice in the light of new policies and research findings.	Promote the sympathetic management of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, farm woodlands, set-aside, field margins, and other arable habitats for the benefit of the turtle dove (particularly through agri-environment and woodland grant schemes).	NE, RSPB, FWAG	
<b>5.4.2</b>	Promote effective management of set-aside for breeding birds, including the turtle dove.	Provide suitable advisory material, to be kept up-to-date as required.		
<b>5.4.3</b>	Promote the sympathetic management of hedgerows and farmland scrub for the benefit of the turtle dove and other farmland birds.	Promote the sympathetic management of hedgerows and farmland scrub for the benefit of the turtle dove and other farmland birds.	NE, RSPB, FWAG	
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Future Research and Monitoring</b>			
<b>5.5.1</b>	Compare Nest Record Cards from the 1960s with those from recent years in order to look for possible explanations for the population decline.	None proposed.		

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NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.5.2	Undertake a study into the summer ecology and habitat use of turtle doves, including an assessment of diet and a comparison with a study carried out in the 1960s.	None proposed.		
5.5.3	Ensure appropriate monitoring of turtle dove breeding numbers through continuation of the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey	Promote voluntary participation in the Breeding Bird Survey.  Encourage submission of turtle dove records to BirdTrack ( <a href="http://www.bto.org/birdtrack/">http://www.bto.org/birdtrack/</a> ) and participation in national breeding and wintering bird atlas project.	BTO, RSPB, Norfolk Bird Club, Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society  BTO, RSPB, Norfolk Bird Club, Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society	
5.6	<b>Communications and Publicity</b>			
5.6.1	Use the turtle dove as an example of a bird under pressure from factors operating outside the UK in order to promote increased protection and beneficial habitat management throughout its range.	Promote the turtle dove as a species of conservation concern, and an example of the international dimension to the BAP process.  Highlight the benefits, and change perceptions, of more traditional and conservation-friendly farming practices, using the turtle dove as an example.  Ensure local education establishments include management for the turtle dove and other farmland birds in relevant courses.	BAP Partners  BAP Partners  Easton College, UEA etc.	

## Turtle Dove - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
<b>5.7</b>	<b>Links with Other Action Plans</b>			
<b>5.7.1</b>	It is likely that implementation of this plan will also benefit the following UK BAP farmland birds : bullfinch, corn bunting, grey partridge, linnet, reed bunting, skylark, song thrush, tree sparrow.	It is likely that implementation of this plan will also benefit the following Norfolk BAP farmland birds: bullfinch, corn bunting, grey partridge, linnet, reed bunting, skylark, song thrush, tree sparrow.	Farmland BAP Topic Group; Communities and Nature BAP Topic Group	
<b>5.7.2</b>	This action plan should be considered in conjunction with those for cereal field margins and ancient hedgerows.	This action plan should be considered in conjunction with those for cereal field margins and ancient hedgerows.	Farmland BAP Topic Group	

## NORFOLK DISTRIBUTION

## MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE

**(This guidance is a general summary; for more detailed information or advice, please consult the references or contacts below.)**

### What do turtle doves need?

- **A continuous supply of weed and crop seed from late April until the end of August**

Both adult and chick turtle doves depend on the availability of seeds, especially those of fumitory, knotgrass, chickweed, oilseed rape and cereal grains. They feed on the ground in weedy areas, especially where the vegetation is short and sparse, and where there are areas of spilt grain and stubbles after harvest. Lack of seed food is probably the major factor limiting the breeding success of turtle doves.

- **Tall mature hedgerows, areas of scrub or woodland edges with a thick shrub layer for nesting**

Most turtle doves nest in hedgerows or scrub over four metres tall. They prefer thorny species such as hawthorn, and nests are often associated with climbers such as travellers joy (wild clematis), honeysuckle or bramble.

### Helping turtle doves on set-aside

- Small plots (eg one acre) of wild bird cover can be created using a biennial mix of seed-bearing plants such as kale, cereal and quinoa. For turtle doves, ensure that at least two plots are created in alternate years so that some seed is available in the spring every year. Use a low seed rate to create an open crop, which will give turtle doves access to the ground as well as allowing some weeds to germinate and seed.
- Natural re-generation of rotational set-aside provides a useful seed source, provided that weed control can be delayed until July.
- The multi-annual set-aside scheme can be used to cultivate an area of non-rotational set-aside each year to allow broad leaved weeds to germinate and seed, providing a food source for turtle doves. Choose an area with a diverse range of broad-leaved weeds, but with low numbers of the highly competitive grass weeds and cleavers.

### Helping turtle doves on arable land

- Where there are field margins with a variety of broad-leaved arable plants that are not highly competitive with the crop, cultivate the margins each year but leave them undrilled, unfertilised and unsprayed so that they will create a seed source for turtle doves.
- Adopt conservation headlands. Avoid spraying the outer six metres of cereal fields with herbicides targeted at broad-leaved weeds; this will provide a seed-rich margin. For turtle doves, it is best to do this in conjunction with an unfertilised headland to produce a shorter sparse crop. Further agronomic advice is available from the Game Conservancy Trust.
- Leave stubbles uncultivated until the end of August to provide seed food for turtle doves until they migrate south.
- The rotational and wild bird cover options of set-aside described above are important on farms where seed sources are limited in the spring.

### **Helping turtle doves on grassland**

- Introduce arable fodder crops (except maize) or create small plots of wild bird cover to provide a seed-rich habitat in pastoral areas.
- Wherever there are species-rich meadows that can be restored to hay meadow management, or clover leys within the rotation, these will boost food availability for turtle doves on mixed farmland.

### **Hedgerow and woodland management**

- Allow some hedges on the farm to be more than two metres wide and four metres tall to encourage nesting.
- Maintain or create a scrub edge around woodland blocks on the farm.

## **REFERENCES AND CONTACTS**

RSPB  
East Anglia Regional Office  
Stalham House  
65 Thorpe Road  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR1 1UD  
Tel: 01603-660066 / Fax: 01603-660088  
[www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)

Defra RDS (to become part of Natural England in 2006)  
122a Thorpe Road  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR1 1RN  
Tel: 01603 631033  
[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Norfolk FWAG  
122a Thorpe Road  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR1 1RN  
Tel: 01603 660334  
[www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)

The Game Conservancy Trust  
Fordingbridge  
Hampshire  
SP6 1EF  
Tel: 01425 652381  
[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)