

SUFFOLK LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Linnet

(Carduelis cannabina)

1 Definition

The linnet is a common and widespread species across the UK countryside, found on farmland wherever there is a plentiful supply of seeds throughout the year. Linnets use weedy fields, hedgerows, gorse thickets, heathland and scrub (particularly near the coast), and are dependant on sources of small seeds as food throughout the year. Part of the UK population winters in Spain and western France; birds remaining in the UK are joined by birds from northern Europe.

2 Current status

National:

Numbers declined by 56% on farmland between 1968 and 1991 (based on data collected as part of the BTO's Common Bird Census). The UK range declined only slightly over this period and the UK population was estimated at 540,000 territories in the New Breeding Atlas (1988-91). The long term national trend (1970 – 2004) shows a 49% decline in linnet populations.

Regional:

The linnet population in East England has declined by 21% 1994 – 2005.

Local:

3 Current factors affecting linnet

The recent decline of the linnet has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or range of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass, wildflower seeds and some cereal grains. Linnets are more dependent than other seed-eaters on wildflower seeds during the breeding season. It is likely that the decline in linnets may be due to changes in agricultural practice, both in the UK and in their wintering grounds in south-west Europe. These include the increased use of herbicides and fertilisers, the switch from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops and the consequent loss of winter stubble fields, and the general reduction in farmland habitat diversity due to the loss of mixed farming and increased specialisation.

Changes in management of pastoral areas may also have caused declines through the increased use of fertilisers, re-seeding of species-rich fields, more intensive grazing, early cutting for silage and the loss of the small proportion of arable fields that were typically present on such farms.

The removal of hedges, gorse thickets and other unmanaged scrub, combined with the increased frequency and severity of hedge trimming and heavy grazing in some areas, will have led to losses of suitable nesting habitat.

The linnet will utilise very young conifer plantations while the trees are still in a thicket stage. Conversion of suitable rough areas to plantation may affect linnets where no other suitable nesting sites are found.

4 Current action

Linnets seek places where they can find lots of seed food. Such areas include rotational set-aside, winter stubbles, root crops and break crops. Oil-seed rape and the associated broadleaved weeds provide ideal food for chicks in the spring.

Thick thorny hedgerow cover will benefit linnets. They also nest in scrub and bramble areas on grassland and waste ground.

ELS options that may benefit linnets include conservation headlands and uncropped cultivated margins.

Linnet is a key target species within the Higher Level Stewardship opportunities for the Joint Character Area of The Broads, part of which falls in Suffolk.

Single farm payment cross compliance requirements for hedgerow management including margins and reinforcement of the Hedgerow regulations, may help to provide habitat for this species.

5 Targets

As a minimum, maintain existing 2007 population and existing range of linnet which will be derived from the survey planned for 2007/2008.

Expansion targets to be set after the results of the first year surveys (2007) have been received.

6 Actions

Action	Date	Partners
Policy & Legislation		
Ensure understanding and compliance with the Hedgerow regulations.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, LAs, FWAG, SWT.
Ensure linnet as a LBAP species, is recognised and protected in LDFs in accordance with PPS9.	Annual 2006- 2010	NE, LAs, RSPB, SWT.
Species management and protection		
Promote the uptake of agri-environment schemes which benefit this species, and	Annual 2006-	NE, FWAG, RSPB, SWT

consider the habitat and food requirements of this species when deciding the scheme options to be taken up, including the retention of scrub, especially all gorse, provision of seed-rich cover and gapping up of hedges	2010	
Explore current or new opportunities with land managers in areas where considerable gorse is found(e.g. on golf courses), advise on the management of gorse to benefit linnet, especially in connection with agri-environment schemes.	Annual 2007	SWT, NE, RSPB, FWAG
Research and monitoring		
Encourage local research and continued support of long-term surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey.	Annual 2006- 2010	BTO, SOG, RSPB, NE
Further determine Suffolk bird population by undertaking detailed winter and breeding surveys of 10km squares, 8 tetrads in each to develop detailed baseline data in Suffolk.	2007 and 2008	SOG, BTO
Take all opportunities to feed the information into revision of the targeting of Environmental Stewardship.	2007	SOG, NE, FWAG, SWT, RSPB, SCC.
Use hedgerow mapping project when complete to identify significant gaps in hedgerow distribution and combine this with the above survey to identify target areas that are strongholds for linnet	2008	SOG, SBRC
Advisory		
Promote sympathetic management of hedgerows including the gapping up of hedgerows with black/hawthorn and gorse and the retention of farmland scrub and the value of seed rich cover year round to all land managers.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, RSPB, NE.
Promote the uptake of boundary and infield options, such as uncropped cultivated margins and conservation headlands through the summer period, and over wintering stubbles and wild bird seed mixtures through the winter period.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, RSPB, NE, SWT.
Ensure that all LBAP partners have copies of the RSPB Farming for Birds and Farming for Wildlife leaflets which include linnet.	2006	RSPB
Produce a Suffolk focused fact sheet for	2007	SWT, SOG.

linnet to promote to a range of land managers such as golf clubs.		
Communications and publicity		
Promote the linnet as a species in need of conservation assistance and produce at least one LBAP press release per year that draws attention to this species.	Annual 2006- 2010	FWAG, RSPB, SWT, LAs

Monitoring of progress:

Reported annually on the UK BAP reporting system BARS Biodiversity Action Reporting system.

Consultation:

Organisations that have been consulted regarding this plan and have agreed to aim to deliver their organisations commitments:

RSPB Kirsty Coutts

FWAG Phil Watson

Natural England Monica O'Donnell, Ian Johnson and Alison Collins

Suffolk County Council Andrew Murray-Wood

SWT Dorothy Casey

Suffolk Biological Records Centre (SBRC) Martin Sanford

Suffolk Ornithologists Group SOG Steve Piotrowski

