

Farm Management to benefit turtle doves



The Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) is encouraging farmers to do their bit to help conserve one of the iconic birds of UK farmland. Turtle doves are under threat for several reasons and some CFE environmental measures that sit alongside productive agriculture can help to provide the nesting sites and food sources that they need whilst in the UK.

The gentle purr of the turtle dove is an evocative sound of summer, but one that has become increasingly rare. By implementing certain CFE Voluntary Measures farmers can help to protect this important farmland bird.

Turtle doves are Europe's only long distance migratory dove. They only spend a third of the year on their breeding grounds in Europe with the rest of their time either on migration or overwintering in sub-Saharan West Africa.

The UK is the northern end of their range and whilst they were once widespread across England, turtle doves are now mainly restricted to the east and south east of the country.



What is a turtle dove?

To identify a turtle dove look for these features:

- Smaller than any other pigeon or dove in the UK and slightly larger than a blackbird.
- Orange eyes.
- Black and white striped patch on neck.
- Black tail with a thin white edge.
- Chestnut and black diamonds on wings.
- Pale grey-lilac head and breast.

Why are turtle doves under threat?

Four main factors are associated with the decline of turtle doves:

- **Food and habitat shortages in the UK:** Shortage of food and suitable habitat for breeding, are thought to be the most important factor driving turtle dove declines. Unlike other dove and pigeon species in the UK, turtle doves feed exclusively on seeds. A lack of available weed seeds in the countryside has caused birds to switch their diet to cereal grains and oil seed rape. This has been associated with a reduction in nesting attempts.
- **Disease:** A high prevalence of infection has been recorded in turtle doves caused by trichomoniasis parasite.
- **Hunting during migration:** It is thought that hunting levels on mainland Europe may constitute a significant factor in current population declines.
- **Habitat loss in Africa:** Increasing human population pressure is reducing many of the wooded habitats favoured by migratory birds.

What you can do



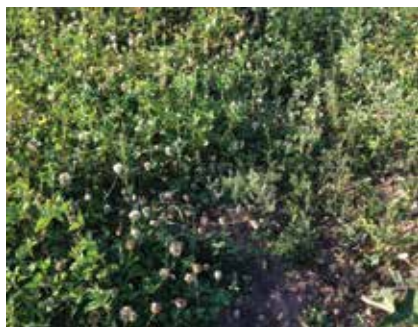
Provide nesting sites

Turtle doves prefer patches of mature scrub or scrubby tall and wide hedgerows for nesting, especially ones with thorny species such as hawthorn or blackthorn. Native climbers such as dog rose, clematis or ivy would be an added bonus.

Hedges should be at least 3 metres tall and 4 metres wide. See the

CFE guide *Managing hedges to benefit pollinators*.

www.cfeonline.org.uk/managinghedges_online/



Provide food

Turtle doves only eat seeds which are sourced on the ground. Aim to provide plenty of bare ground where birds can forage around. It is important that seeds are available when birds first return from migration (mid April onwards). On farm, this can be achieved either by establishing a wildflower seed mix or a cultivated margin, ideally within 300 metres of any nesting site.

- After harvest, establish a **seed mix** of early English vetch (25%), birdsfoot trefoil (20%), black medick (20%), red (10%) and white (20%) clovers and fumitory (5%), ideally in blocks or strips.
- Establish the CFE **Cultivated Margins** Voluntary Measure. Uncropped cultivated margins are generally arable field margins that are cultivated annually but not drilled, to support less competitive broad-leaved 'weeds' or arable plants. See www.cfeonline.org.uk/advice-and-training/voluntary-measures/vm14/



Provide water

Additionally, a source of fresh water is essential, again located no further than 300 metres from any nesting site. This can be provided by ponds or ditches with gently sloping margins.

Further guidance:

Operation Turtle Dove is a project which aims to reverse the decline of one of England's best loved farmland birds.

See www.operationturtledove.org

The CFE website shows farmers how establishing CFE Voluntary Measures on fallow or unproductive land will benefit farmland birds. See www.cfeonline.org.uk/campaign-themes/farmland-birds

This leaflet complements the CFE guide *Conservation management advice for your arable business*

See www.cfeonline.org.uk/cfe_foldout_leaflet_arable

Image credits

Liz Cutting

Jonny Rankin

