

This note gives guidance on the support available to woodland owners and managers who wish to manage their woodlands to help reverse the decline in woodland birds in the East Midlands Woodland Bird Priority Areas.

Wild birds are a good indicator of the general state of health of our wildlife and the countryside and they have been chosen as one of the Government's 15 headline indicators of progress towards sustainable development. The 'Quality of Life' indicator shows woodland bird populations falling by 20 per cent among 33 species in the last 25 years. Some of these such as the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Tit have declined by more than 50 per cent since the late 1960s.

A major survey by the RSPB and BTO in 2003/04 - the Repeat Woodland Bird Survey - further highlighted the declines over a 20 year period, detected by national monitoring schemes, particularly those of long-distance migrant species and less common residents. There was strong evidence, at least for the declining species, to support the hypothesis that declines could be being driven by changes in woodland structure notably increasing woodland age, reductions in active woodland management, and increased deer browsing.

Together with the [RSPB](#), [Natural England](#) and other key Regional Partners, the East Midlands Woodland Birds Project is aiming to reverse this decline by providing financial support and advice to landowners and managers to improve woodland habitat for birds. Details of the bird species, key areas in the East Midlands, potential issues driving decline and the potential solutions can be found on the FC East Midlands website: www.forestry.gov.uk/eastmidswoodlandbirds

The East Midlands Woodland Bird Project area was derived from analysis of regional maps for the East Midlands (available online) of the Birds Conservation Targeting Project

The Bird Conservation Targeting Project has been developed to target management and resources towards important sites for scarce and declining farmland, woodland and wetland birds. Records are brought together from a wide range of sources, including individual birdwatchers, county bird clubs and national surveys, and compiled to show hotspots for individual and for aggregations of species.

See www.rspb.org.uk/targeting

The Peak District, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were identified initially by the FC East Midlands Region as the core target area. In agreement with the RSPB and regional stakeholders, the following Regional Priority Areas were added to the project area (National Forest, Rockingham Forest, Leighfield Forest and Lincolnshire Limewoods) and finally the Lincolnshire Wolds ANOB. These areas have been identified as important areas for wildlife conservation in the:

Regional Forestry Framework (Space4trees)
www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7bbfng

East Midlands Biodiversity Strategy www.embiodiversity.org.uk/documents.html

Note: Discretion can be applied re grant applications for existing woodlands outside the Regional Woodland Bird Priority Areas if all the other eligibility criteria are met and the RSPB supports the application. The final decision whether to accept the application will rest with the Regional Grants & Regulations Manager who will consider the merits of the case and inform the applicant of their decision.

For most woodland, the habitat requirements of a wider range of bird species will be better served by maintaining a mosaic of patches of different growth stages, whether within coppice, plantations or more natural woods. Therefore most woodland types (where the woodland canopy has closed e.g. >15 years old) are potentially eligible for support as long as the target bird species are present in the locality and the work proposed will benefit the target bird species.

Support for the management of existing woodland for woodland birds is primarily delivered under the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). Woods first need to be assessed and the management requirements for woodland birds planned.

In the first instance the support provided by EWGS will include two types of grants:

Woodland Planning Grants that contribute to the costs of preparing a woodland management plan which considers and directs opportunities for sustainable working across the whole woodland holding which, benefits woodland birds. Further information can be obtained from the EWGS website: www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wpg

Woodland Assessment Grants that contribute to the costs of assessing the intensity, scale and significance of the proposed management and methods to be employed such as harvesting and regeneration methods in relation to the woodland size and sensitivities (e.g. ancient or semi-natural woodland). Further information can be obtained from the EWGS website: www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wag

The FC normally expects a management plan to assess the appropriateness and priority of proposals, as well as setting them in a wider context. If there is no plan, the woodland should have a Condition, Opportunities & Threats (COT) Assessment undertaken. An [electronic version of the COT](#) is available for download in the Woodland Management Grant section of the website www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wmg

Woodland Management Grant (WMG) is an area-based standard grant paid in five annual instalments. The eligible work is described in full in the scheme literature on the EWGS website: www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wmg

but for birds will include:

- management to benefit biodiversity interest and protect the woodland resource
- soil and ground water protection – e.g. reducing the effects of the adjacent use of fertilisers, fuels, oils and farm sprays etc;
- woodland light management (canopy);
- woodland open space management (floor);
- management of veteran trees
- maintenance of woodland boundaries;
- controlling non-native species
- managing the impacts of deer.
- sustainability monitoring;

While many of the management needs of existing woods can be addressed through the types of regular management supported by WMG, in some cases more intensive but non-recurring intervention may also be needed.

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This grant can be used to support changes that are required to complement work supported by Woodland Management Grant or to implement actions identified through the Woodland Assessment or Woodland Planning grants.

Grants are delivered through the use of standard costs paid at 80% of published costs towards work that improves habitat for woodland birds. This may include supervision costs required to oversee contract work. The up-to-date list of operations and costs that can be funded are contained in *Operations Note 9 – Standard Costs* under the WIG Bio column in Annex 1. Further information can be obtained from the EWGS website: www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs-wig and www.forestry.gov.uk/eastmidswoodlandbirds

Native woodland wildlife has been declining for decades. The causes are now becoming clearer: woods that were once structurally complex are now generally much simpler, and this is likely to be the cause of declines in woodland dependent wildlife. Reduced levels of management and increases in deer populations are considered likely causes of the change of structure. One of the key challenges for reversing the decline in woodland birds is to create larger areas of both young-growth and old growth habitat.

For further information please refer to:

Symes and Currie (2005) *Woodland management for birds: a guide to managing for declining woodland birds in England* available from the RSPB website:

www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Handbookform_tcm9-234215.pdf