

Bullfinch

Status

BoCC Red listed due to rapid recent declines in abundance.

Population

About 157,000 pairs estimated in Britain.

Habitat

Woodland edge and scrub habitats are used, particularly where fruiting and flowering shrubs and trees are present. They will occupy most broadleaf woodland types, especially the edge, and thicket-stage conifer plantations may be of particular importance in the uplands.

Conservation issues

A steep decline in bullfinch abundance began in the 1970s, but has continued less dramatically since. The decline appears to continue in the south but may have stopped in the north. This appears to be linked to changes in habitat quality, especially in farmed habitats, where well-grown hedgerows and weedy elements of cropland have declined. Changes in woodland structure, especially the degradation of the shrub layer and loss of seed sources, may also be important.

Ecology

Feeding: a variety of fruits and seeds are used throughout the autumn and early winter, especially ash and hawthorn. Stubbles, fallows and set-asides are also exploited where they are close to dense cover. From late January onwards they take leaf and flower buds as they form. Invertebrates are important in the diet of the young.

Foraging rarely occurs more than 10 m from cover. Seeds are extracted from fruit and seed heads *in situ*, but small seed heads and fruits are collected and taken to cover to be eaten.



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Breeding: nests are built in dense scrub or shrub layer trees, between 1 and 2 m above the ground. They are constructed of fine twigs, moss and lichens and are lined with fine roots.

Four to five eggs are laid in May, incubation takes 12–14 days and fledging 12–16 days. A second brood is usual, but pairs may move some distance between broods. Breeding can extend into September.

Management issues

Reduced availability of food in neighbouring farmland, especially in winter, may affect bullfinches breeding in woodland and scrub.

The degradation of the shrub and ground layers may make nests more vulnerable to predation and affect food availability. Damage to the shrub layer during woodland operations is temporary, but deer browsing pressure and excessive shade have a long term impact on the shrub layer and will need to be managed. Developing rides and woodland edge will encourage the shrub layer and seeding herbaceous plants.



Figure 2.25
Breeding distribution of the bullfinch in England.