

# Dunnock

## Status

BoCC Amber listed due to a significant population decline in the late 20th century.

## Population

1.75 million territories.

## Habitat

Scrub, recently established woodland, woodland edge, and young coppice, wherever there is suitable dense structure for the birds to remain largely under cover.

## Conservation issues

Dunnock populations fell dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s but appear to have stabilised. The causes are unknown, but the reduction of dense cover and field layer by deer browsing and by silvicultural management may have been at least contributory.

## Ecology

*Feeding:* small insects dominate the diet in the breeding season, but small seeds are significant in winter. Foraging occurs mainly on the ground; under bushes, hedges, young conifers and piles of twigs, and only occasionally in foliage, sometimes up to 8 m above ground.

*Breeding:* nests are well concealed in scrub, hedges, or in low trees, at 0.5–3.5 m above the ground. The nest is a quite substantial



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cup of twigs, leaves, and other plant parts, lined with wool, hair, or moss.

There are usually two, occasionally three broods. Four to six (sometimes three to seven) eggs are laid in late March or early April, and are incubated for 12–13 days. The chicks fledge in 11–12 days.

## Management issues

The dunnock is absent where dense shrub and field layers are lacking, and the causes of poor woodland structure need to be addressed. Heavy shade that limits shrub layer development and can be addressed by thinning, and high levels of deer browsing need to be addressed by population management (see section on browsing and grazing).



**Figure 2.9**  
Breeding  
distribution of the  
dunnock in  
England.