

Hawfinch

Vincent Munier (Nature PL)



attributed to woodland clearance and management, and the 1987 hurricane affected south-eastern populations. Disturbance may be a factor, especially in winter when birds feed on fallen seeds.

Ecology

Feeding: hawfinches are adapted to large, hard seeds, of the hornbeam, beech, elm, maple, cherry, other *Prunus* species and rose. They also take buds and shoots of trees and shrubs. Invertebrates, especially caterpillars, are fed to chicks. In spring and summer, hawfinches forage in woodland, moving to berry-bearing species in the autumn and feed on fallen seeds on the ground in the winter.

Breeding: nests are located in mature, densely foliated trees, on horizontal branches, abutting the trunk or a vertical branch, often in the cover or ivy or honeysuckle.

A single brood of four to five eggs is laid from the early April to July. The eggs take 11–13 days to hatch and the chicks fledge in 12–13 days.

Management issues

Continuity of high forest is important; changes to the structure of occupied woods can lead to desertion. Management should therefore be gradual and retention of important seed trees prioritised. Drinking water is important and dry woodland pools may need restoration. The ground and shrub layer structure in grazed woodland may be insufficient to provide cover for hawfinches feeding on fallen seeds. Disturbance caused by public access may inhibit feeding on fallen seeds in winter.

Status

BoCC Amber listed because of ongoing but moderate population decline.

Population

Estimated 2,500–6,000 pairs.

Habitat

Hawfinches are closely associated with oak-hornbeam high forest and mature beech, ash and elm woods, where a variety of trees and shrubs provide year-round feeding. Mature orchards and parkland are also used although heavily grazed woodland is usually avoided. They are largely absent from west Britain other than the Forest of Dean, which may reflect climate constraints.

Conservation issues

The causes of the declining population are unclear but historic declines have been



Figure 2.26
Breeding
distribution of the
hawfinch in
England.