

# Spotted flycatcher

## Status

BoCC Red listed due to a prolonged and marked population decline.

## Population

85,000 pairs estimated.

## Habitat

Primarily mature, deciduous woodland where there is a combination of nest sites and open structure, especially rides and glades.

## Conservation issues

The population has been in decline continually since the 1960s. The causes are not well understood, but it is suggested that habitat quality, and the associated biomass of flying insects, has declined in the UK, and conditions in wintering areas may also contribute.

## Ecology

*Feeding:* flying insects are caught during short flights from open perches, often quite high in the strata. A high biomass of small to medium-sized flying insects, especially 'house' and dung flies, is therefore important. In bad weather, birds will forage in the canopy, and occasionally on the ground.

Some preference is shown for mature, tall, native deciduous woodland, where insect abundance is high. Glades, rides and edge habitats are important, as is open park woodland.

*Breeding:* nests are located in natural crooks and hollows on the outside of mature tree trunks, buildings or in dense ivy. The nest is usually partially concealed but with a good field of view.



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Birds arrive on breeding territories from early May, and 4–6 eggs are laid in late May, breeding success is dependent on favourable weather in May and June. A second brood may be started in early July. First brood chicks will assist with the feeding of recently fledged second brood chicks in anticipation of the return migration.

## Management issues

Restructuring of woodlands with unbroken canopy cover to increase the amount of ride-edge and glade habitat (see section on ride and glade management) will increase foraging opportunities close to suitable nest sites. Grazing within or near the edges of woods and copses could be valuable as it may encourage more insects. Ivy clad trees make valuable nest sites, so it is important that ivy is not controlled by stem cutting. The ivy is rarely damaging to the tree.

Where natural nest sites are lacking, provision of open-fronted nestboxes (see section on providing nestboxes) in suitably structured habitat can be beneficial.



**Figure 2.17**  
Breeding distribution of the spotted flycatcher in England.