



Forestry Commission

Forestry Statistics 2016

A compendium of statistics about woodland, forestry and primary wood processing in the United Kingdom



Chapter 5: Environment

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5 Environment

Introduction

This chapter presents a range of information about the woodland environment, mostly using sources that are outside the scope of National Statistics. They are included to provide additional context to the topic.

Estimates for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are included, where possible, in addition to UK or GB totals. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in the Sources chapter.

All of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released.

The statistics on the populations of wild birds (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1) and on woodland fires (Tables 5.2a and 5.2b) have been revised since "Forestry Statistics 2015". For further details on revisions, see the Environment section of the Sources chapter.

A copy of all environment tables is available to download as an Excel spreadsheet from the [Tables for Download page](#).

Key findings

The main findings are:

- Since the early 1990s, the UK woodland bird index has generally been about 20 per cent below the level of the early 1970s, with the decline predominantly in woodland specialist species.
- 75% of the UK public agrees with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases".
- There were around 3,300 woodland fires in 2014-15, burning around 900 hectares of woodland.

5.1 Populations of wild birds

Indices of wild bird populations in the UK are produced annually by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and cover a range of species that are native to the UK.

The index for woodland birds was expanded in 2007 to cover 38 species, of which 12 are generalists and 26 are woodland specialists (those that breed or feed mainly or solely in woodland).

Since the early 1990s, the UK woodland bird index has generally been about 20 per cent below the level of the early 1970s, with the decline predominantly in woodland specialist species (Table 5.1, Figure 5.1).

Causes for the decline in woodland birds may include a lack of diversity in habitats and food sources, loss of habitats and food sources through damage caused by increasing deer populations, and a reduction in some migratory species following pressures in other parts of the world.

Table 5.1 UK populations of wild birds

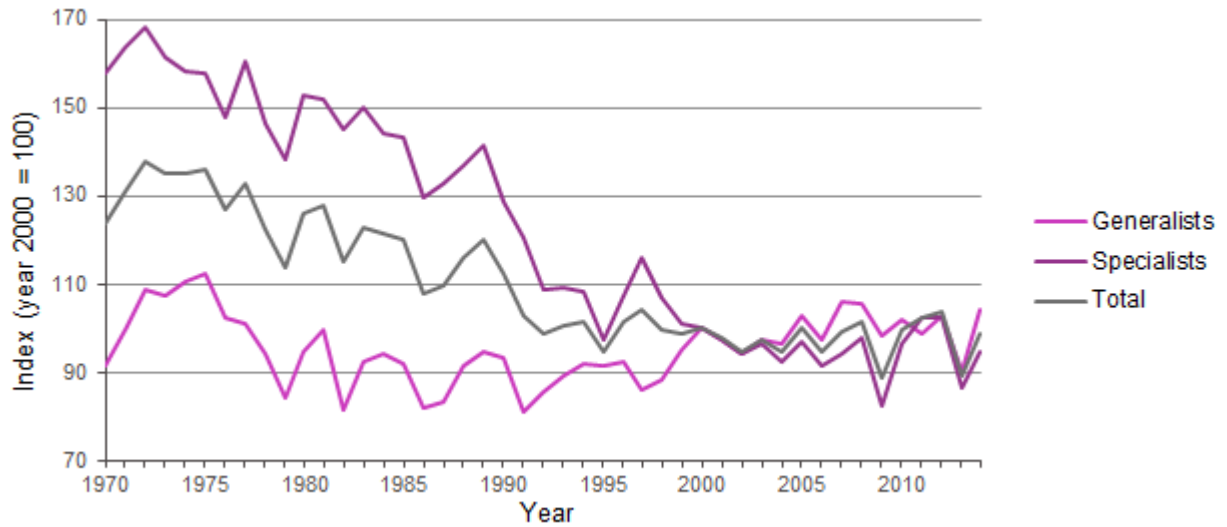
Year	Total breeding birds	Farmland birds	Seabirds	Woodland birds	Woodland generalists	Woodland specialists
index (year 2000 = 100)						
2005	100.2	97.6	91.2	99.9	102.7	97.0
2006	99.9	96.3	94.3	94.7	97.5	91.6
2007	99.0	90.6	88.6	99.1	105.9	94.0
2008	100.5	92.5	83.5	101.6	105.4	97.8
2009	95.8	89.7	88.9	88.9	98.2	82.5
2010	97.2	86.9	86.1	99.6	101.7	96.4
2011	95.5	86.5	79.9	102.5	98.8	102.2
2012	96.6	87.4	76.9	103.7	102.6	102.4
2013	89.3	78.5	75.8	89.2	90.1	86.6
2014	94.2	79.9	83.0	98.9	104.0	94.5

Source: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

1. Based on data in *Wild Bird Populations in the UK statistical release* (Defra, October 2015).

Figure 5.1 UK populations of woodland birds



Source: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

1. Based on data in *Wild Bird Populations in the UK* statistical release (Defra, October 2015)

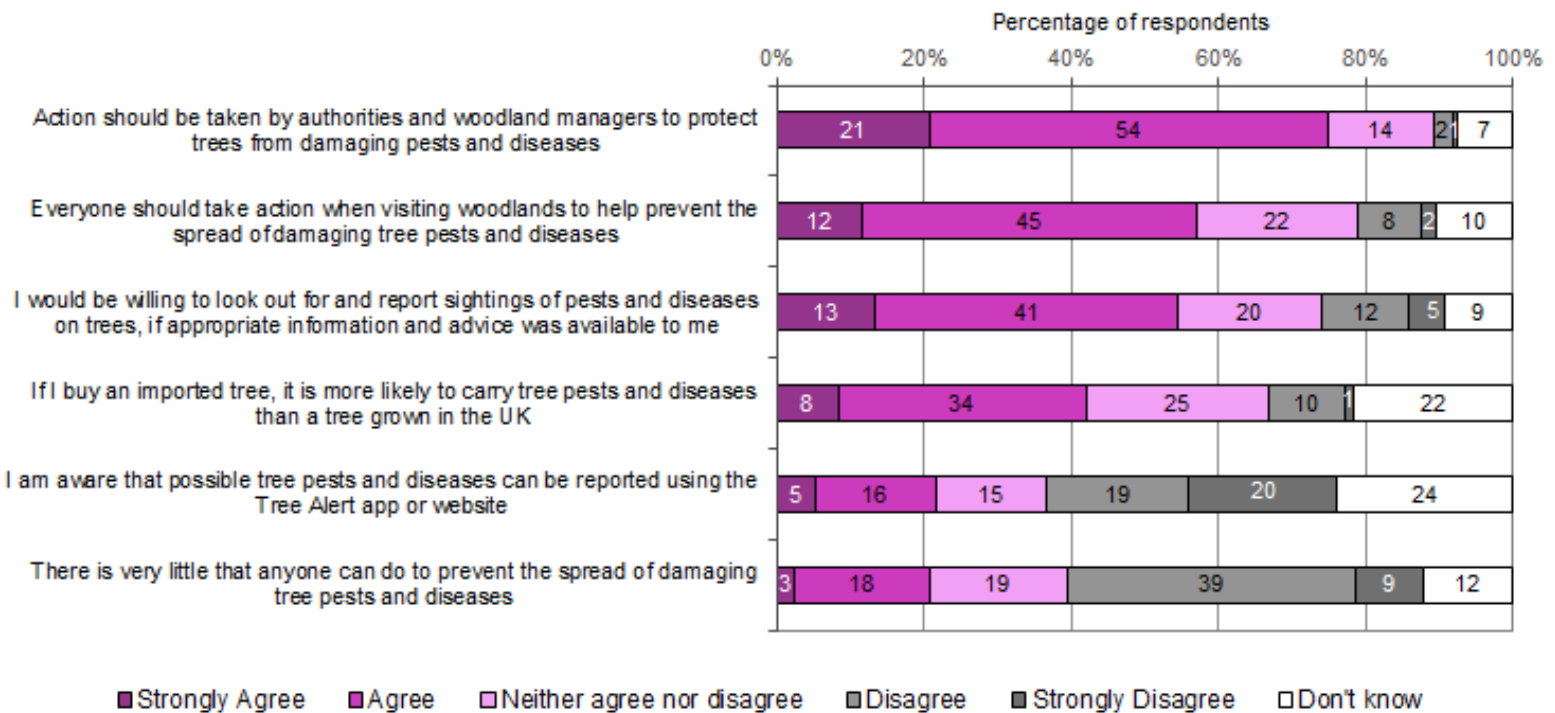
5.2 Public Opinion of Forestry - tree health

The Forestry Commission has conducted similar surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues every two years since 1995. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2015 (with separate surveys in Scotland, Wales, and across the UK as a whole) and in 2014 (in Northern Ireland). The full results are available within the 2015 and 2014 Public Opinion of Forestry reports available on our website at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-5zy19w.

Questions were introduced in 2013, to gauge the public's views on tree health issues.

Latest results show that the highest level of agreement was seen with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases", with 75% of UK respondents in 2015 agreeing (agree or strongly agree) (Figure 5.2). This compares with only 21% agreeing with the statement "there is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases".

Figure 5.2 Public opinion on tree health



Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2015.

Base: 2,000 UK respondents.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics

5.3 Woodland Fires

The Home Office and Devolved Administrations produce estimates of the number and area of wildfires each year, using data recorded by Fire and Rescue Services using the Incident Reporting System. These figures were previously produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government. By analysing the wildfire data with the National Forest Inventory woodland map, it has been possible to produce estimates of fires that occur within woodlands in Great Britain.

Table 5.2a shows the number of woodland fires in 2010-11 to 2014-15. There has been some fluctuation in the number of woodland fires in Great Britain over this period, with a high of around 11 thousand fires in 2011-12 and a low of around 2,400 in 2012-13. Most fires occurred in England.

The total number of woodland fires in Great Britain in 2014-15 (around 3,300) represents 3% of the total of around 106,300 outdoor fires in Great Britain in 2014-15 (Home Office, Welsh Government, Scottish Government).

Table 5.2a Number of woodland fires

Financial year	England	Wales	Scotland	GB
2010-11	6 182	618	1 186	7 986
2011-12	9 360	620	1 059	11 039
2012-13	1 794	176	484	2 454
2013-14	3 899	512	776	5 187
2014-15	2 360	410	490	3 260

Source: Incident Recording System (Department for Communities and Local Government, Scottish Government), National Forest Inventory. These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics.

Table 5.2b shows the area covered by woodland fires between 2010-11 and 2014-15. There was a peak of around 8,500 hectares burnt in 2011-12, with the vast majority of this area occurring in Scotland. Around 900 hectares of woodland in Great Britain were burnt in 2014-15.

Table 5.2b Area of woodland fires

Financial year	England	Wales	Scotland	GB
				hectares
2010-11	979	167	129	1 276
2011-12	279	216	7 982	8 476
2012-13	48	107	268	424
2013-14	101	1 089	318	1 508
2014-15	81	39	762	882

Source: Incident Recording System ((Department for Communities and Local Government, Scottish Government), National Forest Inventory. These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics.

Sources: Environment

Introduction

The statistics presented in the Environment chapter of this release cover:

- populations of wild birds;
- public opinion on tree health; and
- woodland fires.

Woodland fires

Wildfires, including woodland fires, are uncontrolled vegetation fires. Although they can start naturally, the majority are caused by people, either accidentally or deliberately.

Wildfires can impact on transport network and power lines; damage property and businesses; affect tourism and recreation; and threaten people's lives. They also damage the natural and historic environment and release carbon dioxide stored in vegetation and soils which contributes to climate change.

Despite woodland wildfires making up a relatively small proportion of all wildfire incidents in the UK, their impacts can be disproportionately large and costly to society. Destructive wildfire events are predicted to increase in frequency in the UK due to increased land-use pressure and climate change.

Data sources and methodology

Populations of wild birds

Population indices for wild birds are a framework indicator for sustainable development. The data published here are based on those published in the Wild bird populations in the UK, 1970-2014 statistical release (Defra, October 2015), rescaled here to give year 2000 = 100 instead of year 1970 = 100.

The index for woodland specialists was recalculated in 2007 to include 4 additional species; this affected the indices for total woodland birds and (to a lesser extent) all birds.

Public opinion on tree health

Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys have been run every 2 years by the Forestry Commission. The surveys cover public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues. A question asking about tree health was included for the first time in the 2013 surveys (Figure 5.2). Further information on the surveys is available in the Sources: Public Opinion of Forestry page.

Woodland fires

Information about wildfires comes from the Incident Recording System (IRS), reported by Fire and Rescue Services and submitted to the Home Office (previously to the Department for Communities and Local Government), Scottish Government and Welsh Government.

Information on woodland areas has been obtained from the National Forest Inventory woodland map. Further details on the definition of woodland and the coverage of the National Forest Inventory are provided in the Woodland Area and Planting section of the Sources chapter.

A spatial (GIS) analysis has been undertaken to identify fires that occurred in woodlands, as defined by the National Forest Inventory.

References

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2015) "Wild bird populations in the UK, 1970-2014", National Statistics Release (www.gov.uk/government/publications/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk).

Home Office "Fire Statistics data tables" (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fire-statistics>)

Quality

Limited data are currently available on the environmental aspects of woodlands. Other than Wild Bird Populations, all of the statistics in this chapter are outside the scope of National Statistics, but are included here to give a broad indication of the woodland environment.

Revisions

Statistics on the environment obtained from others are subject to revision whenever the source data are revised.

A number of revisions have been made to the data on woodland fires in 2010-11 to 2012-13, to correct a previous error in the way the figures were derived. This has resulted in:

- increases to the numbers of woodland fires in each year (particularly for 2011-12, where the number of woodland fires has been revised up by around 2,000),
- a decrease in the area of woodland fires in 2011-12 of around 400 hectares, and
- minor increases in the area of woodland fires in 2010-11 and 2012-13.

The Forestry Commission's revisions policy sets out how revisions and errors to these statistics are dealt with, and can be found at: [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCrevisions.pdf/\\$FILE/FCrevisions.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCrevisions.pdf/$FILE/FCrevisions.pdf).

Release schedule

For information on the release schedules of statistics produced by others, see relevant websites (above).

The next Public Opinion of Forestry survey is expected to run in early 2017, with results available in summer 2017.

"Forestry Statistics 2017" and "Forestry Facts & Figures 2017" will be released on 28 September 2017.

Further information

Data on woodland vegetation (obtained from the Countryside Survey) is no longer provided in Forestry Statistics. See Forestry Statistics 2015 (available at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqdgc>) for the data previously included or go to www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk for full results.