

## **Jonathan Spencer represented Forestry Commission England**

There are two key issues to address via FC policy in England relating to woodland birds:

- Changes to the extent of woodland management in public and privately owned woodlands
- Impacts of deer on woodlands, woodland birds and woodland management

Other factors clearly influence woodland birds, particularly sub Saharan migrants, but it is not within our gift to address these.

We need to research the effects of changes in woodland management (with respect to both type of operation, and extent of activity across the landscape) and need to find out in what form (remembering that management needs to be tangible/or possible to undertake on the ground) and at what scale woodland management needs to happen in order to have a positive impact on the woodland bird index.

Woodland management is taking off due to both local and political interest in wood products particularly in wood fuel provision, and management per se appears less of a challenge in coming years. Modifying such activity may be repaid in terms of increasing the suitability of woodland for birds. The policy challenge is in directing woodland management in a way that benefits woodland birds and meets the multipurpose function woodlands are now expected to deliver.

Deer however appear to be an increasing problem. Recent research by the BTO and others is finding that deer have a greater influence than first thought on woodland bird communities (largely via woodland structure). Deer are increasing in both range and number and current policies are not addressing either effectively. However work by the FC and Deer Initiative has shown that it is possible to bring deer numbers in hand and improve the prospects for woodland birds in targeted areas. The current policy in England is to 'get on top of deer'. It is critical to achieving the woodland bird target that we have an understanding of how deer management and woodland management can be used together to influence woodland bird populations.

There is a need for quantitative evidence that will help address the question "how much woodland do we need to bring into management to influence the woodland bird index?" and "where does this activity need to take place?". We also need hard data on the causal relationship between woodland management activity and the direct effects and response time on woodland bird communities.

There is clearly strong political support for management of woodlands for woodland birds and 'delivery' is the 'policy'. We anticipate that we will be rolling out the approach carried out in East Midlands FC Region (ref to Neil Riddle's presentation) to all other FC Regions in the near future, but particularly in the SW and SE England FC Regions alongside an increase in woodland bird related work across the FC estate.