

THE DAWN CHORUS



SPRING / SUMMER 2025



RESEARCH UPDATE

Vet drugs and their
effect on songbirds
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25 YEARS
OF SAVING
SONGBIRDS

**25TH ANNIVERSARY
EDITION**

THE SONGBIRD SURVIVAL GARDEN

Shining a spotlight on
the plight of songbirds
PAGE 10



SongBird Survival celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2025, a year to look forward to and a time to reflect on what the charity has achieved in its first 25 years.

From the outset SongBird Survival has not been afraid to shy away from contentious issues, putting the welfare of songbirds before all else. Perhaps our greatest achievement in our first 25 years has been to highlight the damage caused by over 12 million cats. This has been achieved through a combination of scientific research and education, showing the simple steps which people can take to mitigate this damage.

From a humble start with a part time secretary, to a highly dedicated and skilled team, the charity has grown not just in size but also in knowledge and stature which has led to it making an increasingly felt impact.

Sadly, many of our beloved songbirds continue to decline, but if we can establish through scientific research at least some of the reasons for, and means to arrest, this decline, our efforts will not have been in vain.

2025 promises to be a year of activity and advancement for SongBird Survival with new projects planned, the highlight being our garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May. To have been awarded a prestigious garden place at Chelsea represents a huge achievement and all credit goes to the SongBird

Colin Strang Steel



Survival team and garden designer Nicola Oakey for winning this.

While 2025 represents a milestone in the life of SongBird Survival it also marks the retirement of four long serving trustees, Clive Sherwood, Tom Leicester, Peter Roberts and myself. Both Clive and Tom have been with the charity since the outset and it would be difficult to quantify the contribution they have

both made to the charity's growth and impact over the years in making it the voice for songbirds. Peter has also played a significant role in driving the charity forward while ensuring that it continues to operate on a sound financial basis.

It has been a great privilege to serve as your chairman for the past five years, and to witness all the changes which have taken place in that time. These could never have happened without the drive and energy of our chief executive officer Sue Morgan and her dedicated team.

I would have liked there to have been more progress during my chairmanship on having a productive discussion and consideration of the role of predator control within conservation. This nettle needs to be grasped before it is too late for some species.

I wish my successor Nicky Oliver every success. I know that under her capable chairmanship the charity will go from strength to strength.



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Thank you to our retiring trustees



Tom Leicester



Clive Sherwood



Colin Strang Steel



Peter Roberts

At our AGM in March, we said an enormous thanks and farewell to four of our wonderful trustees who are retiring. Between them they have given more than seventy years of service to SongBird Survival for which we are incredibly grateful. It also means they

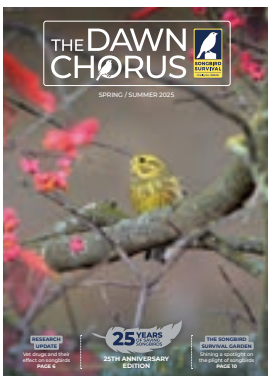
definitely deserve a bit of a rest! Saying that, we know they will still be very much supporting what we do and will continue to help us, but just in other ways.

The responsibility of being a trustee is significant and without their careful guidance and unending passion and enthusiasm we would certainly not be reaching

our milestone 25th anniversary with the achievements made so far and a clear direction for the next chapter of our work. You can read more about the first 25 years of SongBird Survival in the insert accompanying this magazine.

Thank you to Tom Leicester, Clive Sherwood, Colin Strang Steel and Peter Roberts.

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Thank you to our contributors. All content is produced by the SongBird Survival team including Charlotte Bartleet-Cross, George Bradley, Lisa Beamish, Robyn Cooper, Tracey Spensley, Gemma Spall and Sue Morgan as well as the named authors of specific pieces. Cover image: Yellowhammer



RESEARCH UPDATE

The arrival of spring signals a fun and busy time at SongBird Survival Research HQ, with many of our research projects getting off to a flying start with their first season of data collection.

Sand martin



Jenny Darby, our PhD student looking at endocrine disrupting chemicals, has planned her data collection season to start in early spring. Since October, she has been spending time planning and training, making sure she is well equipped for the busy field season ahead. Jenny has identified 7 different sites across the north of England and the midlands which have natural or artificial nesting walls that are used by sand martins for breeding. In the coming months she will be visiting these sites and collecting data on breeding success, as well as testing water, soil and invertebrate samples.



Gavin Kellerman, who works on our disturbance project, has also been hard at work with his planning in the run up to a busy breeding season. He has written a literature review, looking at the evidence base associated with disturbance and the impact on bird species. This review will be invaluable in tailoring the methods he uses to collect his data in spring. Gavin has also got concrete

plans for data collection in several woodlands across the south of England. The selection of sites is very important in this project, as he will need to select sites with many different disturbances, for example bikes, horses and walking with and without dogs. These sites then also need to grant permission to trial his mitigation measures to see what minimises the effects of disturbance on nesting birds.

Blue tit



Dr Cannelle Tassin de Montaigu, who is working on our veterinary drugs project, was recently awarded a prize for her cutting-edge research. This was the birds and pesticides project funded by SongBird Survival. The Latitude prize recognises PhD theses with the most potential for achieving a better and more sustainable future. She received the prize at the University of Sussex during a life science research symposium in January 2025. Huge congratulations to Cannelle from all of us at SongBird Survival. You can read more about Cannelle's research and her latest published paper in this issue of Dawn Chorus.

Garden bird feeding – is it time for a rethink?

Garden bird feeding is an easy way to connect with wildlife and provides untold benefits to our mental and physical wellbeing. It is often considered a risk-free way to help wildlife from the comfort of our own homes and can be a way to learn more about the bird species around us.

With more than half of UK residents feeding their garden birds, there is now a whopping 1 bird feeder for every 9 birds that can use one. However, an emerging body of research is starting to shed light on the unintended negative consequences that garden bird feeding may have on the birds we so want to help.

Risks of feeding birds

- 1) The quality of the bird food supplied matters, with many people putting out bread or meal leftovers that may be nutritionally unbalanced and nutrient poor for our garden birds. Free access to feeders has been shown to decrease survival in some species, as they have higher than average fat scores which reduces take their off speed and survival.
- 2) Bird feeding can restructure bird communities, supporting generalist species more at the expense of specialists. For

example, up to 40% of nesting attempts by willow tits fail due to blue tits evicting birds from their nest cavities. Blue tits are a species that benefits heavily from the use of bird feeders, potentially boosting their numbers to outperform willow tits.

- 3) One of the biggest risks, especially when feeding in summer is increasing the spread of disease. Trichomonosis, also called canker, is a disease thought to have increased in spread from birds using garden feeders and bird baths. Populations of greenfinches, who are particularly affected by the disease, decreased by 66% between 2006-2016. *Trichomonas gallinae*, the parasite that causes canker, can live in water for up to an hour, and damp bird food for up to 2 days, which gives plenty of time and opportunity for other birds to catch this awful disease.

Our suggestions:

- ✓ Reduce feeding in spring to enable birds to feed chicks with better quality natural sources
- ✓ Remove feeders in summer. Instead of filling up feeders in summer, try planting for wildlife in your garden. This is a far safer and more nutritious way of providing for birds, by planting berry bushes, flowers and shrubs to encourage insects and birds alike
- ✓ Provide nesting material to support nesting birds in spring by leaving grass long or keeping grass cuttings, twigs, moss and leaves available as nesting material. You can put out pet fur only if you do not treat your pets for fleas and ticks (see more on this in our veterinary drugs article)
- ✓ Thoroughly clean any water baths or feeders that you do use to reduce the spread of disease. If you do continue to feed in the summer, invest in a feeding station that is easy to clean, like Finches Friend bird feeder, and do not overfeed
- ✓ Stop providing any water or food if you suspect any birds are suffering from disease in your garden for at least 2 weeks. Better to be safe than sorry.



Pesticides found in birds' nests

Following the success of our birds and pesticides research project, we started a new 2 year research study last year looking at the effects of veterinary drugs on nesting tits.

In January 2025, Dr Cannelle Tassin de Montaigu published her newest piece of research in the journal *Science of the Total Environment* which painted a sad picture for our feathered friends.

Many species of birds use hair, wool and fur to line their nests as cushioning before laying their eggs. This lining can come from livestock, deer or sometimes from our domestic pets. This study examined the lining of nests for pesticides that are commonly found in flea and tick treatment and tested if the presence of these pesticides had an impact on offspring of nesting tits.

The results:

- **103 nests were collected from blue tits** and great tits as part of the BTO Nesting Neighbours scheme.
- **100% of nests were contaminated with fipronil**
- **89.1% of blue tit nests and 87.2% of great tit nests had detected levels of imidacloprid** (fipronil and imidacloprid are both banned for agricultural use but used in spot-on flea treatments for domestic pets).
- **89.1% of blue tit nests and 84.6% of great tit nests had detected levels of permethrin** (typically used in anti-parasite treatments for livestock).

- **For all blue tit and great tit nests together, a higher number of dead offspring and unhatched eggs were found in nests with a higher pesticide concentration.**

As a nation of pet lovers, many people will be using the 'spot-on' flea treatments for cats and dogs as they look to keep their pets well. Many pet owners will be very concerned to hear that these veterinary drugs are potentially having such a negative impact on songbird populations. This is why we need a greater environmental risk assessment of what pesticides are used in veterinary drugs. We will lobby for change and call for a more complete environmental risk assessment of veterinary drugs by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate to assess their impact on all wildlife and the environment.

To help in your own home, SongBird Survival recommends:

- ✓ Talking to your vet about the best flea treatments for your pet and how often they really need to be used to help protect your pet, people, and wildlife
- ✓ If you do continue to use these treatments, do not brush your dogs or cats outside or put out hair for the birds to use in nest making.
- ✓ Don't allow pets to go into rivers and streams following the application of spot-on flea treatments.
- ✓ If you choose to use a flea treatment, consider oral/tablet options, available from your vet; these may have a lower environmental impact.
- ✓ To protect the environment, it's important to use flea and tick products correctly. Always follow the instructions on the product leaflet and apply the treatment to your pet as directed. Pets shouldn't swim, be bathed, or go to the groomers for a few days after the treatment, preferably for as long as possible (up to 28 days).
- ✓ Make sure you dispose of the packaging properly in household waste and use the product only on the species listed.

➔ Read the paper here:

www.songbirdsos.org/VetDrugsInNests



Letters & emails

We love to receive your emails and letters and are delighted to share your personal stories and observations.
Contact us at dawn-chorus@songbird-survival.org.uk

National Robin Day always prompts lots of wonderful thoughts and memories of encounters with robins and songbirds and we always love receiving them. We have shared a few of these lovely recollections from this year.



From Garry

How getting out into nature and photographing all birds helps with my mood.

3 yrs ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I underwent chemo and surgery and during my recovery period I started to struggle with my mental health. After I had recovered from surgery and was able to get out, I bought a camera and visited a nature reserve and after that first visit my mood and mental health gradually improved with each time I got my camera and went out into nature. I see many robins on my visits and it feels like a robin follows me round to keep me company. I would hugely recommend to anybody even if they are not interested in photography to get out into nature, see our lovely songbirds. I guarantee they will put a smile on your face just as they do mine everytime. I have thousands of photos of Robins from my travels.

From Catherine Parker

The true story of Kepchie, my childhood robin friend

When Kepchie first appeared. I used to make up stories, 'The adventures of Kepchie', where the little robin had amazing experiences, including befriending a stray cat and sharing his 'crumbs' with a regular visitor, the neighbourhood tramp. We told the schoolteachers about Kepchie and his fame spread. This led to our schoolmates learning a lot about robins as well as other birds.

Kepchie came most in the spring and winter. He must have

had a 'stand-in', lots even, but we always insisted the visiting robin was the original Kepchie. Of course, Kepchie could not have lived to be around when I grew up, got married and had my own children, but they too met 'Kepchie' and made up stories about him. My dad called any robin he saw, 'Kepchie', and we still do that today. Consequently, we have such happy memories of Dad and Kepchie, which we can hold onto. So, for me, robins are indeed very special as well as truly beautiful.

Thank you.

From Cherrilyn Caine (Mrs.)

I have loved Robins since I was a small child in the very early 1950's, and living in London, I used to see them in Hyde Park. Some would dare to eat birdseed from my little outstretched 4yr old hand!

At that time, the Forsythe Saga was being serialised on the radio (we had no TV back then!), and my parents were also having a house built for them in Gerrards Cross - back then a much less urbanised place just 19 miles from Marble Arch! One of the main characters in the Forsythe Saga, Jolyon Forsythe, was having a house built at Richmond and he named it 'Robin Hill'. Instantly my parents said to one another "That's what we will call our new house!" - and so it was. By a strange coincidence we actually had a good many Robins visiting the bird table in the garden and some would follow my Father as he dug all the new flowerbeds. He used to 'talk' to them and if he forked up a clod of earth with a few worms attached, he would gently throw it in the direction of any Robins!

I live in West Oxfordshire and I do indeed still see Robins in our garden but not as many as in the past. Unfortunately, over almost 40 years, we have become somewhat inundated with pigeons and corvids, so I plan to help the smaller birds if I can.

SPOTLIGHT ON Greenfinch

STATUS:

RED

(AV. % CHANGE):

-67% (1995-2022)

Estimated number of UK
breeding pairs:

785,000

Data from www.bto.org/birdtrends



IDENTIFICATION: Greenfinches are brave, gregarious, and greedy birds, that often squabble between themselves year-round. They are quite a stocky finch, with a distinctly forked tail and a chunky flesh-coloured bill. Males are an apple green with a yellow rump and a flash of yellow on the wings and tail, plus a small dark patch between the eye and bill. Females are more subtle in colour, a dull green-grey, with less yellow on the wing and a brownish hue to the upper parts.

BREEDING AND NESTING: Greenfinches usually pair from late February but you may hear males singing as early as January. During the breeding season the male displays an elegant song flight, and its song is very similar to the warbling of a canary. Large nests are built by the female in trees and bushes, made of moss as well as twigs and roots with hair and feathers inside the nest.

Diet: Greenfinches have a varied diet. They will eat various seeds, flower buds, nyger seed, insects, berries, and nuts. They use their powerful bills to break open seeds which they feed on throughout the year.

KEY INFORMATION:

Scientific name:

Chloris chloris

Family:

FRINGILLIDAE

(Finches)

Average length:

15cm

Average wingspan:

25-28cm

Average lifespan:

2-3 years

⚠️ THREATS AND HOW TO HELP:

Greenfinch numbers have declined across the UK largely due to the trichomonosis outbreaks that have been occurring since 2005. This disease can be spread through close contact with other birds and sharing food and water sources. Greenfinches also suffer from other threats such as the changing climate and changes in agricultural practices.

Help to reduce sick birds infecting healthy birds by cleaning bird feeders and bird baths every week. Remove feeders temporarily if you see a bird which appears unwell. Providing a source of food during the winter months can also help. Sunflower hearts, black sunflower seeds and seed mixtures are good choices for food.

DID YOU KNOW? Did you know that around 60 greenfinches were released in Australia and New Zealand in 1800s to remind UK citizens of home? Researchers believe that today's population comes from this initial number of greenfinches.

CEO Column

2025 started with a bang and promises to be a milestone year for SongBird Survival. January saw two key announcements: our garden at The RHS Chelsea Flower Show and the publication of the results from our veterinary drugs research project. These initiatives are important in different ways - one raises national awareness of our cause, while the other has the potential to influence policy changes on threats to some of our UK songbirds.

None of this would be possible without the hard work and dedication of our members, supporters, trustees, and staff. 2025 marks the silver anniversary of SongBird Survival. This may not mean much to the wider world, but it is a good time to reflect on why the charity was founded in 2000, the work we've done, and how it positions us for the next phase of our mission to save songbirds with science.

In 2000, only 30% of us had the internet in our homes, and the global conversation about climate change was just starting. The conservation sector was established and working to support our dwindling biodiversity in the UK. Our founders saw the need to add a new dialogue, determined to be a voice for songbirds and to highlight issues specific to them. Since then, our commitment to finding and promoting solutions based on independent scientific



Sue Morgan

research has grown, as you can read in the special anniversary insert included with this magazine.

I have high hopes and expectations for the future success of SongBird Survival in this anniversary year and beyond. Resolving the crisis for songbirds is a long-term project, and measuring

our impact can be challenging. Ultimate success is achieving our vision of thriving and balanced songbird populations, but we can also recognise the steps we make toward this goal, such as policy changes on pesticides, educating gardeners, influencing cat owner attitudes, and encouraging the next generation of songbird champions with our Ruby Robin Award.

I look forward to what's in store for the rest of this year. I hope to see some of you at the Chelsea Flower Show in May, or the Global Bird Fair in Rutland in July. If not, I'd always be happy to chat and hear your thoughts about our work and your suggestions for our future priorities.

Let's hope this positive start to the year signifies a transformative future. While the loss of songbirds can be overwhelming, we can all do something, and together with your support, I am excited to see the progress this charity makes in the next 25 years, with many more milestones to come!



**Do you have children in your family?
Got a birthday coming up?**

**Why not buy them
a gift membership?**

Our new Family Membership benefits:

- ✓ Monthly Family e-news with challenges, bird facts, reading ideas and much more
- ✓ The Dawn Chorus magazine twice a year
- ✓ Up to 2 adults and 4 children in the same household for just £4 per month

What they will get when you purchase your gift:

- ✓ Joining pack with magazines, leaflets and activities for all the family
- ✓ Handwritten greetings card with your choice of message
- ✓ Posted to them on a day of your choosing

"It is great value; thank you to the team for setting this up - we can't wait to see what our monthly challenge will be!"



"The children are so excited to get their email with this month's activities to do - they have shown a new-found interest in birds and are learning what they can do to help them."

**Sign up today for a
year of family fun, inspiring
the next generation of
songbird champions:
www.songbirdsos.org/Gift**



The SongBird Survival Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show



As we announced in January, we are absolutely delighted that this year we will be celebrating our 25th anniversary with a special garden at The RHS Chelsea Flower Show from Tuesday 20th through to Saturday 24th May. It's been quite a journey to get to this exciting point with only a few weeks to go now until the Show opens.

With UK songbird populations dropping by 50% in two generations, being able to raise awareness of the issues, and demonstrate solutions through a garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show seemed to be an amazing opportunity. Working with award winning garden designer, Nicola Oakey, we were fortunate to win funding through a very competitive process and then be accepted following a detailed RHS selection process.

Project Giving Back is a grant-making charity that provides funding for gardens for good causes. All Project Giving Back-funded gardens are relocated to serve as lasting legacies. Our SongBird Survival Garden will have a permanent home in Yorkshire, at a Community Centre in Hull, thanks to a collaboration with local Hull-based charity, Neighbourhood Network.

The SongBird Survival Garden

Our garden will shine a spotlight on the plight of our nation's songbirds and aims to inspire the next generation of songbird champions. The garden has been designed specially with families in mind and will focus on the three key elements of food, shelter and water, that are vital in supporting bird life.

The design takes the perspective of a bird foraging for food and water, with two paths mimicking a bird's movement through the garden's countryside-inspired planting scheme that offers food, nesting material and shelter. It uses a lot of reclaimed and repurposed materials so visitors to the show will see how beautiful, exciting structures can be made from second hand materials.

Where possible, the plants used in the garden will have been grown peat and pesticide free for the show. This is a particularly important message for visitors to the show to take home, as SongBird Survival research indicates that pesticide use can contribute towards declines in songbird numbers.





Featured plants

The planting has been designed to provide a habitat that is ideal for birds and other wildlife with plentiful sources of food, water and shelter. The garden will include multi-stem trees to provide spring flowers for insects, berries for birds in the autumn/winter, and places for birds to perch, nest and shelter. The structural hedging creates 'highways' that birds can use to navigate the garden.

1. *Crataegus persimilis* 'Pruniflora' (Broad-leaved cockspur thorn)
Multi-stem *Crataegus* provides spring flowers for insects, berries for birds in the autumn/winter, and thorny branches where birds can safely shelter.

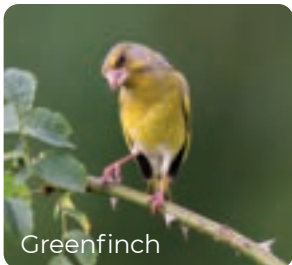
2. *Taxus baccata* (Yew)
Evergreen *Taxus* hedging provides year-round protection and shelter for birds. It also gives the garden an attractive winter structure.

3. *Centaurea montana* 'Purple Heart' (Perennial cornflower)
The flowers of the *Centaurea* are a magnet for pollinators. Once they have flowered, the seedheads are popular with different finches who will pick out the seeds.

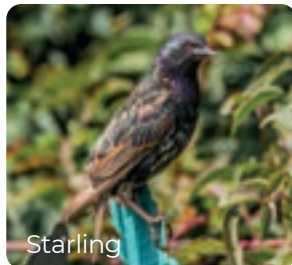
Featured songbirds

The garden's focal point is a life-size Birdhouse Den in the centre of the garden created from repurposed and reclaimed materials. It includes repurposed scaffold boards for the front and back panel walls, recycled corrugated iron sheets to make a bird's wing-inspired roof, reclaimed guttering, and recycled oil drum artwork. The back wall of the Birdhouse also features a dead hedge section to provide habitat

for insects and evoke a nest-like texture. We are working with a metalwork artist, Jeni Cairns, to create some intricate designs made from repurposed oil drums which will be integrated into the birdhouse. These designs will feature six critically endangered songbirds that are on the UK's 'red list' for the biggest decline in numbers. The birds featured are greenfinch, starling, house martin, skylark, willow tit and yellowhammer.



Greenfinch



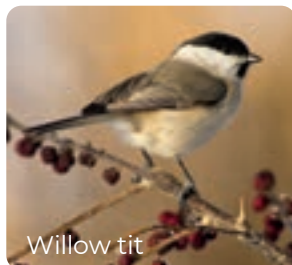
Starling



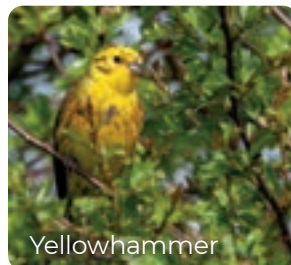
House martin



Skylark



Willow tit



Yellowhammer



Our garden designer

Although this will be her first RHS Chelsea garden, Nicola (pictured) is an award-winning garden designer with plenty of design experience, having run her own successful design studio in Rutland for five years. What's more, in 2018 she was a finalist in the RHS Young Designer of the Year.

"It has been a long-held dream to design a garden at RHS Chelsea. Partnering with a cause I feel so passionate about is really important to me and I'm delighted to be working with SongBird Survival to help raise awareness of the charity's vital work and to share our love of songbirds."

Volunteers at the garden

We are delighted that some of our members and supporters will be helping us by volunteering on the garden for the duration of the show. We know it will be hard work, but we hope it will be lots of fun too. Our volunteers are critical in supporting us to showcase SongBird Survival's unique role in songbird conservation through beautiful and practical gardening solutions that educate and inspire children to be future songbird conservationists.



SCIENCE NEWS

Dog walking disturbs birds

Similar to the SongBird Survival PhD that has been recently commissioned, scientists at Royal Holloway, University of London, are concerned about the impact of dogs on nesting birds. The study, which focused on heathland in southeast England, used GPS units to track dog movement and asked dog walkers about their habits when out walking. The researchers found that 85% of owners let their dogs off the lead for the duration of the walk, even when there were signs stating dogs should be kept on leads to protect wildlife. Dog walking resulted in a 20% increase in the area of nature reserves that were disturbed.

➔ Read more on this study at: www.songbirdsos.org/Unleashed



One of a kind fossil fills gap in understanding

Researchers from the University of Cambridge and the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County teamed up to identify the one-of-a-kind fossil which hails from what is now Brazil. The fossil bridges a gap of understanding between the 150-million-year-old Archaeopteryx—the bird-like dinosaurs and our

modern-day birds. The bird, named *Navaornis hestiae* is about the size of a starling and dates to around 80 million years ago. This fossil is so unique because its skull was largely intact, allowing the researchers to reconstruct the brain. Researchers discovered that *Navaornis* was likely to have been more cognitively

advanced than *Archaeopteryx*, however it did not possess an expanded cerebellum which modern day birds use to control their flight and spatial awareness. This presents more interesting questions about how modern-day bird brains evolved.

➔ Read the paper here: www.songbirdsos.org/Fossil



Skylark

Heathland bird survey to take place

A chance to get involved in research with a new heathland birds survey taking place (the last one was 20 years ago). The survey aims to capture population data of woodlarks and Dartford warblers across the UK, along with many other important heathland species like the nightjar. The BTO is running the survey this year and if you are confident in surveying these species, you can read more about the survey here and how you can help

➔ Read more at: www.songbirdsos.org/Heathland

Long-tailed tit



Cooperative breeding in long-tailed tits

The long-tailed tit, often referred to as the 'flying lollipop', has proven to be a subject of considerable interest following a review of 30 years' worth of data from a long-term study focusing on its breeding behaviours. These birds exhibit cooperative breeding, when related and unrelated individuals contribute to the care of offspring that are not their own, typically when their own breeding attempts have been unsuccessful. These helpers primarily provide food to both nestlings and fledglings and may also support the mother by feeding her during the incubation period. Research findings indicate that this cooperative breeding system is largely attributable to high rates of nest predation, a high degree of kinship within the population, and a low level of dispersal.

➡ For more information and to read more about these fantastic, social birds, go to: www.songbirdsos.org/Coop

A view from a kitchen window

By Colin Strang Steel, Chairman



Fieldfare

It was a strange end to the summer with all the swallows having departed by the middle of September which, as it turned out, was the hottest part of the year. One nest in a shed with young was left by the parent birds and it was not until the first week of October that they finally set off on their arduous journey to warmer climes.

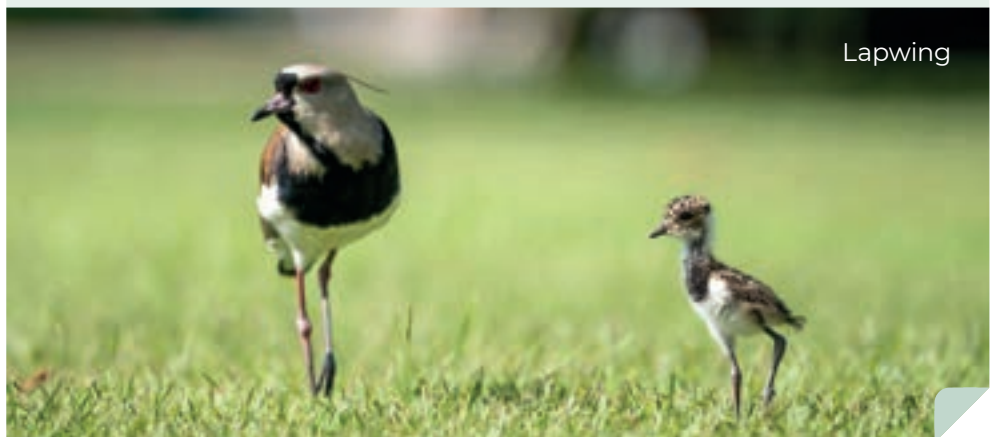
An interesting observation was made at a farm walk in the autumn by a farmer who was doing his bit for waders. He claimed from his experience that when ground nesting birds were nesting in fields where livestock was absent, the rate

of predation of both birds and eggs was considerably lower than in fields where livestock was present. Perhaps the predators did not consider the field worth investigating if there were no animals in it.

The autumn budget inheritance tax changes have created a degree of uncertainty amongst family-owned farms. It's too early to say whether this will have a knock-on effect on conservation activities undertaken by the farming community but it is a worrying development which could ultimately impact farm birds and wildlife.

It is never easy to predict when lapwings will start returning here to their nesting grounds. Normally they start arriving from early January, building up numbers until well into March. But this season, some were observed in November and these were followed by a pair in early January when there was snow on the ground. However, the hard frost and snow which followed saw them disappear, probably back to the coast. The cold weather did prompt the arrival of bramblings, long tailed tits and fieldfare which enjoyed feeding on the cotoneaster berries in the garden.

Lapwing





GOVERNMENT NEWS

DECLINING SONGBIRD NUMBERS: THE FACTS

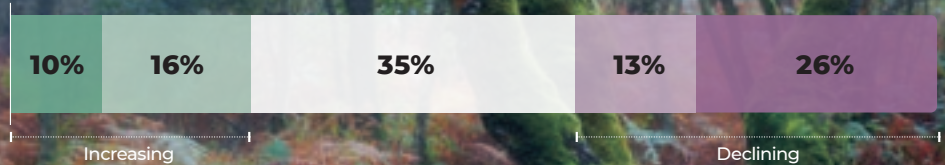
Published wild bird indicator data continues to reveal a troubling decline in UK songbird populations. Over the past 52 years, all bird species have decreased by 15%, with farmland birds experiencing a dramatic 60% reduction. Specialist farmland species, such as the corn bunting and tree sparrow, have suffered even more severe losses, with populations down by as much as 92%.

➔ Read more: www.songbirdsos.org/wildbirds24

Breeding songbird species

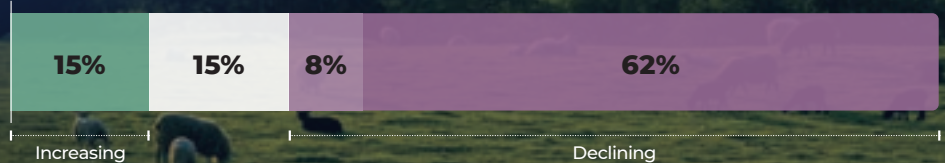
■ Strong increase ■ Weak increase ■ Little change
■ Weak decline ■ Strong decline

Woodland birds



0 25 50 75 100
Percentage of species

Farmland birds



Data sourced from DEFRA

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND INITIATIVES:

The government has implemented several policies intended to address species decline. The “Accelerating to Net Zero” initiative (December 2024) aims to reduce carbon emissions and promote clean energy, including measures to protect natural habitats and biodiversity. The government has also responded to recommendations from the Office for Environmental Protection by implementing nature-friendly farming practices and enhancing environmental protections. These actions form part of a broader strategy to halt and reverse species decline.

➔ Read more: www.songbirdsos.org/ANZ

PESTICIDE REGULATION:

The government has strengthened its commitment to a complete ban on neonicotinoid pesticides, a positive step for pollinators and the broader ecosystem.

➔ Read more: www.songbirdsos.org/bees25

POLICY DISCUSSIONS AND CONFERENCES:

At COP16 in Colombia in November 2024, the UK launched its 30by30 vision for land and sea protection, emphasising nature recovery. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed, addressed the Oxford Farming and CLA Conferences and focused on collaboration within the agricultural sector, though the integration of farming practices with environmental needs received less explicit attention.

➔ Read more: www.songbirdsos.org/SReed24
www.songbirdsos.org/COP16

CLIMATE AND NATURE BILL

A proposed law enforcing new climate change and environmental protection targets in the UK hit a roadblock in the House of Commons in January. The government won a motion by 120 votes to seven to halt the debate, delaying its return to July and making its passage into law unlikely. Liberal Democrat MP Roz Savage, who introduced the bill has agreed to work with ministers to find a way forward.

MEET THE TEAM

Gemma Spall Supporter Care team



Gemma joined the team in October, working in the Diss office alongside Lisa. It's been a busy initial few months as no sooner had they joined than it was straight into our winter fundraising appeal, National Robin Day and the Ruby Robin Award. This has given Gemma a great start with lots of conversations and communication with all our members and supporters.

Gemma has worked with a number of charities and is the chair of an art collective so has come to us bringing lots of great experience and ideas.

A lifelong advocate to protecting the natural world Gemma enjoys hiking, exploring new landscapes and learning about diverse ecosystems. Their interest in nature and the outdoors fuels their commitment to initiatives that encourage others to connect with and protect the environment

"The warm welcome from the team and the chance to connect with our wonderful supporters have made my first few months at SongBird Survival truly rewarding. I'm excited to use my experience to help make our 25th year a great one!"

Bioacoustic monitoring



Our team have been busy this spring setting up a new bioacoustic monitoring project across sites in Humberside and Suffolk.

Bioacoustic monitoring involves the audio recording of animal vocalisations and can be used to detect birds, bats and other wildlife. This type of monitoring can help to identify different birds visiting the area and track migrating birds that visit, as well as resident species even when they cannot be seen. This project is a pilot for a larger project we are hoping to run, where we we plan to look at monitoring in hard to survey areas - such as woodland.

The relocation of the SongBird Survival RHS Chelsea garden to Hull provides a great opportunity to use this technology to find out more about what birds are present in the area. By setting up recorders, we can monitor the area before and after the garden is installed and see what new wildlife emerges in the coming months.



IN THE NEWS

We've had lots of positive media coverage in the past few months. Our National Robin Day campaign secured six national pieces including in the Sun and Ideal Home online. We achieved 18 items of regional coverage including 6 radio interviews.



Our research on the impact of pesticides from cat and dog flea treatments (see page 6) found in birds' nests achieved an exclusive in the Guardian online reaching almost 250,000 people. Further content was included in the Guardian in following weeks and interest in the topic is gathering momentum. We've also had follow up articles in the Express, ITV online and Vet Times (the main vet press publication). Our CEO, Susan Morgan, was interviewed by ITV Meridian on 30th January for a news piece which also featured the lead researcher from Sussex university.



The official launch of the SongBird Survival Garden was featured by horticultural press and lots of regional articles featuring our garden designer, Nicola Oakey. We are anticipating more coverage as we get closer to the event. (see page 10)



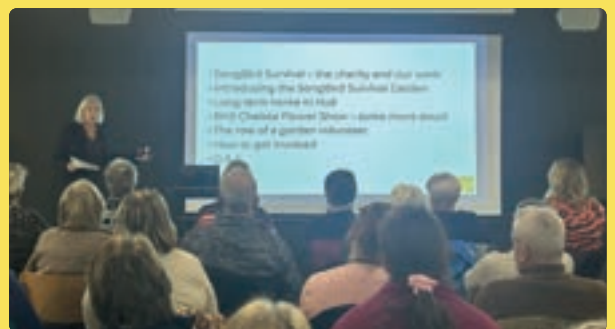
Thousands of children have taken part in this year's Ruby Robin Award and some of the schools have been featured in local newspapers in recent weeks. Pupils at Headlands school in York won their awards in February learning all about how to care for songbirds and raising a wonderful £70.



Out and about



Sue, pictured with podcaster Joff Elphick, and Tracey attended the Garden Press Event in Islington, north London in February. This event gave us a great chance to talk about our SongBird Survival Garden at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in May. We spoke to journalists, bloggers, vloggers and many key influencers in the gardening/horticulture sector and got commitments from many to cover our garden closer to May.



Sue met with more than 100 prospective volunteers in Hull in January. A small team of volunteers from the Yorkshire area, where the SongBird Survival garden will be re-located after Chelsea, will work alongside SongBird Survival members and supporters during the Show in May.

Introducing Nicky Oliver

our new Chairman of Trustees

Having been taught the merits of wildlife in the countryside on the borders of Wales by her father, she now lives with her husband in Suffolk, and both are keen ornithologists.

She has travelled the world and is a keen sportswoman, gardener, passionate about art and sculpture and an avid reader amongst many other interests. She was a vice patron of the Royal British Sculptural Society and was also vice-chair on the funding side of Fine Cell Work, a charity helping prisoners to rehabilitate through stitching.



How did you first get involved with SongBird Survival as a Trustee?

I was inspired to become part of SongBird Survival through my friendship with an existing Trustee, Lord Leicester, who was a vice chair at the time I joined.

SongBird Survival is a thoroughly worthwhile cause. I've always been fascinated by birds and without fail have a pair of binoculars at hand. I've just returned from a trip to India where I saw the most incredible birds and have been fortunate to have spent time birdwatching in Botswana, Zambia, Spain, Sri Lanka and of course the rich variety in our own wonderful countryside.

Can you share some of your key goals and priorities for the organisation?

We want to be able to use the opportunity afforded to us, in our 25th anniversary year, by having a garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show to take the charity forward into its next phase of growth and development.

I am very proud that we now have proven evidence of the impact of pesticides on songbirds from the vets' drugs study at Sussex University.

Another area of concern is predation of our songbirds. This is a significant issue. We need to find a way to work together to ensure it is better managed, finding a stable equilibrium. We now have to alert

and educate the public in order to effect a change in behaviour.

The Board of Trustees has five new members who will help us to develop and grow, so the next few months will involve bedding them into the charity and ensuring we have a steady ship ready to take advantage of future opportunities.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing songbird conservation today?

Our biggest challenge is education. We need to find ways to enlighten more people about the reduction in numbers of songbirds and the myriad of reasons for this tragic decline, and, most importantly what they can do to help. Our scientific studies need to lead change at a national level.

When there are opportunities for more community engagement, we will seek public participation as much as possible. We will grow our social media engagement, attend more nationwide events, engage with MPs and policy makers at the national level.

We understand that you're a keen ornithologist - when and how did you first become interested in birds?

I grew up on English/Welsh border, surrounded by woodland. When I was a child, I enjoyed many happy hours with my father learning all about the local birds. The desire

to keep learning has continued throughout my life and my husband, a keen birder, has taught me even more. The most important thing I've learned is to have patience – I've often spent four or five hours looking at birds and studying their behaviour.

Can you highlight any upcoming projects or initiatives that you are particularly excited about

As I mentioned, our SongBird Survival Garden at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show gives us such a great opportunity to reach many thousands of people to share our stories and we are so grateful to have been given the chance to take part. We will be sharing our simple message via the beauty of the physical garden. Our garden will suggest the solution, whereby everyone can do their bit to help songbirds, and it doesn't have to be complicated or costly.

What partnerships or collaborations do you think will be crucial for the success of SongBird Survival?

We need to build partnerships with representatives from all sectors – including farmers, government representatives, house builders and many more. Having the right corporate partners on board will also help us to reach new audiences and provide much needed additional funding so that we can continue to pay for our scientific studies into the reasons for the decline in the number of songbirds.

Which songbird is your favourite and why?

My favourite songbird is the wren, its sweet call is music to my ears. With its twitchy mannerisms it always looks busy, appearing as though it lives underground. Troglodytes troglodytes translates as 'hole dweller'. It's a very plucky bird which often comes close to the house. Another endearing habit of wrens is how they gather together in nests to keep warm. In fact, the record is 63 wrens in one 'snuggle'!

Songthrush

Threats to songbirds: Infrastructure



Experts believe that we are undergoing the sixth mass extinction event, which is driven by human activity. Climate change, agricultural intensification and deforestation are all devastating wildlife populations at a staggering rate, and the development of human infrastructure is another key threat.

As human populations grow, housing, roads and power supply structures are rapidly built to keep human society functioning as normal. These vast structures are permanently altering the landscape and destroying precious natural habitats, creating huge obstacles for songbirds to overcome.

1. Habitat loss

Nearly half of the world's bird species are in decline, with a large contributing factor being the loss of their habitat. In a study of over 1000 threatened bird species, more than 70% were at risk due to habitat loss specifically. Even where natural habitats are not completely destroyed, they are increasingly fragmented by the building of roads, houses and hedgerow removal. Increasing urbanisation is causing irreversible damage to our songbird populations by reducing nesting and foraging sites, creating a landscape that only supports a select few species well adapted to urban environments. Government statistics from 2019 show that

46.9 million people live in urban areas in England, that's over 80% of the population. With populations continuing to rise, this will only accelerate the loss of habitat across the UK and the loss of our songbirds.

2. Roads

In 2023, Great Britain had 245,700 miles of roads, almost ten times the Earth's circumference. With over 80% of land within 1km of a road, wildlife faces many challenges. Roads cause bird deaths from vehicle collisions, and research has shown that amongst songbirds, woodland species are most at risk from road collisions when swooping during foraging.

This is concerning, as almost 40% of woodland songbirds in the wild bird indicator are undergoing population declines. Roads also pose a number of related threats to birds like noise, chemical pollution, artificial light pollution, habitat fragmentation, and habitat loss from new road construction.

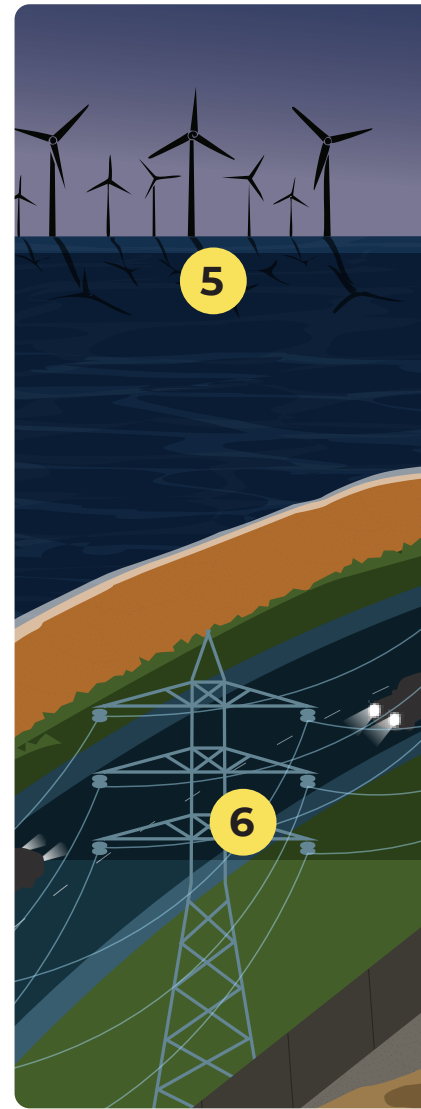
3. Collisions with buildings

Bird collisions with buildings and windows are a major threat to birds, especially as urban areas expand. Large glass surfaces on buildings present the biggest risk to birds because they reflect the environment or appear transparent, making birds think there is no obstacle in their

flight path. In the US an estimated 365-988 million birds are killed each year in collisions, with migratory species most affected. This is echoed by results from ringing schemes in Europe where collisions are recorded as the second highest cause of mortality in birds.

4. Artificial light at night

Over 80% of the world's population lives under light polluted skies. Artificial light at night (ALAN) disrupts the natural day-night cycle and has a significant impact on biodiversity. It may be driving insect declines by affecting their reproduction, development, foraging and behaviour. Songbirds





suffer indirectly from ALAN due to fewer insects being available, but also directly through increased stress, and changes in timing of migration, reproduction and sleep.

5. Renewable energy

The growth in renewable energy has led to the development of many offshore wind farms. In 2023, the UK had over 2,700 turbines on offshore wind farms and more than 9,000 onshore. Whilst positive in the fight against climate change, wind turbines can be deadly for migrating birds. A study in Germany found that in just over a year 436 of the recorded 442 birds that died in collisions were songbirds. Research has

also shown that onshore wind farms are causing displacement of birds due to habitat loss and disturbance.

6. Power lines

Although birds sitting on powerlines might seem safe, powerlines have been deadly for decades. Birds can collide with them or get electrocuted by them. Birds like starlings, who form great flocks, are more at risk because they fly close together, making it harder for them to see and avoid powerlines. Larger songbirds like magpies, jackdaws, and rooks are more prone to electrocution because their size can cause short circuits.

But what can be done?

The development of infrastructure feels like an insurmountable threat to songbirds, because, after all, what can the average person do to stop mass urbanisation? However, there are a few things you can do to reduce your own impact on songbirds that might lighten the load:

- ✓ Keep gardens green to reduce the extent of habitat loss in your own space. By planting berry bushes, trees and flowers, wildlife is encouraged into your garden, and it becomes a wildlife corridor for species to exist in the sprawling urban landscape.
- ✓ Be mindful of energy consumption at home and try and be green by recycling or choosing a green energy tariff.
- ✓ Turn off your indoor and outdoor lights at night when not being used. You can also lobby local businesses or the council to reduce the impact of business and street lighting in your local area.
- ✓ Help to reduce the number of collisions birds have with windows in your own home by buying window markers or bird stickers. These stickers break up surface reflections without damaging glass and reduce the chances of birds flying into them.
- ✓ Take public transport where possible to reduce the impact of road travel on songbirds.

Every small act adds up to create a larger impact.

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£25,000

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and give birds a
helping hand



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numbers

2ND PRIZE
£1,000

Match 5
numbers

3RD PRIZE

£25

Match 4
numbers

**Play for £1 per week and match your
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Lottery run by Unity Lottery with a draw every Friday.

For full details go to www.songbirdsos.org/lottery

For every £1 ticket, SongBird Survival will receive a
minimum of 50p.



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NOW**

