



Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)



It should be noted that there has not been a breeding population of Ring Ouzel in Shropshire since 2003.

The ring ouzel is a bird of mountains and moorlands and a close relative of the blackbird. It is a summer visitor to Britain and its preferred breeding grounds in Shropshire are the hills of the Long Mynd and occasionally the Stiperstones. Ring ouzels are generally ground nesting birds and usually found on heather covered or rocky hillsides. A prominent sprig of heather or a rock is used as a song post. Ring ouzels are surprisingly tolerant of people and several of their nests have been found on steep valley sides within a few metres of well-used footpaths.

The breeding season is very long, from April to July, and many pairs raise two broods. The Long Mynd population has undergone a very serious decline in recent years, from 21 pairs in 1997 to three or less in 2001. Only two pairs were found in 2002, but they produced no young (all nests were predated), and only one pair was found in 2003, which raised one brood of five fledged young. No evidence of breeding was found in 2004, or in 2005, when only passage birds were seen.

The Shropshire Targets for 2005 set in the previous edition of the BAP (2002) have not been achieved, and many of the Actions were not implemented, so concerted action is needed to achieve the targets set for 2010. Ring Ouzel is now on the verge of extinction as a breeding bird in the County.

Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan

1 Objectives and Targets

1.1 Objectives

- A. Restore population of ring ouzels in Shropshire to the mid 1990s level.
- B. Establish and maintain a comprehensive understanding of ring ouzel distribution, status and ecological requirements in Shropshire through research, survey and monitoring.
- C. Promote communication, education and awareness of the status and needs of the ring ouzel.

1.2 Targets

- Restore the breeding population of ring ouzels on the Long Mynd to the mid 1990s level of 12 – 16 pairs by 2015.
- Increase the breeding population of ring ouzels on the Long Mynd to the mid 1990s level of 20+ pairs by 2010
- Survey other potential breeding areas for ring ouzel in Shropshire by 2011.

Many of the Targets and Actions included in the 2002 BAP have been omitted. These actions are either redundant, in view of the apparent local extinction of the species in Shropshire, or they were aimed at local land management, although habitat change has not contributed to the decline. The remaining Target dates have also been revised.

2 Current Status

2.1 Importance

The ring ouzel is listed as a Species of Conservation Concern in the UK Biodiversity Programme. Nationally there has been a decline of at least 40% in the population and a significant contraction in range since 1990.

As a result, the species has now been upgraded from the *Amber List* to the *Red List* in the *Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007*.

In Shropshire, the Long Mynd population almost certainly represented a discrete population with a distinct song dialect.

2.2 Trends

Ring ouzel breeding success has been very poor since 1997, and the population has declined from around 12 pairs in 1998 to 1 in 2003 and 0 in 2004 and 2005.

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2.3 Population and Distribution

The Long Mynd had a fluctuating population of ring ouzels that varied between 9 and 16 pairs until 1997. Since then the population has undergone a catastrophic decline, with three (or less) pairs in 2001. In 2002 only 2 pairs remained on the Long Mynd and breeding was unsuccessful due to predation. There are also occasional records of the species at the Stiperstones and Clee Hills.

The favoured nesting habitat for the ring ouzel in Shropshire is heather hillsides. Feeding sites are short, preferably damp, grassland areas such as sheep grazed hillsides with high densities of leather jackets and earthworms. Adults eat bilberries from late June onwards, and nestlings are fed caterpillars and moths, probably gleaned from heather. Ring ouzels take advantage of autumn berries on the hillsides before migrating south for the winter.

3 Current Factors Affecting the Species

- High levels of grazing in the uplands can result in reduced heather cover which affects the ring ouzel by removing nest sites, or making nests more obvious to predators.
- However, there is no shortage of suitable nest sites. Research by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, with the support of the National Trust, has shown that the population decline and disappearance has been caused almost wholly by predation of nests. Other possible factors have been investigated and eliminated. Project Reports can be viewed on the Shropshire Ornithological Society website, www.shropshirebirds.com.
- Other BAP species (Snipe and Curlew) and other ground-nesting birds have also suffered a major population decline on the Long Mynd in the last 7 – 10 years, also attributed to an increase in predators, and hence predation of nests.

4 Current Action

4.1 Policy and Protection

- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside and Rights-of-Way Act 2000.
- All known ring ouzel breeding sites in Shropshire since 1982 are on land owned by the National Trust and designated as an SSSI.
- Ring Ouzel is a Target Species in the Shropshire Hills Joint Character Assessment (JCA) which sets the priorities for the Defra / RDS Environmental Stewardship. It provides guidance on the land management options that should be included in ES applications.

4.2 Management, Research and Survey

- Nationally, the ring ouzel is the subject of ongoing research work by the Ring Ouzel Study Group.

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- Much research work in Shropshire has been carried out by the Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project (e.g. ringing nestlings and adults, monitoring breeding success, surveys of Long Mynd, research on the reasons for the decline). This work is ongoing and is co-ordinated with other nationwide research programmes and surveys of the ring ouzel that aim to provide data to inform management decisions.
- Some predator control was carried out in the vicinity of nests as part of nest protection schemes in 2002 and 2003. However, little other action has been taken to date to meet the Target in the 2002 BAP: “Address the serious issue of predation” by 2003. This work is now being initiated, with the objective of reducing the threat of predation to any future breeding pairs.
- Survey results for 1994 to 1999 have been published in the 1999 Shropshire County Bird Report by the Shropshire Ornithological Society. Results for each subsequent year have been published annually in the Bird Report.
- Surveys on the Stiperstones (the last site, other than the Long Mynd, to have a confirmed breeding record, back in 1982) in 2002 and 2004, specifically targeted at finding this species, found no ring ouzels
- The Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project, with the support of the National Trust, will continue to search for Ring Ouzels each year, and organise nest protection if any nests are found.
- Other possible breeding sites, including Brown Clee, will be surveyed during fieldwork for the Shropshire Breeding Bird Atlas 2008-11.

5 Key Habitats

- Upland hill country and heather dominated slopes

6 Complementary Plans

Shropshire Upland Heathland HAP

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Habitat / Species	Action Code	Action text	Location of action	Start Date	End Date	Lead	Assisting
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 02	Establish monitoring arrangements to record the population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP and PSA Target Bird Species on all farms covered by any Agri-environment scheme in Shropshire, and measure the effectiveness of such schemes.	Shropshire	2006	2007	NE	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 03	Monitor population, population change, breeding success and habitat usage for all BAP priority bird species on all CSS & ESA Farms in Shropshire until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	NE	FWAG, RS, AONB, SOS, SWT, UOWG
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD AP 08	Develop an Action Plan to monitor population, population change and breeding success of all BAP ground nesting birds on sites not explicitly identified in the Shropshire Biodiversity Action Plan by 2008.	Shropshire	2006	2008	SWT	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD CA 09	Promote agricultural practice that minimises risk to the nests and broods of all BAP ground-nesting birds until 2015.	Shropshire Hills AONB	2006	2015	AONB	
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD FR 06	Seek the necessary resources to implement all the above actions.	Shropshire	2006	2015	SC	SWT
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD HS 03	Manage the open moorland on Wild Moor as a tree-free zone for BAP ground nesting birds (area to be defined in NT Long Mynd Property Conservation Plan) until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Generic Bird Plan	SHR BRD SM 01	Introduce and maintain predator control operation for benefit of BAP ground nesting birds where appropriate at Rhos Fiddle and Long Mynd (SSSI) until 2015.	Long Mynd, Rhos Fiddle	2006	2015	SWT	NT, LMBBP
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU CA 01	Share information on Ring Ouzel status and requirements with all other interested organizations and appropriate landowners until 2015.	Shropshire	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP, SWT, NE
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU CP 01	Increase public awareness of the status and needs of Ring Ouzels until 2010.	Shropshire, Long Mynd	2002	2010	NT, SOS	

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Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU FI 01	Include the requirements of ring ouzels when reviewing ESA agreements in the south Shropshire Hills, including recommendations for management emerging from current research.	Long Mynd, Shropshire	2002	On	NE	NT
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU FR 01	Provide help and support with expenses, equipment and data handling for studying Ring Ouzels in Shropshire until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU HS 01	Ensure that National Trust tenanted in-bye land is managed in an appropriate way through tenancy agreements	Long Mynd	2002	On	NT	NE
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU HS 03	Maintain contact with National Ring Ouzel Study Group, and, if local and national population trends and habitat management prescriptions suggest that re-establishing a breeding population is a realistic possibility, develop an action plan to re-establish a breeding population and increase it to 1990s levels by 2015	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU RE 01	Implement a trial land management technique to improve breeding success of Ring Ouzel by 2010.	Long Mynd	2002	2010	NT, SOS	NE
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU RE 02	Continue detailed study of the requirements of Ring Ouzels	Shropshire, Long Mynd	2002	On	SOS	NT
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU SM 01	Ensure that the Long Mynd continues to be managed to support Ring Ouzel until 2009.	Long Mynd	2006	2009	NT	LMBBP
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU SM 02	Organise protection of any nests found from predation and disturbance until 2015.	Long Mynd	2006	2015	NT	LMBBP
Ring Ouzel	SHR ROU SU 01	Continue to annually survey previous breeding areas and all potential breeding areas for ring ouzel in Shropshire until 2011.	Long Mynd	2006	2008	NT	LMBBP, SOS

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Key to Organisations

NT	National Trust
NE	Natural England
SOS	Shropshire Ornithological Society
AONB	Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership
LMBBP	Long Mynd Breeding Bird Project
UOWG	Upper Onny Wildlife Group
SC	Shropshire Council
SWT	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
RS	RuralScapes

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Plan last revised: November 2008 by Fran Lancaster (Biodiversity Support Officer, Shropshire Council).

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