

Some of the key farmland birds whose numbers have declined within the Lincolnshire Wolds.

3

Birds

Grey Partridge

A medium-sized grey and brown game bird with a vivid chestnut head and short, broad chestnut wings. This traditional game bird nests in areas with a mosaic of grassland, arable and good hedgerows with broad margins. In the Wolds, grey partridge can be found all the year round, but tend to congregate in small groups and use more open arable areas in the winter. The decline of grey partridge is especially serious as it has occurred across the whole of the species' British range.

Lapwing

Known locally as the Peewit, lapwings are medium sized plovers, readily identified on the ground by their iridescent green back and upper wings and black and white chest and head, with its characteristic crest, and in the air by their broad wings and dipping flight. Lapwings traditionally nested in small colonies in spring-sown cereals, root crops and grasslands of all kinds, but most pairs are probably now found in set-aside. In winter these birds are very mobile with very large numbers in coastal areas, but flocks appearing regularly in the Wolds ahead of cold weather on the continent. Lapwing numbers have declined in lowland England largely as a result of the move from spring to autumn sown cereals, loss of wet pasture and early cutting of silage.

Turtle Dove

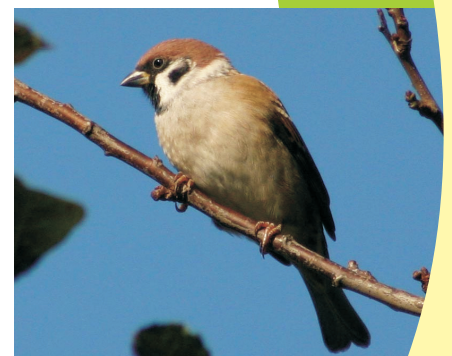
A small dove with an evocative 'purring' song, turtle doves have mottled copper and black wings and back and grey head and chest. They are migrants, arriving in the Wolds in April to breed in tall hedges, woodland and parkland. Once they have bred they return to their wintering grounds in Africa, usually in August or early September. Turtle Doves have suffered a long-term decline in breeding numbers over the last thirty years, probably due to habitat changes both in this country and also in its winter quarters.

Skylark

Best-known for its soaring song-flight, the skylark is a small-to-medium sized brown-streaked songbird with a prominent crest on its head. It nests in a range of habitats including pasture, meadows, moorland and coastal marshes and avoids small fields surrounded by high hedgerows. Skylarks are resident in the Wolds all year, but may be joined in winter by large numbers of continental migrants, and are then found in flocks on mainly arable fields. Skylarks have declined drastically since the 1970s with populations in some areas reduced by 75%. This is thought to be related to the widespread switch from spring to autumn-sown cereals and the lack of suitable stubbles for winter feeding.

Tree Sparrow

A garrulous and often noisy small bird. It is smaller than the related house sparrow and both sexes have a chestnut crown and nape. As the name suggests, tree sparrows nest mainly in tree holes but may also make big untidy grass nests in large hedgerows. They are colonial and will use small woods, parkland, large gardens and big hedges in open country, usually those with mature trees. In the winter they can be seen in more open areas, again in small flocks. The reasons for the decline of tree sparrows are not well understood but may relate to increased herbicide and pesticide use and loss of sites suitable for communal nesting.



Linnet

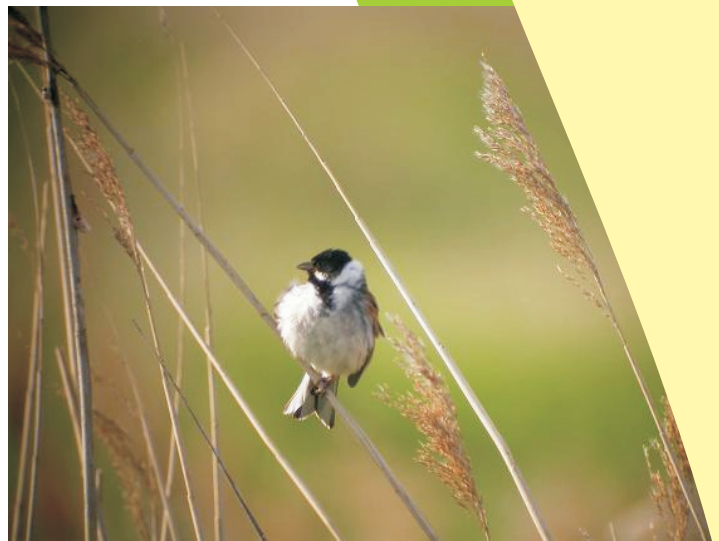
A small finch with a very attractive song, males also have crimson foreheads and chests. The linnet is perhaps the archetypal farmland bird, breeding in large hedgerows, parkland and areas of scrub. In winter they form flocks, often quite large, with other seed-eating birds and feed in areas of stubble, set-aside, salt marsh or waste ground. Most linnets probably leave the Wolds to move to the coast or sheltered valleys. Linnets have declined with the move to more autumn-sown cereals, resulting in the loss of winter stubble, an important food source.

Yellowhammer

A member of the bunting family, the male yellowhammer is immediately identifiable thanks to its canary-yellow head and chestnut-coloured rump. Yellowhammers breed in open country, with preference for farmland with tall hedgerows or wide field margins. In the Wolds they are largely resident but are much less conspicuous in winter. Yellowhammer has declined across much of lowland England during the last three decades, with a 54% decline between 1970 and 1998, according to British Trust for Ornithology data.

Reed Bunting

The reed bunting is a medium-sized bunting. Males have black heads with a white 'moustache', whereas females are less well marked. They nest mainly on the ground in ditch banks and field headlands, but will also use oilseed rape and linseed crops for nesting. In winter they prefer more open habitats, including winter stubble and salt marshes. The decline of reed bunting can probably be attributed to increased use of pesticides and the lack of over-wintering stubbles.



Corn Bunting

The corn bunting is our largest native bunting, a plain, streaked, slightly dumpy-looking songbird with a distinctive song. They are highly reliant on arable crops, in which they breed, but may now be more successful where a range of other crops are also grown and weed seeds are more plentiful. They are largely resident but form small flocks in winter often using fields close to where they breed, particularly if there is locally available set-aside or winter stubble. The corn bunting has been particularly badly hit by the move from spring-sown to autumn sown cereals. According to the British Trust for Ornithology, the British population may have declined 85% since 1970.