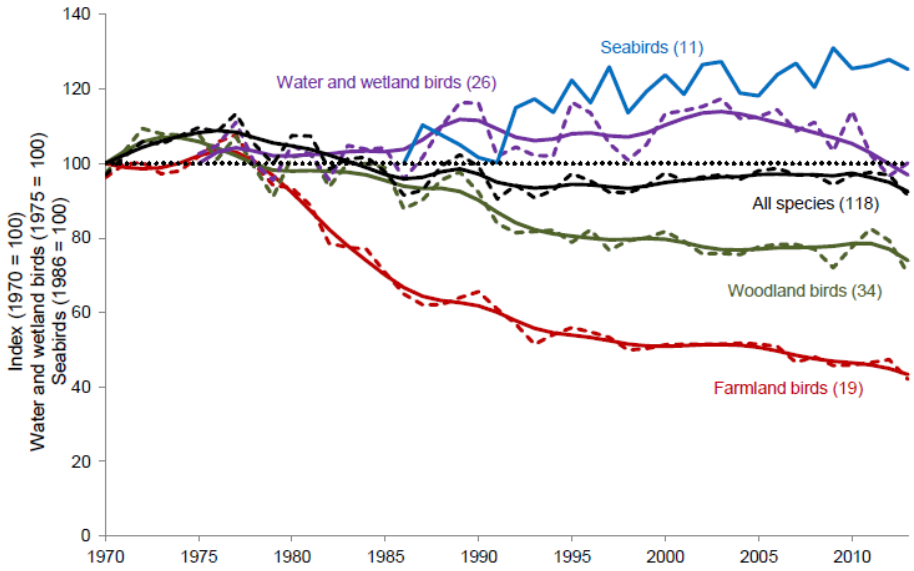
The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project - Final Report

The Need for a Farmland Bird Project

The decline in farmland wildlife has been well documented over the last forty years. Every year Defra releases the latest figures of all wild birds being monitored, (figure 1a), including the 19 bird species which make up the farmland bird index. In the South West, bird numbers fell by 45% between 1970 and 1994, and a further 8% between 1994 and 2007. Arable land now supports a large proportion of Britain's most endangered plants which are also in urgent need of conservation.

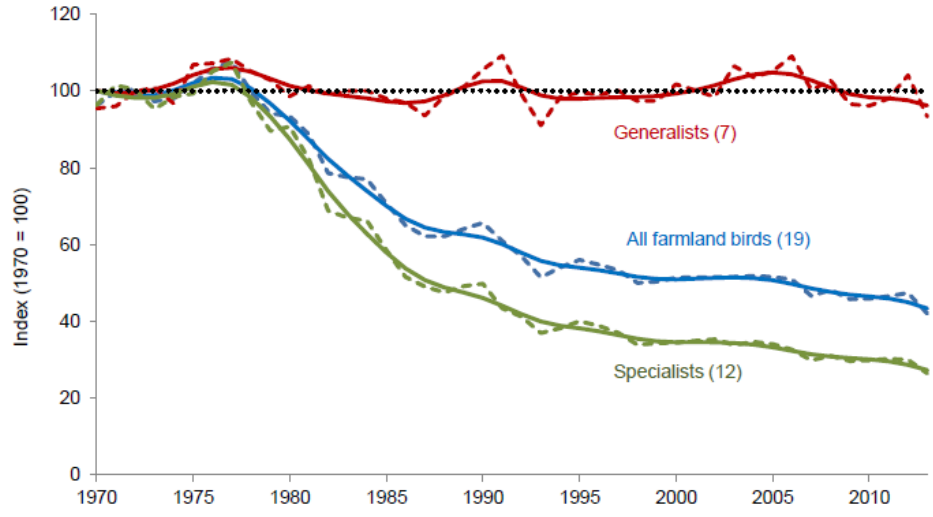
Figure 1a: Populations of wild birds in England, by habitat, 1970-2013



Source: RSPB, BTO, JNCC, Defra

Examining the data reveals interesting trends. In figure 2a, the population trend of seven species, 'the generalists', remains largely unchanged whereas the 12 'specialists' show steep declines; they are dragging the farmland bird index down. (Generalists: greenfinch, jackdaw, kestrel, reed bunting, rook, wood pigeon and yellow wagtail. Specialists: corn bunting, tree sparrow, turtle dove, grey partridge, lapwing, linnet, skylark, starling, stock dove, goldfinch, whitethroat and yellowhammer)

Figure 2a: Populations of farmland birds in England, 1970-2013



Source: RSPB, BTO, JNCC, Defra

How the Project Came About

The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project (SWFBP) was part of the larger Natural England led South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI) which was designed to reverse the decline in numbers of six of those bird species associated with arable farmland which had declined the most, by working with farmers to provide key year-round bird habitat; safe nesting areas, summer insect food and winter seed food. These species were:

- corn bunting
- grey partridge
- lapwing
- tree sparrow
- turtle dove
- yellow wagtail

By adopting measures specific to the species above, other less specialist birds such as skylark, yellowhammer and linnet were likely to benefit.

How Did the Project Work?

Feedback from farmers indicated that many were willing to help farmland birds but they requested specific areas where they could act. Before SWFBI, farmland bird options existed as part of Environmental Stewardship (ES) and its predecessors Countryside Stewardship and the Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme, but uptake was extremely low as options were often complicated and involved taking arable land out of production. Management of hedges and grass strips around field were much more popular but had limited value for many bird species. A co-ordinated and comprehensive scientifically-based approach was required.

The Farmland Bird Package

Farmers were encouraged to adopt the Farmland Bird Package; an evidence-based group of management options which would deliver year-round habitat for the birds in question, also know as the 'big 3';

1. safe nesting habitat (particularly for ground nesting birds like lapwing, corn bunting, grey partridge);
2. adequate summer insect food for chicks and
3. winter seed food for adults.

Specifically, farmers were asked to deliver 7% of their arable land as key farmland bird options, as research suggested that this was the amount required for (all) farmland bird numbers to increase, figure 3.
The package was delivered mainly through the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS). Each project delivered a combination of workshops and individual farm visits by specialist farmland bird advisers to help farmers match the needs of birds and other wildlife with their farm business.

Resource ('Big 3')	**Environmental Stewardship (ES) options**	**HLS area required (min per 100 ha arable land)**
Winter seed food	Wild bird seed mixture or Weed-rich overwintered stubble (or a combination)	2 ha Or 5-10 ha
Spring-summer invertebrate food	Conservation headlands, low (chemical) input spring cereals, beetle banks, areas of nectar mix, flower rich grass margins	2-3 ha
Places to nest in-field	Skylark plots Fallow plots	20 *plus* 2 ha (if appropriate)

Figure 3- The Farmland Bird Package

Farms over 50ha within the project area were encouraged to join HLS. Due to the wealth of bird records, it was possible to identify which of the three target birds were located in or around each individual holding visited allowing targeting of specific options to each species. Experienced project advisers focused solely on management of farmland bird options such as specific winter seed mixes which filled a skills gap amongst many NE advisers but working closely with them to produce good quality HLS agreements.

In order to raise awareness of the benefits of farm conservation as well as the importance of project sponsors, walks and talks were organised for the general public which were very popular.

Many of the farmland bird options have also increased habitat for brown hare, harvest mouse and bat species as well as rare arable plants such as cornflower and corn marigold. Many options included in the farmland bird package involved reduced agro-chemical usage so there were benefits to resource protection also.

Project Aims

1. Firstly, whether a comprehensive evidence-based 'package' of habitat creation measures, the Farmland Bird Package, funded by agri-environment schemes, could be put in place on enough farms to halt the decline in populations of the target species.

2. Is it more efficacious to deliver agri-environment advice to farmers through third party partners, rather than directly through Natural England or Defra staff?

Organisation of the Project

The four SWFBI projects operated where there were concentrations of three or more of the target bird species. As you can see from the map below these six species are now largely absent in Somerset, Devon and Cornwall.

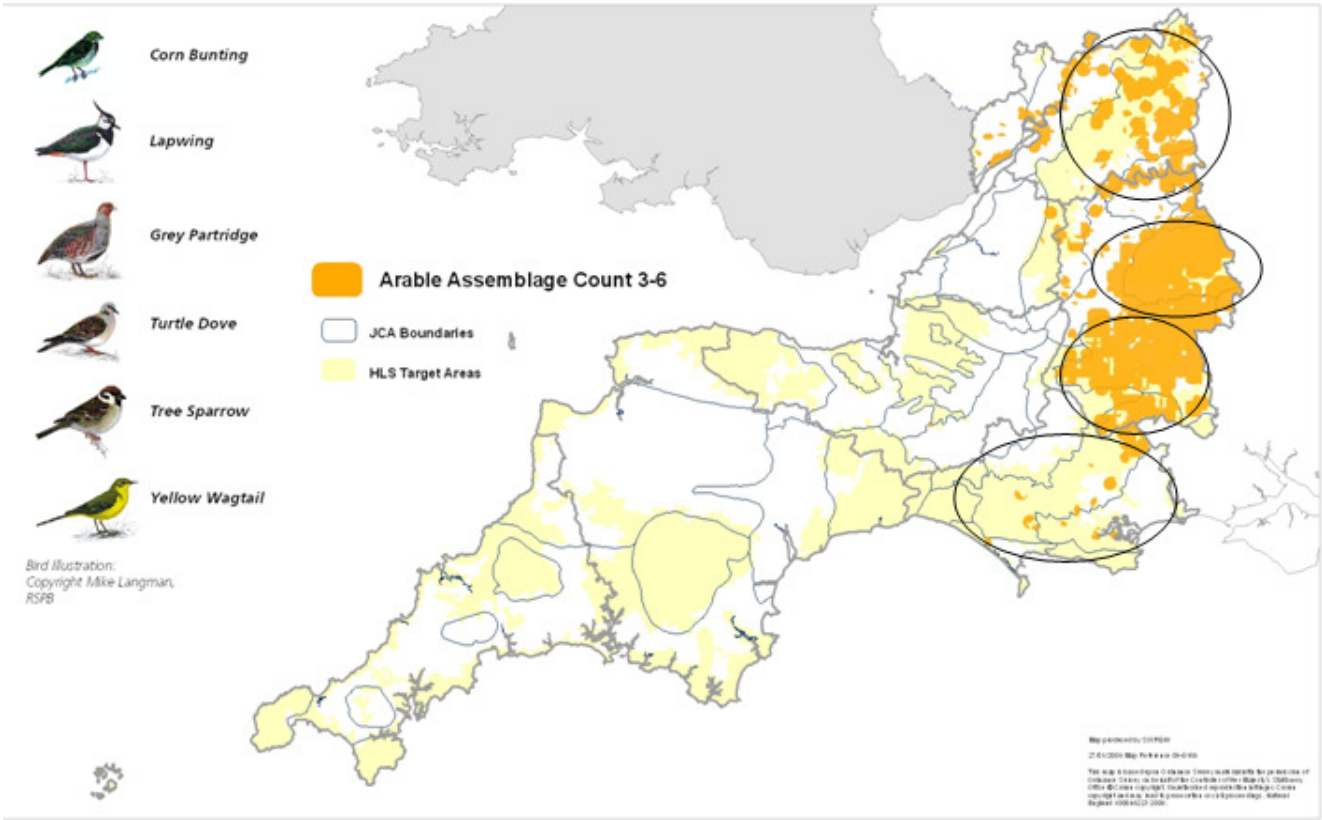


Figure 4: How locations for the four SWFBI projects were decided

Four projects were set up by Natural England with Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the RSPB as main partners. SWFBI was a true partnership approach with each project run to the same model but by different organisations as can be seen in figure 5. Tracy Adams was appointed to the post of South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project Adviser in late July 2009.

Project Partners

The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project was a true partnership approach working with over 100 farmers, gamekeepers, Natural England (NE), Catchment Sensitive Farming project, Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Plantlife, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT), Wessex Water (WW), Bright Seeds, Oakbank Game Cover, Kings Crops, Black Sheep Ecology and Canopy Land Use along with other independent farm advisers.

Figure 5 – Organisation of SWFBI Projects

Project Funding

The project was successful in levering in significant additional funds which totalled £205,418; for every £1 from WW, £4.10 came from other sources (see figure 6). Initial funding came from NE, Wiltshire Council and the AONB. Wiltshire Council's contribution ended in 2011, but fortunately a successful application was made to Phase 4 of Wessex Water's Partner's Programme in 2010 that allowed the project to continue. In 2010, this was used to part-fund capital conservation grants and in the following years it was directed towards staff costs. NE funding was reduced in 2013 but a further collaboration with Wessex Water advising on the Corfe Mullen to Salisbury Transfer Scheme attracted extra funding through to 2017.

Year	WW Grant	Other Sources
2010-2011	£10,000 (all used as a capital grant fund for conservation works)	Natural England (NE) £26,041; Wiltshire Council £15,000; AONB £7,000 (in kind funding for employment costs) **£10,000 Grant fund led to contributions from landowners as follows;** - Picket Grove, Fonthill Estate; water supply to enable grazing of 27ha chalk grassland £2500 (27%) - Manor Farm, Fisherton; scrub clearance on 1.5ha chalk bank £1000 (45%) - Manor Farm, Lower Woodford; fencing to allow grazing of 3.5ha chalk grassland £687.50 (43%) - 14 Tree Sparrow Boxes £307.25 (100%) - AONB Arable Plant Survey £1500 contribution from GWCT
2011-12	£10,000	NE £26,041; AONB £9,000
2012-2013	£10,000	NE £26,041; AONB £9,000 6 full skilled volunteer days nest box checking 6 x £150 = £900 * 3 days making & erecting replacement boxes 3 x £150 = £450
2013-2014	£10,000	NE £15,000; AONB £9,000; WW Corfe Mullen/Salisbury Pipeline £15,000 3 full skilled volunteer days nest box checking 3 x £150 = £450
2014-2015	£10,000	NE £4,500; AONB £9,000; WW Corfe Mullen/Salisbury Pipeline £15,000 8 full skilled volunteer days nest box checking 8 x £150 = £1200 **

* not including turtle dove surveys carried out by volunteers organised by Natural England

** including 5 days tree sparrow work carried out by BTO volunteer Kevin Sayer

Figure 6: How the project was funded and the additional funding for nature it attracted.

Other Additional Income

Most farmers provided farmland bird habitat through ten year HLS agreements where annual payments were made for each management option provided. For example, £475 for each hectare of wild bird seed mix grown to feed birds over the winter. However figures were never adjusted throughout the scheme's lifetime despite prices of arable crops increasing considerably from 2009 to 2013, meaning farmers were subsidising the farmland bird project.

In 2006 the National Farmers Union and Campaign for Protection of Rural England published a report entitled, 'Living landscapes - hidden costs of managing the countryside'.

"*We estimate that the landscape maintenance work carried out on the average English farm, not supported by agri-environment funding, amounted to £2,410 per year…It does not fully consider the loss of income associated with any reduced production…[or] the extent to which current agri-environment schemes fully compensate the management activities that they require the farmer to undertake…"*

We know of at least 75 farmers carrying out farmland bird and other conservation work across the project area. Based on the figures above this would be worth £180,750 per year. Over five years this equates to nearly £1million; more if you included inflation from 2006.This is **in addition** to agri-environment scheme payments.

Project Monitoring

In order to demonstrate whether or not the measures employed through SWFBI resulted in an increase in farmland bird numbers, a scientific monitoring programme was included as part of the project. Over a period of ten years, (the life of an HLS agreement), six farms in each participating county would receive nine bird surveys, four in spring/summer and five in winter repeated over three separate years. The baseline year surveys were carried out in 2010/2011, the next survey is due to take place in 2015/6 with final surveys in 2020/21. This rigorous approach was chosen to allow the SWFBI to create its own Farmland Bird Index which could be used in direct comparison with Defra's National Farmland Bird Index. Unfortunately at the time of writing there are no plans for the mid term survey to take place which is of extreme concern to many project partners. Whilst Natural England have comprehensive records detailing what habitat has been created and where, it will not be possible to conclude whether this approach to conservation has worked without completing these bird surveys.

Project Achievements

Work Completed August 2009 to March 2015	**Activity**
Number of farms receiving one to one advice	**147**
Total number of farm visits	**242**
Area covered by farms visited	**24,000 ha**
Number of Environmental Stewardship applications enhanced with project input	**55**
Area of arable land enhanced by advice	**10,500ha**
Area of habitat created for farmland birds (also benefiting rare arable plants and brown hare)	**1003ha** (including WW pipeline project)
Area of habitat enhanced through WW grants	Fencing & water to allow grazing of 32ha chalk grassland; 1ha woodland restocked; 350m new hedgerow planting
Media coverage highlighting the project and Cranborne Chase AONB	**16** published articles**, 6** radio interviews, **2** TV slots, **2** You tube videos **353** followers on Twitter, **16** blog posts
Public Walks and Talks	**14** walks and talks for the public to over **365** people
Farmers and landowners attending events	**233**
Tree sparrow boxes checked	**100**
New nest boxes for owl, kestrel, tree sparrow	**32**

Figure 7 Summary of project work

Project Time Line 2010 – 2015

2008 -2010
South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI) started in Dorset, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs AONBs. The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project began with employment of adviser, Tracy Adams by the Cranborne Chase AONB in late July 2009.

2010
A successful funding bid to the Partners Programme was made and Wessex Water became a project partner. Applications to the Environmental Stewardship (ES) were in full flow.

2011
Along with assessment of new HLS applications, ongoing advisory visits were made to existing agreement holders. During the summer, the AONB instigated a visit to the Duke of Norfolk's Arundell Estate in Sussex with Cranborne Estate staff to see the wild grey partridge project in action. This led to a similar project which was recognised in 2013 by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) which awarded Cranborne Estate with the Wessex Grey Partridge Trophy. The Farmland Bird Project and project adviser Tracy Adams featured on BBC Countryfile in a seven minute segment filmed on a farm in Tytherington near Warminster.

2012
Interest in ES experienced a considerable decline as compensation payments failed to keep pace with rising crop prices. The AONB contacted NE Executive Director for Biodiversity, Jim Smyllie, highlighting these concerns which resulted in him visiting the AONB to meet farmers and hear their concerns and views of ES. Tracy was awarded BASIS Foundation Award in Agronomy. Turtle dove and tree sparrow work started.

2013
The Wessex Water Corfe Mullen to Salisbury Pipeline work started. One of the conservation initiatives set out in the Wessex Water's Environmental Management Plan (as required by North Dorset Local Planning Authority) included supporting the South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project Adviser to enable work with farmers along the pipeline route to create new wildlife habitats. To date a number of farms are taking part in environmental projects including planting of approximately 2.5ha nectar mix rich in flowering plants for bees and butterflies; restocking of deciduous woodland, provision of new nest boxes and new hedgerow planting.

2014
The final year for applications to Entry Level and Higher Level Schemes. Tracy moved to part-time hours from April to December when the AONB purchased additional time for Tracy to return to full time work for four months using claw-back funds from Natural England's SWFBI budget. Tracy awarded BASIS Certificate in Conservation Management.

2015
A successful application to Wessex Water Phase 5 Partners Programme was made and the South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project evolved into the South Wiltshire Farmland Conservation Project.

Figure 8 shows the total area of farmland bird habitat created through SWFBI over four projects in three participating counties, from 1st August 2008 to 1st August 2012. Unfortunately NE were unable to provide data beyond August 2012.

County	Total Option Delivery (ha)	Total Skylark Plot** Delivery (number of plots)
Dorset	1,488	305
Gloucestershire	3,848	1,684
Wiltshire*	3,763	653
Total SWFBI	**9,099 ha**	**2,642 plots**

Figure 8: SWFBI Key Farmland Bird Option uptake from 1st April 2008 to August 1st 2012
(Skylark plots included separately due to their small area)
*Wiltshire is covered by two projects, South Wiltshire and the North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Projects
** Skylark plots are areas of around 16m^2 left bare in winter cereal crops to allow skylarks to land and forage close to where they nest

NE's national corporate target was to deliver a further 4,100 ha of key arable farmland bird options through Environmental Stewardship in 2009/10 and in 2010/11, increase this by another 8,200 ha to achieve 40% over baseline. As shown in figure 8, delivery in the three SWFBI counties achieved nearly 75% of this target without taking into account other farmland bird projects across the country.

Grey Partridge and Corn Bunting

There is evidence that targeted habitat provision can increase populations of certain species. As mentioned earlier, wild grey partridges at Cranborne Estate in Dorset increased from just a few pairs in 2009 to a total of 34 pairs in 2012 after provision of year round habitat and predator control. The catalyst for this project, the Norfolk Estate in West Sussex, has experienced considerable increases in farmland bird numbers as championed in a Natural England report on the results of its farmland conservation schemes in 2009. It reported that "*grey partridge numbers have increased by over 250% per year, corn buntings over 100% per year and skylarks 71% per year*".
Anecdotal reports from farmers from across Wiltshire and Dorset echo these results.
Since 2014 the GWCT have organised a Big Farmland Bird Count in February where farmers spend one hour counting birds on an area of their farm around two hectares (200m by 100m). One SWFBI farm in Longbridge Deverill recorded a total of 465 birds of 23 species. This included 47 corn bunting, 135 linnet and 147 yellowhammer, a species that continues to decline across the country.

Turtle Dove

Martin Down National Nature Reserve (NNR) on the border of Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset Downs is one of the only areas where turtle dove occur in any number in this project area and they have been regularly breeding here with up to 12 pairs recorded over the previous five year period.
This healthy breeding population is at odds with the surrounding areas and the Farmland Bird Adviser was keen to secure this population and also explore why it appears to be bucking the national trend. After discussions with Reserve Manager, Robert Lloyd (NE), local landowners were approached and asked to create small areas of foraging habitat to increase food availability for the birds when they return from Africa in late spring. This consists of cultivated land left unsown as turtle doves eat only seed. A small amount of funding was secured by Robert Lloyd from NE for 2013/2014 to compensate farmers taking land out of production. This came in very useful although some farmers put small areas of land aside for the project for free last year and have continued to do so this year.

At the same time, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ringing group working at Martin Down expressed an interest in working alongside NE to undertake a turtle dove research project on site. Following several meetings and discussion with the East Anglian NE/RSPB turtle dove research project facilitated by the Farmland Bird Adviser, over the 2015 breeding season a PhD student will be working with three farmers to capture turtle doves and test them for presence of the protozoan parasite *Trichomonas gallinae* to investigate the potential role of parasites in the ecology of this species. In future it is hoped that this can expanded to monitor foraging behaviour.

Yellow Wagtail

Yellow wagtail appears to be largely absent from much of the South Wiltshire project area and has been so prior to 2007 according to the BTO Breeding Bird Atlases 2007 to 2011 and 1988 to 1991.

Lapwing

From conversations with farmers and the GWCT who are researching the species across the region, our native breeding lapwing appear to be having mixed success. Many farmers report problems with predation by badgers, foxes, crows, buzzards and increasing numbers of ravens.
Since 2010 GWCT have been researching breeding success of lapwing on arable land using the one to two hectare unsown areas or 'fallow plots' funded through ES and on wet grassland with assistance from the Farmland Bird Adviser. Comparison with GWCT data for wet grassland within the Avon Valley (Hampshire, Dorset) in the same years indicates that nest survival on fallow plots is higher but brood survival lower. Poor chick survival therefore seems to be limiting lapwing productivity on fallow plots in the Hampshire-Wiltshire-

Dorset area. "*Despite considerable investment in habitat improvement through agri-environment schemes, it is possible that lapwing numbers are not increasing on many farms owing to low food availability for chicks or high predation rates (on nests and/or chicks). Most research to date has been conducted on wet grassland nature reserves, where high predator densities can result in poor breeding success of lapwings, but the situation in the wider countryside, where lapwings are typically nesting at lower densities, may be different." (Holland 2014).* GWCT believe that in the arable landscape, poor chick survival through starvation may be equally or more important. The fallow plots and surrounding arable crops may simply provide insufficient food, typically beetles and insect larvae in grassland areas, although the diet in arable areas has been little studied.

Tree Sparrow

Since 2012 the Farmland Bird Adviser has been checking tree sparrow nest boxes on farms around the Deverills (near Warminster) and Maiden Bradley both of which are home to several tree sparrow colonies. Across the rest of South Wiltshire records and sightings are sparse. Box monitoring with the help of a volunteer was started to allow feedback to farmers, many of whom were keen to know if their habitat improvements were working. As well as useful feedback, it allowed the boxes to be maintained and re-sited if found to be empty for several years in a row. Farmers appreciated the regular visits and in many cases they have erected more boxes and started supplementary feeding. Recent developments include another volunteer coming forward to increase the number of supplementary feeding stations and provision of box checking.

Rare Arable Plants

It was anticipated that arable plants one of Britain's fastest declining group of plants, would benefit from farmland bird projects as many options allow arable plants to thrive unlike commercial crops where they cannot. This was certainly the case in South Wiltshire; the majority of farms visited had a number of arable plants particularly in fallow plots left for nesting lapwing or areas of unsprayed and unfertilised crops. Many of these were not the rarer 23 UK Biodiversity Action Plan species such as cornflower but were still important as they add variety to the flora of any farm increasing insect habitat and potentially boosting bird numbers.

In 2010 part of the WW grant was used to part fund a desktop survey and report entitled, "*Assessing the Distribution of Arable Plants across the Cranborne Chase AONB*". Various factors including light chalky soils and a long history of arable cropping have contributed to parts of Wiltshire and Dorset being classified as Important Arable Plant Areas by UK's leading plant charity Plantlife. Despite this they are very under-recorded as the majority occur on privately owned land in cropped fields. The survey aimed to predict hotspots within the AONB where arable plants where highly likely to occur despite a lack of surveys, based on past land use, soil type, aspect and altitude. This would inform future land use and agri-environment scheme options, many of which overlook arable plants in favour of other management such as chalk grassland restoration. Following this survey it was hoped that plant surveys could be organised using volunteers or paid surveyors to ground truth some of the hotpots highlighted within the report. Unfortunately this has not happened due a lack of resources.

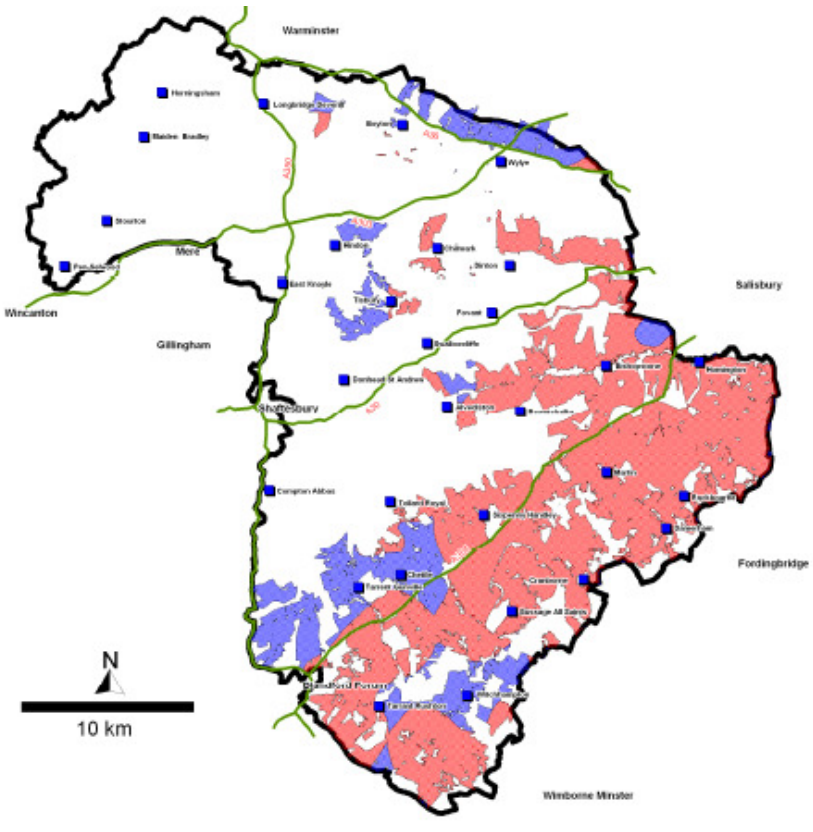


Figure 9: Map showing where the target area overlies the known hotspots of arable biodiversity (pink) and the areas that are likely to be important for arable biodiversity and there is need for survey work to be done (blue).

Mammals

Two species are particularly associated with arable farms. Brown hares are abundant across Wiltshire and seem to favour areas such as wild bird seed mixes and fallow plots. Farmers report an increase in numbers seen but it is not known if this is as a direct result of the farmland bird project. Harvest mice are an under-recorded species so their status across the south west is uncertain. However there is a considerable area of unharvested cereal crops grown within the project area for birds to eat which would offer safer areas for harvest mice to nest as they would not be at risk from the combine harvester. Also the decreased use of insecticides in the unsprayed cereal 'conservation' headlands which are particularly used where there are grey partridge would result in more insects for the mice to eat. One keen farmer near Warminster has recorded harvest mice on an infra-red camera located in his conservation headland much to his surprise and delight!

Project Coverage

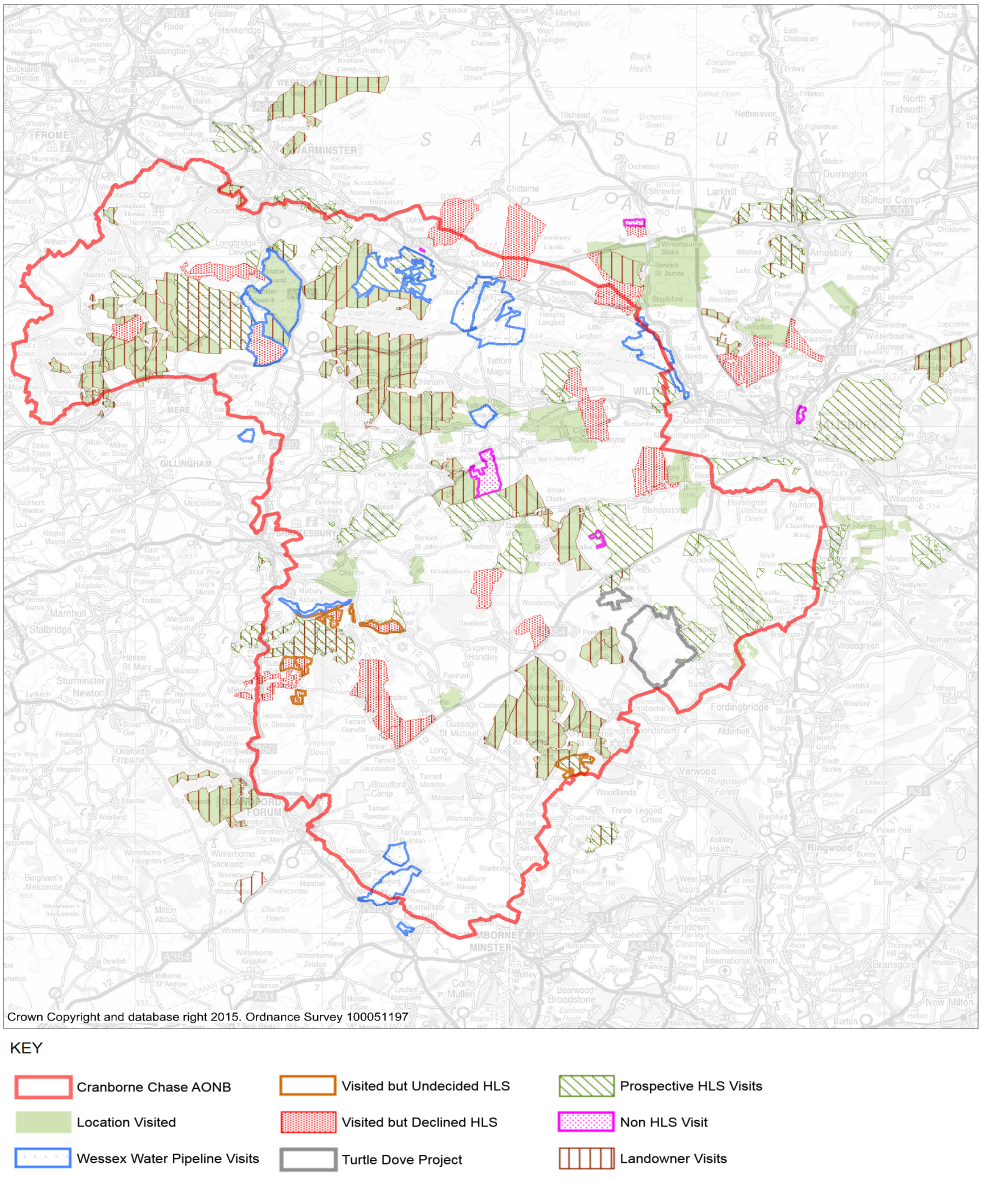


Figure 10 Area Covered on Different Visits Since Start of Project

Each coloured shape or polygon represents a farm visited as part of the project and the main basis for that visit. The majority of farms received several visits, phone calls, emails and the farmer may also have attended farm walks and talks. Most farm visits took around two hours plus 30- 90 minutes travel time and were followed up with a comprehensive report detailing potential for farmland birds and how new habitat would fit in with the farm business as part of a new HLS agreement. For farms already in HLS, the post visit report detailed management recommendations and often required consultation with agronomists, seed suppliers and NE. Over the lifetime of the project 242 visits were made to 147 farms representing a considerable time commitment.

Contribution to Wider Biodiversity and Environmental Targets

Figure 10 shows that the area covered by the project from 2009 - 2015 was substantial, over 52,000ha which is an area 30% larger than the Isle of Wight and almost as large as the New Forest. It fulfils the requirement for 'more, better, bigger, joined up habitats' as included in Professor Sir John Lawton's report, "Making Space for Nature", an independent review of England's wildlife sites and the connections between them, published in 2010, with recommendations to help achieve a healthy natural environment that will allow our plants and animals to thrive. Although not all farms visited went on to take part in HLS, all those visited were sent a comprehensive report detailing how they could improve the farm habitat for birds and other wildlife. In some cases this initial contact has been revisited through the Wessex Water Pipeline Project and is potentially useful in future farm conservation projects.

Project Legacy

The SWFBI targeting and delivery approach has been adopted nationwide as the way to deliver for farmland birds, using ES as the key delivery tool. The SWFBI approach has also influenced the design and delivery of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) which aims to replicate the environmental benefit of set aside. This approach has now been rolled out across England and all regions (other than London) now have specific local farmland bird projects or initiatives in place - with all of these delivering the same message and the same ask of the farming community across England. The research led package has also been extended to farmland butterflies and woodland birds. It has since fed into the newer Countryside Stewardship Scheme due to start in summer 2015.

The key to the success of the South West Farmland Bird Initiative was twofold. Firstly, the creation of the Farmland Bird Package. Working with partners, and using the latest research and experience to date, an ***evidence based*** package of simple measures was developed which would deliver the minimum amount of habitat needed for farmland bird populations to increase. This was heavily promoted to anyone working with farmers to put together Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) applications helping ensure continuity of delivery. A research based package also increased the project's credibility amongst land managers.

Even more important than the package, were the project advisers delivering it. The species involved are highly specialist as are the options required to deliver gains in populations, requiring adjustment to arable farming operations. Farmers needed more persuasion to adjust their arable regime and technical advice to achieve good outcomes for birds. Without the dedicated specialist advice available to NE advisers, farmers and agents, the increase in farmland bird habitat would not have been so substantial and the continued goodwill of farmers would not have been sustained.

Feedback from farmers was that they found on-going support and specialist agronomic advice vital to the continuing use of these options by farmers and farmland birds. Farming businesses change and options develop problems which need adjustment to ensure they continue to deliver for the farmer and the birds. Farmers also welcomed the continuity of advice and actual personal contact; a common complaint was that since signing up to a scheme such as the old Countryside Stewardship Scheme they had had no contact with an NE adviser due to resource issues, *"I'm getting all this taxpayer money…yet no one seems bothered with how my agreement is going and whether its working. I'd certainly like to know if the rare plants and birds have returned!"* Anonymous Chalke Valley farmer.

These good working relationships with farmers across the Cranborne Chase AONB are the most important legacy of the farmland bird project and the WW pipeline work and make the case for continued funding of the same project adviser to build on past successes into an uncertain future.

"I have found being involved with the South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project to be very rewarding. Working with Tracy Adams who has a practical and common sense approach and the experience to give tried and tested advice, has helped us to achieve a noticeable increase in bird numbers on our farm." Richard Coward, Wood Farm, Mere, Wiltshire.

Other landscape scale activity influenced by the SWFBI include the Nature Improvement Area (NIA) approach which led to the Stepping Stones project across the Cranborne Chase and North Wessex Downs AONBs improving the quality of chalk grassland sites. The GWCT Farmer Cluster development which has been included in the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme – came out of the hub idea of SWFBI and the NIA experience.

How will the success of the project be sustained?

The strength in the project lies within the good working relationships formed over the past six years. The legacy of this continues through the Corfe Mullen to Salisbury pipeline project with funding for project adviser time secured until 2018. (see figure 11). It is anticipated that participating farmers will build on the skills and expertise gained through the project to continue their conservation work though the new Countryside Stewardship Scheme and farm cluster approach as part of the new Phase 5 of the WW Partners Programme along with assistance from the GWCT. This project will run from 2015-2020.

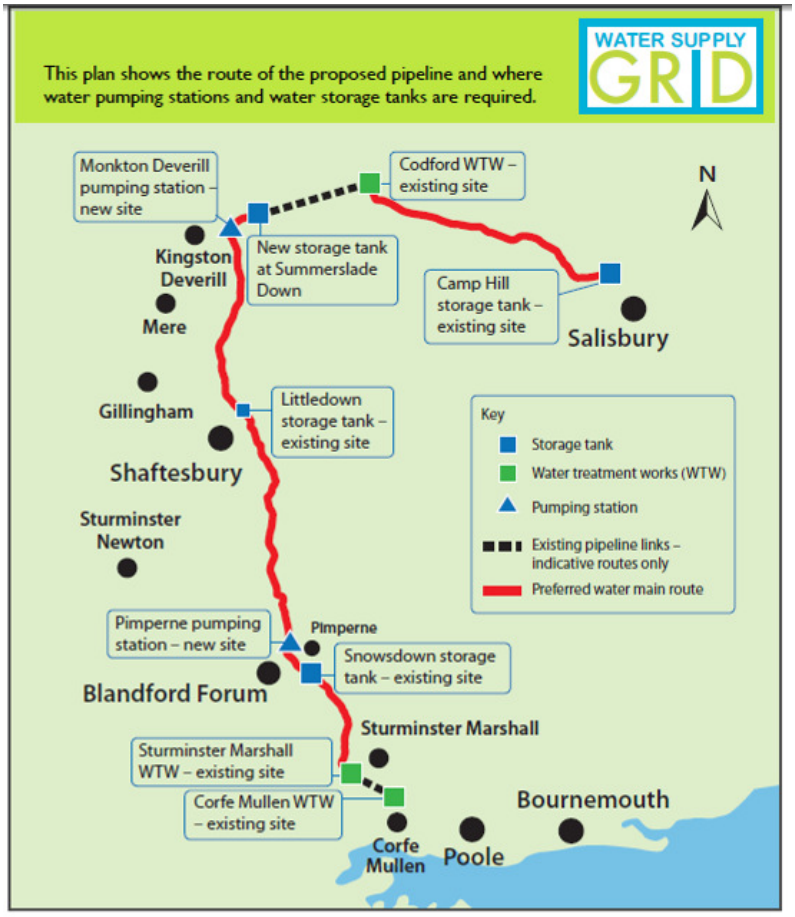


Figure 11 Wessex Water Corfe Mullen to Salisbury Water Pipeline Project

Tracy Adams,
South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Adviser,
March 2015

Cranborne Chase
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Wessex Water
a YTL company