

The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project - Project Summary

Project Aim

The South Wiltshire Farmland Bird Project was one of four projects which made up the South West Farmland Bird Initiative (SWFBI), and started in July 2009 with the employment of project adviser Tracy Adams by the Cranborne Chase AONB. Originally, this Natural England (NE) led initiative consisted of four projects targeting the Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs, Dorset and South Wiltshire, each hosted and part-funded by a different organisation. The aim of SWFBI was to reverse the decline in numbers of six farmland bird species associated with arable land; corn bunting; grey partridge, lapwing, tree sparrow, turtle dove and yellow wagtail by working with farmers to provide key year-round bird habitat.



Project Delivery

Using NE's Environmental Stewardship (ES) schemes, each project was to deliver a combination of workshops and tailored advice to help farmers match the needs of birds and other wildlife with their farm business. 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 known as the 'big 3';

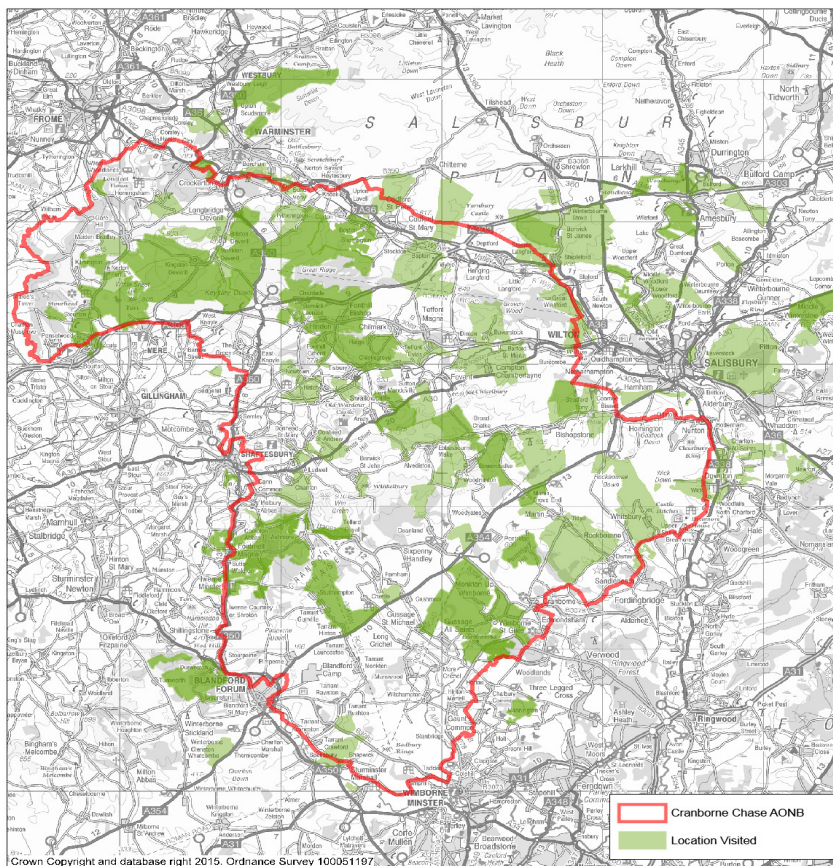
1. safe nesting habitat (particularly for ground nesting birds like lapwing, corn bunting, grey partridge);
2. adequate summer insect food for chicks and
3. winter seed food for adults.

In 2013, the project adviser started working with landowners affected by a major Wessex Water (WW) engineering scheme, the Corfe Mullen to Salisbury Pipeline to carry out environmental improvements such as tree planting, hedgerow planting and pond restoration.

Project achievements August 2009 – March 2015

Work Completed August 2009 to March 2015	Activity
Number of farms receiving one to one advice	147
Total number of farm visits	242
The 147 farms cover an area of	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 public walks & talks to over 365 people
Farmers and landowners attending events	233
Tree sparrow boxes checked	100
New nest boxes for owl, kestrel, tree sparrow	32

Project Coverage



Farms visited throughout project. Dark colours indicate more visits.

Project coverage from 2009 - 2015 was substantial, over 52,000ha; an area 30% larger than the Isle of Wight. The most valuable aspect of the project has been the excellent working relationships formed with farmers across the area which will continue into future projects. *“I have found being involved with the [SWFBI] project to be very rewarding. Working with Tracy Adams who has a practical and common sense approach and experience to give tried and tested advice, has helped us to achieve a noticeable increase in birds on our farm.”* Richard Coward, Wood farm, Mere, Wiltshire.

Comprehensive scientific monitoring of six farms in each county participating in SWFBI and using the farmland bird package is taking place between 2010 and 2020, but to date only the baseline surveys have been completed. There is evidence that by creating sufficient year round habitat tailored to target birds, population increases are achievable. Wild grey partridges at Cranborne Estate in Dorset increased from just a few pairs in 2009 to a total of 34 pairs in 2012 although predator control is part of their project and is not included in the farmland bird package.

Summary of Project Funding

Year	WW Grant	Other Sources
2010-2011	£10,000 (all used as a capital grant fund for conservation works)	Defra £26,041; Wiltshire Council £15,000; AONB £7,000 (for employment costs) £10,000 grant fund led to contributions of £5,688 from landowners for a variety of projects including fencing and a new water supply to allow grazing of chalk grassland, scrub clearance, new tree sparrow boxes and a rare arable plant survey of the Cranborne Chase AONB.
2011-12	£10,000	Natural England (NE) £26,041; AONB £9,000
2012-2013	£10,000	NE £26,041; AONB £9,000 9 full skilled volunteer days; 9 x £150 = £1350
2013-2014	£10,000	NE £15,000; AONB £9,000; WW Corfe Mullen/Salisbury Pipeline £15,000 3 full skilled volunteer days; 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 8 x £150 = £1200

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. These payments were calculated on an income foregone basis in 2004. However they were never reviewed despite considerable increases in farm commodity prices from 2009 to 2013. In addition they do not allow for the extra time and work involved in growing relatively small areas of crops for birds in addition to cash crops such as wheat and oilseed rape. Along with other stewardship-type management this represents a considerable amount of unpaid benefit to biodiversity provided by farmers which has been estimated at over £2,400 per farm (CPRE & NFU, 2006). This is covered in more detail in the main report.

The Impact of Wessex Water Funding

The use of the Wessex Water Partners Programme funding in the first year as a capital grant fund, attracted match funding of nearly £6000 from landowners and organisations. Beyond this the funding has been essential to the continuation of this project in a full-time format beyond 2010, as contributions from Natural England (NE) dwindled over subsequent years. Unlike NE where the level of funding was unknown beyond 2013, WW offered financial security over a five year period which was important for forward planning and job longevity.

The scale of the achievements would have been significantly scaled back as this has always been about developing relationships with farmers and providing ongoing assistance through the life of their HLS agreements. Turtle dove work would not have happened. Tree sparrow boxes would not have been checked; both of these have resulted in some albeit, limited volunteer involvement and also better relationships with landowners who have been encouraged to do more than their original HLS agreements.

Tracy Adams

Farmland Bird Adviser

Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

March 2015



Cranborne Chase

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

