



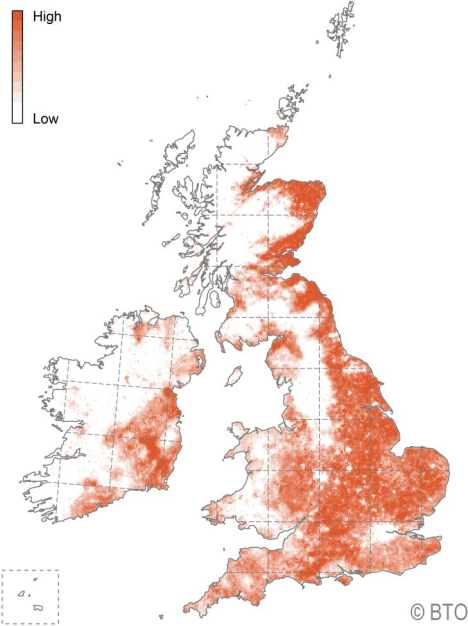
giving nature a home

LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

YELLOWHAMMER

(*Emberiza citronella*)

Breeding Relative Abundance 2008-11



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

The yellowhammer is widely distributed on all farmland types. Densities are higher in lowland areas, especially where there is at least some arable farming. The UK yellowhammer population fell by 55% between 1970 and 2013, probably because fewer sources of seed food are available to them on farmland.

WHAT DO YELLOWHAMMER NEED?

Nesting habitat

Yellowhammers nest on, or close to, the ground, in ditch vegetation or at the base of short, thick hedgerows and scrub. They are most common in hedgerows that have a wide, uncut grass margin or ditch. They often breed until the end of August, so cutting hedges or margins before the end of August can destroy nests.

Summer food

Yellowhammer chicks depend largely on insects for food. Adults also feed on insects in the breeding season. Wide grass margins around

arable fields provide many insects as well as nesting habitat.

Winter food

Adults feed mainly on seeds throughout the year, especially cereal grain. They seek places where they can find lots of seed food, such as winter stubbles, wild bird seed mixtures or areas where cereals are fed to livestock.

Yellowhammers rarely use improved pastures or grass leys, as these do not provide any seed food.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Adult birds move in flocks in search of food | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Birds pair up for breeding season | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Main breeding season | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |
| Birds form wintering flocks | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ |

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE YELLOWHAMMER?

Nesting habitat

- Maintain short, thick hedgerows and trim between September and February.
- Maintain areas of short scrub and gorse, especially along ditch banks.
- In hay and silage meadows, leave a strip uncut next to hedges or ditches.
- Create wide grass buffer strips and field corners in arable fields next to thick hedges and ditches. Leave the hedge-side margin uncut to form tussocks, but cut the crop-side margin annually between September and March

Summer food

- Try to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides after 15 March.
- Adopt conservation headlands or low-input cereal crops to boost broadleaved weeds and the associated insects.
- In hay and silage meadows, leave a strip uncut next to hedges or ditches.
- Create wide grass buffer strips and field corners in arable fields next to thick hedges and ditches. Leave the hedge-side margin uncut to form tussocks, but cut the crop-side margin annually between September and March.
- Extensively grazed swards with areas of

taller vegetation provide more insects and seeds. Unimproved grasslands can be particularly valuable. Minimise the amount of topping to maintain taller patches.

Winter food

- Create areas of wild bird seed mixture in the spring with a high proportion of cereal in the mix.
- Leave fields of overwintered stubbles unmanaged for as long as possible through the winter and early spring.
- Low-input cereal crops followed by overwintered stubble provide the most seed food for birds.
- Maintain or increase areas of arable cropping and leave overwintered stubbles if possible, or create plots of wild bird seed mixtures.
- Allow some areas of ryegrass to go to seed to provide a rich winter food source

KEY POINTS

- Maintain short, thick hedges and ditches with wide grass margins for nesting
- Provide summer insect habitat
- Ensure that there is at least one good seed food source throughout the winter

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