



Golden oriole

Oriolus oriolus

Status

Amber listed: BR
Non-SPEC
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981

National monitoring

Rare Breeding Birds Panel.
National surveys in 1994 and 1995 (Golden Oriole Group).

Population and distribution

The golden oriole is a rare breeding species in the UK, and regular breeding is confined almost exclusively to the fenland basin in East Anglia. Numbers have remained relatively stable since 1985; there are estimated to be up to 35 pairs breeding in the UK (*Population Estimates*).

Ecology

Woods and belts of planted poplars *Populus* are the preferred nesting habitat in East Anglia, but oak and alder are also favoured elsewhere in Europe. It is not known why such a narrow range of tree species is chosen in England when other apparently suitable and widespread trees are available. A clutch of 3–5 eggs is laid between late May and early June, and one brood is usual (*Red Data Birds*).

Breeding season survey – population

Information required

- number of confirmed breeding pairs
- number of probable breeding pairs
- all other records.

Number and timing of visits

Two visits: one during the last ten days of May and the second between mid-June and the end of July.

Time of day

Visit in the two or three hours after dawn, for at least two hours.

Weather constraints

Do not visit during inclement weather, especially cold and windy conditions.

Sites/areas to visit

All areas that are known to have held orioles in the past.

Equipment

- 1:25,000 OS map
- Schedule 1 licence.

Safety reminders

No specific advice. See general guidelines in the *Introduction*.

Disturbance

Do not approach breeding sites without a Schedule 1 licence. A close approach is not necessary and may well be counter-productive, as orioles are liable to be quiet if there is a human nearby. Permission should be sought from landowners for access to all private land.

Methods

Mark the boundary of the survey area on a map. On each visit, get to within 100 m of all suitable habitat, make regular stops to watch for birds, and listen for calling males. By staying still and quiet, on a still day the song of the male can be heard from further away than 100 m. Beware that the male may give a warning note on seeing a human intruder and will then stay quiet. Isolated pairs are likely to be less vocal and more unobtrusive than those surrounded by neighbours. Record all golden orioles heard and seen on the map using standard BTO notation (Appendix 1) and use visit-specific codes (eg A and B) to clarify on which visit each record was made.

The male can range over several hundred metres through woodland as it sings, so take care not to overestimate the number of males present. Unpaired males also range over a wide area. To prove breeding, spend time observing any orioles recorded. A pair communicating with the 'cat-call' note is good evidence that they are holding territory and, if this is heard in late June, wait and watch carefully and you may see adults carrying food for their young. After the second visit, interpret the summary map as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Confirmed breeding</i> | Nest found (do not actively search for nests); adult seen carrying nest material; adult seen carrying food; recently fledged young, or family party seen. |
| <i>Probable breeding pair</i> | A pair present in suitable breeding habitat for at least one week; a cat-call heard from a pair; behaviour observed which is suggestive of breeding with no definite evidence (such as birds chasing predators). |
| <i>Other records</i> | A bird seen or heard in suitable habitat in the breeding season but no other evidence found. |

Report the numbers of confirmed and probable breeding pairs and all other records. Provide a map of registrations.

Contributed by Peter Dolton/Golden Oriole Group