



Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2018: report summary

The 2018 report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel was published in *British Birds* in December 2020 (Eaton *et al.* 2020) and can be obtained by subscription at www.britishbirds.co.uk; a pdf will be available at www.rbbp.org.uk in due course. The report documents 96 species and races of rare native breeding bird which bred, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2018. In addition, records of 13 rare non-native breeding species are detailed. The tables in this document provide a summary of numbers of these species and races in 2018.

Table 1: UK totals and trends for rare native breeding birds, 2018

.....2018 data.....										
Common Name	Breeding population status ¹	Population estimate ²	Estimate source ²	Trend category (25 yr trend unless stated) ³	Trend ³	Number confirmed breeding pairs	Maximum number breeding pairs	Number sites	Quality of coverage in 2018 ⁴	Notes
Capercaillie	Rare	1114 individuals	Wilkinson et al 2018	Weak decrease (6 yrs)	-13	-	185	52	High	Maximum count is of lekking males
Common Quail	Scarce	341	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-40	3	168	-	High	The poorest year for Quails since 1991
Whooper Swan	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	371	22	29	26	Near-complete	The highest productivity recorded, with 43 young fledged
Garganey	Rare	117	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-7	21	140	88	High	The best year for Garganey since 1998
Shoveler	Less scarce	1196	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	405	1459	255	High	Highest year - substantially so - in 13 years of reporting
Eurasian Wigeon	Rare	211	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	42	210	98	Moderate	
Black Duck	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	-	-	A single male bird, resident since 2007

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Pintail	Very rare	28	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-35	14	27	19	Near-complete	Pretty average year although an unusual number of proven breeding records, best since 1999
Green-winged Teal	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	4	3	-	One pair and 3 single males
Pochard	Scarce	757	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	87	493	797	171	High	
Ring-necked Duck	Pot. Breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single displaying male
Greater Scaup	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A pair on two dates
Common Scoter	Rare	52	Eaton et al 2008	Stable	-9	8	54	7	Near-complete	Highest number since 1999; probably reflects improved monitoring coverage
Goldeneye	Rare	200	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	58	62		Moderate	Monitoring much reduced in recent years; numbers reported now far short of true population
Smew	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A pair on one date
Red-breasted Merganser	Less scarce	1565	Humphreys et al 2016	No trend available	-	45	147	87	Low	Only second year of coverage: numbers reported maybe only 10% of true total
Great Bustard	Very rare	5	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	8	8	1	Near-complete	Minimum of 4 birds fledged
Turtle Dove	Less scarce	3600	Woodward et al 2020	No RBBP trend available	-	59	597	385	Moderate	The first year of RBBP reporting
Corncrake	Less scarce	1078	Wotton et al 2015	Strong increase (23 yrs)	146		936		Near-complete	Very similar to last year; numbers have fallen since peak in 2014
Little Crane	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing female, and the first time this species has been reported by the RBBP
Spotted Crane	Very rare	26	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-24	0	18	13	High	A poor year, albeit better than last year
Crane	Rare	35	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	1375	42	46	24	Near-complete	New record total of pairs and fledged young (25 birds)

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Pied-billed Grebe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single male bird, resident since 2014
Red-necked Grebe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single male bird at same site as 2016 and 2017
Slavonian Grebe	Very rare	28	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-64	27	27	14	Near-complete	An unsuccessful breeding attempt on Shetland was the first for the islands
Black-necked Grebe	Rare	56	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	13	30	57	20	Near-complete	
Stone-curlew	Scarce	350	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	138	254	263	-	High	Numbers have fallen since a peak earlier in the decade
Black-winged Stilt	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	Black-winged Stilts have now bred for five years in a row
Avocet	Less scarce	2034	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	330	2155	2155	122	Near-complete	The five-year mean for Avocets has now exceeded 2000, and they bred in Scotland for the first time
Little Ringed Plover	Scarce	586	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	1	380	588	-	Moderate	
Dotterel	Scarce	423	Hayhow et al 2015	Strong decrease (24 yrs)	-57	14	41	-	Low	Typically low reporting
Whimbrel	Scarce	290+	Jackson 2009	No trend available	-	0	41	-	Low	Three pairs reported from Outer Hebrides, rest on Shetland
Black-tailed Godwit	Rare	53	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	0	45	51	12	Near-complete	
Ruff	Very rare	12	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-45	0	9	8	Near-complete	
Purple Sandpiper	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-58	1	1	1	Near-complete	Pair fledged young at traditional site
Red-necked Phalarope	Rare	78	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	263	22	108	40	Near-complete	Remarkable continued increase to highest total reported
Green Sandpiper	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	-18	1	2	2	Near-complete	First confirmed breeding since 2011

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Wood Sandpiper	Rare	32	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	571	4	41	23	High	Highest total ever reported by the RBBP
Greenshank	Less scarce	1080	Hancock et al 1997	No trend available	-	18	100	-	Low	As usual, massively underreported
Mediterranean Gull	Less scarce	1481	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	6571	2373	2400	50	Near-complete	Massive between-year increase due to 1736 pairs at one site in Hampshire
Ring-billed Gull	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	Returning individual in a Common Gull colony
Yellow-legged Gull	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease (15 yrs)	-33	1	4	3	Near-complete	One pair and 3 possible mixed pairs
Little Tern	Less scarce	1418	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	-13	1376	1376	51	Near-complete	The total fledged was the lowest since 2007
Roseate Tern	Rare	109	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	2	120	120	3	Near-complete	The highest total reported since 1989
Black Tern	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	One summering individual
Arctic Skua	Scarce	785	Woodward et al 2020	Strong decrease (15 yrs)	-37	-	174	32	Low	
Red-throated Diver	Less scarce	1255	Dillon et al 2009	Weak increase (12 yrs)	38	181	231	-	Low	
Black-throated Diver	Rare	217	Eaton et al 2007	Stable (12 yrs)	16	21	46	-	Low	
Spoonbill	Very rare	23	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	30	34	3	Near-complete	Remarkably, successful breeding occurred in Orkney
Bittern	Rare	186	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	860	74	213	98	Near-complete	Another new record for the 13th year in a row
American Bittern	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	First record for the RBBP
Little Bittern	Very rare	4	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	++	0	1	1	Near-complete	Absent from usual site in Somerset

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Night-heron	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	Sightings of an adult at the site used for breeding in 2017
Cattle Egret	Colonising breeder	-	-	No trend available but increasing	++	3	5	4	-	At least two young fledged
Great White Egret	Very rare	9	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	12	18	6	Near-complete	Another record total although breeding still restricted to two sites
Little Egret	Less scarce	1260	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	1001	1178	1335	162	High	A fall in numbers from 2017, likely related to mortality in hard winter weather
Osprey	Rare	242	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	242	188	220		High	A lower total than of recent, but due to a gap in reporting
Honey-buzzard	Rare	40	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	75	24	39		Moderate	
Golden Eagle	Scarce	508	Hayhow et al 2017	Stable	16	179	302		Moderate	
Goshawk	Scarce	673	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	204	517	735		Moderate	A new record total for Goshawk
Marsh Harrier	Scarce	391	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	270	344	423		High	16 territorial pairs in Scotland was a new high
Hen Harrier	Scarce	575	Wotton et al 2018	Weak decrease (12 yrs)	-29	236	387		Moderate	Included a better year in England, with 13 confirmed pairs
Montagu's Harrier	Very rare	7	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-46	1	4	2	Near-complete	Just one successful pair, and three single females
White-tailed Eagle	Rare	111	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	1217	88	121		Near-complete	95 young fledged was the highest total since reintroduction; included two fledged on Orkney
Long-eared Owl	Less scarce	1800+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	227	295		Low	
Short-eared Owl	Scarce	620+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	87	176		Low	
Wryneck	Former breeder	-	-	-	-	0	3		-	A male held territory in Hampshire, but no breeding since 2002

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Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Less scarce	1000+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	26	310		Moderate	
Merlin	Less scarce	1160	Ewing et al 2011	Weak increase	94	272	371		Moderate	
Hobby	Less scarce	743	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	56	289	765		Moderate	Continuing signs of a decline in the last decade
Peregrine	Less scarce	1701	Wilson et al 2018	Stable (22 yrs)	5	853	1143		High	
Red-backed Shrike	Very rare	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-57	1	4	4	High	Bred at a new site in Devon
Golden Oriole	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-97	0	1	1	Near-complete	One singing male, the first report since 2015
Chough	Scarce	381	Hayhow et al 2018	Stable (32 yrs)	1	327	372	-	Near-complete	
Willow Tit	Less scarce	2750	Woodward et al 2020	No RBBP trend available	-	164	626	-	Moderate	
Bearded Tit	Scarce	689	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (15 yrs)	55	-	602	80	Near-complete	A drop from 754 in 2017 caused by the preceding hard winter weather
Woodlark	Less scarce	3064	Conway et al 2009	No trend available	-	-	833		Moderate	A drop from 974 in 2017 caused by the preceding hard winter weather
Iberian Chiffchaff	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	0	5	5	-	Five singing males, the most yet recorded
Great Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	One singing male
Marsh Warbler	Very rare	10	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-70	3	18	16	Near-complete	
Icterine Warbler	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	-	-	
Savi's Warbler	Very rare	6	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-60	0	5	3	Near-complete	As usual, no proven breeding

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Dartford Warbler	Less scarce	3214	Wotton et al 2009	Weak increase	65	-	1133	-	Moderate	A fall of nearly 1/3 since 2017, following hard winter weather
Fair Isle Wren	Rare	40	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase (15 yrs)	43	-	40	-	Near-complete	
St Kilda Wren	Rare	230	Forrester et al 2007	no trend available	-	-	15	-	Low	
Fieldfare	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	1	3	3	-	Proven breeding for the first time since 2012, in Dumfries & Galloway
Redwing	Very rare	28	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-3	2	38	36	Moderate	Have increased over the last decade after a trough in numbers
Bluethroat	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	One singing male in Cambridgeshire
Black Redstart	Rare	64	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-14	24	80	57	High	The highest total since 1998
Blue-headed Wagtail	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	1	2	2	High	1-2 mixed pairs
White Wagtail	Very rare	19	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	8	29	9+	High	Mostly in the Channel Isles
Scandinavian Rock Pipit	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	0-2 mixed pairs
Hawfinch	Less scarce	500+	Clements 2013	no trend available	-	15	178	-	Low	
Mealy Redpoll	Very rare	15	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	7	32	-	High	The highest total reported
Snow Bunting	Rare	79	Hayhow et al 2018	no trend available	-	3	27	-	Moderate	As usual only a low proportion of the population was reported
Cirl Bunting	Less scarce	1079	Jeffs et al 2018	strong increase (27 yrs)	814	-	255	-	Low	Usual low reporting outside of a survey year

Table 2: Rare non-native breeding birds in the UK, 2018

Common name	Notes
Reeves's Pheasant	Reported from five sites in Sussex and Wiltshire, but no evidence of breeding
Golden Pheasant	Reported from six sites in five counties, no confirmed breeding though may have occurred on the Isles of Scilly
Indian Peafowl	Recorded received from three counties only despite being widespread, with the only reported wild breeding in Cornwall
Bar-headed Goose	One hybrid pair (identify of other parent unknown) in Meirionnydd
Snow Goose	12 birds on Coll, Argyll, but no breeding
Black Swan	Reported from 16 counties, with confirmed breeding in Dorset, Hampshire, Kent and Susse
Muscovy Duck	Records received from just seven counties; this species is clearly underreported
Wood Duck	Breeding confirmed in East Glamorgan and Hampshire
Red-crested Pochard	63 pairs, with the stronghold in Gloucestershire & Wiltshire
Ruddy Duck	One pair bred in Surrey, otherwise single birds in Cambridgeshire and Clyde
Harris's Hawk	Pairs in Yorkshire (successful), Caernarfonshire (nest-built) and a hybrid pair with Common Buzzard in Lancashire & N Merseyside
Eurasian Eagle Owl	Two pairs in Lancashire & N Merseyside, one of which was successful, as was a pair in Highland
Blue-crowned Parakeet	A probable breeding pair in Greater London

Footnotes:

1. An indication of population status in one of four categories: Very rare (mean of <30 breeding pairs (bp) per annum); Rare (30–300 bp per annum); Scarce (301–1,000 bp per annum); Less scarce (>1,000 bp per annum).
2. Published estimate or RBBP 5-year mean. If a recent estimate from a published national survey is available, this is used and referenced. Otherwise the estimate is based on RBBP data, using the mean maximum population size from the last five years (currently 2014–18). If annual RBBP coverage is poor, the best available national population estimate is used. The unit varies, but is most frequently 'breeding pairs' (bp). We acknowledge that, for some species, estimates based purely on RBBP data may be contrary to other estimates, especially where RBBP coverage is moderate or low (see below).
3. A population trend, where one can be calculated; this is presented as a 25-year trend where possible. For species that were added to the RBBP list in 1996, a 15-year trend is given. Trends are calculated by comparing the 5-year mean in 2018 (for the years 2014–18) with that for either 25 or 15 years earlier (1993, from 1989–93, or 2003, from 1999–2003). Trends are categorised into five bands, based on thresholds of rate of change used to classify species trends in the Wild Bird Indicators (e.g. Defra 2020): further details can be found in the RBBP report. Most trends are derived from RBBP data, although in some cases trends from periodic surveys are used if they are more robust.
4. The degree of coverage (in 2018), defined as follows: Near-complete (RBBP reports present more or less complete annual totals); High (a good estimate of the number of pairs breeding annually, though an unknown (but thought to be small) proportion has not been recorded/reported); Moderate (a less accurate estimate of the number of pairs breeding annually, which is nonetheless thought to be a significant proportion of the total population); Low (the volume of the data received is such a small proportion of the total population that RBBP totals are of little value for calculating trends or status reviews; however, maintaining an archive of known sites is useful, and this information can be used in the design of future targeted surveys). Coverage categories (reassessed in this report) are based on comparisons between the 5-year mean and the most reliable population estimate, where possible, taking into account known factors in the monitoring and detectability of the species.