

Guidance on the reporting of Rare Breeding Birds



- All breeding birds can be vulnerable to interference and disturbance.
- It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb many species of rare breeding bird while they are nesting.
- The Rare Breeding Birds Panel advocates special caution with regards to making breeding records of any RBBP-listed species public; we list 37 species for which we recommend no records are shared publicly, other than at well-known protected sites.
- This includes reporting by national Bird News Information Services, sharing on local birdwatching message boards, and via social media such as on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and sharing on personal websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- We urge all those birdwatchers lucky enough to find rare birds in the spring, and those sharing news onward, to consider whether birds may be breeding before doing so.
- Sightings should always be submitted, in confidence, to county bird recorders, to contribute to the RBBP's long-term monitoring.

In order to minimise the impact of disturbance on rare breeding birds, while still encouraging the proper reporting of these species, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel provides guidelines on how records of these species should be handled during the breeding season.

Most of the species considered by the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel are, by their nature, not numerous in the UK. In addition, many species of bird, whether rare, scarce or common, are vulnerable to interference and disturbance when breeding; however, the impact of disturbance on the conservation status of the less numerous species is greater. Deliberate interference can occur from egg-collectors or by those intent on their persecution. Incidental disturbance can also occur from birdwatchers and bird photographers, and this may be a growing problem for the welfare of rare breeding birds.

All species of bird are fully protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 but some species are also assigned special protection when at or near the nest – these species are included in Schedule 1 of the Act (list [here](#)) – note also that there is some variation in wildlife legislation in the UK's four countries¹, and additional Schedules (ZA1 in England and Wales, A1 in Northern Ireland and A1 and 1A in Scotland) offer extra protection for some species of raptor and their nests. It is an offence to intentionally disturb birds listed on Schedule 1 whilst they are building a nest, or in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or to disturb dependent young even if not in the nest. It is also an offence to recklessly disturb these species, through for instance trying to get a better view by going too close to the birds, leading to the potential for accidental disturbance. Most Schedule 1 species are included on the RBBP List, but there are additional species not on Schedule 1 which are now monitored by RBBP by virtue of their UK breeding population being less than 2000 breeding pairs. Some of these species, such as Common Crane and Cattle Egret, only began nesting in the UK since 1981 and would have otherwise been very likely to have been included on Schedule 1.

¹ An overview of the Wildlife and Countryside Act can be found [here](#), and guidelines on countryside-specific variation [here](#) for England and Wales, [here](#) for Scotland, and [here](#) for Northern Ireland.

If birdwatchers observe an offence in progress, such as a Schedule 1 species being intentionally or recklessly disturbed at or near the nest, they should contact the Police, and subsequently report details to the RSPB at crime@rspb.org.uk.

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel therefore advocates special caution with regards to making breeding records of all RBBP-listed species public, particularly in the period March to mid-August. Although we encourage sensible monitoring of the breeding attempt, in order to provide information for county recorders and RBBP, observers must always prioritise the interests of the individual birds and the conservation of the species, and avoid disturbing the birds and their nest. Bird ringers and participants in the Nest Record Scheme in England, Scotland and Wales should apply to BTO to obtain for licences to monitor nests of species on Schedule 1, unless they are non-ringing participants in the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, in which case they should apply to NatureScot. Schedule 1 Licences are issued by BTO for England, on behalf of Natural England, and Scotland, on behalf of NatureScot; licences for Wales are issued by Natural Resources Wales. Anyone wishing to apply for a Schedule 1 licence for any purpose in Northern Ireland should apply directly to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Details of obtaining a Schedule 1 licence, and the list of species on Schedule 1, are accessible [here](#). The list of species covered by RBBP is available [here](#).

It is of course possible to carefully monitoring the activity of a breeding pair from a safe distance without the need to visit the nest and we would encourage this where conditions permit and there is no disturbance to the birds – an example would be observation from a distance or from a permanent hide using telescope and/or binoculars.

The RBBP believes that the following species are especially vulnerable, and we suggest that no records of these species in circumstances suggestive of breeding or potential breeding are shared in the public domain during the breeding season, unless public viewing has been arranged:

Capercaillie	Purple Heron
Common Scoter	Osprey
Baillon's Crake	Honey-buzzard
Common Crane	Hen Harrier
Red-necked Grebe	Montagu's Harrier
Slavonian Grebe	White-tailed Eagle
Black-necked Grebe	Snowy Owl
Stone-curlew	Long-eared Owl
Ruff	Short-eared Owl
Purple Sandpiper	Bee-eater
Red-necked Phalarope	Wryneck
Green Sandpiper	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Wood Sandpiper	Red-backed Shrike
Black-throated Diver	Golden Oriole
Spoonbill	Marsh Warbler
Little Bittern	Savi's Warbler
Night Heron	Fieldfare
Cattle Egret	Bluethroat
Great White Egret	

This list is not definitive, and we would urge careful consideration over sharing records of **all** other species on the RBBP list (as well as any species breeding, or showing the potential to breed, in the UK for the first time) away from well-known and protected sites. In particular, caution should be employed over the sharing of details of other rare breeding birds at isolated or edge of range locations. Context is vital; it would not be untoward to share that you had seen nesting Avocets in Suffolk, or heard Corncrake in the Hebrides. Were the observations

the other way around, a Corncrake in Suffolk or Avocets in the Hebrides, the situation would be different. **If in doubt, do not share!**

By the public domain, we mean reporting by national Bird News Information Services, sharing on local birdwatching message boards, and via social media on Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and sharing on personal websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter accounts. The RBBP liaises with national information services to encourage sensible policies on the reporting (and non-reporting) of rare breeding birds in the breeding season. We wish to encourage all owners and moderators of message boards, Facebook and WhatsApp groups and similar forums to employ policies prohibiting the sharing of sensitive records of rare breeding birds.

In particular, we would urge all those birdwatchers lucky enough to find rare birds in the spring, and those sharing news onward, to consider whether birds may be breeding before doing so. For example, Black-necked Grebes on inland water-bodies may be itinerant pairs looking for new breeding sites; Cranes on new wetlands may be part of the expanding population looking to colonise; singing Marsh Warblers may not just be migrants passing through, but could attract a mate and attempt to breed. Please consider the potential for breeding before sharing news.

We would, however, encourage birdwatchers to consider whether landowners and managers should be informed about rare breeding birds on their land, to ensure sites can be protected and harmful activities avoided. This could, for example, include Little Ringed Plovers on active quarry sites, tree-nesting raptors in forestry plantations, and species such as Stone-curlew and Marsh Harriers which may breed within crops: informing cooperative landowners may mean inadvertent disturbance or even nest-site destruction can be avoided.

Sightings should always be submitted, in confidence, to county bird recorders (a list of all recorders can be found [here](#)). They can be contacted directly or records submitted to them via BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net), which has measures in place, developed with RBBP, to restrict disclosure of such records to the public. Records submitted in these ways will reach the Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel so that they can be added to the Panel's secure archives and included in their annual reports, aiding the long-term conservation of these species. Advice on reporting rare breeding birds can be found in the RBBP's [Guidance Notes](#) and further information on the Panel's work elsewhere on the Panel's website, at www.rbbp.org.uk.

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