



Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2019: report summary table

The 2019 report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel was published in *British Birds* in November 2021 (Eaton *et al.* 2021) and can be obtained by subscription at www.britishbirds.co.uk; a pdf of the report will be available at www.rbbp.org.uk in due course. The report documents 99 species and races of rare native breeding bird which bred, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2019. In addition, records of 10 rare non-native breeding species are detailed. The tables in this document provide a summary of numbers of these species and races in 2019.

Table 1: UK totals and trends for rare native breeding birds, 2019

Common Name	Breeding population status ¹	Population estimate ²	Estimate source ²	Trend category (25 yr trend unless stated) ³		Number confirmed breeding pairs	Maximum number breeding pairs	Number sites	Quality of coverage in 2019 ⁴	Notes
				Trend ³	2019 data					
Capercaillie	Rare	1,114 individuals	Wilkinson et al 2018	Weak decrease (22 yrs)	-49	-	174	59	High	Maximum count is of lekking males.
Common Quail	Scarce	370	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	+3	3	584	-	High	A rise in numbers from a very poor year in 2018.
Whooper Swan	Rare	31	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+488	24	31	29	Near-complete	Another good year for this increasing species.
Garganey	Rare	120	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-6	30	136	96	High	Just three pairs less than 2018.
Shoveler	Less scarce	1,241	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	258	1,384	268	High	Numbers have increased over the 13 years of coverage, although this may be due to better reporting.
Eurasian Wigeon	Rare	216	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	50	210	89	Moderate	The same maximum total as for 2018, but this is thought to be well below the true population level.
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	-45	3	29	18	Near-complete	A pretty average year, with the bulk of the population in Argyll and Orkney.
Common Pochard	Scarce	734	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+57	349	725	167	High	
Ring-necked Duck	Potential Breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	Males in suitable breeding habitat at two sites.
Lesser Scaup	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male displaying to Tufted Ducks; the third time this species has featured in RBBP reports.
Common Scoter	Rare	52	Eaton et al 2008	Stable	-22	16	47	9	High	(the extensive area of the Caithness & Sutherland Flows are treated as one site).
Goldeneye	Rare	200	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	68	88	-	Moderate	Monitoring in Scotland much reduced in recent years; numbers reported now far short of true population.
Red-breasted Merganser	Less scarce	1,565	Humphreys et al 2016	No trend available	-	51	194	89	Low	Only third year of coverage: numbers reported maybe only 10% of true total.
Great Bustard	Very rare	6	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	12	12	1	Near-complete	At least 10 young fledged from a minimum of 5 successful nests.
Turtle Dove	Less scarce	3,600	Woodward et al 2020	Strong decrease (23 yrs)	-95	29	652	321	Moderate	The second year of RBBP reporting; results of the 2021 national survey will reveal what proportion of the true population are reported.
Corncrake	Less scarce	992	Wotton et al 2015	Strong increase	+108	-	904	-	Near-complete	The recovery of this species has faltered; this is the lowest total reported since 2003.
Baillon's Crake	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	3	2	-	Only the fourth time this species has been reported by the RBBP.
Spotted Crake	Very rare	20	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-37	0	19	11	High	Another relatively poor year.
Common Crane	Rare	40	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,446	39	48	31	Near-complete	11 non-breeding pairs were also reported.
Pied-billed Grebe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single male bird, resident since 2014.

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Red-necked Grebe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	3	6	-	Two pairs, and a single individual which moved between four sites.
Slavonian Grebe	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-61	25	28	16	Near-complete	A typical year by recent depleted standards.
Black-necked Grebe	Rare	55	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+1	41	57	20	Near-complete	
Stone-curlew	Scarce	328	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+107	293	307	-	High	In addition it is estimated that there were another 57 pairs in Norfolk and Suffolk.
Black-winged Stilt	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	1	3	3	-	Black-winged Stilts have now bred for six years in a row; no young fledged in 2019.
Avocet	Less scarce	2,138	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+326	2,154	2,154	122	Near-complete	
Little Ringed Plover	Scarce	604	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	+3	421	669	-	Moderate	The highest total reported since 2011.
Dotterel	Scarce	423	Hayhow et al 2015	Strong decrease (24 yrs)	-57	19	46	-	Low	Typically low reporting.
Whimbrel	Scarce	290+	Jackson 2009	No trend available	-	0	19	-	Low	No records other than a few from the core range in Shetland.
Black-tailed Godwit	Rare	53	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+9	47	51	5	Near-complete	48 juveniles were released by Project Godwit in a 'head-starting' intervention.
Ruff	Very rare	13	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-52	1	10	8	Near-complete	Only the seventh year this millennium that breeding has been proven.
Purple Sandpiper	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-67	0	1	1	Near-complete	Pair at the traditional site, although breeding was not confirmed in 2019.
Red-necked Phalarope	Rare	87	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+267	38	91	34	Near-complete	A considerable drop from 2018, but still the second-highest total ever reported.
Green Sandpiper	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	+9	2	5	3	Near-complete	

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Wood Sandpiper	Rare	36	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+528	5	44	27	High	Highest total ever reported by the RBBP.
Greenshank	Less scarce	1,080	Hancock et al 1997	No trend available	-	14	108	-	Low	As usual, massively underreported.
Mediterranean Gull	Less scarce	1,560	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+5,810	1,136	1,187	48	Near-complete	Less than half of the 2018 total due to a sharp fall at the main Hampshire colony.
Ring-billed Gull	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	Returning individual in a Common Gull colony in Scotland.
Yellow-legged Gull	Very rare	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease (15 yrs)	-28	1	3	3	Near-complete	One pair and 2 possible/probable mixed pairs.
Little Tern	Less scarce	1,375	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	-14	1,303	1,303	59	Near-complete	The second-lowest total reported since RBBP reporting began in 1995.
Roseate Tern	Rare	115	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+26	125	125	3	Near-complete	The highest total reported since 1989. In addition, three hybrid pairs with Common Terns were reported.
Black Tern	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	One summering individual returned for the fourth year in succession.
Arctic Skua	Scarce	785	Woodward et al 2020	Strong decrease (19 yrs)	-70	-	272	91	Low	An increase in numbers reported, and sites surveyed, owing to fieldwork for the <i>Seabirds Count</i> census.
Red-throated Diver	Less scarce	1,255	Dillon et al 2009	Weak increase (12 yrs)	+38	151	230	-	Low	Only a small proportion of the population is monitored annually.
Black-throated Diver	Rare	217	Eaton et al 2007	Stable (12 yrs)	+16	12	62	-	Low	Only a small proportion of the population is monitored annually.
White Stork	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	A female released by the reintroduction project in Sussex paired with a wild male; eggs were laid but the attempt failed.
Eurasian Spoonbill	Very rare	27	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	34	37	5	Near-complete	A new record total, with 43 young fledged although all but two of these were from the main colony in Norfolk.
Eurasian Bittern	Rare	201	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,128	79	227	109	Near-complete	Another new record for the 14th year in a row, and 11 more occupied sites than in 2018.
Little Bittern	Very rare	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	++	0	1	1	Near-complete	Returned to the usual site in Somerset after an apparent absence there in 2018.

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Night-heron	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	Two birds, possibly a pair, in Kent.
Cattle Egret	Colonising breeder	-	-	No trend available but increasing	++	9	19	9	-	A big increase in numbers, and at least 24 young fledged.
Purple Heron	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	A series of sightings in Norfolk may have represented an undetected breeding attempt; a single bird was present in Somerset.
Great White Egret	Very rare	13	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	16	24	10	Near-complete	Another record total and expansion in occupied sites, 35 young fledged.
Little Egret	Less scarce	1,337	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+648	1,387	1,458	182	High	A partial recovery from the winter weather-related dip in 2018.
Osprey	Rare	242	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+207	196	236		High	Reporting has been incomplete in recent years, so the true number will have been higher.
Honey-buzzard	Rare	38	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+57	17	31		Moderate	The 2020-21 national survey will give a better estimate of the size of the British population.
Golden Eagle	Scarce	508	Hayhow et al 2017	Stable	+16	175	288		Moderate	
Northern Goshawk	Scarce	712	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+206	558	820		Moderate	Once again, a new record total for Goshawk.
Marsh Harrier	Scarce	401	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+239	321	406		High	
Hen Harrier	Scarce	575	Wotton et al 2018	Weak decrease (12 yrs)	-29	209	331		Moderate	The much depleted English population increased again, to 15 confirmed breeding pairs.
Montagu's Harrier	Very rare	5	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-60	1	2	2	Near-complete	For the second successive year there was just one confirmed breeding pair.
White-tailed Eagle	Rare	116	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,216	99	123		Near-complete	New record values for the breeding population, and the number of young fledged (103).
Long-eared Owl	Less scarce	1,800+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	166	234		Low	Numbers reported may be only 10% of the true population of this elusive species.

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Short-eared Owl	Scarce	620+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	70	139	-	Low	The lowest total reported since Short-eared Owl was added to the RBBP list in 2010.
Hoopoe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Wiltshire.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Less scarce	1,000+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	38	275	-	Moderate	The lowest total reported since this species was added to the RBBP list in 2010.
Merlin	Less scarce	1,160	Ewing et al 2011	Weak increase	+94	279	358	-	Moderate	
Hobby	Less scarce	735	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+48	261	677	-	Moderate	There are signs of a decline in the last decade
Peregrine	Less scarce	1,701	Wilson et al 2018	Stable (22 yrs)	+5	823	1,110	-	High	The most widespread species covered by the RBBP, reported from 83 recording areas.
Red-backed Shrike	Very rare	4	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-44	1	10	9	High	Included the first breeding in eastern England since 1992.
Great Grey Shrike	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male, briefly.
Golden Oriole	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-96	0	2	2	Near-complete	Two singing males.
Red-billed Chough	Scarce	381	Hayhow et al 2018	Stable (32 yrs)	-1	320	358	-	Near-complete	
Willow Tit	Less scarce	2,750	Woodward et al 2020	Strong decrease (23 yrs)	-82	206	1,048	-	Moderate	There was a large increase in reporting due to the first year of the national survey.
Bearded Tit	Scarce	673	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (25 yrs)	+82	-	706	94	Near-complete	Largely recovered from the drop in 2018 caused by hard weather in the preceding winter.
Woodlark	Less scarce	3,064	Conway et al 2009	No trend available	-	-	963	-	Moderate	A return to 2017 levels following a weather-related drop in 2018.
Pallas's Leaf Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing bird in Cornwall, only the second appearance in an RBBP report.
Iberian Chiffchaff	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	0	0	4	-	

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Great Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	5	6	-	Five singing males, the highest number recorded since 1994.
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	
Marsh Warbler	Very rare	10	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-75	2	8	7	Near-complete	
Savi's Warbler	Very rare	7	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-48	1	11	10	Near-complete	Included the first-ever proven breeding in Wales.
Dartford Warbler	Less scarce	3,214	Wotton et al 2009	Weak increase	+41	-	1,450	-	Moderate	A recovery from the dip in 2018 caused by hard winter weather, although not yet back at 2017 levels.
Fair Isle Wren	Rare	39	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase (15 yrs)	+41	-	34	-	Near-complete	
Fieldfare	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-84	0	1	1	High	A single bird in suitable habitat in Ayrshire.
Redwing	Very rare	27	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+21	0	12	12	Moderate	A considerable drop on recent years.
Bluethroat	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male in suitable breeding habitat in NE Scotland.
Black Redstart	Rare	65	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-16	18	70	53	High	
White Wagtail	Very rare	21	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	20	20	-	High	One mixed pair in the UK, plus an estimated 20 pairs on the Channel Isles.
Brambling	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	-	The first proven breeding since 2002.
Hawfinch	Less scarce	500+	Clements 2013	no trend available	-	18	382	-	Moderate	
Common Redpoll	Very rare	20	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available but increasing	++	19	33	-	High	A new record total.
European Serin	Former breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Kent.

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Cirl Bunting	Less scarce	1,079	Jefferies et al 2018	strong increase (27 yrs)	814	152	325	-	Low	As usual, low reporting outside of a survey year.
Snow Bunting	Rare	79	Hayhow et al 2018	no trend available	-	10	38	-	Moderate	

In addition to the native species listed above, Short-toed Treecreeper (Channel Islands only), St Kilda Wren (St Kilda only) and Parrot Crossbill (Highland only) were known to have been present in 2019, but no breeding records were submitted.

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

Common name	Notes
Golden Pheasant	Reported from five sites in four counties, with confirmed breeding in Angus & Dundee only.
Indian Peafowl	Recorded received from five counties only; breeding was confirmed in Cornwall and Derbyshire.
Snow Goose	10 birds on Coll, Argyll, as the population there continues to dwindle, although a pair did raise one young.
Black Swan	Reported from nine counties, with confirmed breeding in Dorset, Hampshire, Staffordshire and Sussex.
Muscovy Duck	Records received from just three counties; this species is clearly hugely underreported.
Wood Duck	Breeding confirmed in Hampshire and Lancashire & North Merseyside.
Red-crested Pochard	Reported from 11 counties with confirmed breeding in six; the stronghold remains in Gloucestershire & Wiltshire.
Ruddy Duck	Four breeding season reports were received, although there was no indication of breeding.
Harris's Hawk	A male resident in Cambridgeshire was the only record received.
Eurasian Eagle Owl	One pair in Lancashire & N Merseyside but no sign of a breeding attempt; also a single bird in Highland.

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 2015–19). 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 2019 (for the years 2015–19) with that for either 25 or 15 years earlier (1994, from 1990–94, or 2004, from

2000–2004). 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, and trends from the BTO/JNCC/RSPB UK Breeding Bird Survey are given for Turtle Dove and Willow Tit.

4. The degree of coverage (in 2019), 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.