



Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2020: report summary table

The 2020 report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel was published in *British Birds* in November 2022 (Eaton *et al.* 2022) 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 101 species and races of rare native breeding bird which bred, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2020. In addition, records of 12 rare non-native breeding species are detailed. The tables in this document provide a summary of numbers of these species and races in 2020.

Reporting of rare breeding birds in 2020 was impacted significantly by the restrictions on human activities as part of Covid-19 lockdowns, and this adversely affected RBBP reporting for most species. The RBBP made assessments of the impact of the lockdowns on the reporting of all of the regularly occurring rare breeding birds, placing each species in one of five categories: very low or low impact (24 species), moderate impact (24), high impact (10), very high impact (10), and uncertain (seven) impact. Impacts were particularly marked on the reporting of species found principally in northern UK and in remote uplands habitats.

For the species which reporting was believed to have been moderately impacted, or greater, 2020 data has not been used to update population estimates or trends. In such cases the values derived from RBBP and given in the table below are the same as given in the 2019 report, and are given in *italics*.

Table 1: UK totals and trends for rare native breeding birds, 2020

.....2020 data.....											
Common Name	Breeding population status ¹	Population estimate ²	Estimate source ²	Trend category (25 yr trend unless stated) ³	Trend ³ (%)	Impact of Covid lock-downs on 2020 numbers	Number confirmed breeding pairs	Maximum number breeding pairs	Number sites	Quality of coverage in 2020 ⁴	Notes
Capercaillie	Rare	1,114 individuals	Wilkinson et al 2018	Weak decrease (22 yrs)	-49	Very high	-	52	18	Low	Maximum count is of lekking males.
Common Quail	Scarce	400	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	+4	Very low or low	2	565	-	High	Similar numbers to 2019.

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Whooper Swan	Rare	31	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+488	Moderate	26	31	27	High	Another good year for this increasing species.
Pink-footed Goose	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	2	1	-	Two pairs present at a site in Highland.
Garganey	Rare	120	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-6	Moderate	14	92	64	Moderate	A reduction in monitoring of wetland reserves impacted the numbers reported in 2020.
Shoveler	Less scarce	1,241	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	High	218	627	268	Moderate	A reduction in monitoring of wetland reserves impacted the numbers reported in 2020.
Eurasian Wigeon	Rare	216	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	Very high	29	88	55	Low	Poor reporting for this species with a largely Scottish distribution.
Black Duck	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single male bird, resident since 2007, with no evidence of breeding behaviour in 2020.
Pintail	Very rare	28	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-45	Moderate	5	31	19	High	Included the first breeding attempt for Oxfordshire.
Common Pochard	Scarce	734	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+57	Moderate	293	556	162	High	The lowest total since 2006 due to reduced monitoring.
Lesser Scaup	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male with Tufted Ducks, although no breeding evidence was reported.
Common Scoter	Rare	52	Eaton et al 2008	Stable	-22	Very high	1	3	2	Low	Very little monitoring due to lockdown restrictions.
Goldeneye	Rare	200	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	Moderate	27	58	-	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	-	High	48	97	61	Low	Coverage even lower than typical levels.
Great Bustard	Very rare	10	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	Very low or low	22	22	1	Near-complete	At least six birds fledged from 22 nesting attempts.
Turtle Dove	Less scarce	2,100	Stanbury et al in prep	Strong decrease	-96	Very low or low	42	619	396	Moderate	The third year of RBBP reporting; results of the 2021 national survey suggest a population of 2,100 pairs.
Corncrake	Less scarce	992	Wotton et al 2015	Strong increase	+108	Moderate	-	801	-	High	RSPB-led monitoring was impacted by lockdown restrictions.
Spotted Crane	Very rare	20	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-37	High	1	13	12	Moderate	Low numbers, but a confirmed breeding attempt.

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Baillon's Crake	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing female in Somerset; this species is being reported with increasing frequency.
Little Crake	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing female in Cambridgeshire, only the second time we have reported this species.
Common Crane	Rare	44	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,281	Very low or low	40	57	30	Near-complete	Eight non-breeding pairs were also reported.
Pied-billed Grebe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single male bird, resident since 2014.
Slavonian Grebe	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-61	Very high	2	7	7	Low	Very little coverage due to lockdown restrictions.
Black-necked Grebe	Rare	53	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-7	Very low or low	29	52	13	Near-complete	The southerly distribution meant coverage remained high.
Stone-curlew	Scarce	328	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+106	Moderate	198	232	-	Moderate	RSPB fieldwork was impacted by lockdown restrictions
Black-winged Stilt	Colonising breeder	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	-	-	-	1	2	3	-	Black-winged Stilts have now bred for seven years in a row; three young fledged in 2020.
Avocet	Less scarce	2,138	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+326	Moderate	1,970	1,970	135	High	Some reduction in coverage, particularly from RSPB reserves.
Little Ringed Plover	Scarce	620	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (20 yrs)	+7	Very low or low	426	671	-	Moderate	Numbers reported were actually up on the recent average.
Dotterel	Scarce	423	Hayhow et al 2015	Strong decrease (24 yrs)	-57	High	6	26		Low	Reporting was even lower than usual.
Whimbrel	Scarce	290+	Jackson 2009	No trend available	-	Very high	7	8	-	Low	Very few records, although did include a territory-holding male in Warwickshire.
Black-tailed Godwit	Rare	52	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+22	Very low or low	45	55	13	Near-complete	Productivity, in the absence of head-started birds from "Project Godwit", was low.
Ruff	Very rare	13	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-52	Very high	0	2	6	Near-complete	Considerable reduction in monitoring coverage.
Pectoral Sandpiper	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A displaying male in Orkney.
Red-necked Phalarope	Rare	95	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+254	Very low	38	123	40	Near-complete	A new record total.

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Green Sandpiper	Very rare	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (20 yrs)	+100	Very low or low	0	3	2	Near-complete	
Wood Sandpiper	Rare	36	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+528	Very high	0	11	7	Low	Very little monitoring in 2020.
Greenshank	Less scarce	1,080	Hancock et al 1997	No trend available	-	Very high	3	31	-	Low	As usual, massively underreported.
Mediterranean Gull	Less scarce	1,823	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+6,228	Very low or low	1,136	1,187	48	Near-complete	Less than half of the 2018 total due to a sharp fall at the main Hampshire colony.
Little Tern	Less scarce	1,375	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (15 yrs)	-14	Moderate	1,172	1,172	51	High	Lockdown restrictions resulted in reduced monitoring.
Roseate Tern	Rare	119	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+43	Very low or low	133	133	3	Near-complete	Another increase in the population.
American Black Tern	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A summering male in Northumberland, the first record of this race reported by the RBBP.
Arctic Skua	Scarce	785	Woodward et al 2020	Strong decrease (19 yrs)	-70	Very high	-	78	15	Low	Lockdown restrictions meant fieldwork for the <i>Seabirds Count</i> census was cancelled.
Long-tailed Skua	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	Individuals in Outer Hebrides and Shetland.
Red-throated Diver	Less scarce	1,255	Dillon et al 2009	Weak increase (12 yrs)	+38	High	73	145	-	Low	Even in normal years, only a small proportion of the population is monitored.
Black-throated Diver	Rare	217	Eaton et al 2007	Stable (12 yrs)	+16	Moderate	12	39	-	Low	Even in normal years, only a small proportion of the population is monitored.
White Stork	Reintroduced breeder	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	1	-	Two pairs from the reintroduction project bred successfully, fledging four chicks.
Eurasian Spoonbill	Very rare	32	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	Very low or low	36	40	4	Near-complete	A new record total.
Eurasian Bittern	Rare	201	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,128	Moderate	49	247	123	Near-complete	Another new record for the 15th year in a row.
Little Bittern	Very rare	3	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but has increased	++	-	0	2	1	Near-complete	Two males at the usual site in Somerset.

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Cattle Egret	Colonising breeder	-	-	No trend available but increasing	++	Very low or low	27	35	11	Near-complete	Another substantial increase in numbers, with breeding at five new sites.
Purple Heron	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-		0	1	1	-	
Great White Egret	Very rare	18	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	Very low or low	22	27	10	Near-complete	Another record total.
Little Egret	Less scarce	1,260	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (15 yrs)	+1,001	Moderate	1,100	1,175	138	High	A drop in numbers, presumably related to reduced reporting. Breeding was confirmed in Scotland for the first time.
Osprey	Rare	242	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+207	Moderate	200	235	-	Moderate	Reporting has been incomplete in recent years, so the true number will have been higher.
Honey-buzzard	Rare	108	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (20 yrs)	+85	Very low or low	41	108	-	High	Numbers reported were much higher than usual due to the national survey.
Golden Eagle	Scarce	508	Hayhow et al 2017	Stable (33 yrs)	+16	Moderate	130	229	-	Moderate	
Northern Goshawk	Scarce	712	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+206	Moderate	581	864	-	Moderate	Once again, a new record total for Goshawk.
Marsh Harrier	Scarce	401	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+239	Moderate	277	367	-	High	
Hen Harrier	Scarce	575	Wotton et al 2018	Weak decrease (12 yrs)	-29	Moderate	210	322	-	Moderate	The much depleted English population increased again, to 24 confirmed breeding pairs.
Montagu's Harrier	Very rare	5	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-61	Very low or low	0	6	2	Near-complete	There was no confirmed breeding in 2020, for the first time since 1975.
White-tailed Eagle	Rare	122	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,224	Very low or low	103	138	-	High	New record values for the breeding population, and the number of young fledged (108).
Long-eared Owl	Less scarce	1,800+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	Very low or low	309	377	-	Low	A good year, possibly due to vole numbers.
Short-eared Owl	Scarce	620+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	Moderate	129	248	-	Low	

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Snowy Owl	Former breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	4	2	-	Four individuals.
Hoopoe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Hampshire.
Wryneck	Former breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	3	3	-	Included a pair in Ceredigion, the first pair recorded since 2002.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Less scarce	1,000+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	Moderate	26	278	-	Moderate	
Merlin	Less scarce	1,160	Ewing et al 2011	Weak increase	+94	Moderate	253	326	-	Moderate	
Hobby	Less scarce	692	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+40	Very low or low	260	699	-	Moderate	The late summer fieldwork period for Hobby means that the lockdown restrictions had relatively little impact on coverage.
Peregrine	Less scarce	1,701	Wilson et al 2018	Stable (22 yrs)	+5	Moderate	777	1,092	-	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	-31	Uncertain	1	4	4	High	A pair fledged three young in Shetland.
Red-billed Chough	Scarce	381	Hayhow et al 2018	Stable (32 yrs)	-1	Moderate	313	338	-	High	
Crested Tit	Less scarce	1,000-2,000	Forrester et al 2007	No trend available	-	Uncertain	8	27	-	Low	Low reporting on the return of this species to the RBBP list.
Willow Tit	Less scarce	5,550	Wotton et al in prep	Strong decrease	-86	Moderate	110	712	-	Moderate	The last year of reporting as this species has now been removed from the RBBP list due to the new population estimate of 5,550 pairs.
Bearded Tit	Scarce	673	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+82	High	-	453	91	Moderate	A drop in numbers due to lockdown restrictions.
Woodlark	Less scarce	3,064	Conway et al 2009	No trend available	-	Moderate	-	719		Moderate	
Shore Lark	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A bird in suitable habitat in Shetland.
Iberian Chiffchaff	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	3	-	
Great Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	2	-	The same singing male at two sites.

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Blyth's Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	
Marsh Warbler	Very rare	15	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-64	Very low or low	2	32	22	Near-complete	The highest total since 1997.
Savi's Warbler	Very rare	9	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-22	Very low or low	0	15	13	Near-complete	The highest number reported since 1992.
Zitting Cisticola	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	A pair bred successfully on Alderney, Channel Islands.
Asian Desert Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Northumberland.
Dartford Warbler	Less scarce	3,214	Wotton et al 2009	Stable	+41	Very low or low	-	1,510	-	Moderate	Good coverage was achieved in much of the range.
Fair Isle Wren	Rare	39	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase (15 yrs)	+41	High	-	20	-	Moderate	There was no island-wide census in 2020.
Fieldfare	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-74	Unknown	1	5	5	Moderate	A confirmed breeding pair in Dumfries & Galloway.
Redwing	Very rare	27	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+21	Moderate	11	18	16	High	An increase from low numbers in 2019
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	Moderate	30	53	41	High	
Citrine Wagtail	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	Singing males on Fair Isle and Orkney.
White Wagtail	Very rare	23	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	Very low or low	33	33	-	High	Three pairs in the UK, plus an estimated 30 pairs on the Channel Isles.
Hawfinch	Less scarce	500+	Clements 2013	no trend available	-	Very high	20	52	-	Low	A large reduction in coverage in the core area of the New Forest.
Common Rosefinch	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in North-east Scotland.
Common Redpoll	Very rare	20	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available but increasing	++	High	6	11	8	Moderate	

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European Serin	Former breeder	-	-	-	-		0	1	1	-	A singing male at the same site in Kent as last year.
Cirl Bunting	Less scarce	1,079	Jeffs et al 2018	strong increase (27 yrs)	+814	High	86	189	-	Low	
Snow Bunting	Rare	79	Hayhow et al 2018	no trend available	-	High	1	19	-	Low	Numbers reported were even lower than usual due to lockdown restrictions.

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 2020, but no breeding records were submitted.

Table 2: Rare non-native breeding birds in the UK, 2020

Common name	Notes
Helmeted Guineafowl	Pairs bred in Berkshire and Devon, with records from two more counties.
Reeve's Pheasant	A pair reported in Dorset, and two males in North-east Scotland.
Golden Pheasant	Reported from three counties, with confirmed breeding in Dorset and Suffolk.
Indian Peafowl	Records received from nine counties only; breeding was confirmed in Cornwall, Yorkshire and Breconshire.
Snow Goose	Eight birds on Coll, Argyll, as the population there continues to dwindle; there was no breeding in 2020.
Black Swan	Reported from seven counties, with confirmed breeding in Wiltshire and Kent
Ruddy Shelduck	Possible breeding in Yorkshire.
Muscovy Duck	Records received from six counties with breeding confirmed in three; this species is clearly hugely underreported.
Wood Duck	Reported from two counties; no confirmed breeding.
Red-crested Pochard	Reported from eight counties with confirmed breeding in four; the stronghold remains in Gloucestershire & Wiltshire.
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.

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 2016–20, or 2015–19 if 2020 data were impacted by lockdown restrictions in which

case the estimate is given in italics). 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 or 20-year trend is given. Trends are calculated by comparing the 5-year mean in 2020 (for the years 2016–20) with that for 25, 20 or 15 years earlier (1995, from 1991–95, 2000, from 1996–2000, or 2005, from 2001–2005). If 2020 coverage was impacted by lockdown restrictions trends to 2019 are used instead and give in italics. 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 2020), 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.