



Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2024: report summary table

The 2024 report of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel was published in *British Birds* in November 2026 (Eaton *et al.* 2026) 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 103 species and races of rare native breeding bird which bred, or showed signs of breeding, in the UK in 2024. In addition, records of 15 rare non-native breeding species are detailed. The tables in this document provide a summary of numbers of these species and races in 2024.

Table 1: UK totals and trends for rare native breeding birds, 2024

.....2024 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 2024 ⁴	Notes
Whooper Swan	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+356	29	39	28	Near-complete	The highest total we have reported, with the highest ever productivity of 57 fledged young.
Pink-footed Goose	Occasional	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	Mixed pair with a Greylag Goose
Common Scoter	Rare	52	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (17 yrs)	0	16	52	12	Near-complete	There was higher coverage than normal, broadly equivalent to the last national survey in 2007, with the same number of pairs found.
Common Goldeneye	Rare	200	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	90	97	-	Moderate	
Red-breasted Merganser	Less scarce	1,565	Humphreys et al 2016	No trend available	-	72	222	155	Low	Only a small proportion of the population are reported annually.
Ferruginous Duck	Occasional	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	-	The first definite breeding attempt in the UK occurred in Warwickshire, but there is doubt over whether birds were of wild origin.
Common Pochard	Scarce	859	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+116	337	1,118	248	High	By far the highest total we have reported, which may in part be due to wintering birds delaying migration during a cold April with adverse winds.

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Lesser Scaup	Potential	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male was paired with a female Tufted Duck in Yorkshire.
Garganey	Rare	116	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	0	17	128	95	High	A similar return to 2023.
Blue-winged Teal	Occasional	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A pair may have tried to breed in Yorkshire, but evidence was lacking.
Northern Shoveler	Less scarce	1,456	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (10 yrs)	+49	509	1,556	354	High	The second highest total (just below that for 2023) we have reported since adding the species to our list in 2006.
Eurasian Wigeon	Rare	226	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available	-	40	227	104	Moderate	A typical return.
Northern Pintail	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-33	11	27	22	Near-complete	The UK's scattered breeding population has been stable in recent years.
Green-winged Teal	Potential	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male in Devon was seen attempting to mate with a female Teal of unknown race.
Capercaillie	Rare	542 individuals	Wilkinson et al 2023	Strong decrease (29 yrs)	-75	-	153	42	High	For the first time there were no lekking males reported in Moray & Nairn and Perth & Kinross.
Common Quail	Scarce	498	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	-3	2	419	-	High	A slight drop on recent years.
Slavonian Grebe	Very rare	19	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-60	12	20	14	Near-complete	An increase from the low of 16 pairs in 2023, but productivity was poor (seven young fledged).
Black-necked Grebe	Rare	63	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+25	39	66	18	Near-complete	Numbers remain high.
Great Bustard	Very rare	21	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (10 yrs)	+657	30	-	1	Near-complete	46 nests were found, a considerable increase on previous years.
European Turtle Dove	Less scarce	2,092	Stanbury et al 2023	Strong decrease (28 yrs)	-98	32	474	305	Moderate	A national survey of Turtle Doves will be conducted in 2027.
Common Crane	Rare	76	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+2,129	71	85	45	Near-complete	There were more confirmed breeding pairs, and more young fledged, than in any year since the species' return as a breeding bird in 1981.
Corn Crake	Scarce	798	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+44	-	798	-	High	There was a drop in coverage since 2023.
Spotted Crake	Very rare	29	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-40	0	41	16	High	The highest total since 2021; over half the singing males were in the Lower Derwent Valley, Yorkshire.

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Eurasian Stone-curlew	Scarce	331	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak increase	+59	315	359	-	High	The highest total we have reported since 2015.
Pied Avocet	Less scarce	2,320	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+221	2,520	-	152	Near-complete	A new record total and the ninth successive year the population has exceeded 2,000 pairs.
Black-winged Stilt	Very rare	5	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (10 yrs)	+380%	0	1	5	Near-complete	After confirmed breeding records annually between 2014 and 2023, a surprising gap in 2024.
Eurasian Dotterel	Scarce	423	Hayhow et al 2015	Strong decrease (24 yrs)	-57	1	28	-	Low	
Little Ringed Plover	Scarce	679	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (20 yrs)	+16	368	615	-	Moderate	Included confirmed breeding in Highland for the first time, and the first successful breeding in Cornwall.
Eurasian Whimbrel	Scarce	378	Skene & Perkins 2023	No trend available	-	0	57	8	Low	
Black-tailed Godwit	Rare	58	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+29	44	58	11	Near-complete	Ten young birds were fledged, the highest natural productivity since 2018.
Spotted Sandpiper	Occasional	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A male in Highland may have bred with a female Common Sandpiper.
Red-necked Phalarope	Rare	128	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+331	54	126	54	Near-complete	Another high total and the fifth successive year with over 100 breeding males.
Green Sandpiper	Very rare	6	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (20 yrs)	+182	0	6	6	Near-complete	
Wood Sandpiper	Rare	74	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+738	18	78	48	High	The second-highest total we have ever reported, down from 98 pairs last year.
Greenshank	Less scarce	1,080	Hancock et al 1997	No trend available	-	24	118	-	Low	Typically low reporting.
Ruff	Very rare	8	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-5	1	2	5	Moderate	A female flushed from a nest in Shetland provided only the tenth confirmed breeding record this century.
Temminck's Stint	Very rare	2	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	A group of four birds moved between two sites; at the second site two clutches were laid. Two chicks survived for nearly three weeks before being predated.
Purple Sandpiper	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-25	3	3	2	High	The last time there were three breeding pairs was 2003.
Arctic Skua	Scarce	727	Burnell et al 2023	Strong decrease (18 yrs)	-66	-	93	-	Low	Standardised coverage through the Seabird Monitoring Programme suggests the population continues to decline.

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Little Tern	Less scarce	1,392	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable (20 yrs)	-13	1,368	-	54	Near-complete	A slight increase in breeding pairs, but productivity fell from the bumper levels in 2022 and 2023.
American Black Tern	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A remarkable record – a female returned to Northumberland for the fifth successive year, then paired and laid a clutch of three eggs with a male Arctic Tern. They did not hatch.
Roseate Tern	Rare	139	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+107	129	-	3	Near-complete	There was a slight increase from the HPAI-depleted numbers in 2023, and high productivity which suggests a recovery is underway.
Mediterranean Gull	Less scarce	2,779	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+4,971	3,187	3,250	45	Near-complete	It seems likely there was an impact of HPAI on colonies in 2023, but no reports within Mediterranean Gulls in 2024.
Ring-billed Gull	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A single bird returned to the Common Gull colony in Perth & Kinross it has frequented since 2009.
Yellow-legged Gull	Very rare	1	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-33	2	2	2	Near-complete	One pure pair, and one mixed pair with a Lesser Black-backed Gull.
Red-throated Diver	Less scarce	1,255	Dillon et al 2009	Weak increase (12 yrs)	+38	87	135	-	Low	The usual low level of reporting.
Great Northern Diver	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	Two mixed pairs with Black-throated Divers, one of which raised a single chick.
Black-throated Diver	Rare	217	Eaton et al 2007	Stable (12 yrs)	+16	16	46	-	Low	The usual low level of reporting.
Barolo Shearwater	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Devon for the second year running.
White Stork	Reintroduced breeder	-	-	-	-	29	30	3	-	The released population in Sussex continues to grow.
Eurasian Spoonbill	Rare	71	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+2,842	87	91	12	Near-complete	Another jump in numbers to a new record total.
Eurasian Bittern	Scarce	311	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+1,756	91	362	166	Near-complete	A new record total.
Little Egret	Less scarce	1,727	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (20 yrs)	+867	1,957	2,000	203	High	Another species reaching a record total, and analyses suggest the true population may be considerably higher.
Black-crowned Night Heron	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	0	1	-	An apparent mixed pair with a Little Egret in Norfolk.
Great Egret	Rare	85	RBBP 5-yr mean	No trend available but increasing	++	153	164	20	Near-complete	Yet another heron species reaching a new record total, and with the first confirmed breeding record in Scotland.

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Western Cattle Egret	Rare	83	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (10 yrs)	+20,650	145	163	38	High	A new record total. A mixed pair with a Little Egret fledged a chick in Cumbria.
Purple Heron	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	Birds in Kent and Somerset.
Short-eared Owl	Scarce	620+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	66	228	-	Moderate	Close to the mean total reported since the species was added to our list in 2010.
Long-eared Owl	Less scarce	1,800+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	234	338	-	Low	As usual, the numbers reported were only a small proportion of the true population.
Osprey	Rare	314	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+170	292	351	-	High	A new record total for the UK as well as for England, Scotland and Wales separately.
European Honey-buzzard	Rare	130-150	Clements et al. 2022	Strong increase (20 yrs)	+85	42	106	-	High	The highest total we have reported outside of the 2020-21 national survey.
Golden Eagle	Scarce	508	Hayhow et al 2017	Stable (33 yrs)	+16	184	348	-	High	
European Goshawk	Less scarce	1,133	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+298	738	1,181	-	Moderate	A return to the rising trend after a dip in numbers in 2023.
Hen Harrier	Scarce	691	Kelly et al (2025)	Stable	+21	264	503	-	High	
Montagu's Harrier	Very rare	4	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-65	2	3	2	Near-complete	After four years without confirmed breeding in the UK, pairs bred in Suffolk and Wiltshire, although neither were successful.
Western Marsh Harrier	Scarce	525	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+272	485	608	-	High	The population exceeded 600 pairs for the first time in our recording.
White-tailed Eagle	Rare	161	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+958	141	206	-	High	The population exceeded 200 pairs for the first time.
Common Hoopoe	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	Two singing males within a few miles of the site in Leicestershire & Rutland where breeding occurred in 2023.
European Bee-eater	Colonising breeder	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	A pair returned to the breeding site in Norfolk for the third year running, but were not successful.
Eurasian Wryneck	Former breeder	-	-	-	-	0	4	4	-	Four singing males, including three in Wales.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Less scarce	1,000+	Woodward et al 2020	No trend available	-	20	243	-	Moderate	A slight increase, but is hard to know whether the numbers reported reflect genuine trends.

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Merlin	Less scarce	1,160	Ewing et al 2011	Weak increase	+94	187	297	-	Moderate	
Eurasian Hobby	Less scarce	2,050	Woodward et al 2020	Stable	+27	324	8	-	Moderate	The highest number we have reported since 2015.
Peregrine Falcon	Less scarce	1,701	Wilson et al 2018	Stable (22 yrs)	+5	687	1,041	-	High	Numbers remain close to 2023 levels, after a substantial drop between 2022 and 2023, likely related to HPAI mortality.
Red-backed Shrike	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-64	0	4	4	High	No increase in breeding activity despite a large late spring influx of migrants.
Red-billed Chough	Scarce	493	Hayhow et al 2018	Stable (32 yrs)	-1	441	494	-	High	This total exceeds that from the last national survey (493 pairs in 2014), and the true population is likely to be somewhat higher.
Crested Tit	Less scarce	1,000-2,000	Forrester et al 2007	No trend available	-	6	43	-	Low	As usual only a very small fraction of the population were reported.
Bearded Tit	Scarce	709	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+108	-	744	114	High	The true population is likely to be considerably higher.
Woodlark	Less scarce	3,064	Conway et al 2009	No trend available	-	-	1,270	-	Moderate	
Icterine Warbler	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	5	3	-	After a large spring influx, five singing males is the most we have ever reported, but there were no breeding pairs found.
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	A pair fledged at least two young in Highland, the first confirmed breeding in the UK.
Marsh Warbler	Very rare	17	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-40	2	13	10	High	A rather average year, with confirmed breeding in Lincolnshire and Northeast Scotland.
Great Reed Warbler	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male in Cambridgeshire.
Savi's Warbler	Very rare	10	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase	+123	0	7	7	Near-complete	
Dartford Warbler	Less scarce	3,214	Wotton et al 2009	Weak increase	+64	-	1,668	-	Moderate	The national Heathland Birds Survey, in 2025, will give us a much better idea of the current population.
Fair Isle Wren	Rare	37	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+13	-	30	-	Near-complete	The lowest population of this endemic race we have reported since 2007.
Redwing	Very rare	14	RBBP 5-yr mean	Weak decrease	-40	1	4	4	High	The lowest number of breeding Redwing we have ever reported. All were in Highland.

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Fieldfare	Very rare	2	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong decrease	-51	0	3	3	High	
Bluethroat	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A White-spotted Bluethroat returning to a site in Gloucestershire for its fourth year running.
Red-breasted Flycatcher	Potential breeder	-	-	-	-	0	2	2	-	A new species for RBBP reports, with males holding territory in Northeast Scotland and Upper Forth.
Black Redstart	Rare	90	RBBP 5-yr mean	Stable	+16	30	85	65	High	
Blue-headed Wagtail	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	One mixed pair with a Yellow Wagtail
White Wagtail	Very rare	4	RBBP 5-yr mean	no trend available	-	2	2	2	High	Two mixed pairs with Pied Wagtails
Scandinavian Rock Pipit	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	-	One mixed pair with a British Rock Pipit
Hawfinch	Less scarce	500+	Clements 2013	no trend available	-	30	132	-	Moderate	A typically low return for this elusive species.
Common Rosefinch	Occasional breeder	-	-	-	-	0	1	1	-	A singing male returned to the Highland territory it occupied in 2023.
Common Redpoll	Very rare	24	RBBP 5-yr mean	Strong increase (15 yrs)	+606	6	28	19	Moderate	A typical year for what is now regarded as a subspecies of Redpoll.
Snow Bunting	Rare	79	Hayhow et al 2018	no trend available	-	2	40	-	Moderate	
Cirl Bunting	Less scarce	1,079	Jefferies et al 2018	Strong increase (27 yrs)	+814	69	481	-	Moderate	Results from the Cirl Bunting Monitoring Programme suggest there may have been a slight increase in recent years, and there has been a notable expansion into Dorset.

In addition to the native species listed above, **St Kilda Wren**, **Short-toed Treecreeper** (Channel Islands only) and **Parrot Crossbill** (Highland only) were known to have been present in 2024, but no breeding records were submitted.

Table 2: Rare non-native breeding birds in the UK, 2024

Common name	Notes
Black Swan	Confirmed breeding records received from six counties with wild birds reported in a further six counties.
Snow Goose	Five adults on Coll, Argyll, and a colony in Yorkshire.
Swan Goose	Five reported in East Glamorgan.
Wood Duck	Reported from sites in three counties.
Muscovy Duck	Records received from 13 sites in five counties with no confirmed breeding; this species is clearly hugely underreported.
Red-crested Pochard	Reported from 30 sites, with 9-89 pairs, in seven counties.
Helmeted Guineafowl	Reported from 11 sites in five counties.
Reeve's Pheasant	Records from eight sites in six counties.
Golden Pheasant	Reported from Cornwall, Derbyshire, Dorset and the Isles of Scilly.
Lady Amherst's Pheasant	Reported from Cambridgeshire and the Isles of Scilly.
Silver Pheasant	One was reported from Cornwall.
Indian Peafowl	Confirmed breeding records received from four counties with wild birds reported in a further three counties.
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	Single birds reported in Denbigh & Flint, Highland and Yorkshire.
Harris's Hawk	Singles were reported from Cornwall and Derbyshire.
Alexandrine Parakeet	A pair were reported in Buckinghamshire and a single in East Glamorgan.

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 2020-24, excluding 2020 if data for that year were impacted by lockdown restrictions). 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; if a species has been covered by the RBBP for a shorter period then a 10-year, 15-year or 20-year trend is given as appropriate. Trends are calculated by comparing the 5-year mean in 2024 (for the years 2020–24) with that for 25, 20, 15 or 10 years earlier. If 2020 coverage was impacted by lockdown restrictions that year is omitted from the trend calculation. 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 2026): 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.
4. The degree of coverage (in 2024), 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.