



GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Corn bunting (*Emberiza calandra*) Norman Crowson, Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) Andyworks, Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) Norman Crowson, Turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) MikeLane45

Farmland & garden birds

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All about farmland & garden birds

- Several farmland species that were once common in the UK countryside, such as turtle dove, corn bunting, yellowhammer, and skylark, have become increasingly difficult to see. This has put increasing pressure on our gardens and many species once common in farmland, are relying on the seeds, fruits and berries that can be found in a typical urban garden.
- The corn bunting is a nondescript streaky brown bunting that typically sits on prominent perches in arable farmland and can be easily overlooked. It has a jangly song ("Pip-pip-pip-Tweedledee" that sounds like jangling keys), a dumpy gait and a fluttering flight style. The corn bunting is present in the UK all year but easier to find in spring and summer. It feeds mainly on seeds, but also invertebrates during the breeding season.
- The yellowhammer is a very bright yellow bunting with brown back and streaked underparts. The male is more colourful than the female, although predominately yellow too. It is a bird of open countryside with hedgerows, often sings its well-known song ("A-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese") from a vantage point. The yellowhammer is present in the UK all year but more vocal in spring and summer. Like the corn bunting it feeds mainly on seeds, but also takes insects.
- The skylark appears to be a featureless brown bird on the ground, but in flight unleashing its continuous song it is unmistakable. Small and streaky with a slight crest on the head and white flanks on the tail, the skylark is easy to miss in winter when it mainly keeps to the ground. It can be tempted into the air to sing on a bright sunny day in early spring or even late winter – the soundtrack of many a long spring or summer day in open countryside. It has a particular liking for moorland habitat as well as farmland. The skylark feeds mainly on seeds and insects.
- The turtle dove is a small dove; a little larger than a blackbird. Darker than our common collared dove; it is clearly mottled with chestnut and black on its back. The familiar purr of the turtle dove is a well loved sound of the summer but this species is in rapid decline, probably faster than any other breeding bird in Britain. They can still be found on unimproved grassland and scrub areas in eastern and south eastern England between late April to August; it is very rare elsewhere.

Why do farmland & garden birds need our help?

- Loss of habitat, intensive farming, changes in farming practices, pesticides, over-development and climate change are the major contributing factors.
- Corn bunting, yellowhammer and skylark have declined in numbers over recent decades, making them 'red listed species', meaning they are now absent in parts of the UK.
- Turtle doves are the most rapidly declining farmland bird species in Britain. This sub saharan migrant is in trouble because of agricultural change, a shortage of food on their breeding grounds, hunting on their migration route and habitat loss on their wintering grounds. The impacts are so great that the UK population has fallen by 93% since 1970.

DID YOU KNOW? In Victorian Britain skylarks were a delicacy and were collected for the pot, a dozen birds sold for one shilling and sixpence and Mrs Beeton had recipes for them!

How can we help?

- It is not too late to take action and creating new places for turtle doves to thrive may at least help to slow their decline. Creating new areas of scrub and wider field margins will help to bring about new spaces and food sources for this threatened dove.
- In order to address the fortunes of our farmland birds we need to significantly diversify and 'rewild' areas that are currently intensively farmed.
- For our gardens, allowing more space for nature means letting your grass grow, leaving some scrub areas (including thistles, nettles and docks).
- Create small ponds for wildlife and ensure that there is a good supply of bird food all year round.
- Keeping to public footpaths, especially during the breeding season.
- Keeping any dogs on a lead.
- Supporting any farming initiative we know that does not employ intensive methods, for example through buying locally grown produce.

Learn more

- Find out about any British bird here: bto.org/understanding-birds/birdfacts/find-a-species
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at naturalist@arocha.org