

Turtle Doves in the Howardian Hills

The beautiful Turtle Dove is our smallest European dove. This tiny power house of a bird flies 11,200 km to reach the Howardian Hills from Mali in Africa each spring.

Unfortunately Turtle Doves are in big trouble; their population has declined in both the UK and Europe to such an extent there may now be fewer than 100 birds nesting in the whole of Yorkshire. Only 50 years ago it was classed as a fairly common bird.

Why Are Turtle Doves in Trouble?

Turtle Doves are no different from many other birds; they need food, shelter and water. However changes in land management practices means there are fewer places they can find the tiny native seeds they prefer to feed on. They like to nest in large scrubby hedges or young conifer plantations. Ponds are essential too; these provide a good supply of drinking water. Their decline may have been worsened by hunting in southern Europe as they migrate in spring.

The new North Yorkshire Turtle Dove Project funded by Heritage Lottery, North York Moors National Park, Forestry Commission and Howardian Hills AONB in partnership with RSPB, Scarborough Borough Council, and North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre aims to help these birds. It will focus on where Turtle Doves have been recorded recently, principally around the forests of the southern fringe of the North York Moors National Park and Howardian Hills AONB.

What are the Project Aims?

1. Provide advice, training, support and small-scale capital work.
2. Train keen farmers about Turtle Dove conservation so that they can spread the word amongst the farming community.
3. Recruit volunteers to conduct surveys.
4. Deliver talks and guided walks for local residents, schools and community groups.
5. Create publicity and display material at key locations such as the Sutton Bank National Park Centre and the Dalby Forest Visitor Centre.

How Can You Help?

If you have a farm or are in control of land, big or small and you have areas which could be managed to improve feeding and/or habitat we need to hear from you. Turtle Doves love feeding on native seed from autumn sown pollen & nectar mix, flower rich arable field margins or wild flower grasslands. Helping to increase these areas of habitat will also restore the vibrant colour to our local countryside.

Howardian Hills Turtle Dove Survey 2018

There has never been a special survey to find out how many Turtle Doves are still breeding in the AONB. We intend to launch a new volunteer survey project in 2018. This exciting project will also be an opportunity to record other important species in our area such as Tree Sparrow. If you would like to know more about this survey please email us at r.baines@northyorkmoors.org.uk.

We also would like to know about any sightings you have in or close to the National Park or Howardian Hills. If you see a Turtle Dove please email us at conservation@northyorkmoors.org.uk or phone the National Park office at 01439 772700.

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