

Guidance on the reporting of Rare Breeding Birds to Bird News Information Services

In order to minimise the impact of disturbance on rare breeding birds, while still encouraging the proper reporting of these species, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, in consultation with RSPB Investigations, has compiled some guidelines on how records of these species should be handled during the breeding season.

Most of the species considered by the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel are, by their nature, not numerous in the UK. In addition, many species of bird, whether rare, scarce or common, are vulnerable to interference and disturbance when breeding; however, the impact of disturbance on the conservation status of the less numerous species is greater. Deliberate interference can occur from egg-collectors or by those intent on their persecution. Incidental disturbance can also occur from birdwatchers and bird photographers.

Rare breeding birds inevitably attract attention and interest from a wide range of people, who mostly wish them well. Certainly, most birdwatchers would like to be able to watch rare breeders, since by their nature they are not encountered often and are usually very interesting in their breeding habitat, but most people realise that approaching them is likely to cause harm and don't do so. Some individuals however wish to harm our rare breeders. This might be because they want to kill them (usually raptors on land used for shooting) or because they want to take their eggs or young for personal satisfaction or gain. Other people may not wish to harm them but could do so by behaving irresponsibly. This would include people trying to take photographs of breeding birds from close up, or to photograph nests. Even repeated disturbance by visiting birdwatchers can cause a pair not to settle, to desert or for their nest to be predated while they leave it.

All species of bird are fully protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) but some species are assigned special protection when at the nest – these species are included in Schedule 1 of the Act. It is an offence to intentionally disturb these birds whilst they are building a nest, or in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young; or to disturb dependent young even if not in the nest. It is also an offence to recklessly disturb these species, through for instance trying to get a better view by going too close to the birds, leading to the potential for accidental disturbance. Most Schedule 1 species are included in the RBBP List, but there are additional species not on Schedule 1 which are now monitored by RBBP by virtue of their UK breeding population being fewer than 2000 breeding pairs. Some of these species, such as Common Crane and Little Egret, only began nesting in the UK since 1981; others, like Icterine Warbler, have nested infrequently but more often set up territories and may be attempting to nest.

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel therefore advocates special caution with regards to making breeding records of all RBBP-listed species public, particularly in the period March to mid-August. Although we encourage sensible monitoring of the breeding attempt, in order to provide information for county recorders and RBBP, observers must always prioritise the interests of the individual birds and the conservation of the species, and avoid disturbing the birds and their nest. A licence for nest monitoring of species on Schedule 1 can be applied for; these are supplied by Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (for disturbance of species nesting in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland, respectively). Bird ringers and nest recorders can apply for licences from the BTO.

Details of obtaining a Schedule 1 licence, and the list of species on Schedule 1, are accessible here: <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/taking-part/protected-birds>. The list of species covered by RBBP is available here: <http://www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-species-list-full.htm>.

It is of course possible to carefully monitor the activity of a breeding pair from a safe distance without the need to visit the nest and we would encourage this where conditions permit and there is no disturbance to the birds – an example would be observation from a distance or from a permanent hide using telescope and/or binoculars.

RSPB and RBBP both believe that the following species are especially vulnerable and we suggest that no records of these species in circumstances suggestive of breeding or potential breeding are publicised during the breeding season unless public viewing has been arranged:

Capercaillie	Ruff
Black-throated Diver	Temminck's Stint
Little Bittern	Purple Sandpiper
Cattle Egret	Green Sandpiper
Great White Egret	Wood Sandpiper
Purple Heron	Red-necked Phalarope
Eurasian Spoonbill	Snowy Owl
Red-necked Grebe	Long-eared Owl
Slavonian Grebe	Bee-eater
Black-necked Grebe	Wryneck
Honey-buzzard	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
White-tailed Eagle	Golden Oriole
Montagu's Harrier	Red-backed Shrike
Osprey	Penduline Tit
Baillon's Crake	Savi's Warbler
Common Crane	Marsh Warbler
Black-winged Stilt	Bluethroat

By publicity, we mean reporting to Bird News Information Services (national schemes but also local networks) and notifying others via social media such as What'sApp, Twitter and Facebook. We ask those who maintain the national networks and also those who monitor local grapevines to share these guidelines to help educate the birdwatching public in good practice:

- (1) if you find a rare bird in breeding habitat, consider whether it might actually be breeding there and whether the birds might therefore be at risk of disturbance;
- (2) do not publicise the birds or the site (either locally or via the national bird information services) unless you are sure that there are suitable viewing opportunities which will not disturb the birds in any way;
- (3) always inform the county/regional bird recorder and submit details of your sightings to the recorder so that they can be stored locally and with the Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Sightings should be submitted, in confidence, to county bird recorders. They can be contacted directly or records submitted to them via BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net): this software has measures in place, developed with RBBP, to restrict disclosure of such records to the public via websites or other media. Records submitted in these ways will reach the Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel so that they can be added to the Panel's secure archives and included in their annual reports, aiding the long-term conservation of these species.

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