

Criteria for categorising Turtle Dove breeding evidence in the UK

EBCC standard breeding categories	Specific interpretation for Turtle Dove	Notes/rationale
Possible breeding		
1. Species observed in breeding season in possible nesting habitats.	One or more birds seen in suitable nesting habitat between 1 May and 31 August.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turtle Doves are late migrants, beginning to arrive in late April, though many birds are first recorded at potential breeding sites. ● To be classed as suitable breeding habitat, the area needs to include tall hedgerows, tall dense scrub, woodland edge or scattered tall bushes within an open environment, often arable land or downland. ● Turtle Doves generally occur at low elevations, but in forest edge habitat may occur up to around 250m asl. It is suspected that birds nesting in woodland margins or young forestry may be under-recorded. ● Note that feeding areas can be several km from a nest site, so observations of one bird only within an area on different dates may relate to the same individual/territory, given how scarce this species now is.
2. Singing male(s) present (or breeding calls heard) in breeding season.	Single singing bird in suitable nesting habitat between 1 May and 31 August.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is the most likely source of records of Turtle Dove, with the soft purring song being distinctive. ● Early morning, ideally within two hours after sunrise, is the best time to detect the gentle purring song of Turtle Doves. ● Records of singing birds should wherever possible be followed up a week or more later in an effort to upgrade the breeding category to 'probable' breeding (see below).
Probable breeding		
3. Pair observed in suitable nesting habitat in breeding season.	Two birds behaving as a pair in suitable nesting habitat between 1 May and 31 August.	
4. Permanent territory presumed through registration of territorial behaviour (song <i>etc.</i> on at least two different days a week or more apart at the same place).	At least two birds singing against each other, or one bird singing at the same site and heard at least a week apart.	
5. Courtship and display.	A pair displaying together at a site constitutes Probable breeding.	
6. Visiting probable nest site.	Turtle Doves nest in bushes or small trees, usually in range 1–5m above ground. Hawthorn is the favoured tree species.	
7. Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults.	Not generally applicable.	

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8. Brood patch on adult examined in the hand.		
9. Nest building or excavating nest-hole.	Adult birds may be seen collecting nest material on the ground and then flying into a bush or tree.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note that Turtle Doves are prone to nest desertion, especially when building a nest.
C. Confirmed breeding		
10. Distraction-display or injury-feigning.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If flushed from a nest an adult may injury-feign. Disturbance at or near a nest should be avoided.
11. Used nest or eggshells found (occupied or laid within period of survey).		
12. Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species).	Recently fledged should be interpreted as full-sized young or juveniles which are still being fed by a parent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care should be taken to include only young which appear to have fledged from a nest in the close vicinity. Juveniles can wander widely after they become independent, typically within 3 weeks of leaving the nest.
13. Adults entering or leaving nest-site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (including high nests or nest-holes, the contents of which can not be seen) or adult seen incubating.	Nests are typically hidden in dense foliage and contents are unlikely to be visible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note that Turtle Doves are prone to nest desertion, especially when building a nest. Birds actually entering, or exiting, areas of dense wood vegetation (rather than just sitting on top and singing) is a very strong indication of nesting.
14. Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young.		
15. Nest containing eggs.	Turtle Dove is a late nester: eggs are laid mainly between late May and early August.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turtle Doves are traditionally multi-brooded in the UK but in recent years this has become less frequent, perhaps contributing to the population declines. During incubation, the following behaviour is indicative of there being a nest with eggs. The male will perch close to nest site, gives a soft purr, the female then comes out and the male goes in. The female often then sits nearby preening for a short while. This changeover typically occurs in the mid-morning with the reverse process in mid to late afternoon.
16. Nest with young seen or heard.	Young may be in the nest from May to September, but mainly from June to August.	

Notes.

- We recommend that county recorders encourage their observers to listen out for singing Turtle Doves, in suitable breeding habitat; these birds can be recorded in BirdTrack as with the breeding evidence category of “Possible Breeding”. Turtle Doves are territorial, so a repeat visit a week or so later will provide valuable information that the bird is still present in the same area; in BirdTrack this can be recorded as “Probable Breeding” as permanent territory is presumed.
- Tips for county recorders: all nests can clearly be classified as Confirmed breeding; occupied territories and other indications of a territory or pair should be classified as Probable breeding. Most records will be based on casual records of singing males, which can be entered as such on the RBBP Data Submission Form.

- Getting evidence of confirmed breeding of Turtle Dove can be difficult; recently fledged young are often seen, though it is often not clear how far the birds may have travelled from their breeding site, so care needs to be taken in the use of this evidence code – it should only be used if the observer can be sure the young birds have fledged within 1km of the sighting, which requires regular observation of a site through the breeding season.
- Submissions to the Panel: numbers of pairs should be submitted according to the criteria detailed here. However, if the species has been studied more intensively in the area and a population estimate for the county is possible, this can be given in addition to the numbers based on observations in the year under consideration.