



Black redstart

Phoenicurus ochruros

Status

Amber listed: BR
Non-SPEC
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981

National monitoring

National survey: 1977 (BTO).
Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Population and distribution

Black redstarts have been slowly colonising Britain for about 70 years. They are concentrated in London, the Home Counties, Kent, west Midlands and Suffolk/Norfolk, and are thinly distributed elsewhere in England. The population has exceeded 100 occupied territories (Morgan and Glue 1981) but declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s before showing a slight recovery in recent years. There are currently estimated to be 27–74 pairs of black redstarts in the UK (*Population Estimates*). The population may fluctuate strongly from year to year.

Ecology

Breeding sites are typically in industrialised, built-up or derelict surroundings, although some coastal sites are on sea cliffs (Morgan and Glue 1981). A clutch of 4–6 eggs is laid between late April and the end of June. There are usually two broods and the young fledge by mid-July (*Red Data Birds*).

Breeding season survey – population

This method is based on the 1977 black redstart survey (Morgan and Glue 1981).

Information required

- number of proven, probable and possible breeding pairs
- map of the survey area boundary with a summary map of registrations.

Number and timing of visits

At least five fortnightly visits from mid-April to the end of June.

Time of day

Early morning (in the hours after sunrise) and/or evening (hours before sunset).

Weather constraints

Avoid cold, wet and windy conditions.

Sites/areas to visit

Urban and industrialised habitats, eg gasworks, docks and warehouses,

power stations, railway sheds, derelict buildings, farm outbuildings, sites under construction and urban developments. A few birds nest on sea cliffs.

Equipment

- 1:10,000 OS map
- Schedule 1 licence.

Safety reminders

It is very important to gain access permission, even though this may prove quite difficult. Industrialised areas can be particularly dangerous, so please abide by any safety advice given by the landowner, eg wear a hard hat or stay away from unsafe buildings or machines.

Disturbance

The method involves minimal disturbance to nesting birds.

Methods

Map the boundary of the survey area. The survey route may depend on where access permission has been granted and where it is safe to survey. Taking these factors into consideration, walk a predetermined route through the area which allows you to approach to within 100 m of each accessible spot. Mark the route on to the map and use the same route every time, even between years. Take a new map on each visit, and clearly mark each map with the date. Alternate the direction of the route taken on each subsequent visit, so that you are not always starting and ending at the same place. Walk slowly, taking time to stop and listen for singing birds or to observe any suspected sightings through binoculars. Whenever a black redstart is seen or heard, follow this up immediately. This will inevitably mean deviating from the original survey route for a short time.

Males prefer to sing from a prominent position on a building – often a rooftop, gutter or chimney stack. The far-carrying (if scratchy) song is the best auditory cue. Map the location and behaviour of the bird(s) using conventional BTO codes (see Appendix 1) and then continue on the survey route.

From all the individual visit maps, create a summary map of registrations and use the following criteria to assess the number of proven, probable and possible breeding black redstarts that were present. Report these along with the summary map of registrations.

Breeding is *proved* if:

- a nest or used nest is found
- a nest with young is seen or heard
- recently fledged young are located
- adults are seen entering or leaving a nest-site, or an adult is seen incubating
- an adult is seen carrying a faecal sac or food for young.

Breeding is *probable* if:

- a pair of birds is seen in suitable nesting habitat during the breeding season
- a male is heard singing at the same place on two or more occasions
- courtship and/or display are seen
- a bird is seen visiting a probable nest-site
- birds exhibit agitated behaviour or give alarm-calls
- nest-building is observed.

Breeding is *possible* if:

- birds are seen in the breeding season
- birds are seen in possible nesting habitat during the breeding season
- a singing male is heard **once** during the breeding season.

Reference

Morgan, R A and Glue, D E (1981) Breeding survey of black redstarts in Britain, 1977. *Bird Study* 28: 163–168.