Redwing
Turdus iliacus

Status

Amber listed: BR
SPEC 4^{W} (S^{W})
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981
Annex II/2 of EC Wild Birds Directive

National monitoring

Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Population and distribution

The redwing colonised Britain in the early part of the 20th century, first nesting in Sutherland in 1925 (*68–72 Atlas*). It is a rare breeding species, restricted for the most part to north and west Scotland, although breeding has been recorded as far north as Shetland, and as far south as Kent. The British breeding population, most of which breeds in the Highlands, is quoted as 40–80 pairs (*88–91 Atlas*, *Population Estimates*, Marchant et al. 1990), although this may well be a substantial underestimate (Ogilvie et al 1996). Redwings are common winter visitors from Iceland, Scandinavia and Finland (Goodacre 1960, Zink 1981). During this period, the British redwing population swells to about three-quarters of a million birds (*Population Estimates*), with the highest numbers in west and south-west Britain (*Winter Atlas*).

Ecology

Redwings breed in a variety of habitats, often close to water. These include hillside birchwoods, the edges of oakwoods, mature woodland and parkland surrounding estate houses, scrubby wooded areas along river valleys and plantations of spruce *Picea* (Spencer et al 1986). Characteristic of many of these sites is the presence of scrub with damp patches for feeding (Williamson 1973). Redwings generally breed solitarily, although loose colonial clusters have been recorded (*BWP*, Spencer et al 1990). Eggs are usually laid between May and mid-July, but occasionally earlier. Clutches are of 5–6 eggs, incubation lasts 12–13 days, young are in the nest for 10–11 days and fledglings become independent 14 days after leaving the nest. Pairs are frequently double-brooded (*BWP*, *Red Data Birds*).

Breeding season survey – population

This method is based on the territory-mapping approach of the CBC (see generic survey methods section). Because only a single, relatively rare species is recorded, the number of visits is reduced from that required by the CBC and the recommended plot size is increased.

Information required

- number of territories
- number of confirmed breeding pairs.

Number and timing of visits

At least three, between 1 May and 14 June with at least one week between each visit.

Time of day

Dawn to midday, preferably early morning.

Weather constraints

Avoid periods of heavy rain and winds of Beaufort force 5 and over.

Sites/areas to visit

Areas which have traditionally held breeding redwings. Also, areas of birch, oak and alder woodland, sitka spruce plantations, parkland and scrub, particularly close to water (eg river valleys) in north and west Scotland.

Equipment

- 1:25,000 OS map of the area
- larger-scale photocopied map (1:2,500 to 1:10,000)
- Schedule 1 licence.

Safety reminders

Always tell someone where you have gone and when you expect to return. Take a compass and always carry a survival bag, waterproofs, whistle, extra clothing, food and a first-aid kit whenever surveying in a remote area.

Disturbance

This method does not require nest visits and therefore causes little or no disturbance.

Methods

Define the boundary of your survey area, either by revisiting the birds' traditional haunts or by cold searching. To do this, drive, cycle or walk along minor roads and tracks through suitable habitat during early to mid-May. Stop for a few minutes every few hundred yards and listen for the characteristic, liquid, descending song of the male. If you hear or see a redwing, include the general area in which you located it within (one of) your study plot(s), bearing in mind that other pairs may be nearby.

Decide the overall boundary of your study plot and mark it clearly on a large-scale map (1:2,500–1:10,000 depending on plot size and availability of maps). This should incorporate as much suitable habitat as possible, but should not be so big that it cannot be surveyed in a morning. In relatively open terrain (eg scattered trees and scrub in a river valley) this should probably be less than 250 ha, and in a more closed habitat (eg woodland) less than 75 ha. These areas are bigger than are generally recommended for standard multi-species territory mapping, but are manageable because only a single species is being recorded.

Walk slowly around the study plot and mark on the map the location of all the redwings encountered, using a separate letter for each visit (A for 1st visit, B for 2nd visit, etc) and standard BTO codes (see Appendix 1) to indicate behaviour. For example, a male recorded singing on the second visit would be marked on the map as an encircled B. Some registration types are more useful than others in determining how many

redwing territories there are in the survey plot. Records of two or more males singing simultaneously (denoted by two, or more, encircled visit letters joined by dotted lines) are particularly useful, as each represents a separate territory. Evidence of nesting, such as birds carrying nesting material or food, or alarm-calling adults, is also valuable.

Wherever possible, visit the study plot more than three times. In general, the more visits that are made, the more reliable are the results. However, if too many visits are made (eg more than 10) it is possible to become confused and to double-count the same pair/territory, particularly if the pair has moved between nesting attempts. Ideally, visits should be concentrated during the peak of song activity (RBBP records suggest this is the last three weeks of May and the first two weeks of June). This is the most efficient way of recording the species and gives a better estimate of the total potential breeding population than that given by surveys carried out later in the season, which only give an indication of the number of successful pairs.

At the end of the season, draw non-overlapping rings, representing territory boundaries, around the clusters of bird registrations. If only a few visits were made to each plot, each cluster will necessarily consist of only a few records. Simultaneous registrations indicate different individuals and should never be incorporated into the same cluster unless they are thought to be two adults of a pair. Records of nests can be counted as a cluster even in the absence of records of adults. When delineating territory boundaries, bear in mind that redwings do sometimes breed in loose colonies, so records from different pairs/territories may be clumped. Where individual clusters are difficult to differentiate, analyses of the map may inevitably become subjective.

Report the number of territories recorded on each study plot, and the number of these from which breeding evidence was obtained (eg alarm-calling adults, nesting material or food being carried, nest found, recent fledglings, etc).

References

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