

## TREE SPARROW *PASSER MONTANUS* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The tree sparrow has been declining nationally in both numbers and range for a large part of the last century and consequently it has been classified as a priority species in the UKBAP<sup>37</sup>. It has therefore been selected for action in Caerphilly county borough.

Relevant Legislation/Species Status	
priority species (P) or species of conservation concern (S)	P
EC Birds Directive 1979	-
Berne Convention 1982	-
Bonn Convention 1979	-
CITES 1975	-
WCA 1981	Part I Section 1
Birds of Conservation Concern List <sup>30</sup>	Red
Other Species Status	RDB Birds: candidate



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### 2. CURRENT STATUS

#### 2.1 UK and Wales

The tree sparrow is found across the UK normally on lowland or low upland farmland.

However its distribution is patchy and with prolonged fluctuations involving inexplicable colonisations, and desertions of well established areas. The main populations are found across the Midlands, southern and eastern England, the species being almost absent in the western parts of the UK. Tree sparrows appear to undergo irregular fluctuations in numbers. There was an 85% decline in numbers in Britain between the two breeding atlas periods (1968-72 and 1988-91), the largest decline of any common species during this period. The tree sparrow's range also decreased by 20% during the same period the largest losses being in Wales and Scotland.

The species is a breeding resident in Wales, in small numbers with a patchy distribution, and absent from most western areas. Its stronghold has always been in the Marches, in those counties bordering the west Midlands. Tree sparrows nest in holes in trees, usually having 2-3 broods. The clutch size varies between 2-7, (frequently 5) with 11-14 day incubation and 15-20 day fledging periods. Acceptable habitat includes pollarded willows and other trees with nest-holes along lowland watercourses; free standing trees along roadsides or in groups in parks, cemeteries, or farmland; woodlands, especially where they are small, isolated in open country with well-spaced mature broad-leaved trees. They feed predominantly on the ground, eating seeds, berries and buds, and rough grassland supports important seed sources.

#### 2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

Tree sparrows in Caerphilly county borough are now very uncommon. Small numbers are occasionally recorded on autumn passage, but generally, upland areas in the county are not suitable for the species and although it has never been common in the industrial valleys, their status here is now thought to be unstable. Historically, the area has had residential breeding colonies in suitable habitat along river valleys, especially the Sirhowy and lower Rhymney valleys.

Data collected by the Gwent Ornithological Society during 1998–2000 shows a dramatic decline in distribution when compared to survey details collected during 1981–85<sup>19</sup>. Only one of the eight tetrads in the Sirhowy valley had tree sparrow records and a former stronghold in the Crosskeys/Risca area appears to have been lost completely.

No recent survey has been conducted in the lower Rhymney river valley, however one tetrad bordering the area has had tree sparrow recorded recently during the breeding season, therefore it is possible that a residual population still exists in this area (see **Map 2.15**).

### **2.3 Links with Habitats**

- **Deciduous Woodlands** (lowland wood pasture and parkland, wet woodland)
- **Wildlife Corridors** (roadside verges, railway lines)

## **3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES**

Little is known about the factors affecting numbers of tree sparrow, but their recent decline has occurred at the same time as decreases in the numbers and/or ranges of other farmland birds which share its diet of grass, wildflower and cereal seeds, and also feed their young on insects. It is likely therefore that the reasons associated with the decrease in breeding numbers are:

- Changing agricultural practices - increased use of herbicides; shift from spring-sown to autumn-sown crops and consequent loss of winter stubble in fields; more intensive management of grassland; and the general reduction of habitat diversity on farmland due to the loss of mixed farming and increased specialisation.
- Availability of nests sites may be a limiting factor for this hole-nesting species.
- Long-term changes in climate, which may be a factor in the species retreat to the east.

## **4. CURRENT ACTION**

- 4.1 UK BAP priority species<sup>37</sup> and implementation of the UK SAP.
- 4.2 Nest box schemes have been implemented in some areas.
- 4.3 Although the species is not monitored systematically, the Gwent Ornithological Society and Glamorgan Bird Club gathers information from its members on the distribution of tree sparrow and other birds and both bodies publish annual bird reports<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>.
- 4.4 The BTO Breeding Bird Survey also contributes to the monitoring and recording of tree sparrow populations<sup>6</sup>.

## **5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS**

### **5.1 UK Objectives and Targets**

- 5.1.1 In the short term, halt or reverse the decline in numbers of the tree sparrow by the year 2003 so that the Breeding Bird Survey index is at least at 1996 levels.

5.1.2 In the long term, see a sustained recovery, so that the BBS index is at least 50% higher than 1996 levels, and a measurable increase in range is achieved by 2008.

**5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets**

5.2.1 Gain a full understanding of the current population of tree sparrow in Caerphilly county borough by carrying out a county wide survey on existing and historical breeding sites by 2005.

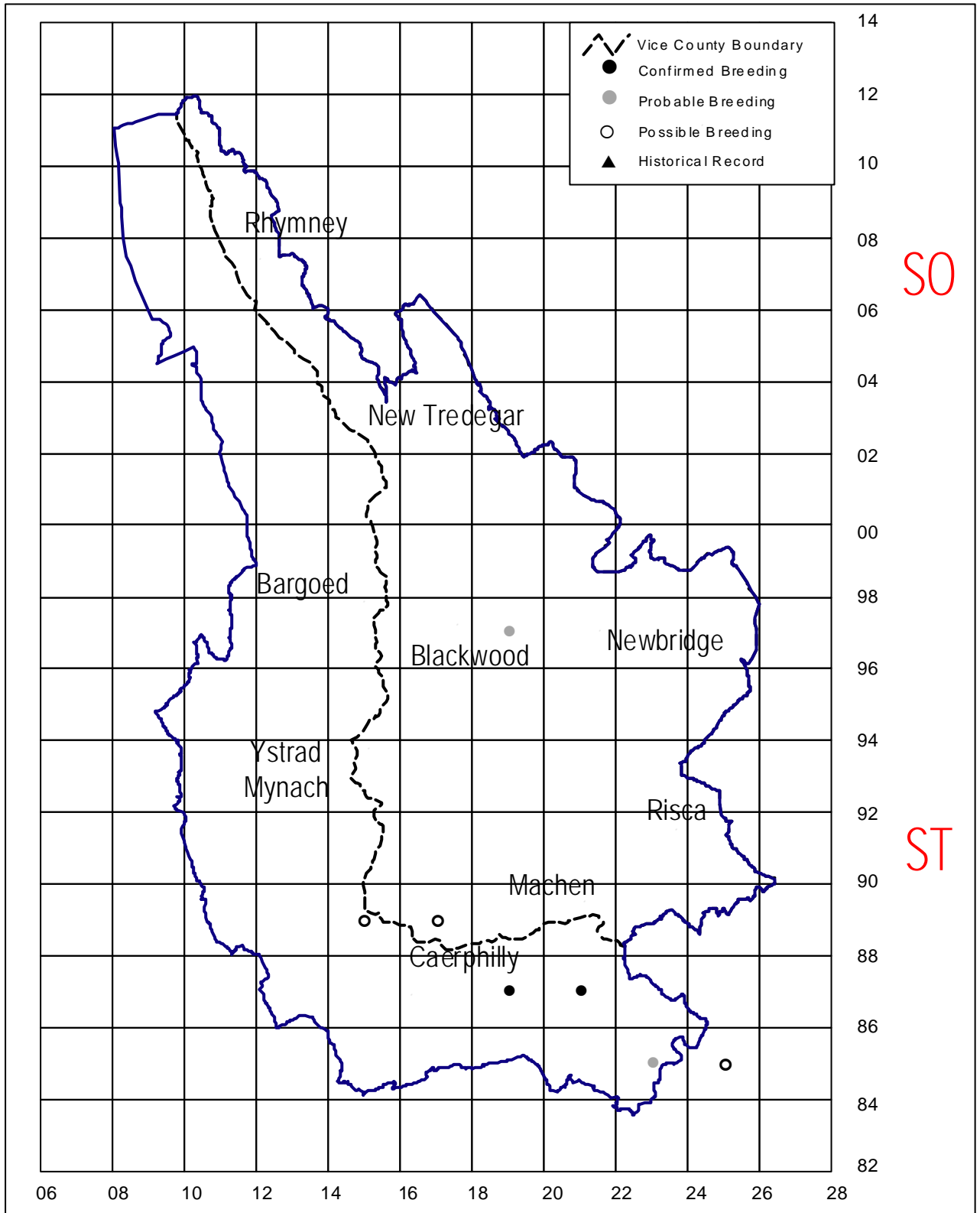
5.2.2 Maintain the current distribution and abundance of tree sparrow. (Target: ongoing)

**6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS**

Action	Key Partners		Year to be complete or in place by:								
	Lead	Partners	2003	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>6.1 Policy and Legislation</b>											
6.1.1 Introduce specific targets for increasing the number of breeding pairs in the light of survey results.	CBP	-			✓						
6.2.1 Seek to designate all regularly used nesting sites as SINCLNR.	CCBC	CCW									✓
<b>6.2 Site Safeguard and Management</b>											
None proposed at this time.	-	-									
<b>6.3 Species Management and Protection</b>											
6.3.1 Consider the scope for introducing management measures where tree sparrow colonies still exist, e.g. including the provision of nest boxes, retention of dead trees, encouragement of pollarding and the provision of winter feeding.	CCW	CCBC Coed Cymru FC	✓	✓							
6.3.2 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.4 Advisory</b>											
6.4.1 Advise land managers on management for tree sparrows, taking account of findings of research resulting from UK BAP.	CCW	NAWAD FC CCBC Coed Cymru RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>6.5 Future Research and Monitoring</b>											
6.5.1 Undertake a local breeding bird survey to cover suitable habitats.	GBC GOS	RSPB BTO	✘								
6.5.2 Collate all the known information on breeding sites (historic and existing) in the county borough to target survey, monitoring and habitat management.	GBC GOS	BTO RSPB CCW	✓								
<b>6.6 Communications and Publicity</b>											
6.6.1 Improve co-ordination and information sharing between all groups and individuals with knowledge of tree sparrow and their distribution.	CBP	RSPB	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

✘ Survey year to be determined.

MAP 2.15 - TREE SPARROW



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