

THE PAN-EUROPEAN COMMON BIRD MONITORING INITIATIVE

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The Common Birds Census (CBC) and more recently, the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) have provided population trends for common breeding birds in the UK since the 1960s. Across Europe, long-term annual bird surveys have also been operating in more than a dozen countries (Fig. 1). In recent years, there has been a surge of activity with new schemes, many based on the design of BBS, starting in countries such as Ireland, Spain, Hungary, Poland and France. In countries such as Romania, there is also considerable interest in initiating new schemes but finding the time and the resources is a real problem.

EUROPEAN-BASED DATA NEED

Those who follow BTO publications regularly, will be well aware of long-term declines in specialist farmland species, such as Corn Bunting and Turtle Dove, and increasing concern about declines in woodland species, such as Willow Tit. But how do these compare with trends in the rest of Europe? Leafing through *European Bird Populations* (BirdLife Conservation Series No 10) reveals that Corn Buntings are declining steeply in Germany, stable in France and Bulgaria, and increasing in Spain. Willow Tit numbers are going down in Austria and Lithuania, stable in Finland and increasing in France. Given the mixed fortunes of individual species, as well as specific trends

in individual countries, it would be helpful to develop a system for summarising the status of European bird populations in a way that will convince those in power to influence change. Many of the land management practices that affect birds are increasingly decided at the European level, the Common Agricultural Policy being the most obvious example.

THE MONITORING INITIATIVE

Last September, representatives from 29 countries attended a workshop in Prague to discuss a new Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring (PECBM) initiative. This workshop,

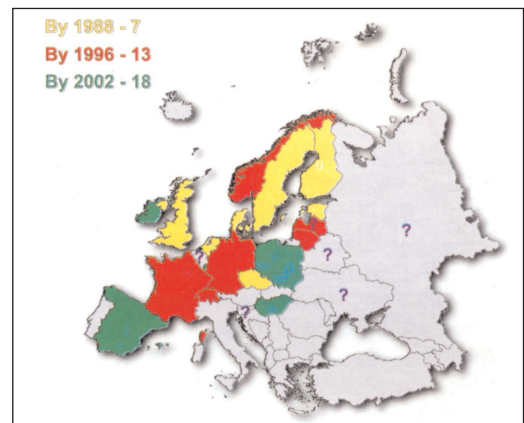


FIGURE 1. National common breeding bird surveys in place.

funded by RSPB, BirdLife International and the European Bird Census Council (EBCC), was organised by the PECBM coordinator Petr Vorisek, and was hosted by the Czech Ornithological Society. The main aims of this project are:

(i) to increase bird survey coverage across Europe through new national schemes and, where needed, develop new 'international' census plots;

(ii) to develop methods of combining data from surveys using different field and analytical methods; and

(iii) to produce European trends for as many species as possible, and combine species trends across Europe to produce Pan European multi-species indicators.

Presentations and discussion focused on details of a common bird monitoring scheme, including organisational structure, analyses and reporting trends. In the end, all countries agreed to produce annual species indices, which would then be combined to produce Pan-European indices based on total numbers of birds, and later combined to produce multi-species indices for farmland and woodland by spring 2003.

THE PILOT WORK

To get some idea how this might work, check a paper by Arco van Strien of Statistics Netherlands, and published in *Bird Study* 2001: Vol 48. This gives the results of some pilot work carried out with data from four countries. Species indices will be combined to produce multi-species indicators, representative of different

landscape types (similar to the UK's headline wild bird indicators for farm-land and woodland). It is intended that a semi-popular publication on the *State of Europe's Common Birds* will be produced during the initial phase of this project. This publication and the links developed between participating countries will then be used to seek funding from the EU to further develop this project, including support for new monitoring schemes, international plots, analyses, and web-based facilities.

IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN CONSERVATION

It was particularly helpful that delegates from the European Environment Agency participated at the conference, confirming the need for this information in delivering Europe's responsibilities for the conservation of biodiversity. The multi-species indicators should provide a useful presentational tool for summarising a potentially complex array of species trends to decision-makers at a European level. This initiative would also provide data on the status of biodiversity in the accession countries planning to join the EU.

The BTO, along with EBCC, RSPB, BirdLife International and our Dutch counterparts, SOVON, will be playing an important role in these developments to ensure that the valuable data collected for so many years in the UK can be effectively used, in combination with data from our European neighbours, to contribute to bird conservation at a broader geographical scale.