

Black Redstart

“London is the metropolis not only of man but of the black redstart in the British Isles” (Holmes *et al.*, 1957)

1. Aims

- To protect, conserve and enhance the present population in London.
- To promote the black redstart as a cultural icon for London.
- To raise awareness of the black redstart to the population as a whole and more specifically to planning authorities, architects, landscapers and developers.

2. Introduction

The black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) is an attractive, robin-sized bird of the thrush family with a distinctive orange/brown tail. A relatively recent colonist from Europe, black redstarts are regarded by many as the ‘bomb site’ or ‘power station’ bird. In continental Europe the bird is common and associated with rocky mountainous terrain and cliffs. In the UK, although some birds do breed on cliffs along the south coast, the black redstart’s distribution is concentrated in the urban environment. Power stations, gasworks, industrial units and dilapidated wharves are their preferred habitat. For this reason the species’ conservation requirements are unique for a British bird.

In London, the black redstart is concentrated on both industrial sites and post-industrial brownfield land along the River Thames East of the River Wandle and along the River Lee. Isolated pairs are still found in central London, which was the bird’s stronghold after the second-world war and they breed on at least one mainline station in central London. The boroughs of Havering, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Hackney, City of London, Islington, Camden, Wandsworth, Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich and Bexley regularly host breeding birds. A combination of stony bare ground, sparsely vegetated areas and a complexity of structures, whether they are cranes, old jetties, piles of scrap metal cars or disused building complexes, appear to be its preferred habitat.

3. Current Status

The black redstart population in the UK is concentrated in London, the West Midlands and the coast of Norfolk and Suffolk, but there are clusters in a number of other conurbations such as Nottingham, Liverpool and Manchester. The population is

presently thought to fluctuate between 80 and 120 pairs. The last estimate by the Rare Breeding Birds Panel in 1996 put the total at 28-65 pairs. The vast majority of these are in England.

The species is most probably under-recorded. On average there are between 8 and 12 pairs breeding in Greater London each year with a further 6-10 singing males present. One pair breeding in a London Borough would therefore amount to approximately 3% of the national population.

4. Specific Factors Affecting the Species

4.1 Regeneration

The large black redstart population present in the City until the mid-1960s was displaced by the gradual redevelopment of the area. Regeneration along the Thames, especially in Tower Hamlets, Lambeth and Southwark during the late 1970s and 1980s, led to a further decrease in the population in the centre of London. At the time there was little consideration of the conservation requirements of black redstarts and the general view was that their conservation was not possible within the culture of regeneration. As an opportunist species, it was thought that the bird would find suitable habitat elsewhere. Pressure from loss of habitat is likely to increase since a high target has been set for the development of brownfield sites in London.

5. Current Action

5.1 Legal status

In the UK the black redstart is afforded full protection as a Schedule 1 breeding species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended). It is also listed as a Red Data Book species and is on Appendix II of the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, 1979.

5.2 Mechanisms targeting the species

These current actions are ongoing. They need to be supported and continued in addition to the new action listed under Section 7.

5.2.1 Advice

The London Biodiversity Partnership launched www.blackredstarts.org.uk to provide information and advice on black redstart conservation both in the capital and nationally in 2002.

The Environment Agency and English Nature now advise developers that they require black redstart surveys on all likely sites along the Thames and the River Lea and that, if present, mitigation for the species should be included in any planning proposals. In 1999 the London Wildlife Trust published '*Black Redstart - an advice note for their conservation in London*', which drew attention to the species, the legislation, and its conservation requirements. This was distributed to planners, developers and

consultants (Frith *et al.*, 1999).

The Creekside Environment Programme published '*Black Redstarts in Deptford*' for local site owners and managers in 1997, highlighting the unique contribution that the industries along Deptford Creek played in the survival of the species. In 2002, the Enfield Black Redstart Working Group made available an advice note aimed specifically for the Lower Lea area of Enfield which the local council develops.

5.2.2 Provision for black redstarts in development

Specific provision for black redstarts has been incorporated into a number of new developments via landscape and built architecture. These include 'landmark' buildings at the Laban Dance Centre and the Greenwich Cruise Liner Terminal in Deptford.

Site Action Plans for the species have been prepared by the British Trust for Ornithology in Deptford Creek, where development has threatened their survival.

5.2.3 Habitat improvement

Detailed landscape drawings of both ground and roof level possibilities are now published on www.blackredstarts.org.uk. A number of such schemes are planned and in some cases have now been built.

6. Objectives, Actions and Targets

Most of these actions are specific to this species. However, there are other, broader actions that apply generically to a number of habitats and species. These are located in a separate 'Generic Action' section which should be read in conjunction with this document. There are generic actions for Site Management, Habitat Protection, Species Protection, Ecological Monitoring, Biological Records, Communications and Funding.

Please note that the partners identified in the tables are those that have been involved in the process of forming the plan. It is not an exclusive list and new partners are both welcomed and needed. The leads identified are responsible for co-ordinating the actions – but are not necessarily implementers.

Objective 1 Increase our knowledge of the distribution and population of black redstarts in London

Target: To organise a London-wide survey during the breeding season in 2006

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
1.1 Identify key locations for black redstarts and co-ordinate their survey	Achieved 2001	LWT	GLA, EA, LA
1.2 Collate current data on London black redstart population and map onto Geographical Information System (GIS)	Achieved 2001	LWT	LNHS, Essex Birdwatching Society
1.3 Remain informed regarding current	Ongoing	LWT	LNHS, Essex

data on London black redstart population and update Geographical Information System (GIS) maps			Birdwatching Society, East London Birders Forum
1.4 Secure funding for, commission and complete survey of wider Thames Gateway area	2006	LWT	Thames Gateway Partnership
1.5 Implement a monitoring programme to assess population trends	2006	Working Group	BTO, LNHS

Objective 2 To promote good practice where development is liable to impact black redstart populations

Target: Determine black redstart habitat requirements within urban areas and disseminate this information as it is acquired

Action	Target Date	Lead	Other Partners
2.1 Disseminate existing black redstart Advice Note	Achieved 2003	LWT	LA, EN, EA, GLA
2.2 Maintain updated Advice Note and disseminate as required	Ongoing	LWT	LA, EN, EA, GLA
2.3 Promote the black redstart website	Ongoing	LBP	BRWG, LWT
2.4 Commission and complete PhD (beginning 2003) studying brownfield invertebrate life to increase current knowledge of black redstart food sources	2006	LWT	Royal Holloway, BW, Livingroofs.org
2.5 Promote results of PhD research to appropriate audiences to encourage the creation of specific landscape schemes in new developments and key locations	2006	LWT	LA, BTCV, LLP, EN, EA, Royal Holloway University of London, Livingroofs.org
2.6 Assimilate annual black redstart research, determine habitat requirements in urban areas, and disseminate knowledge to relevant parties including developers and planners	Annually	LWT	GLA, Royal Holloway University of London
2.7 Monitor where mitigation is being provided for within development schemes in the key areas for black redstarts wherever possible	Ongoing	LWT	GLA, EA, EN, BRWG

Relevant Action Plans

London Plans

Tidal Thames; Wasteland, Built Structures.

National Plans

Urban Habitat Statement.

Key References

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Abbreviations

BRWG - Black Redstart Working Group

BTCV - British Trust for Conservation
Volunteers

BTO - British Trust for Ornithology

BW - British Waterways

EA - Environment Agency

EN - English Nature

GLA - Greater London Authority

LA - Local Authorities

LWT - London Wildlife Trust

LLP - Lower Lea Project

LNHS - London Natural History Society

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