



**SONGBIRD  
SURVIVAL**



SAVING SONGBIRDS WITH SCIENCE

Tel: 01379 641715

[www.songbird-survival.org.uk](http://www.songbird-survival.org.uk)

Charity No: 1085281

# The Dawn Chorus

## Spring / Summer 2021

**Your  
Voice  
For  
Songbirds**

**CATS & THEIR OWNERS**  
Research update P14

**WHAT'S NEXT FOR SBS**  
Our new strategy P12

## Chairman's Notes

If anything good has come out of the covid pandemic, it has been the increased appreciation and awareness of the wildlife that surrounds us and especially of garden and songbirds. These birds have demonstrated that the public do value their presence and the companionship and comfort which they have brought to so many in the darkest times. Now that the public have rediscovered birds it is up to all of us to ensure that they remain an integral part of everybody's lives and are not forgotten once life returns to normal.

In the last Newsletter our Chairman, Tom Streeter, paid tribute to his predecessor and retiring trustees. Sadly, I now find myself paying tribute to Tom, who has stood down, due to ill health. In the two years that he was Chairman, Tom made his mark on the charity through his energy and impartial attitude, not to mention his dedication and enthusiasm for SongBird Survival. It is thanks to Tom that we now have professional PR consultants to raise the profile of the charity, and already their efforts are bearing fruit as a result of increased media exposure.

Another very positive step has been the recent appointment of our new CEO, Susan Morgan, who comes with a wealth of experience in the charity world. Susan brings a dynamic, new approach to our world and is

keen to extend our reach to members and make contact with as many of you as possible. We have also welcomed recently a new trustee, Peter Roberts, who lives in Yorkshire. Peter is an intrepid entrepreneur who has had a very successful career in the leisure industry. He is also a very knowledgeable and passionate countryman as well as being an ardent tree specialist/ gardener. Both Susan and Peter will add to the strength of our existing team, but we would always welcome anybody else who feels that they could make a positive contribution, either as a member or as a trustee.

Despite lockdown we have continued to sponsor vitally important scientific research, the latest paper coming from Exeter University who have made some startling discoveries about cat behaviour as a result of the type of food they are given as well as the amount of time that should be devoted to playing with them. You can read all about this research on page 4.

Last year we instigated a highly successful fundraising campaign, which so many of you supported in an amazing way. Thanks to your continuing

generosity and pledges the charity finds itself in a sound financial position, but we must never let complacency take over, particularly as we look forward to a bright new era for the charity, and for this reason we will be looking at ways of keeping funds permanently topped up.

Thank you all for your continuing support in what has not been an easy time, but all of us at SongBird Survival remain passionately committed to playing our part in helping garden and songbirds throughout the country. If you feel that there is anything in particular which you can do to help the charity, whether through ideas, fundraising or bird activities, we would love to hear from you.



Colin Strang Steel



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### SBS Membership

Individual	£24
Family	£35
Corporate	£150
Life	£500

Discount available for Direct Debit  
Please contact us if you would like to Join

## Spotlight On

# YELLOWHAMMER



Status: **RED** (since 2002)

Long term trend: **Rapid decline**

Av. % change (51 yrs): **-69%**

Av. % change (10 yrs): **-11%**

Yellowhammers are birds of open countryside, most often found in agricultural and wooded areas. They are present across much of Britain, making them one of the most familiar farmland species. Typically they are associated with hedgerows, where suitable song posts are available and are much less common on high ground.



Data from [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)



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The yellowhammer is a member of the Bunting family and is one of the brightest coloured of our native birds. Being polymorphic, they have several different plumages. The male has the most colourful feathers in the breeding season featuring bright yellow colouring on their heads, which can also cover most of the body. The birds' underparts have a dark-streaked red-brown coloured and is another feature well worth looking out for. During the winter months, the plumage is more subdued, but the yellow can still be seen on the head, under the bill and below the cheeks. Females and young, however, are duller in colour and are somewhat brown-looking birds often with only a hint of yellow.

Female yellowhammers will begin to build their nests in early April. Nests are usually placed low on the ground, among hedgerows or woodland fringes and contain a mixture of different building materials, such as plant matter, dry grass, stalks and leaves. The lining is typically comprised of fine grass and animal hair. Small clutches of eggs, typically three to four, will be laid between mid-April and July. These beautiful smooth glossy eggs can vary in colour from light blue to a reddish-brown. The surface is covered by a fine, ink-like squiggle, earning this bird another traditional name: the "scribble Lark".



The stunning yellowhammer sings his song in the heat of the summer afternoon, a cheerful repetitive song that is easy to learn and one that will help you to easily identify him. The song will attract your attention, it's made up of short, quick repetitive notes that sound like the bird is saying "a little bit of bread and no Cheese". He will usually sing from an exposed perch, such as a fence post or wire, or a bush top or open branch.

The yellowhammer's song has apparently been an influential factor in Beethoven's writing of the powerful four-note opening motif in his incredible 5th Symphony (as everyone knows: short-short-short-long). Accordingly, the yellowhammer "theme" was used in two piano concertos, No. 21 in C major and No. 23 in F minor.



Females choose a mating partner based on his songs. Males with the biggest repertoire of songs have the greatest chances of finding a mating partner!

# Cats and their owners

## Research Update

The fantastic team at the University of Exeter has not stopped throughout 2020-21 and has had yet another amazing paper published from the project SBS funded.

This paper demonstrates, for the first time, that cat owners can do something effective to help reduce hunting by their cats – a real win-win solution which is fun for both cat and owner!

### Top tips to save UK wildlife:

1. **Play with cats for 5 to 10 minutes each day**
2. **Feed cats a meat protein-rich diet (vs protein from non-meat sources)**
3. **Fit cats with a BirdsBeSafe® collar cover to protect birds from cats**

Until now, previous solutions to the hunting of mammals and birds by cats were controversial, with many owners finding the idea of restricting their cat's freedom unacceptable. However, this paper, in the journal *Current Biology*, suggests three simple solutions. Making these non-disruptive changes can have a substantial impact on cats' hunting behaviours, and therefore, a significant positive impact on the safety of our wildlife.

The publication follows on from the last paper, published in September 2020 and highlighted in our Autumn/Winter issue of *Dawn Chorus*, which revealed there are 5 'types' of cat owner in terms of their views on hunting behaviours.

Given that **4 of the 5 types** of cat owner viewed **cat hunting negatively**, this new research suggests that the majority will be interested in learning easy ways to reduce predation, as demonstrated by this latest paper.

Your amazing PR team pulled out all the stops with these latest papers and your charity has been featured in the press, TV, radio and online all over the world to try and help educate cat owners about the simple steps they can take to help improve the lives of their pets as well as birds and other wildlife.

Keep an eye out for even more news from this exciting project in the months to come as we expect at least one more paper to be published soon. None of this work would have been possible without your fantastic support and we want to thank you all so much for making this possible.

George Bradley, Spokesperson for SongBird Survival, notes, "This latest study we have funded, thanks to generous donations from our supporters, is excellent news for birds. The data shows that cat owners like me can make a few small and easy steps to really improve the health and happiness of our pets, as well as making a really big difference for all of our wildlife, especially our beloved songbirds. Making these easy-to-implement changes will be a win-win for birds, cats and cat owners. There's nothing to hold us back."

**Does YOUR cat hunt?**

Two simple steps to reduce hunting behaviours...

Love nature, love your cat - a win-win for all!  
#NurtureYourCatsNature  
#TenMinsPlayADay

Over 24% of UK adults own a cat.<sup>1</sup>

Domestic cats kill millions of small birds per year<sup>2</sup>

Songbirds have fallen by approx. 50% over the last 50 years!<sup>3</sup>

1. **PLAY**  
5-10 minutes of daily play led to a 25% fall in the number of prey captured.\*

2. **DIET**  
Feed premium, meat-rich food (protein from meat instead of plant sources) reduced number of prey brought home by 36%.\*

Alternatively, fit your cat with a BirdsBeSafe® collar cover reduced the number of birds captured by 42%.\*

University of Exeter study shows that owners can **REDUCE** cats' wildlife hunting behaviours without restricting their **FREEDOM**.

SONGBIRD SURVIVAL  
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If you would like a copy of any of our 15 research papers published so far – they can be downloaded at: [www.songbird-survival.org.uk/scientific-publications](http://www.songbird-survival.org.uk/scientific-publications). Or contact us on 01379 641715 to request a copy in the post.

## SBS sponsors another Doctor

*Martina Cecchetti, the PhD student who put in so much work on this study, alongside Dr Sarah Crowley and Prof. Robbie McDonald on the Exeter team has recently achieved her full doctorate for her work on this study.*

Martina adds her new qualification to her BSc Biological Sciences from the University of Perugia and MSc Evolution of Animal and Human Behaviour from the University of Turin.

Previously she has worked as a fieldworker with Ornithologica, a not-for-profit association of independent researchers based in Rome. Here she studied the effect of free-roaming cats on shearwaters on Linosa Island, in collaboration with University of Palermo. She also worked as a radar specialist for raptor migration on the Strait of Messina. Martina's research interests include wildlife conservation, animal welfare and the impacts of invasive species on island endemics. She has now returned to live in Italy with her beloved cat, Menni.

***This makes Martina the 3<sup>rd</sup> Doctor SBS has funded with your help – further advancing the education and science of birds and the factors which affect them.***



## A new book by long-time supporter of Songbird Survival, Charlie Corbett, explores mental health and his re-connection with the natural world through the lens of 12 songbirds.

### 12 Birds To Save Your Life: nature's lessons on happiness

Slated for hardback publication on 10th June 2021, 12 Birds to Save Your Life: nature's lessons on happiness is billed as "a profound exploration of grief, life and of being human", drawing on the author's own struggles with grief and depression. World rights were bought by PMJ's non-fiction publisher Charlotte Hardman from Gordon Wise at Curtis Brown.

Corbett, who most recently set up his own communications consultancy, Bullfinch Media, previously pursued a 20-year career in financial journalism. However he remains, at heart, "a country boy", according to PMJ, hailing from a family of livestock and arable farmers with his childhood divided between farms on the downs of Hampshire and the Isle of Mull.

In the book, Corbett writes about the comfort that a simple decision to reconnect with the natural world brought. "When Charlie first started to learn about songbirds, from solitary skylarks to squabbling sparrows, he realised that these characterful creatures have much to teach us about life, happiness and acceptance," reads the book's description.

Hardman said she fell in love with the book as soon as she read the proposal. "When life was unexpectedly put on hold earlier this year and lockdown kicked in, one of the few pleasures to be found from the quietness was our engagement with nature. Suddenly birdsong seemed to come to the fore," she said. "In Charlie's beautiful book he celebrates birds and their place in the natural world whilst weaving throughout a thread of his own personal story of overcoming grief. As he talks of the ebb and flow of the seasons and his own story of adapting to the sudden loss of his mother, Charlie inspires us to go outside, pause and listen."

Corbett said: "I wanted to write a book about birds that had genuine meaning for people. To move away from the abstract science of the guidebooks and embed birds, and other wildlife, into the context of people's real lives. Reconnecting with the birds around me didn't just help me to cope with a personal tragedy, it still helps me every day. By moving more with the rhythms of the natural world around me, I become grounded. I gain perspective. These 12 birds taught me there was a whole dimension to my life that I had ignored for too long. We all have. And by re-establishing this severed connection with our natural environment, my book will show how people can become better able to deal with the stress, uncertainty and anxiety that comes with modern living."

Pre-order your copy today at <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/Birds-Save-Your-Life-Happiness/dp/0241503337/>

### 12 Birds To Save Your Life nature's lessons on happiness



CHARLIE CORBETT

# Species Trends Headlines & Highlights

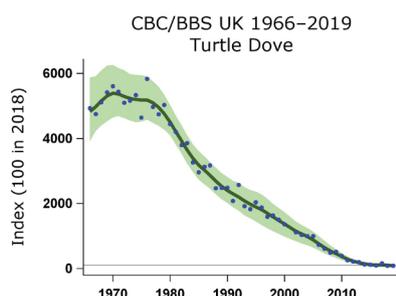
Trends of numbers of the most hard hit songbirds assessed in the annual BTO bird trends study continue to make sobering reading. Nearly all twenty-four red listed species have become considerably more scarce in the last ten years according to the latest publication from BTO.

## Red Status

### Top 3 rapid decline % 1967-2018

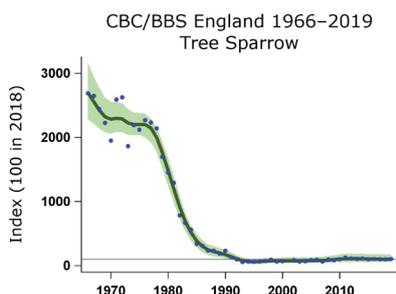
#### Turtle Dove – numbers down by 98%

Turtle dove numbers have dropped critically, and the species now faces the risk of extinction. A migratory bird, it can be found in lowland areas of Wales and the south of England.



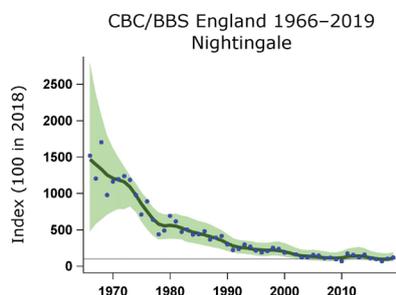
#### Tree Sparrow – numbers down by 96%

Rapid decline of tree sparrows until the mid 90's led to the current extremely low numbers. It's slightly larger relation, the house sparrow also follows this trend. The main population can be found across the Midlands, Eastern & Southern England.



#### Nightingale: Numbers down by 93%

With its beautiful distinctive song, the rapid decline of the nightingale is a sad loss in the UK. If you are very lucky you may get to hear one in the South East in May and June.



Looking more widely at the green listed species, we must be ever vigilant that green does not necessarily mean safe. Common favourites such as the blackbird, are green listed but numbers have declined by 15% in fifty years. Blue tits have increased by 26% in this period, which sounds positive. However, in the last ten years they have stayed the same, and numbers are down by 3% in the last five years in a worrying more recent trend.

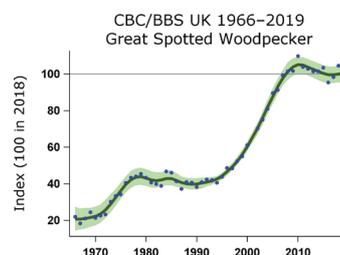
There is also good news! Although in the minority, there are songbird species which are faring well in the long term trends. These include some regular garden visitors such as Goldfinch (+134%), Wren (+109%) and Long Tailed Tit (+108%).

## Green status

### Top 3 increase % 1967-2018

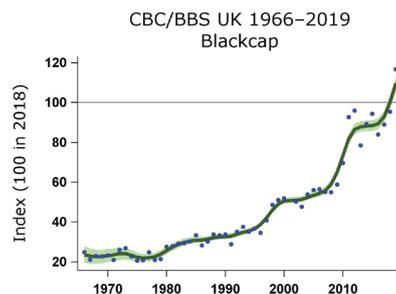
#### Great Spotted Woodpecker: Numbers up 387%

Since the mid 1990's, this species has been thriving in UK woodland, nesting in chiselled out tree cavities. In spring, listen out for them drumming on trees to establish territory. Woodpeckers can peck up to 20 times per second, sometimes getting into the region of 8,000-12,000 a day!



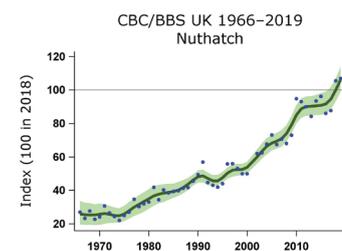
#### Blackcap: Numbers up 338%

The rate of increase of the blackcap has grown, with numbers up 181% in the last ten years. Historically a summer visitor, but some German birds have now adapted to staying over winter. Listen out for its beautiful varied song which has led to it being called a 'mock nightingale'.



#### Nuthatch: Numbers up 293%

Numbers have been rising steadily with a sharp increase of 115% in the last ten years. You may spot them climbing up and down the bark of trees to find insects, but they can also visit hanging garden feeders liking peanuts, mixed seeds, suet treats and sunflower hearts



Source for data and charts: BTO/JNCC BirdTrends Report

# CEO Column

**M**y first three months, since I joined at the end of January have been a whirlwind of meeting trustees, getting to know the staff team and finding out all about the wonderful research that our partners are carrying out. Of course, this has all been by the power of video technology and it has certainly enabled me to cover a lot of virtual ground very quickly. As restrictions lift I am very much looking forward to getting out and about in person and I'm really looking forward to meeting as many supporters and members as I can.

Like many of us, spring is my favourite season, with the longer days and the promise of new life and better things to come. This seems even more pertinent this year, and rather than a New Year resolution, I have made a spring pledge to myself, to continue to make more time to connect with nature and do more to protect our native wildlife. In May, I've decided to walk at least 5,000 steps each morning before I start work in my garden office; a perfect way to listen to the Dawn Chorus (and by sharing my commitment with you, it'll inspire me to keep going). April's project was planting a flower bed with bird and bee friendly plants and creating a wild lawn. I'll let you know how it goes.

I have joined SongBird after what has been a very challenging time for the organisation. At the start of the pandemic, the trustees and staff made some difficult but vital decisions, which have ensured we are still here to continue as the voice for song birds. It has been tough, with the office closing, all staff except George on furlough and the postponement of our planned research project into grey squirrel nest predation. I am incredibly grateful to you all for your loyalty and continuing support throughout the long months of 2020. Without your generosity and commitment to the Future Appeal we may not have been in a position to get things moving again. But we are emerging from that difficult period and I can already see there is a wonderful foundation on which to build and grow in the future.

The statistics of song bird decline for many species makes for depressing reading. The need for robust, quality scientific research to identify and quantify the causes, and suggest solutions, is as important as ever. I am committed to ensuring that our research programme will thrive and grow, and that we will commission projects which have the potential to make a real and positive impact on bird populations. Research is



Susan Morgan

understandably expensive and needs significant funding. A priority for me in my new role is to proactively reach out to new audiences of supporters to join our community. I believe many people recognise the vital and essential role of the beautiful birds in our ecosystem, and will want to join us in our efforts to protect them.

I am certainly looking forward to this challenge and am here to listen to your ideas and suggestions as we move into spring and summer.

Email

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Twitter [@yorksue](https://twitter.com/yorksue)



# Spotlight On GOLDFINCH

Status: **GREEN**  
 Long term trend: **Rapid increase**  
 Av. % change (51 yrs): **+134%**  
 Av. % change (10 yrs): **+60%**

Data from [www.bto.org/birdtrends](http://www.bto.org/birdtrends)



Adult goldfinches have a distinctive red face with a black cap and black around the eyes. The wings are dark with a striking yellow flash on the underside, and the goldfinch's breast is a light brown-grey. It is a small species, usually being slightly smaller than a robin. Most goldfinches are resident in the UK, but some will leave for the winter, travelling as far south as Spain.

The Irish name for the goldfinch is lasair choille, which translates as 'flame of the forest'. Elsewhere it has been known as the 'proud tailor', for its wonderful patchwork appearance.



The gold on the goldfinch's wings gives the bird connotations of wealth and prosperity. Gold was believed by early civilisations to hold curative properties, and thus the goldfinch has also become a symbol of health and a protection against illness.

The collective name for goldfinches, a charm, is derived from the old English c'irm, describing the birds' twittering song. This song and the colourful plumage has been valued for many years - 19<sup>th</sup> century trappers caught and caged goldfinches almost to extinction.

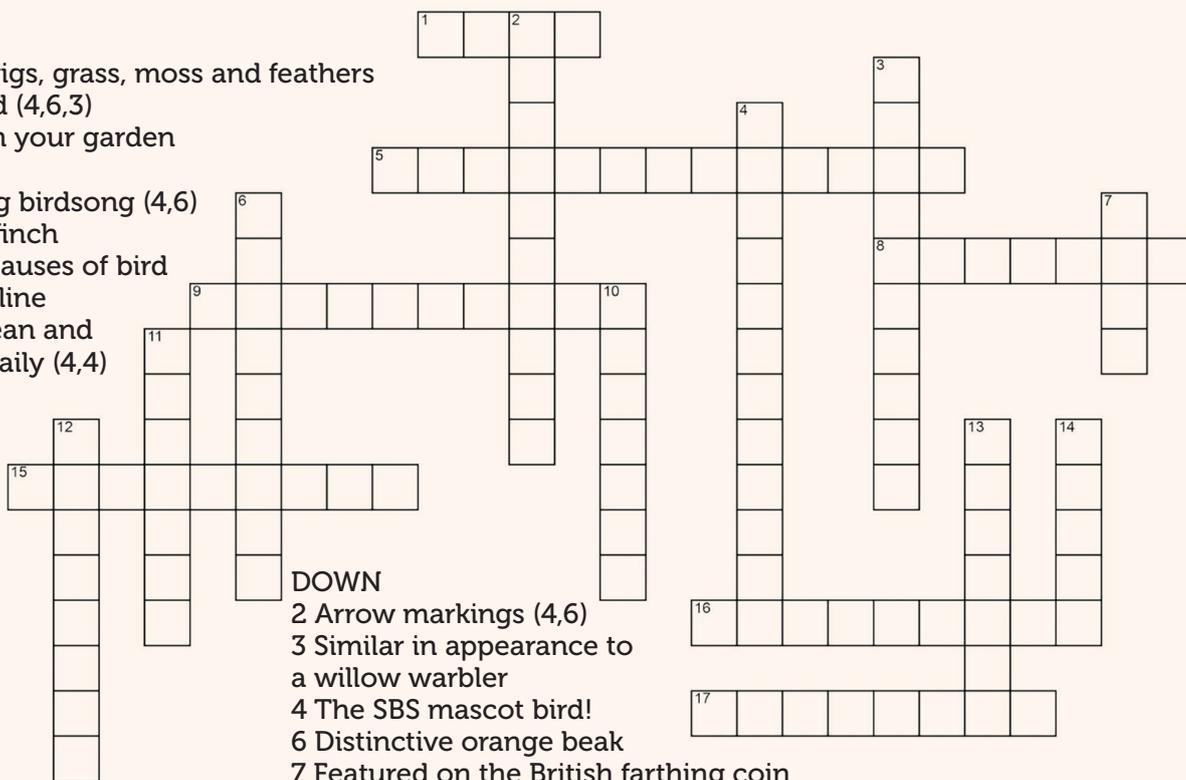


Recent trends have been more positive and goldfinches are a popular visitor to many gardens across the UK using its fine beak to extract seeds from plants.

## Quick Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 Made with twigs, grass, moss and feathers
- 5 "Lollipop" bird (4,6,3)
- 8 Hang these in your garden to attract birds
- 9 Early morning birdsong (4,6)
- 15 The largest finch
- 16 One of the causes of bird number decline
- 17 Keep this clean and topped up daily (4,4)



### DOWN

- 2 Arrow markings (4,6)
- 3 Similar in appearance to a willow warbler
- 4 The SBS mascot bird!
- 6 Distinctive orange beak
- 7 Featured on the British farthing coin
- 10 Two varieties of this bird
- 11 Feed on the wing
- 12 Walks up and down trees
- 13 Most threatened category of bird (3,4)
- 14 "Seasonal" bird

Answers on page 19

# Top tips to help your garden birds this Spring/Summer

**There is a lot you can do to make your garden a nurturing and appealing environment for songbirds and this will also benefit other wildlife.**

## Fill your garden with native plants

Plant a wide variety of native flowers and shrubs, not only do they provide great nesting sites and coverage, but birds will feed on the plants themselves, and the more varieties you introduce, the more species of insect they will attract, another great food source for the birds!



## Offer a variety of feed

Buy bird food from reputable sources. This ensures that the seeds can provide the required levels of energy and have been grown with the environment in mind. Experiment with different sorts of feeders and seed mixes. For example, greenfinches adore sunflower feeders whilst goldfinches prefer niger seeds. Adjust feed according to climate. In Spring, supplement dry feed with nutritious fresh fruit – apples, oranges, grape halves and



banana slices are all appreciated this time of year. During very hot weather when the ground becomes hard, add mealworms or buggie nibbles for your ground feeding birds

## Water



Keep birdbaths clean and topped up regularly with fresh water. During warmer months your birdbath is a vital water source and may need changing and topping up several times a day as it gets used more often in for bathing and cooling down!

## Feeder position



Reduce the opportunities for predators like cats and sparrowhawks by placing feeders where the birds can spot danger easily. Position feeders and birdbaths at least 2m away from low cover and fences, and with a lookout point to warn the birds and allow them to escape if disturbed!

## Make your windows bird-safe

The bright glare of the sun can cause confusion and make the likelihood of a collision even



more likely during brighter months. Windows may appear invisible to birds, or reflect an inviting vista of trees. Help to avoid collisions by putting stickers or decorations (or bird feeders!) on your windows.

## Your lawn

If you have space, allow a patch to turn into meadow, alternatively, just avoid cutting as much as possible! This provides a home for insects, worms and bugs which in turn will attract the birds and provide a source of food. Avoid using pesticides and herbicides which can unintentionally have deadly consequences for birds.



**If you would like to find out more about what you can do to help birds in your garden, ask for a copy of our Gardening for Birds and Wildlife leaflet by emailing [dawn-chorus@songbird-survival.org.uk](mailto:dawn-chorus@songbird-survival.org.uk)**

# WHY DO THE BIRDS SING?



**W**hen the cars and background noise stopped in spring 2020, the volume dial of birdsong was effectively turned up. We took time to embrace nature and to value the benefits it brings. It is tragic that it took a global pandemic to achieve this, but gives us a wonderful opportunity to rethink how we interact with our environment and to marvel at the positive experience our birds bring for us. For many, it was the first time they had really paused and listened to the wonder of the dawn chorus and asked questions why and how this phenomenon happens.

The dawn chorus heralds the start of a new day and is a time for songbirds to embrace their inner performer and quite simply show off! As the days grow warmer and longer, our feathered friends grow noisier, singing their hearts out as the soundtrack to the natural world. The song can have a number of purposes including recognition attracting a mate or defending a breeding territory.

At times, it may be hard to love the sounds outside your window when you are awakened at 4am, but the cacophony of chirps and tweets melded together into a complex song, spell out the sitcom of life in the passerine world. It really is an incredible achievement for such small creatures.

Birds start singing at different times, with the best time to listen around half an hour before and after sunrise. The song thrush is often first followed by blackbirds, wrens and robins, who will start to sing well before the sun rises. At this time of day, sound travels much farther than when there is more background noise and there is often less wind. This enables the birds to hit the mark with their quest for territory or attracting a mate. It's also too early to gather food in the dim light, so a perfect use of time!

Each species has at least one signature song, with some having a repertoire of up to five tunes. The songs have to be learned and it is a vital lesson as those which sing the wrong tune, may have less success finding a mate.

Similar to how humans make their first ventures into speech, young birds listen to their elders and test out short bursts of song. If it doesn't sound quite right, they will adapt and try again. For some species it is critical to learn the song at only a few months old but for others, new songs are learned throughout their life.

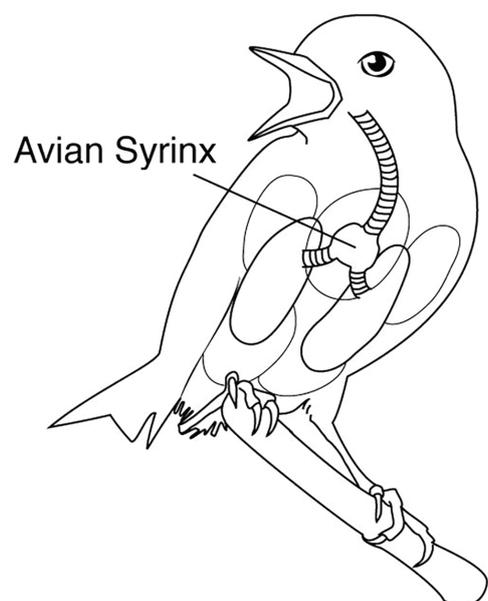
## How do birds sing?

The unique nature of birdsong is due to an organ called the syrinx buried

deep in the chest cavity, and sited just above where the larynx splits into the two windpipes which connect each lung. The syrinx, was named in 1872 after a Greek nymph who was transformed into panpipes, as it

has a similar structure: Uniquely, the syrinx enables two unrelated pitches to be created at once, which means those beautiful complex songs are possible.

In these spring and early summer months, take time to listen to your local vocalists and have a try at working out who is hogging the airwaves. Head over to our website for recordings of birdsong which will help you know the performer of the tunes you are hearing.



TecumsehFitch, CC BY-SA 4.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

# Get Involved

**T**here are so many ways you can get involved to help fund our vital research. We just cannot do it without you. A few ideas are listed here, and we would love to hear your suggestions and other ideas for how you would like to show your support.

## Challenge Yourself

Set yourself a challenge and get sponsored. We can provide a sponsor form or download one from our website. How about setting a target of walking 5,000 or 10,000 steps a day for a month?

## Birthday Fundraiser

Ask your friends and family to donate in lieu of birthday gifts. You could set this up online with a fundraising page on Just Giving or Facebook via our SongBird Survival Facebook page.

## Join our Facebook Supporters Group

Find our group on our Facebook page and join to chat to like-minded supporters and others who want to protect the future of UK songbirds.

## Hold a coffee and cake morning

A perfect excuse to invite round those people you haven't been able to see for months when restrictions are lifted. Ask for donations and help us raise funds. We can provide posters and leaflets and advice – email [dawn-chorus@songbird-survival.org.uk](mailto:dawn-chorus@songbird-survival.org.uk)

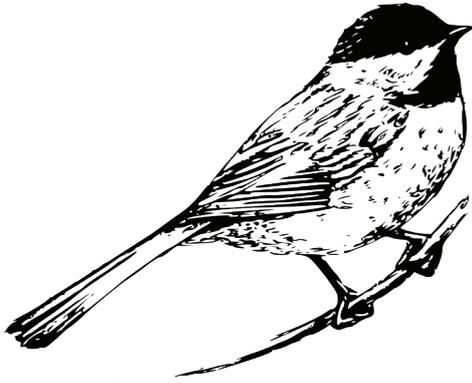


*Save the soundtrack of nature with a gift in your Will*

Leaving a legacy is your opportunity to continue to make a difference on the world you leave behind and to stay a part of our mission to save UK songbirds. It will make a real difference; enabling us to fund more crucial research and pinpoint the changes we must make to keep the music alive.

For more information on how to leave a gift, or find out about our free will service go to [songbird-survival.org.uk/legacy](http://songbird-survival.org.uk/legacy) or call George on 01379 641715

A photograph of a small brown bird perched on a branch, singing. The bird is the central focus of the image, with its beak open as if in the middle of a song. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting. The photo is presented as if it's a physical print with a white border and a small piece of tape at the top.



# OUR STRATEGY FOR SONGBIRDS

**S**ongBird Survival will be 21 years old in 2021, having been set up by a group of individuals concerned about the alarming decline in UK songbird numbers since the 1970s. They set out to fund science to identify why this was happening, and thus help prevent it.

Sadly, our job is far from done. Extinction remains a real threat for some bird species which have been part of our landscape and heritage for centuries. The biodiversity crisis is not unique to our shores: a million species around the world are at risk, leading the United Nations in 2020 to set an annual target of keeping the number of plant or animal species that go extinct to just twenty. Arguably, this is an impossible task.

A seemingly insurmountable number of threats face UK songbirds. Yet, by finding ways

to relieve these threats, and cascading the knowledge, we can make a positive impact.

To enable us to achieve this, this new strategy will guide our research and work in the next few years.

The strategy recognises that songbirds can only thrive if the 'three legs of the conservation stool' - food, habitat and predation - are balanced. The science that you support us to fund, addresses all three.

## Principles

The charity's vision is to see a resilient and balanced UK songbird (and other small bird) population, sustained through sound management strategies. Our aim is to fuel such strategies (plus the policies and laws that encourage them) with top quality scientific findings.

Whilst we are a small charity compared to the likes of the RSPB and the BTO, we nonetheless

listen, and by the same token, we wish to reach and influence a range of audiences including the public, landowners and farmers, other NGO's and policy makers. To have an impact.

We believe that the results of the independent scientific studies we fund -if acted upon - can be used to have a positive impact on songbird numbers, but we must be realistic about the wide range of inextricably linked factors at play. It is hard to separate them, but we will prioritise research which fills knowledge gaps, and which has the potential to make the most positive difference.

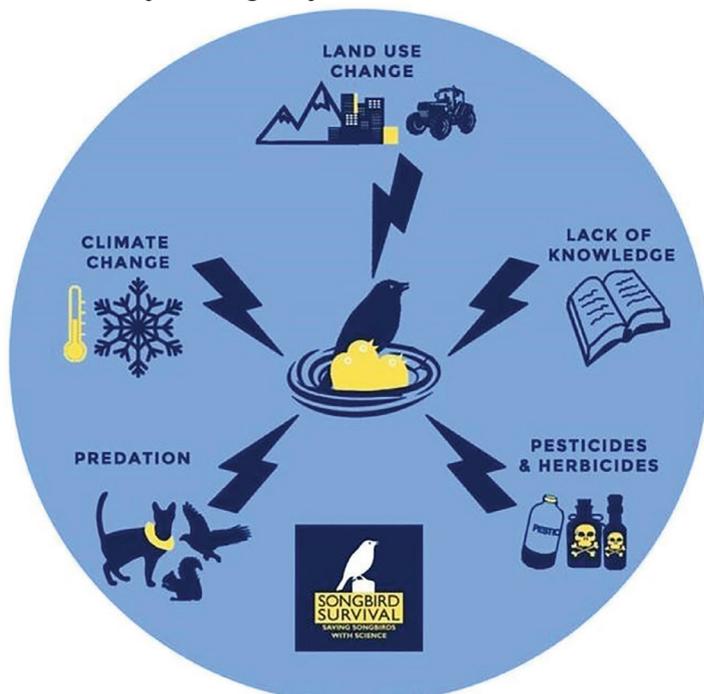
## What this means in practice?

### Targeted Scientific Research – Habitat, Food and Predation

There is no more complex system than the natural environment. Reducing the number of one species, intentionally or otherwise, will always have a knock-on effect on others. This complexity makes long-term decision-making extremely hard.

No individual or group can provide the 'perfect' ecological balance, alone: it is incumbent on us as the dominant species to do good research, listen and collaborate with those who can help support songbird populations in the UK.

In the past, we were known to focus narrowly on predation when few other organisations were prepared to, for fear of 'ruffling feathers' or alienating potential donors. Yet, even the most initially cautious



or sceptical about the need for predator control, such as naturalist and broadcaster, Mary Colwell, have been persuaded by our findings that control of certain predators is essential to achieve a healthy balance of species. We now live in what many see as a 'squeamish' and sanitised society where death is 'taboo'. Despite this, we are one of the only charities that stands by the need to fund top quality scientific research into the effects of predation on songbird populations to understand the 50% decline in 50 years.

Our current project is looking at whether use of modern pesticides is contributing to the ongoing decline of farmland birds through the impact on their food sources. You can find out more about this on Page 14.

We are also looking at how habitat changes are affecting our bird populations. As we develop our detailed research objectives during the next year, we will be scoping the opportunities for gaps in knowledge and projects which may provide evidence which can be used to influence and lobby for change.

#### Changing mind-sets, cascading the science

The most effective way to change attitudes and behaviours is to harness peer-to-peer recommendation: we will encourage the scientists we engage to go out to influence other scientists, as well as policy-makers.

Studies around the world show that people with the closest connections to nature are those keenest to protect it. Yet, birdsong can be heard even in the most barren of concrete jungles. We must therefore educate and use influential figures to entice new generations in both town and countryside to appreciate birdsong: only they can safeguard our dawn chorus

for future generations to come.

We will continue to build a rich programme of social media content to entice new, younger audiences, and keep older ones interested. This will build up the SBS story and 'brand' consistently



to remind audiences of our mission, vision, and the fact we have our 'fingers on the pulse.'

Our investment in media outreach about our research will also enable us to be part of wider debates about conservation, nature, wildlife, wilding, farming, environmental sustainability, and so on.

#### Education and a pledge for action

Good science is the touchstone on which decisions are made by government, but it also filters down to all levels of decision – such as where to position a bird feeder, how wide a verge to leave unmown, or whether to let a cat out at night to go hunting. We will provide educational information to guide and inform better choices which benefit song birds.

Examples of this include

- Providing the public with advice
- Educating children how to identify and support songbirds.
- Urging local councils and politicians to create bird-friendly environments

- Supporting local farmers by respecting environmental schemes.
- Encouraging supporters and members to tell friends and family how serious the threat to songbirds is
- Predation – this issue is so often avoided, yet must be addressed.

We will educate and raise awareness that predator control has to become an accepted part of wildlife management.

As we reshape and affect their natural habitat, we must implement simple steps to help reverse the decline. We recognise that the public must play their part in helping to keep the dawn chorus alive. Wildlife conservation must involve us all, and small steps can have a great effect. We must encourage them to make a pledge to create a new way for us to reverse the decline.

#### Influencing policy

Post Brexit, the UK faces the biggest shift in agricultural and environmental policy in a generation. This will see a move away from payment to farmers purely for the food they produce - to being paid public money for public goods, which include wildlife. As such, the charity will take this opportunity to influence these policies by 'lobbying' on behalf of songbirds.

The strategy was developed with consultation from a range of stakeholders from different professions. The trustees and staff are now working hard to deliver the strategy through workable plans and action and this can only be made possible with your support. We want to hear your views and if you would be interested to read the full copy of the strategy document or have any questions, please email [susan@songbird-survival.org.uk](mailto:susan@songbird-survival.org.uk)

# Pesticides and potential impacts to songbirds

## Research update

**During 2020 the Sussex University research team have been making great progress with the three year project to investigate the role which pesticides may play in the decline of the UK songbird population.**

**S**everal strands of research are underway to help understand the impact of the pesticides led by Professor Dave Goulson with Priyasha Vijendar and Cannelle Tassin de Montaigu conducting the research as PhD students.



Luckily, fieldwork could take place in autumn 2020 enabling monitoring bird consumption of uncovered pesticide coated seeds during the drilling season. Cannelle was able to use camera trapping technology and direct observation to identify which species were eating the seeds and will now analyse the seed dressings and calculate the levels of toxicity which the birds were subjected to. Also well underway is the study to model spatial and temporal patterns of population change in seed eating birds to see if they are predicted by patterns of pesticide use.

[If you take part in the BTO annual garden birdwatch you may well have contributed to the research.](#)

People were asked about pesticide use in their gardens alongside the bird count and analysis of this will see whether domestic use of pesticides in the garden and on pets predicts populations of insectivorous birds.

**The findings of each stage of the project will be published over the next two years and we will keep members updated via Dawn Chorus and your monthly e-news.**



### MEET THE RESEARCHER

#### Cannelle Tassin de Montaigu



**Like a lot of children, I wanted to be a vet. But, one day, I saw a documentary about Jane Goodall and her relationship with wild chimpanzees, it completely changed my perspective on nature. I realised that I was not just interested in animals, but their behaviour, their physiology, how they evolved to be the best version for their environment and most importantly how to protect wildlife. I pursued a career in research early on, and through internships and volunteer projects it confirmed my interests in conservation ecology and ecotoxicology.**

**Follow Cannelle on twitter for updates on her work @CannelleTassin**

# Defra & Government News

## George Eustice's speech:

[www.songbirdsos.org/genfu21](http://www.songbirdsos.org/genfu21)

The Government has set out the way forward for farming and the natural environment post-Brexit, in a series of recent speeches and news announcements: Environment Secretary, George Eustice, at the NFU Conference in February announced, "the centrepiece of our future policy will be made up of three parts; the Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery, and Landscape Recovery."



Environment secretary  
George Eustice with  
George Bradley

## Sustainable Farming Incentive:

[www.songbirdsos.org/SFS0321](http://www.songbirdsos.org/SFS0321)

In March, details of the pilot of the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme were published. The details of the Local Nature Recovery and the Landscape Recovery Schemes, to work side by side with this, will be published later this year. The three schemes will reward farmers and land managers for producing public goods like biodiversity, cleaner water, cleaner air, improving soil, and carbon reduction on their land. They will help our farmers, foresters and other land managers play a crucial role in the national effort to tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions.

The Scheme will support approaches to farming that deliver for the environment, such as actions to improve soil health, hedgerows and integrated pest management. For example, a farmer might be paid to manage and plant hedgerows to provide year-round food, shelter and breeding cover for birds and insects, or take actions to boost the levels of organic matter in soils.

Roll-out of the Sustainable Farming Incentive



## Countryside Stewardship:

[www.songbirdsos.org/CSapply](http://www.songbirdsos.org/CSapply)

In February, Defra announced farmers and land managers are being encouraged to apply for Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements to help them protect and improve the natural environment. Through CS, farmers can apply for funding to improve their local environment – from restoring wildlife habitats and creating woodlands to managing flood risk. Following close working with industry, changes have been made to the scheme this year to broaden out the options available and make it easier to apply. CS will eventually be replaced with the new Environmental Land Management scheme and by entering an agreement now, farmers will be best-placed to benefit from the new agricultural policy once it is fully rolled out in 2024.

## Government Promise

Environmental organisations have called for the Government to enshrine its promise to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 in law. Read in full at:

[www.songbirdsos.org/30by2030](http://www.songbirdsos.org/30by2030)

## General licences

The new 2021 licences were announced in November 2020. Make sure you are fully up to date with the new rules and restrictions at: [www.songbirdsos.org/GL4021](http://www.songbirdsos.org/GL4021)

## Glue-Trapping

The European Court of Justice has banned the controversial practice of glue-trapping to catch songbirds in France, saying the fact this method was traditional, did not mean it was acceptable. Read in full at:

[www.songbirdsos.org/glue](http://www.songbirdsos.org/glue)

## Neonicotinoid Use

The Government gave emergency authorisation for farmers to use a neonicotinoid earlier this year - but in March, after cold weather killed off the target virus-transmitting aphids, said the chemical was no longer needed – see:

[www.songbirdsos.org/neoU](http://www.songbirdsos.org/neoU)

**If you would like more details of any of the news above and don't have access to the internet, please call us on 01379 641715 and we will be happy to post any articles which you ask for.**



# Supporter Spotlight

**I**t's been a tough year for fundraising, with most events being cancelled or postponed due to Covid restrictions, so we are super grateful to our supporters on Facebook who set up fundraisers to support us!

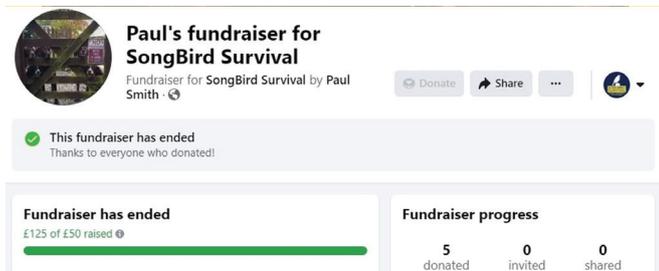
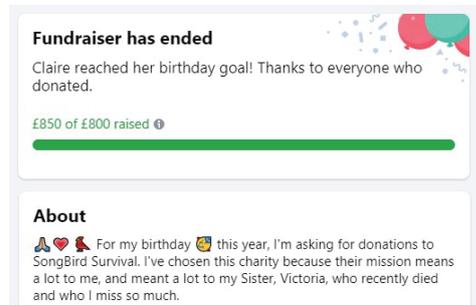
A big thank you from all the SBS team to;

Claire Penny who raised a staggering £850 in memory of her late sister Victoria

Sarah Norris with her £220 raised for her BIG birthday!

Paul Smith who raised £125

Libby Adam who raised £130



## Thank you to all our Facebook fundraisers!

If you would like find out how easy it is to set up a Facebook fundraising page, it's very simple, just visit <https://www.facebook.com/fund/SongBirdSBS/>



**Talented musician, singer, composer and choir leader Ben See wrote to us recently to tell us about his unique fundraising project. Ben released a song called Fallen Feathers, which is all about declining numbers of songbirds, and decided to use it to help fundraise for us!**

**The piece is a wonderfully moving piece expressing love and joy for our amazing birdlife which has helped us all during challenging times in the past year. This inspiring music brings the promise of Spring, new life, and a positive outlook for the future. Thank you Ben for sharing your talents and recognizing SBS as the UK's voice for songbirds!**

**You can listen to Fallen Feathers on YouTube, visit:**

**[https://fb.watch/3qqy5eDu9\\_/](https://fb.watch/3qqy5eDu9_/)**



# A VIEW FROM THE KITCHEN WINDOW

**S**ongbirds may have been an example of a species which has benefitted from the coronavirus pandemic, as at the height of lockdown sales of bird food increased by 300%. It would be interesting to know how much all the additional food put out for birds has benefitted them, as like junk food for humans, some foods will carry greater protein and energy content than others.

This winter has heralded the arrival here of Scandinavian blackbirds with their distinctive black

beaks and slightly aggressive attitude towards the native blackbirds. While there was a thick blanket of snow here, fieldfares arrived and started stripping berries off the cotoneaster hedges. As soon as the snow started to go, so did the fieldfares, back to the fields where they had flown in from. Bramblings have also been winter visitors, although in nothing like the numbers previously seen. It would be interesting to know why their numbers can fluctuate so wildly from one year to the next. Being migratory birds there are so many things which can affect them, of which we in this country are unaware.

A flock of 26 lapwings was observed here in mid-January, which is earlier than normal. However once the weather deteriorated they took off, presumably back to the coast some 30 miles away, but as soon as the snow had gone, they returned

in larger numbers, so hopefully they will set up residence here for the summer and nest in the field which they have occupied for the last 12 years or so. Our local Waders group consisting of 7 farms and covering an area of 8,000 acres has got off the ground with a grant being obtained from the organisation "Working for Waders" who have been very supportive of our plans. Each farm has been assessed for its potential. Now it is hoped that each farmer will monitor the presence of any waders and thereby allow decisions to be taken as to what

improvements can be carried out to make the whole area more attractive to waders. One thing which is certain is that without predator control, waders, like all ground nesting birds, stand little if any chance of breeding success and the parent birds are also at risk once they start sitting on eggs. It would be very beneficial to the scheme if it was possible to obtain a grant towards the

cost of employing somebody to carry out predator control over the 7 farms.

At the beginning of the year a pair of swans took up residence on one of the ponds adjacent to where the lapwings nest. Despite having taken off when the ponds froze over for several weeks, they duly returned, and it will be interesting to see what effect, if any, their presence will have on the lapwings as well as other visiting birds.

**By Colin Strang Steel, Chairman**



## Science News

It is great that ever more people are becoming more aware of the nature around them, and enjoying the physical and mental health benefits it brings. (see this recent research showing Biological Diversity Evokes Happiness: [www.songbirdsos.org/bdhappy](http://www.songbirdsos.org/bdhappy)) But, conversely, our dwindling wildlife needs all our help. Here is a roundup of some of the recent wildlife news which are all steps towards helping our songbirds and other wildlife:

### Global priority areas for ecosystem restoration

[www.songbirdsos.org/nat-rest](http://www.songbirdsos.org/nat-rest)

New research shows that restoring natural landscapes damaged by human exploitation, can be one of the most effective and cheapest ways to combat climate change, while also

boosting dwindling wildlife populations.

### Climate Change

[www.songbirdsos.org/Gtt](http://www.songbirdsos.org/Gtt)

Climate change has also featured in recent research news, showing adverse effects on songbird species such as great tits.

Another songbird species, the willow tit (92% down since 1967) needs a vast 7 hectare of territory per pair. They are mainly using accidentally rewilded brownfield sites, like former coal mines, to survive. Read more at: [www.songbirdsos.org/willow7ha](http://www.songbirdsos.org/willow7ha)

### Pesticides

[www.songbirdsos.org/Reach321](http://www.songbirdsos.org/Reach321)

Pesticides and other chemicals and pollutants are ever more difficult to understand and control. New research (from the same team who are conducting our own project into pesticides and songbirds) has found that pet

flea treatments are poisoning our rivers across the UK. One dose of pet spot on flea treatment can kill 60million bees. (read more at: [www.songbirdsos.org/flea-river](http://www.songbirdsos.org/flea-river)) We welcome news of chemical restrictions announced by the Government in March.

### How can you help?

[www.songbirdsos.org/BioMead](http://www.songbirdsos.org/BioMead)

You can help on your patch! New research proves that well-distributed, flowering fields and meadows of different plant types are essential parts of our landscapes. They promote biodiversity from soil, through to the birds and other wildlife, and will all benefit. For more hints and tips visit our website: [www.songbirdsos.org/HelpinYourGarden](http://www.songbirdsos.org/HelpinYourGarden)

**If you would like more details call us on 01379 641715 and we will post hardcopies.**



## Gene editing offers potential solution to control invasive species

**Genetic science could provide a humane solution to manage the population of invasive species and recent research findings from the Roslin Institute present an exciting potential solution to manage grey squirrel populations.**

The research, funded by the European Squirrel Initiative and published in the journal

Scientific Reports, found that releasing 100 mutated squirrels into a population of 3,000 greys would wipe out the population within 15 years. In the study, computer modelling analysed the effect of introducing squirrels with infertility genes into the population, and how this then affected the natural breeding success over time.

The edited gene code which determines the infertility is introduced using technology called CRISPR which enables DNA sequences to be modified. This research is at the very early stages and has not yet included any testing on live animals, but is one to watch in the coming years, as the practical feasibility of the approach is assessed.

Gene Editing was the subject of a recent consultation by DEFRA focusing on stopping gene editing from being regulated in the same way as genetic modification, as long as the organisms could have been produced naturally or through traditional breeding. This approach has already been adopted by a wide range of countries across the world, including Japan, Australia and Argentina. SongBird Survival submitted a response supporting gene editing as a potential method to humanely control invasive species such as the grey squirrel and ring necked parakeet.

# MAKE YOUR OWN BIRDBATH

Providing water for birds is often forgotten about, but is vital for their survival. All birds need water to survive, just how much depends a lot on their diet. Insect-eating birds will need less water than ones that have a dry diet of seeds.

Regular bathing is also essential to keep their feathers in tip-top condition. Shallow water is a great way of washing out any grit or lice before preening.

Experts have also found that clean birds are more streamlined, so can escape from predators quickly. An elevated bird bath will offer birds a better view of stalking cats!

We've put together this quick guide on how to create your very own bird bath, using terracotta pots and saucers.

## Step 1

Wipe down your pot and saucer and leave to dry. We suggest using a large pot, to give some height. Alternatively, you could use 3 or 4 smaller ones, stacked on top of each other.

If you are feeling creative, you may like to paint the pots, for an added wow factor!

## Step 2

Once completely dry, apply a generous layer of waterproof glue or tile adhesive to the base of the pot. Now place the saucer on the base of the pot and leave to set for 24 hours.

If you have chosen to use a few smaller pots, you will need a layer of glue around the inside of the rim of each pot you are stacking. Finishing off with the saucer on top.

## Step 3

Choose a suitable spot for your bird bath. Add stones, so that the smaller birds can perch to drink fresh water. Remember to top up the water regularly and keep your birdbath clean to prevent spreading disease!

## Step 4

Sit back and enjoy watching your garden visitors having a drink and a dip!

We'd love to see your bird baths in action – please send us a photo to [dawn-chorus@songbirdsurvival.org.uk](mailto:dawn-chorus@songbirdsurvival.org.uk)



## SBS Spring 2021 crossword answers

### ACROSS

- 1 nest
- 5 long tailed tit
- 8 feeders
- 9 dawn chorus
- 15 bullfinch
- 16 predation
- 17 bird bath

### DOWN

- 2 song thrush
- 3 chiffchaff
- 4 yellowhammer
- 6 blackbird
- 7 wren
- 10 sparrow
- 11 swallow
- 12 nuthatch
- 13 red list
- 14 robin





# SUPPORTER OFFER

**GET 10% OFF the jumbo box of giant seed cakes with FatBird Feeds  
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