

Turtle dove rapid habitat survey report

Site location: Wakelyns, Fressingfield

Landowner: D. Wolfe

Date: 5th August 2020

Surveyor: Mike Marsh

Turtle dove recorded on site visit? Yes, one seen briefly near the north-east corner of the site. The land manager has seen up to three individuals in the area of the farmhouse.

Rapid habitat survey notes

Nesting habitat

Suitable scrub and hedgerow nesting habitat for turtle doves is considered to have the following characteristics:

- *Tall (at least 3 metres and preferably higher with some taller mature trees within providing variation)*
- *Wide (at least 4 metres) and dense*
- *Containing thorny species such as hawthorn and blackthorn, as well as native climbers such as ivy and dog rose*

There are many stretches (approx. 1,200 metres) of good quality, dense hedgerow containing hawthorn, blackthorn and plentiful bramble which appear to be typically suitable for nesting turtle doves (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Good quality hedgerow typically suitable for nesting turtle doves

There are other stretches of hedgerow (approx. 700 metres) of similar quality that are lower and narrower than typically suitable for nesting turtle doves. These will however be suitable for other nesting birds, such as yellowhammers, of which three were heard singing during the visit.

In addition to hedgerows, there are several small patches of scrub containing plentiful bramble (Figure 2), which is also present in the lines of hazel coppice and mature trees.



Figure 2. Scrub habitat typically suitable for nesting turtle doves

Overall, the nesting habitat on site is considered very favourable for turtle doves, and this is confirmed by the presence of up to three individuals on the site. To maintain the preferred dense scrub and hedgerow habitat, it is recommended that 1/5th is cut every three years on rotation (or 1/15th every year) to prevent succession to woodland.

There are Countryside Stewardship options that can be used to manage nesting habitat – see <https://www.operationturtledove.org/get-involved/habitat/do-you-manage-land/establishing-feeding-and-nesting-habitat/> for more information on these and other management advice.

Foraging habitat

Turtle doves typically feed on a mixture of crop seeds and arable plant seeds, with both being important components of their diet. Ideal foraging habitat for turtle doves is considered to have the following characteristics:

- *At least 30% bare ground, preferably 50-60% (for birds to land and access seed)*
- *Arable plants growing such as fumitory, knotgrass, chickweed, white clover, black medick and bird's-foot trefoil (not an exhaustive list) to provide a seed resource for foraging birds throughout the breeding season, with vegetation height under 15cm.*

The vegetated strips between the lines of hazel coppice contain large quantities of clover with smaller amounts of bird's-foot trefoil and bristly ox-tongue (Figure 3a). The amount of bare ground in these strips varies but on average is c.10-20% (Figure 3b).



Figure 3a. Clover strips in between hazel coppice, and **Figure 3b.** Clover close-up showing some bare ground

The strips between the lines of mature trees are grassier but still contain good amounts of clover. A cultivated area of lentils also includes some poppies and sow-thistles and has c.30% bare ground (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Cultivated area of lentils

It is possible that birds will land on the bare ground in these areas and feed on any available seed. The clovers and bird's-foot trefoil present are typically favoured by turtle doves but they are known to eat seed of a diverse array of wild and cropped arable plants. It is important that this is available to turtle doves throughout the breeding season (late April to August).

It was noted that the three turtle doves seen by the land manager have been in the vicinity of the farmhouse. In these areas that are currently managed as pasture and planned to be managed as wildflower meadows in 2021 and 2022, cultivating small areas to have the shorter and sparser

vegetation favoured by turtle doves, perhaps on the field margins nearest to the hedges and scrub, may be an option to provide additional food resource for visiting turtle doves and other birds.

For more detailed advice on how to achieve this kind of foraging resource, please see <https://www.operationturtledove.org/get-involved/habitat/do-you-manage-land/establishing-feeding-habitat/>. Supplementary feeding could also be an option on areas of bare ground, including farm tracks and RSPB may be able to help with the cost of seed, if not possible through agri-environment schemes. Let us know if you are interested in taking on either of these options to maximise foraging opportunities for turtle doves.

There are also Countryside Stewardship options that can be used to manage foraging habitat – see <https://www.operationturtledove.org/get-involved/habitat/do-you-manage-land/establishing-feeding-habitat/> for more information on these and other management advice.

Water sources

Accessible water is important for turtle doves to drink and bathe, as their seed diet contains little water.

Three reasonable sized ponds were seen, which were largely enclosed by tall bushes and trees (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Pond at Wakelyns, enclosed by tall bushes and trees

To make sure water is accessible by drinking and bathing birds, ensuring one side has a shallow sloping edge is preferable.

If pond restoration or creation is of interest, let us know and we can point you in the direction of support from local conservation organisations.

Additional surveyor notes:

Three yellowhammers were heard singing. A total of 12 species of butterflies were recorded and 4 species of dragonflies, including the brown hawker (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Brown hawker dragonfly

Further information:

Many thanks for allowing access to your site. Please do keep in contact with us and let us know if you would like to discuss any aspects of turtle dove habitat management in more detail (including e.g. provision of supplementary food, planting of turtle dove seed mixes and how turtle dove management can be delivered through Countryside Stewardship schemes).

The following websites also contain further advice which you may find helpful:

- <https://www.operationturtledove.org/>
- <https://farmwildlife.info/>

Report written by Mike Marsh and Jamie Murphy (for and on behalf of the RSPB)

Attached documents:

- Species list

Disclaimer:

This survey report only provides general information on how to manage land for nature. It may not deal with every aspect of how the management should be applied to particular circumstances and should not be treated, or relied on, as a substitute for specific advice relevant to particular circumstances. No responsibility is accepted for any loss which may arise from reliance on the information provided.