

# song thrush

## Description of Species

The song thrush, *Turdus Philomelos*, is a familiar bird in gardens, woods and hedgerows. It is distinctive with a spotted breast and a melodious song and is often seen singing from the top of a hedge or tree. The song thrush is a resident and partial migrant. Large numbers of continental breeders overwinter in the UK, whilst many birds from the UK breeding population winter further south in Europe.

The bulk of the song thrush's diet is earthworms, snails, insects and berries. Fruit is an important component of their diet in the autumn.



Song thrush (picture courtesy of Stan Irwin)

## Current Status & Distribution

### Distribution in the UK

This common and widespread species is generally more abundant in the east and south of the UK. It prefers lowland areas which contain scrub, thick hedges and trees, especially when breeding. However, there has been an estimated decline throughout the UK of 73% in farmland and 49% in woodland since the mid 1970s.

### Distribution in Wales

The song thrush is common and widespread in Wales. A survey of the distribution of the species on farmland in Wales (Shrubb et al 1997) concluded that the population had remained fairly stable. However, this study was not particularly intensive, as records were drawn primarily from

presence or absence of song thrush in a small number of 10 km survey squares.

### Distribution in Wrexham County Borough

In Wrexham County Borough the song thrush is described as "common and widespread" (Wrexham Birdwatchers Report 1996), although the extent of their distribution is not accurately known. It can be found in a variety of habitats throughout the County Borough.

## Legislation and Site Designation

The song thrush is protected under the EC Birds Directive; the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and is listed under the RSPB's Red List of Conservation Concern in the UK, Channel Isles and Isles of Man (1996).



Hedgerows make a good habitat for the song thrush

## Current Factors Affecting Species

The following factors are believed to be partly responsible for the decline of the species:

- ✿ high post fledgling mortality;
- ✿ increased use of pesticides, especially molluscicides;
- ✿ hunting in southern France;
- ✿ severe winter weather and dry soil conditions affecting food supply;
- ✿ predation by cats, corvids and foxes;
- ✿ changes in farming practices affecting food supply and the availability of nesting sites (particularly the switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals); and
- ✿ hedgerow destruction.

## Current Action

### Management and Programmes of Action

A national species action plan is being prepared by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), in collaboration with Joint Nature Conservancy Council (JNCC) and the country agencies.

### Survey, Research and Monitoring

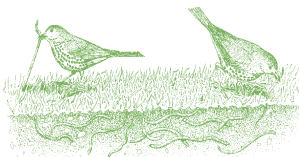
Little national action was taken for the species until census work by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) highlighted its decline. Current work now includes survey, research on the species' ecology, and investigation of the causes of the decline.

Research is being carried out by RSPB in Sussex and Essex, on sites where agricultural methods differ and so do productivities of the populations of song thrushes. The mixed farmland in Sussex appears to have a higher productivity than the more extensive arable farms in Essex. This is because there are a greater number of breeding attempts made per pair per year in Sussex. Further study is aimed at investigating whether food shortages leads to this difference.

### Local Action

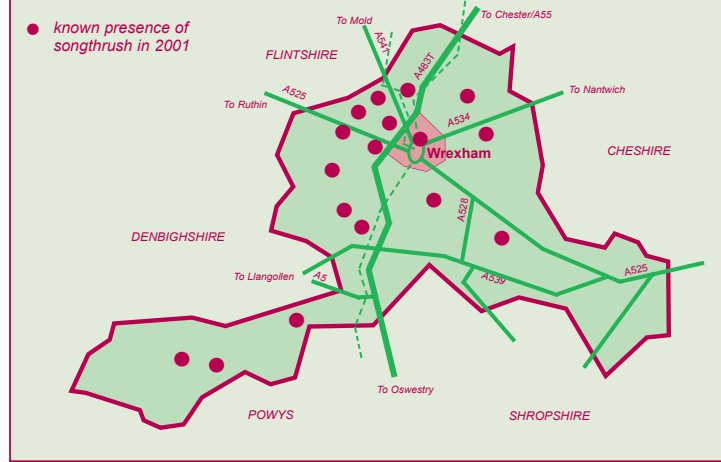
Wrexham Biodiversity Audit has highlighted the lack of information concerning the song thrush population size and distribution within Wrexham County Borough.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has 3 Breeding Bird Survey squares within Wrexham County Borough, but song thrush has not recently been recorded within them.



Scrubby woods with open areas are a habitat favoured by song thrush

## Distribution of Song Thrush in Wrexham County Borough



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## Abbreviations

- BTCV** British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
- BTO** British Trust for Ornithology
- CCW** Countryside Council for Wales
- FWAG** Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
- JNCC** Joint Nature Conservancy Council
- NAWAD** National Assembly for Wales Agriculture Dept
- NWWT** North Wales Wildlife Trust
- RSPB** Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- WCBC** Wrexham County Borough Council

## Objectives and Targets

- 1** Raise awareness of local, national and international biodiversity issues by using the song thrush as a flagship species, over the next ten years.
- 2** Protect, enhance and extend habitats favoured by song thrush such as hedgerows, woods and scrub, over the next ten years.
- 3** Survey the song thrush population in Wrexham County Borough to establish its size and distribution, by the end of the year 2002.
- 4** Monitor the song thrush population every five years.
- 5** Reduce the general use of pesticides by 25% during the next ten years.

## Sources Of Information

- ✿ UK Biodiversity Steering Group, Volume 2: Action Plans (1995) HMSO
- ✿ The impact of changes in farming and other land uses on bird populations in Wales Welsh Birds Vol. 1 No.5:4-26 Shrubbs, M.; Williams, I.T. & Lovegrove, R.R. (1997).
- ✿ Birds in Wales Lovegrove, R.; Williams, G. & Williams, I.T., (1994). T & A.D. Poyser, London.
- ✿ Wrexham Birdwatchers Report, 1996

## Links to Other Action Plans

- Habitat Action Plan for Woodlands in Wrexham County Borough
- Habitat Action Plan for Hedgerows in Wrexham County Borough
- Species Action Plan for song thrush in Flintshire, Cheshire & Denbighshire
- Habitat Action Plan for arable field margins in Wrexham County Borough.



Hedgerows along lane in Glyn Ceirrog Valley

## Proposed Action with Lead Agencies

Action	Objectives	Partners	Target
<b>Communication and Publicity</b> Organise (song thrush) biodiversity events, such as talks, walks, tree planting, etc.	Objective 1	WCBC, NWWT, BTCV	Newspaper article by 2002 and one biodiversity event each year for the duration of this plan.
Use song thrush to promote the importance of biodiversity.	Objective 1	WCBC, BTCV, NWWT	Produce publicity material by 2005.
Set up a countywide song thrush garden survey involving the general public.	Objectives 1 & 3	WCBC, BTCV, Wrexham Bird Watchers Group, general public	Before the end of 2002.
Produce literature with guidelines for garden and allotment owners and other managers of open spaces. This could include planting and management schemes which will benefit song thrush whilst emphasising the importance of such habitats.	Objectives 1 & 5	WCBC, NWWT, RSPB	By end of 2005.
<b>Practical Management and Policy</b> Promote agri-environment schemes which benefit song thrush, such as Tir Gofal, woodland grants & organic farming and those which enhance its favoured habitats: woodlands, hedges, scrub and arable field margins.	Objectives 2 & 5	Forest Enterprise, CCW, NAWAD FWAG	Land under agri-environment agreements in Wrexham should cover 200ha by 2010.
Reduce pesticide use, especially molluscicides such as slug pellets.	Objective 5	WCBC, farmers, gardeners, National Trust	Reduction of 25% of current levels by 2010.
Protect habitats favoured by song thrush	Objective 2	WCBC, CCW	Ensure that the area of these habitats in WCB suffers no reduction over the next ten years.
Encourage the adoption of a policy discouraging the use of slug pellets in County Borough parks; also plant berry producing shrubs and keep wild corners.	Objective 5	Environmental Services at WCBC	Before end of 2002.
Ensure that all hedgerow management is completed by the beginning of March, when song thrushes and other birds start nesting, and that hedge cutting takes place only once every 2-3 years.	Objective 2	Highways Dept. and Community Services at WCBC	Before end of 2010.
<b>Monitoring and Research</b> Survey the breeding population (distribution and size) in Wrexham County Borough, to establish a baseline for monitoring.	Objectives 3 & 4	WCBC, RSPB, BTO	Survey by end of 2003, then monitor every five years for the next ten years.

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## Further information

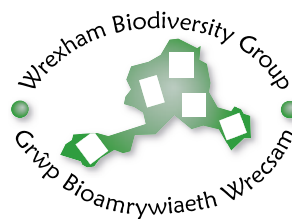
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