

**TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:**

Severe decline in the South Pennines in the last 10 years, probably in the order of 50%.

ESTIMATED POPULATION IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

A quarter of the South Pennines population - approximately 200 pairs.

NATIONAL BAP STATUS:

Species of Conservation Concern

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT ACTION PLANS:

Habitats: Nesting - Heather Moorland. Feeding - Hay Meadows, Rush Pasture, Unimproved Pasture, Rough Grazing.

Species: Curlew, Lapwing.

INTRODUCTION

The twite is arguably the bird of highest conservation priority within the Peak District owing to its rarity and recent severe population decline. Dependent on moorland for nesting and moorland fringe habitats for feeding, the twite is very vulnerable to habitat change. In England, the twite is restricted as a breeding species to the uplands of the South Pennines. Approximately a quarter of the South Pennine population breeds within the Peak District. A small, brown finch, the twite is one of only two British birds that have a diet consisting entirely of seeds. This has been the cause of its demise. As hay meadows, traditional lightly grazed pastures and unmanaged sites have disappeared, so too has the supply of late summer seeds on which the twite depends.

Formerly widespread across the entire moorland area, twite now exhibit a disjunct north/south population base. A small and declining population persists on the North Staffordshire/Cheshire border, with the core population in the north of the Dark Peak. Notable breeding colonies occur around Digley, Winscar Reservoir, Butterley Reservoir, Deer Hill and Wessenden. An estimated 50 % decline since 1990 has been accompanied by a severe range reduction and twite are now absent from the Eastern Moors and are virtually extinct in the Dark Peak south of Longdendale with the exception of a few isolated colonies.

The English population, estimated at between 600 - 1200 pairs, is the most southerly in the European Community and is entirely separate from the larger Scottish population. As well as being recognised as of international importance, the twite is a barometer of the quality and extent of upland hay meadows and pastures (priority UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitats) as the future of the two are inextricably linked.

ADVERSE IMPACTS	Historic	Current
Land Management – Feeding Sites		
The loss of seed food associated with upland hay meadows and species-rich pasture, especially species such as common sorrel. This is linked to:		
Conversion from hay to silage production.	✓	✓✓
Re-seeding and fertilising of species-rich pasture.	✓	✓✓
Heavy grazing reducing seed production.	✓	✓✓
Decline of arable and fodder crops in the uplands.	✓✓	✓
Early summer cutting of roadside verges, on which twite feed in the absence of hay meadows.		✓
Regular mowing of reservoir banks and dams, reducing the period of seed availability at such sites.	✓	✓
Land Management – Breeding Sites		
Eradication of bracken stands, in which twite often nest.		✓
Overgrazing and over-burning of heather moorland, reducing the area of tall heather for nesting. This is now less of a problem since the introduction of the Environmentally Sensitive Area schemes.	✓✓	✓

An impact ✓

Significant impact ✓✓

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- The Dark Peak, Goyt Valley and Leek Moors SSSIs are all recognized as being important for their assemblages of upland breeding birds including twite.
- Twite are considered as being a species of interest within the South Pennines Moors SPA (incorporating all of the above SSSIs) although they are not a qualifying species in terms of the designation. Implementation of the EU Birds Directive in the SPA should impart increased protection for the twite's Peak District habitat.

New Initiatives

- The RSPB has submitted proposals to MAFF to fund arable break crops, wildlife seed plots and reversion to hay, via a special project unique to the South Pennines, within Countryside Stewardship (CS).

Sites Owned and Managed by Conservation Organisations

- Re-creation of hay meadows on a tenanted farm owned by the NT in the Edale Valley aims to increase twite feeding habitat.

Sites within Conservation Agreements

- A large number of hay meadows are being managed sympathetically under agri-environment and conservation scheme agreements, as a result of the PDNPA's Hay Meadow Project (HMP) and work by Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and CS Project Officers.
- The RSPB is working with farmers to facilitate management of hay meadows under the CS scheme through the Hade Edge Community Project.
- Overgrazing of moorlands is being successfully addressed through the ESA schemes.

Awareness Raising

- The RSPB has produced a twite management sheet for landowners/land managers and conservation organisation staff and has run courses on twite management for the NT, the PDNPA and MAFF.
- The RSPB Hade Edge Community Project takes opportunities for awareness raising about twite ecology and management needs.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

There is no national action plan for twite in the UK. The RSPB, however, has published an internal Species Action Plan for twite. Its objectives are:

- To maintain the breeding numbers and distribution (based on the 1999 survey) of twite in the UK.
- In the long term, to recover the distribution of twite into areas where there has not been irretrievable habitat loss.

A Vision for the Peak District

Intimately linked with both hay meadows and heathland, the future for twite in the Peak District seems at best uncertain. Co-ordinated and targeted action between all involved will be essential if we are not to lose this special 'moorland linnet' and with it a symbol of upland farming. The objectives and targets respect both the short and long term RSPB aims.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Maintain the existing breeding population and range, as estimated in 2000.

Target

Bring all known twite feeding sites into favourable conservation management by 2005.

Objective 2

Achieve a measurable and sustained increase in both the numbers and range of breeding twite, by increasing the area of suitable feeding sites by 2010.

Target

Increase the number of seed-rich feeding sites within 2 km of the moorland edge, in the current and former range of breeding twite, by 20 % by 2010.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievement of Targets

Land Management

- Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.
- Effectiveness of agri-environment and conservation scheme prescriptions.
- High land prices – forcing intensive management following purchase of land.

Resources and Financial Incentives

- Availability of funding for survey, awareness raising and negotiation of conservation agreements.
- Availability of funding for agri-environment and conservation scheme agreements.
- Adequacy of financial incentives within agri-environment and conservation agreements.

Planning and Regulation

- Planning policy.

Conflicts with Other Conservation Priorities

- Conflicts between the habitat requirements of twite and other ecological conservation priorities e.g. when considering bracken stands in the moorlands.
- The potential conflicts with archaeology/landscape particularly in relation to the re-introduction of arable/fodder crops and the creation of small scale wildlife seed plots.

Others

- Lack of a strategy for safeguarding sites of particular wildlife importance where this cannot be achieved through the normal channels of negotiation.
- Threats to twite in its wintering habitat.
- Predation of chicks and eggs.

ACTIONS

Key to the achievement of the proposed targets are the actions relating to:

- survey and compilation of a comprehensive list of twite breeding and feeding sites (particularly hay meadows on the moorland fringe) coupled with negotiations to secure appropriate land management (Actions TW1 - 4 and 19 - 23);
- awareness-raising and training measures (TW10 – 16), and
- ensuring agri-environment and conservation schemes provide adequate financial incentive and appropriate management prescriptions to safeguard twite habitat (TW18).

ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD AGENCY & Partners	
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY			
Data Collation			
TW1	Collate existing information on twite. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	RSPB/EN/PDNPA WTs/LAs/LRCs Voluntary Sector
TW2	Compile an 'inventory' of twite breeding and feeding sites, including their 'Wildlife Site' status, and initiate a system for regular up-dating. Ensure linkage between the twite, PDNPA hay meadow inventory and any other known hay meadow records. (Objective 1)	2001	RSPB/BBAPG
Survey			
TW3	Identify priority sites for survey. (Objective 1)	2001	RSPB/Bird Study Groups
TW4	Carry out a co-ordinated survey of all breeding and feeding sites. (Objective 1)	2001	RSPB/Bird Study Groups

EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES

Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites

TW5	Agree methodology for the evaluation of 'Wildlife Site' status. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	BBAPG
Defining favourable condition			
TW6	Agree definitions of favourable condition for the range of twite breeding and feeding sites in the Peak District. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	BBAPG
TW7	Agree guidelines for the appropriate management needed to achieve favourable condition and enhancement of twite breeding and feeding sites. To include: *Consideration of re-introduction of arable/fodder crops *Small scale wildlife seed plots *Uncut field margins/corners *Twite friendly management of reservoir banks and dams *Late meadow cutting (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	BBAPG/WCs

RESOURCES

TW8	Seek resources to carry out survey and negotiation of agreements in collaboration with other grassland and bird action plans. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	RSPB/EN/PDNPA
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MONITORING

TW9	Repeat co-ordinated twite surveys in 2005 and 2010. Ensure that the information is used to update the twite 'inventory'. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2010	RSPB/Bird Study Groups
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AWARENESS RAISING

TW10	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation and restoration sites with landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	RSPB/EN/PDNPA/NT WTs/FWAG/MAFF
TW11	Run bi-annual training courses for all farm conservation advisers to update on twite habitat requirements and promote proactive targeting of sites within the 'inventory'. (Objective 1)	2001	RSPB/EN/PDNPA/MAFF FWAG
TW12	Carry out an awareness raising campaign to highlight the decline in twite and to raise profile for targeted conservation action. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002-2005	RSPB/PDNPA/EN
TW13	Produce and disseminate a Twite Recovery leaflet to a large land-owning audience. (Objective 2)	January 2002	RSPB/PDNPA/EN/NFU MAFF/Bird Study Groups
TW14	Produce a slide pack and talk, and use to promote twite conservation to farmer/landowner clubs, group branches and organisations eg. NFU branch talk circuits. (Objectives 1 and 2)	January 2002-2005	RSPB/PDNPA/EN MAFF/NFU
TW15	Organise a series of annual farm demonstration days to promote successful twite agri-environment schemes and management agreements. (Objective 1)	2002 - 2005	RSPB/PDNPA/EN MAFF
TW16	Set up a 'Showing twite to people' viewing scheme with the aim of disseminating messages regarding ecology and management for twite to landowners and other members of the public. (Objective 1)	Summer 2003	RSPB/PDNPA/EN

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

Designation

TW17	Consider twite key sites in any programme of acquisition/lease/management of nature reserves including NNRs and LNRs. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	EN/LAs(joint leads) PDNPA/WTs/RSPB/NT
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Grant Schemes

TW18	Consider recommending a review of agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that: *Management prescriptions and payments address wildlife seed plots, arable break crops, reversion of improved pasture to seed rich pasture, and consider a supplement for late cutting of hay (Aug 1 st). (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2010	MAFF/EN/PDNPA/WEG BBAPG
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Negotiation and Review of Agreements

TW19	Review management of all twite breeding and feeding sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers, through appropriate mechanisms, to ensure maintenance and restoration of favourable condition and site extension. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 - 2005	EN/RSPB
TW20	Negotiate appropriate agreements with landowners and managers of all key twite sites outside SSSIs and existing agreements, in order to achieve favourable condition of the site. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002 - 2005	RSPB/PDNPA/MAFF
TW21	Review management of twite breeding and feeding sites in existing agreements, outside SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners and managers to ensure that favourable condition is being achieved. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002 - 2005	RSPB/PDNPA/MAFF FWAG
TW22	Review whole holding agreements which include unprotected twite breeding and feeding sites. Consider the opportunities for amending the agreement to incorporate their safeguard, enhancement and extension. (Objective 1 and 2)	2002 - 2005	RSPB/PDNPA/MAFF
TW23	Approach owners to re-create feeding sites elsewhere in the twite's current and former range and negotiate agreements as appropriate. (Objective 2)	2003 - 2005	RSPB/PDNPA/EN MAFF/FWAG

Land Acquisition

TW24	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority moorland fringe sites of importance for twite where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation and when a negotiated conservation solution has not succeeded. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs/RSPB NT
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Direct Action

TW25	On land owned by public and conservation bodies ensure that: *Management maintains and, where possible, enhances twite breeding and feeding sites *Opportunities are taken for twite habitat restoration and creation where appropriate *Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/WTs/NT/LAs EN/FC
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TW26	Consider the need and practicalities of supplementary winter feeding of grain to encourage twite to over-winter in areas with suitable breeding habitat. Implement if appropriate. (Objective 2)	Winters 2003-2005	BBAPG
TW27	Agree a strategy for delayed road-side verge cutting in key twite areas. (Objective 2)	Autumn 2001	RSPB/LAs/HA (joint leads)

REGULATION

Planning

TW28	Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on twite breeding and feeding sites; that loss or damage to the sites is avoided; and that opportunities for the enhancement or creation of key habitats are considered in relevant planning decisions. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/LAs/WTs
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Pollution Control & Waste Management

TW29	Review procedures and consultation processes in relation to the spreading of paper pulp. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	EA /LAs/PDNPA/EN WTs
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Other Regulatory Mechanisms

TW30	Ensure that all woodland planting proposals avoid adverse effects of planting on twite breeding and feeding sites. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	FC /LAs/EN/PDNPA MAFF
TW31	Ensure that bracken control does not take place in the vicinity of twite breeding sites. (Objective 1)	2001 onwards	EA /EN/PDNPA/MAFF

RESOURCES

It is envisaged that many of the actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- continuing investment by landowners and managers managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- EN's programme of grant and management agreement schemes;
- MAFF's Environmentally Sensitive Area and Countryside Stewardship schemes;
- the RSPB's surveys and advisory work;
- volunteer surveys;
- the PDNPA's advisory and grants service for landowners/managers and its rolling programme of special conservation projects;
- FWAG and the WTs' advisory services;
- continuing management of twite habitat in the ownership of conservation organisations, public bodies (EN, NT, WTs, LAs, PDNPA) and WCs.

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- for survey work (2001), and negotiations (2002 - 2005);
- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation and restoration management of twite feeding sites (2001 onwards);
- for a programme of awareness raising (2001 onwards);
- to aid in the production of the proposed registers (2001 onwards).

The RSPB, PDNPA and EN are currently seeking resources for a Ground-nesting Bird Habitat Project (to run from 2001 - 2004) which would specifically target twite feeding sites. The PDNPA and EN are currently seeking resources for a continuation of the Pastures Project, to run during 2001/2002, aimed at surveying and securing high quality sites within appropriate agreements. This may also have implications for twite conservation.