

Twite

Carduelis flavirostris



Description

The Twite is a small brown bird heavily streaked above and below, with a pink rump. It is the upland equivalent of the Linnet.

Twite occur in largely treeless areas, notably hills, mountains and moorlands, and over-winter in coastal areas.

They breed mainly in areas of unenclosed moorland edge and fringing farmland. In the South Pennines, nests are mainly in tall Heather, or among mounds of Bracken litter, and on the ground.

During the breeding season birds may fly up to 2km from the moorland nest site to species-rich meadows to feed. They feed mainly on seeds, and during the spring, particularly Dandelion heads. In the summer months, the young are fed on Sorrel, which is a close relative of Dock, and this is the key species needed for their survival.

By October most Twite leave the moorland habitat or in-bye land for the coast, where they remain in varied-sized flocks, feeding on a variety of weed seeds.

National Status

A Red List Bird of High Conservation Concern due to significant historical declines in population between 1800 and 1995. Formerly a Red Data Bird in Britain, as a species breeding and wintering in internationally-significant numbers.

In comparison to other passerines, little is known about the Twite's numbers, status and ecology.

In 1992 an estimated 65,000 pairs of Twite bred in the UK. The current population from a 1999 survey is thought to be an alarming 12,000 birds. It is clear that there has been a dramatic decline during the 1990s. The majority of birds are found in Scotland, with small populations in the South Pennines and in Wales. Britain holds the vast majority of the EC Twite population, in fact more than 90%.

Local Status

Twite in the South Pennines are now down to around 225 pairs with core populations around Halifax, Marsden and Meltham. The present Barnsley population could now be breeding in very low numbers, or possibly be extinct as a breeding species.

Legal Status

The Twite is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981, the EU Birds Directive and Appendix 2 of the Bern Convention.

Links with other Action Plans

HAPI1 Upland Heathland

HAPI3 Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Most important limiting factor on the breeding grounds is thought to be the agricultural intensification of the moorland fringe. This results in loss or overgrazing of herb-rich in-bye meadows and pastures important for feeding,
- The loss of Heather and Bracken nesting habitats through conversion to grassland.
- Overgrazing and excessive Bracken control.
- Poor Heather burning management.

Current Local Action

- RSPB research and evaluation of the Twite population in the South Pennine Uplands.
- Recording by Barnsley Bird Study Group.
- Feeding programme established at Winscar Reservoir.

Proposed Local Action

- In partnership with landowners and the National Twite Project (led by RSPB and funded by Natural England) provide feeding stations at suitable locations to encourage Twite.
- Survey of historic and recent locations to assess status.

BMBC Development Control Actions

- On land owned by public or conservation bodies, ensure that management maintains, and where possible, enhances, Twite breeding and feeding habitats.
- Consider the impact on Twite breeding/feeding sites when assessing planning applications.
- Encourage sympathetic management of quarries and other derelict sites on the moorland fringe.

BMBC Land Ownership and Management Actions

- Review Wogden Foot management plan with Coalfield Heathland Project to ensure Twite habitat not compromised and, preferably, enhanced.