Nesting habitat: corn buntings in the eastern lowlands nest on the ground in cereal fields, grass field margins, grassland and in cereal-based wild bird cover crops. In the Uists and Barra, corn buntings nest in the corn field margins and the adjacent dune vegetation. They start nesting late in the spring, usually June and can have flightless chicks late into August or early September.

Summer food: adults eat seeds and insects. Insects are very important for chick survival. Breeding success relates directly to the availability of insect food and can be reduced by the use of pesticides. Corn buntings take insects and spiders from crops, grassland and field margins.

Winter food: birds form flocks and feed on seeds, particularly cereal grains in cover crops and winter stubbles. They have become extinct in some pastoral areas of the UK where grain is no longer grown.

WHAT DO CORN BUNTINGS NEED?

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE OF A CORN BUNTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flocks may move to find new sources of seed food, especially cereal grains, throughout the winter and spring. Males return to territories to sing during the winter, especially during fine weather.</td>
<td>Main breeding season. Most nest in cereal crops and feed on seeds and grains. Chicks are fed mainly on insects.</td>
<td>They require seed-rich cover crops or stubbles for moulting, when almost flightless.</td>
<td>They flock together in winter to find sites with plenty of seed food and roost communally in habitats such as weedy stubbles or scrub.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CORN BUNTINGS?

**Nesting habitat**

- Many early nests are destroyed in grass silage, during mowing in June. Later nests are often in spring cereals, which are safer from agricultural operations. Extensively managed fields hold more birds.
- If possible, harvest fields with nesting corn buntings last. Some may nest in silage fields and payments for later cutting are available in Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities.
- Use wild bird seed mixtures, low-input cereals or undersown cereals to provide a dense crop favourable for nesting.

**Summer food**

- Undersown spring cereals can boost insect numbers on mixed farms.
- Maintain a range of crops (eg both autumn and spring cereals) to extend the periods of food availability.
- Create wide, rough grass buffer strips, ditch banks and field corners around arable fields, especially fields away from large hedges or treelines.
- Create beetle banks through the middle of arable fields larger than 16 hectares.
- Try to avoid using broad-spectrum insecticides after 15 March.
- Adopt conservation headlands or low-input cereal crops to boost broadleaved weeds and the associated insects.
- Maintain areas of unimproved grassland or manage grassland with low-inputs to boost insect food.
- If whole fields cannot be selected for extensive management, then a combination of wide grass margins and conservation headlands would be appropriate.

**Winter food**

- Create areas of wild bird seed mixture in the spring with a high proportion of cereal in the mix and, where possible, re-sow each year to maintain the supply of grain food.
- Spread seed-rich tailings or waste grain on farm tracks or in stubbles.
- Leave fields of over-wintered stubbles for as long as possible through the winter and spring.
- Low-input cereal crops followed by over-wintered stubble provide more seed food for birds than conventional stubbles.
- On the Uists and Barra, harvest a small part of your crop traditionally with a binder, with payments available through Rural Development Contracts.

See also the RSPB Scotland advisory sheets on:

- Wild bird seed mixtures
- Over wintered stubbles
- Conservation headlands
- Arable field margins
- Beetle banks

Contacts and advice

The best way to help corn buntings on your farm/croft is to walk the ground with an adviser and discuss options for management and funding.

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries visit www.farmwildlife.info

RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB, the UK charity that speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.