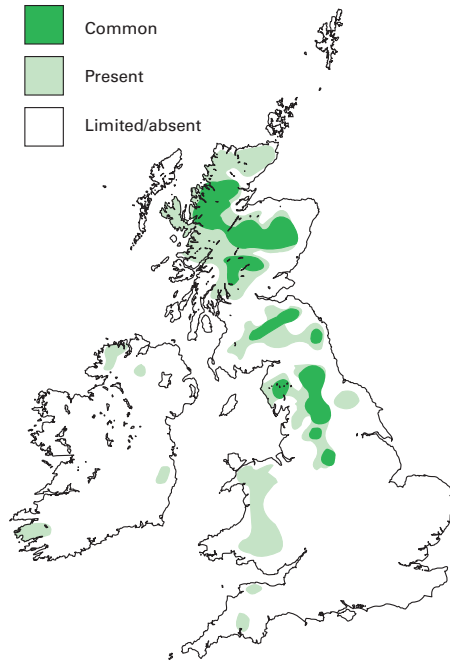




for birds  
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Distribution map showing the relative abundance of ring ouzels in Britain and Ireland 1988-91



Ring ouzel by Tony Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

The ring ouzel resembles a blackbird; it has a white crescent on its chest, which is most prominent on the male.

Ring ouzels breed on moorland and often use in-bye grasslands for feeding. They spend the winter in the Mediterranean and North Africa. The UK range for these birds contracted by 27% between 1970 and 1990, and the population is thought to have decreased by about 60% between 1990 and 1999. Possible causes of this decline include afforestation, loss of heather for nest sites, climate change (in particular warmer summers), changes in grazing regimes and grassland improvement. Ring ouzels may also be experiencing problems on migration through southern Europe and in their wintering grounds.

## WHAT DO RING OUZELS NEED?

### Nesting habitat:

Ring ouzels usually nest on crags or on the ground in mature heather, bilberry, or occasionally under bracken, mainly on steep slopes.

### Food:

A mosaic of heather and grass provides the best foraging conditions for ring ouzels. They may fly down to in-bye pastures to feed if there is insufficient short grassland on the nearby hills. During the breeding season, they

eat earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles and other invertebrates. Moorland berries – such as bilberry, crowberry and rowan – are probably important in the late summer and autumn.

## ANNUAL LIFECYCLE OF A RING OUZEL

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Wintering grounds.		Return to breeding grounds. Feed on insects, snails, slugs and earthworms.		They nest on crags or on the ground in taller vegetation. Chicks are fed on invertebrates.		Post-breeding. Moorland berries are probably an important food source.		Migration to Mediterranean and North Africa.			
<b>Breeding season</b>				<b>1st broods</b>		<b>2nd broods</b>					

## HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE RING OUZELS?

### Nesting habitat

- **HLS** Exclude rocky areas and steeper slopes from the heather burning rotation to maintain areas of mature and naturally re-generating heather.
- Exclude stock along a burn side or steep slope to encourage taller vegetation for nest sites.
- Retain small areas of bracken as potential nest sites.
- Avoid planting forest blocks near suitable nesting habitat on crags and steep slopes. Ring ouzels may benefit from the planting or regeneration of scattered native broadleaved trees, in particular rowan and hawthorn, but avoid planting trees in high densities.

### Feeding habitat

- Ensure a mosaic of short grass and heather for foraging.
- **EIS** Retain short grazed permanent pasture on in-bye near moorland.
- **EIS** **HLS** Retain and restore unimproved grassland on in-bye land.

## PRIORITY ACTION

- Provide heather at least 30 cm tall on the steeper slopes, and a mosaic of heather and short grass elsewhere.
- Avoid intensive tree planting near nesting and feeding areas.
- Nesting areas need protection from overgrazing and burning.
- In areas of rank vegetation, create a mosaic of heather and grass close to nesting areas by burning, cutting or grazing.

### KEY

**EIS** = Entry Level Stewardship

**HLS** = Higher Level Stewardship

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB,  
UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy,  
Bedfordshire SG19 2DL  
Tel: 01767 680551  
[www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)



Farming and Wildlife Advisory  
Group, NAC, Stoneleigh,  
Kenilworth, Warwickshire  
CV8 2RX Tel: 024 7669 6699  
[www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge,  
Hampshire SP6 1EF Tel: 01425 652381  
[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)

See also the **RSPB advisory sheets on:**

- Bracken management in the uplands
- Grazed pasture
- Heather moorland management
- Moorland grazing

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries,  
visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info)