

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and enlarge bullfinch populations on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management for this species.

Introduction

The bullfinch is a heavily built finch that spends most of its time among tree branches, hedgerows, scrub, and dense undergrowth. Named for its stout neck and head, it uses its round bill to feed on soft buds, flowers and shoots.

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that bullfinches are present at 52 Club sites

How to recognise this species

- Black cap, hood and chin, thick, stubby bill
- Bright red-pink underside
- Pale grey back
- Black tail, with white under tail and on rump
- In flight, white rump and grey-white band on black wings visible
- Call is low and soft *peeuw*, *deu* or *phiu*. Song infrequent, creaky pea-whistle



Credit: Sergey Yeleseev

Current status

- The UK bullfinch population has declined severely, from 300-350,000 pairs in 1984 to only 190,000 in 1988-91. A further 27% decline was recorded between 1994 and 1998, including a 64% decline in farmland habitats and 38% decline in woodlands
- It is estimated that only 10,000 pairs remain in the UK
- Due to the severe population decline, the bullfinch is a UK BAP Priority Species, and is also on the RSPB Red List. It is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the EC Birds Directive
- Factors causing the decline include:
 - Loss of farmland trees, hedgerows, scrub and thickets, used for foraging and nesting
 - Reduction in quality of remaining farmland hedgerows, due to frequent and un-sympathetic flaying/trimming
 - General intensification of agriculture
 - Loss of food sources (buds, seeds and fruits)
 - Loss of winter food sources through use of herbicides
 - Loss of winter stubble fields
 - Increased predation by sparrow hawk (on adults) and magpie (eggs) from growing open-country habitats

Ecology/management requirements

Habitat: Woodland, scrub, hedgerows, thickets, gardens and parks, where there is dense vegetation and cover. Nest is a cup of twigs lined with grass and moss, in a bush or tree.

Food: Soft buds, seeds, fruits, berries, flowers, shoots. Also takes some invertebrates from low cover, occasionally on the ground. It does not visit bird-feeders or tables.

How to look after this species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<p>DO <u>Manage hedgerows appropriately</u> (coppice, fill gaps, trim irregularly outside bird breeding season)</p> <p>DO <u>Trim hedgerows in rotation</u>, so that lengths with seeds/berries are always available</p> <p>DO <u>Lay new hedgerows</u> if there is space. Look for opportunities to replace fencing with native species-rich hedgerow</p> <p>DO <u>Maintain/increase area of scrub, broad-leaved and mixed woodland</u>, where possible</p> <p>DO <u>Maintain/plant orchard habitat</u> – this is valuable for many species, including bullfinch</p>	<p>DO Start a weekly <u>bird sightings board</u>, to educate visitors, and monitor birds on site</p> <p>DO Where hedgerow planting/replanting is necessary, <u>use native, seed and berry-bearing species</u>, of local provenance (follow the <i>Flora Locale</i> code)</p> <p>DO <u>Maintain/improve hedgerow, woodland and scrub connectivity</u> – bullfinch do not move far from these habitats when foraging</p>
DON'TS	<p>DON'T <u>Cut/trim hedgerows, scrub or trees during the bird breeding season</u> (March – August)</p> <p>DON'T <u>Over-manage areas of dense vegetation</u> such as scrub and woodland edges. They may look 'untidy', but bullfinch require good plant architecture and diversity</p>	<p>DON'T <u>Directly disturb nests</u> when they are in use (this is illegal)</p> <p>DON'T <u>Monitor bullfinch by looking at bird feeders/tables</u> – this species appears to dislike artificial feeding stations</p>

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for bullfinch: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>

UK BAP for bullfinch: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=542>