

## Tree sparrow

### Description

The tree sparrow is often considered the 'country cousin' of the far more familiar house sparrow. A much more localised species, the tree sparrow has undergone one of the largest population crashes of all our commoner bird species. Smaller than house sparrow from which it can be told by a combination of rich brown crown, black cheek-spot and white neck collar. In Ireland tree sparrows breed in farm old farm building, trees and take to specially designed nest boxes extremely well. Decline is considered to be a consequence of reduced habitat diversity due to loss of mix farming, and general agricultural intensification.



Considered to be a semi-colonial nesting species, the tree sparrow usually lays around five or six eggs at the beginning of May, with incubation lasting 12 to 13 days. Fledging takes about two-and-a-half weeks and two or three broods per year may be raised. Whilst primarily a seed-eating species, invertebrates form an essential part of the diet of unfledged young.

### Distribution

Found mainly in the Lough Neagh basin and the north-west and south-east coasts. In Ireland, they are found near farmland with hedgerows and trees. In the breeding season, the tree sparrow is local but widely dispersed in Lough Neagh basin and around some lowland, pastoral coastal areas. In winter, they are frequent stubble fields.

### Action

UK Species Action Plan which was published in 1998.

Some very successful nest box schemes such as at Portmore Lough RSPB Reserve

Portmore Lough is designated as an ASSI

Following on from the success of the Lough Neagh Wetlands Tree Sparrow Project, the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Biodiversity Officer is now concentrating on the creation of suitable habitats to help the tree sparrow expand its range from the shore of the Lough.

Implementation of the Northern Ireland Habitat Action Plans for Species Rich Hedgerows and Parkland

### Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=127>

### MLA Species Champion