

Yellowhammer

Description

The yellowhammer can be seen in Northern Ireland all year round. They are particularly visible where a mixture of arable and livestock farming exists. This species has been in decline. However, it is still a popular species in eastern County Down.

The yellowhammer is one of the larger buntings, which is a family of plump sparrow-sized birds with triangular bills. They are perfectly designed for eating both seeds and insects. The males are known for their bright yellow heads and underparts, with a chestnut color over their breasts. Females and the younger birds are duller and streaked in appearance.



The yellowhammer builds its nest on or close to the ground in dense vegetation, at the base of a thick hedge, bank or gorse bush. The nest is made of grasses, leaves, moss and straw and lined with fine grasses. Breeding starts in early April when the first clutch of three to four eggs is laid. A pair can lay up to three broods each season. The young feed on insect foods such as caterpillars but feed on grass and weed seeds and split grains from stubble fields throughout the rest of the year. In winter, they gather in flocks and scan surrounding areas for food.

Distribution

Although common in the east of Europe the yellowhammer has suffered significant decline in many western and northern European countries. In Northern Ireland, all yellowhammers are restricted in range to arable and mixed farming areas. Once widespread across the whole of the country, this dynamic has seen a 91% decline, and is currently red listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland.

Action

DARD's Agri-Environment Scheme provides options that can help support this species, measure including the provision of wild bird cover, retention of winter stubble and hedgerow management.

The RSPB have been working closely with farmers in east County Down since 2005, the Yellowhammer Recovery Project (2006-2012) implemented AES measures and offered advice to farms within schemes, this resulted in a 79% increase of yellowhammers on their farms over this time Farmer buy-in to this project was extraordinary, the RSPB are continuing to work with land owners in this area for the recovery of this species.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=122>

MLA Species Champion