

# Back from the Brink – Species summary

## Willow Tit

**BftB project:** SP12 Willow Tit Species Recovery Project

**Project lead organisation:** RSPB

**Contact:** [info@ywt.org.uk](mailto:info@ywt.org.uk)

**Partner organisation for species:** Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

<b>Species name – common &amp; scientific</b>	Willow Tit <i>Poecile montanus</i>
<b>Photograph</b>	 <p>© Ian Buttler / Back from the Brink</p>
<b>Taxon group</b>	Birds
<b>Conservation status</b>	UK Red List
<b>UK distribution</b>	Populations relatively stable across Wales, North-West England, Yorkshire, North-East England. Distribution contracting in the Midlands. Locally extinct in South-East England and small, fragmented populations across South-West England and Scottish borders.
<b>Habitat associations</b>	Prefers damp young woodland and scrub, riparian woodland. Can be stable in upland reservoir plantations that has a mix of broadleaf and conifer. Naturally regenerated brownfield sites (former coal and gravel pits etc.) are commonly occupied in Northern England.
<b>BftB work carried out:</b>	
<b>Survey &amp; Monitoring</b>	The standardised nationally recognised playback method was used within the project area to establish distribution and number of territories. Radio tracking technology was used for the first time on Willow Tit to gain more in-depth understanding of individual birds' movements over the winter months. A total of 11 birds were fitted with radio trackers and were monitored between 1-12 days.

<b>Sites habitat management works</b>	<p>Works have been done to diversify the structure of woodlands and scrub and have included interventions such as coppicing, selecting thinning, glade creation and block felling. Some tree planting of key species has been done to kick-start understory growth along glade and woodland edges.</p> <p>Nest boxes have been trialled – birch boxes filled with sawdust to mimic rotting deadwood, though no evidence of Willow Tit using these was found. Rotting logs have been tied to living trees as a more natural means of increasing nesting opportunities. Some of these have shown starts of nest excavation.</p>
<b>Conservation 'interventions' incl. reintroductions &amp; translocations</b>	N/A
<b>Technical advice provision</b>	Advice on management when tree felling/removal provided to landowners and managers including Barnsley Council, Environment Agency and Northern Power Grid.
<b>Links made with other taxa / conservation work?</b>	The boxes used to encourage Willow Tit will attract other bird species, such as Tree Sparrow. Native hedgerow and scrub planting will benefit a range of other amber and red listed birds, including Yellowhammer and Bullfinch.
<b>Wider engagement &amp; advocacy activities?</b>	The project helped facilitate Willow Tit Summits -
<b>BftB results obtained:</b>	
<b>Recorded Distribution (in BftB focal areas)</b>	A breeding territory map has been produced over the course of the project within the Dearne Valley NIA, noting the distribution change from 2015 (pre-BftB baseline) to 2021. Distribution has seen a contraction over this period, with territories largely disappearing in the eastern half of the area after 2015.
<b>Recorded Abundance of species populations</b>	Abundance of territories within site boundaries is noted, along with the change over the 2015-2021 period. All core sites (Rabbit Ings-Carlton Marsh, Old Moor, Worsbrough Reservoir) have all seen a dramatic decline in territories since 2015. No territories were recorded during the breeding season at Old Moor and Rabbit Ings-Carlton Marsh in 2021, however during the summer of 2020 they were still being picked up. These sites may no longer have breeding but still have habitat to support juveniles summer foraging.
<b>Other results documented?</b>	Winter ranges of birds through radio tracking have been mapped, showing that paired and un-paired birds can occupy varied home ranges (e.g. some stuck to a small linear scrub corridor, others travelled between two large woodland patches separated by 1km of linear scrub). This gives more insight into the needs of Willow Tit – large areas of well-connected woodland/scrub at least 2ha but possibly up to 7ha per breeding pair.
<b>Species Recovery Curve progress made</b>	<p>Prior to this project, very little was understood about how Willow Tit use the habitats and the landscape. Information about habitat is well documented, but the drivers of decline uncertain. The Willow Tit was placed at 'step 6' of the Species Recovery Curve.</p> <p>Through this project, we now know a significant amount more than before about winter ranges and movement across habitats of paired and unpaired birds. Several habitat management interventions were trialled, however there has been no increase in Willow Tit as a result. It is likely that</p>

	colonisation will take longer than the duration this project allowed, and so support is in place to continue monitoring these areas annually.
<b>Other measures of species recovery progress? e.g. FCS</b>	This project has supported the RSPB's National Willow Tit Survey across the 2019 and 2020 survey seasons. The project helped contribute to national distribution and abundance data coordinated by the RSPB and was detailed in surveying 1km tetrads. The national trend remains one of continued decline.
<b>Recommendations for future work:-</b>	Due to the ongoing declines of local and national Willow Tit populations, it is of great importance to continue monitoring areas where Willow Tit still remain to keep track of changing distribution and abundance. Willow tit are sedentary but require a specific niche early successional habitat, and will move with succession, so monitoring the local area of previously held territories is important. Restoring woodlands to healthy conditions, with a diverse structure, and creating and maintaining biological corridors across landscapes (hedgerow, scrub, rivers, canals and railways) are needed to sustain and increase Willow Tit populations.

# Back from the Brink – Species summary

## Willow Tit

**BftB project:** IPO6 Roots of Rockingham

**Project lead organisation:** Butterfly Conservation

**Contact:** [info@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:info@butterfly-conservation.org)

**Partner organisation for species:** RSPB

<b>Species name – common &amp; scientific</b>	<b>Willow Tit</b> <i>Poecile montanus</i>
<b>Photograph</b>	 <p>© Francis C. Franklin CC-BY-SA-3.0 / Back from the Brink</p>
<b>Taxon group</b>	Class: Aves Order: Passeriformes
<b>Conservation status</b>	Classified in the UK as Red under the Birds of Conservation Concern 5: the Red List for Birds (2021). Protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.
<b>UK distribution</b>	Willow tits are mainly found in England and Wales, with some in south Scotland. Core range now limited to mid Wales, the midlands, northern England and south-west Scotland; declining and now scarce/locally extinct in southern England including the south-west. Severe range contraction (82% reduction in the number of occupied 10km squares in the last 16 years) 94% population decline since 1970. See Willow Tit factsheet on <a href="#">Woodland Wildlife Toolkit</a> for distribution map

<b>Habitat associations</b>	Primarily wet woodland includes riparian scrub and damper areas in broadleaf woodland types, conifer plantation edges, damp scrub. Preferred habitat niches: Wet woodland or damp woodland margins, with small diameter birch and shrubs such as hawthorn, willow and elder; deadwood required for self-excavated nests. Some open space within scrub / shrub layer. Dense understorey and shrub layer preferred with foliage zone above 2m.
<b>BftB work carried out:</b>	
<b>Survey &amp; Monitoring</b>	Volunteers carried out Willow Tit surveys on 10 sites and RSPB staff carried out surveys at 3 sites. 12 sites were also visited by RSPB staff to assess current habitat condition, as well as potential beneficial habitat management for the priority bird species.
<b>Technical advice provision</b>	Detailed site surveys carried out at 12 sites by RSPB. During each site survey, a route was walked around the wood, following the ride network and aiming to cover the majority of area of the woodland. A visual assessment was made for each wood of the following: stand structure and composition, internal open space (rides and glades), internal and external edge structure, scrub / pioneer habitat availability, availability of large mature / open grown trees, decaying wood availability, wetness and wet features; and where possible, connectivity to other woodland habitats. File notes were provided for each site to inform the relevant landowners and managers how they could manage their land to improve habitat for the target bird species.  Section on managing woodland for birds was included in each of the three landowner workshops.
<b>Wider engagement &amp; advocacy activities?</b>	ID and survey training, guided walks, talks, bird quiz, virtual dawn chorus walk, creative writing workshop.
<b>BftB results obtained:</b>	
<b>Recorded Distribution (in BftB focal areas)</b>	Recorded at 3 sites.
<b>Recorded Abundance of species populations</b>	Total of 4 records during project surveys.
<b>Species Recovery Curve progress made</b>	Species Recovery Curve moved from 4 to 5 A national trial management project is nearing completion and results will be incorporated into management advice. Further trials (on re-wetting) are likely. At the local level, willow tit might receive some benefit from the management carried out under the project along rides, if scrub edges develop. Management for this species has been suggested through advice to landowners, although volunteer surveys did not find the species to be present at many sites. Any benefits for this species from ride edge management carried out through the project, in terms of increasing scrub edge connectivity, are likely to be seen over the next five or so years. However, bird survey results for this species were not encouraging and local population recovery is unlikely without more intensive intervention.
<b>Recommendations for future work:-</b>	The bird survey skills and enthusiasm of the volunteers should be harnessed by linking project volunteers to local bird groups and national bird surveys such as the national willow tit survey (currently runs to 2021, but updates can be found on the <a href="#">RSPB website</a> See <a href="#">Willow Tit factsheet</a> on Woodland Wildlife Toolkit for further information including habitat management advice for this species

