

# Back from the Brink – Species summary

## Willow Tit

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

**Project lead organisation:** RSPB

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**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.