



Birds in Fairfield Nature Reserve 2014

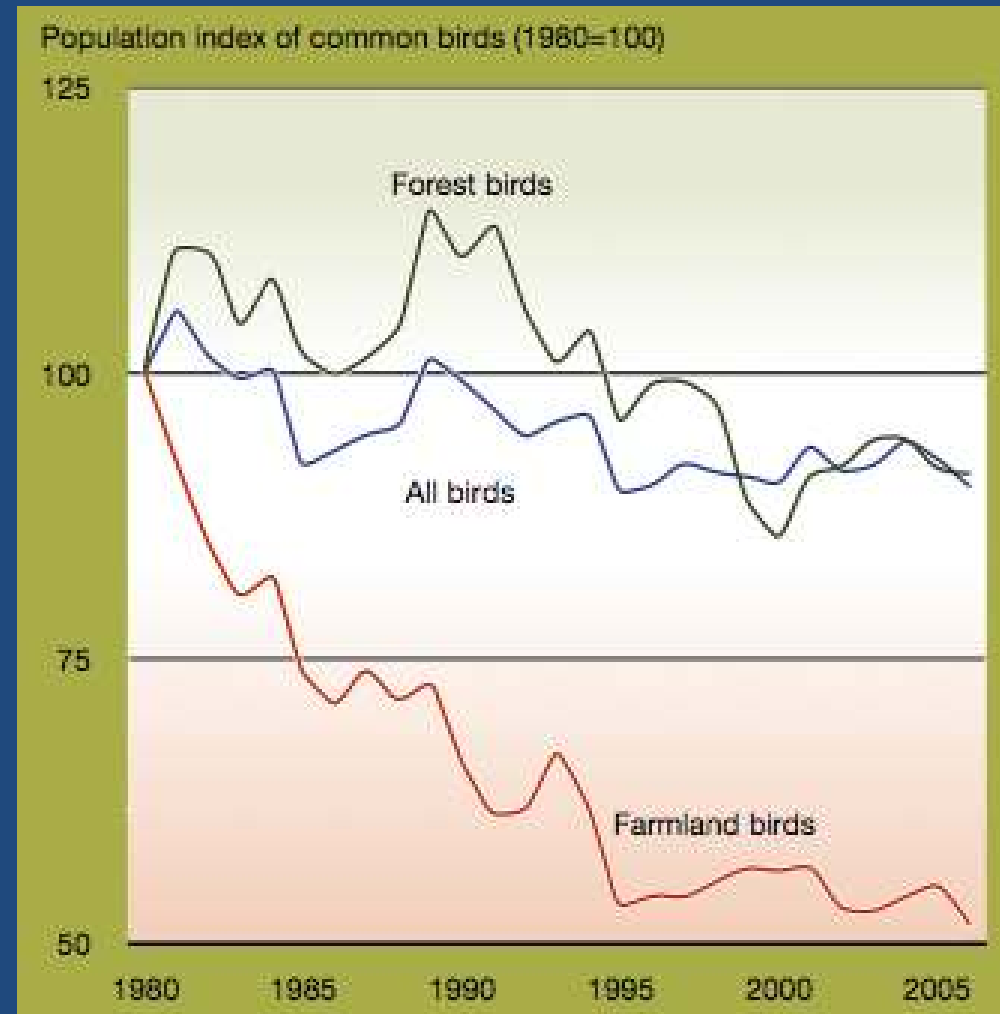


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Some National Trends

Since the war we have lost ~50 million birds. In particular, there has been a sharp decline in numbers of farmland birds.

50-70 years ago farming was mixed with adjacent arable and livestock and plentiful hedges and ponds.



Agricultural Intensification

- **Loss of mixed farming** – most farms had both livestock and arable crops providing open nesting sites for the young.
- **Switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals** – gives rise to the loss of overwinter stubble, which provides food and shelter between harvest and mid-February.



Agricultural Intensification

- **Increase in chemical usage** – farmers use fertilisers as well as ~350 different pesticides, herbicides and fungicides which impact upon weed, insect and invertebrate populations, which are all food for birds.
- **More intensive farming methods** – in 1992 the EU decreed that farmers set aside 15% of all cropped farmland for wildlife. The figure was reduced and then the whole scheme was scrapped in 2008.

How Do We Classify Bird Populations?

There are different types of criteria.

Long-term trends by which we assign birds to

Red, Amber or Green lists

52 126 68 species



A criterion used in assigning birds to the red list is severe (at least 50%) decline in breeding population over last 25 years.

How Do We Classify Bird Populations?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature criterion is proximity to extinction.



Fairfield Nature Reserve Is Effectively Farmland

We have that mix of
arable, livestock, orchard,
pasture, ponds, wet
grassland!



Marshy land



Orchard

Cattle grazing

Ponds

Hay meadow

Wet pasture

Woods

Arable

Developments in Fairfield

With funding from the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and advice from the RSPB we have:-

- raised the water levels and made a new reedbed area
- created ponds, ditches and scrapes
- planted an arable crop - a wheat/oat hybrid
- planted more trees in Pony Wood
- created some hedges and lowered others
- introduced cattle-crossing points
- put in margins with wild bird seed mix and floristically enhanced grass
- put up nestboxes

Fairfield Red and Amber List Birds

RED

Grey Partridge
Lapwing

Song Thrush
Fieldfare
Redwing

Tree Sparrow

AMBER

Reed Bunting

Snipe

Grey Partridge

Red-listed and Vulnerable

The Grey partridge is a medium-sized, plump gamebird which is found in lowland arable areas. It feeds on seeds, shoots and leaves.



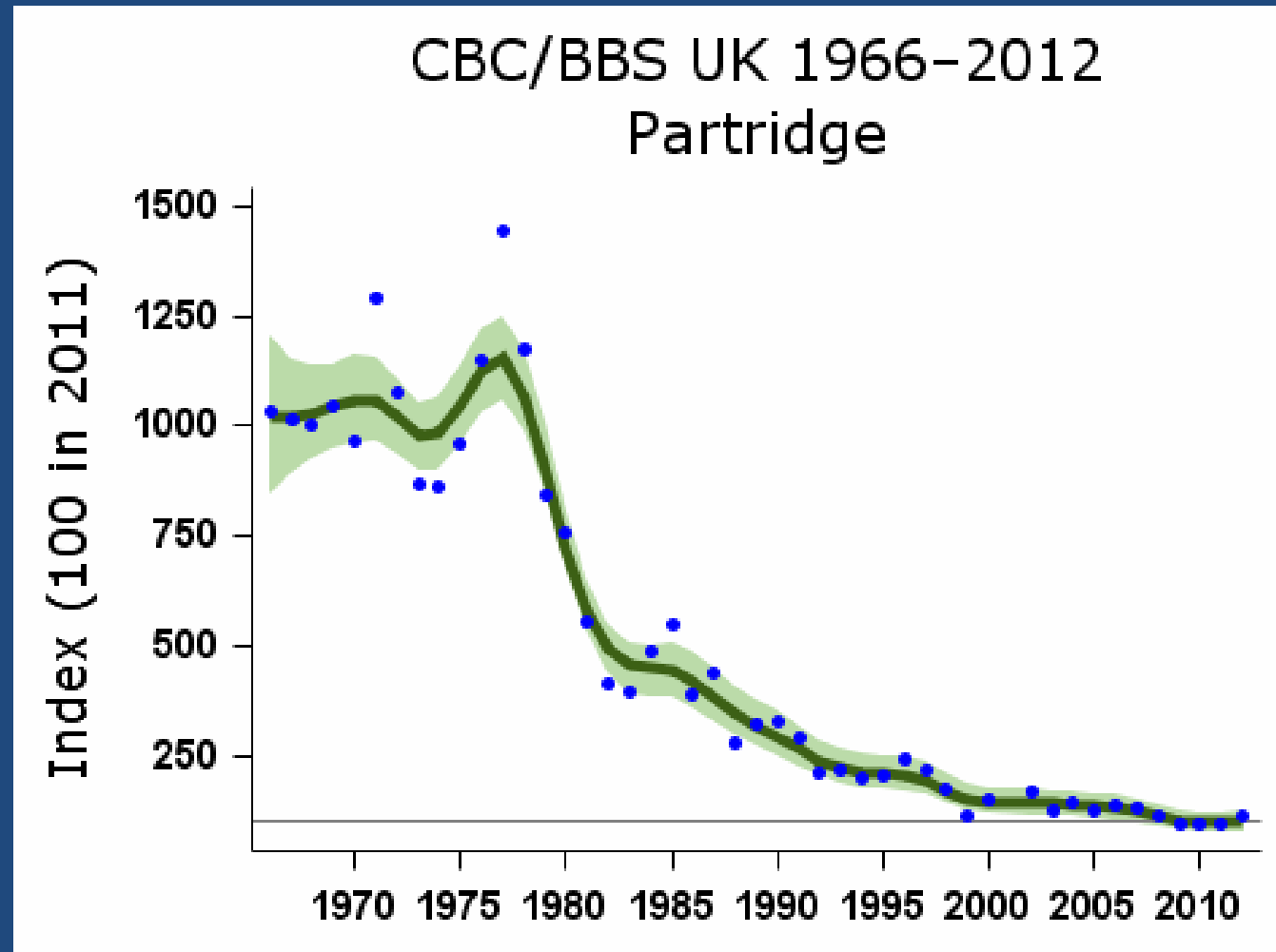
Bag records show that between 1870 and 1930 around 2 million birds were shot annually.

Today there are 43,000 breeding territories.



Grey Partridge Numbers

Grey partridge numbers have fallen by >90% in the last 50 years. It used to be called the Common Partridge!



Causes of Decline

Herbicides - Chick survival rates have fallen. In the first few weeks of life, grey partridge chicks feed on insects to obtain proteins for their rapid growth. The introduction of organo-chlorine herbicides (e.g. DDT, dieldrin) in the 50's eliminated many crop weeds that were insect food plants.

Hedgerows - The situation was exacerbated by the removal of grassy nesting cover as fields were enlarged by removing hedgerows.

Additional Risks

Raptors – In areas where grey partridge are in low density their numbers are at high risk of predation by female sparrowhawks particularly in late winter.



Thus, it is important to provide tall cover in February and March.

Grey Partridge in Fairfield

This year we had a pair of grey partridge nesting in the west field, but they did not seem to raise chicks.

In August we released 4 chicks into the arable field.



Lapwing

Red-listed and Vulnerable
UK breeding 140,000 pairs

Lapwing are ground-nesting birds that breed on wet pastures or farmland.

They feed on insects, spiders and earthworms.

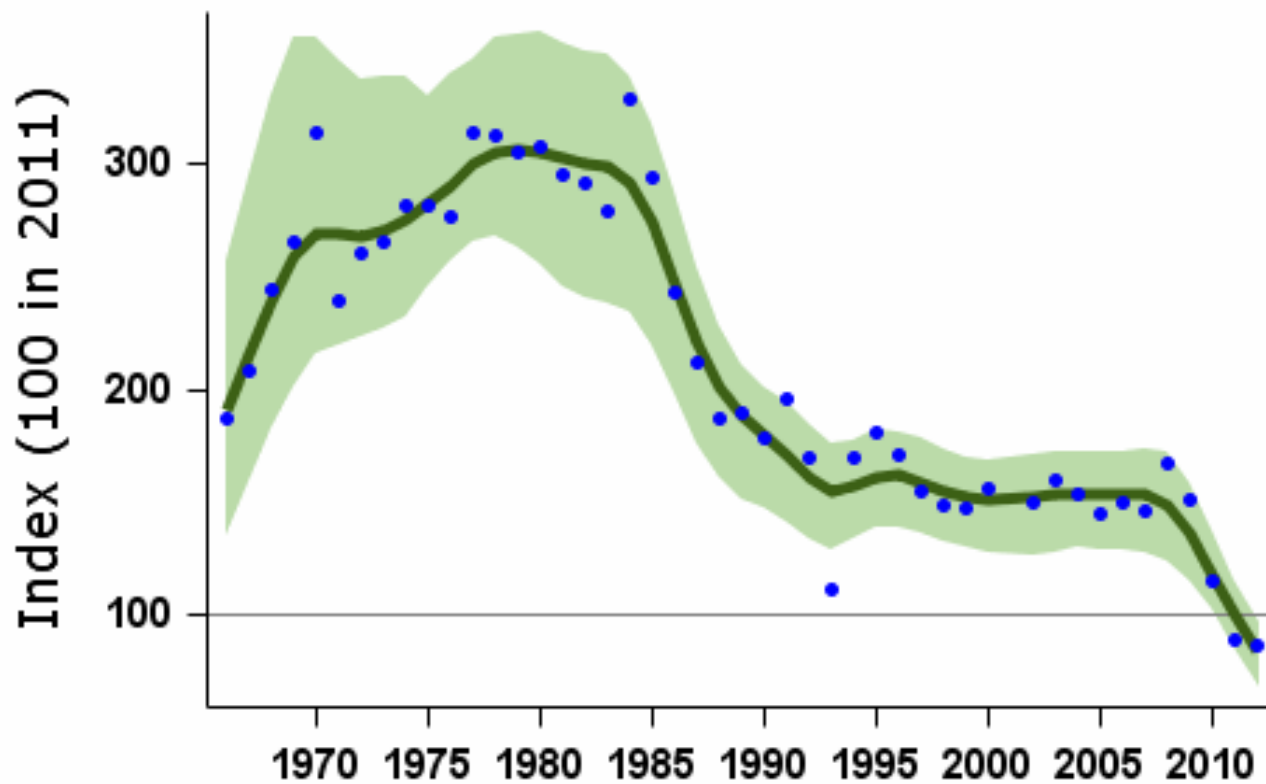
Their prime habitat is a mosaic where grass and spring tillage fields are close together.



Lapwing Numbers



CBC/BBS UK 1966–2012
Lapwing



Lapwings are one of the most strongly declining bird species in Europe, having decreased in all countries since 1980.

Lapwings in Fairfield

This year lapwings bred and there were two pair of chicks.

This is quite a success story as lapwings have not bred here for many years!

This also achieves one of our targets!



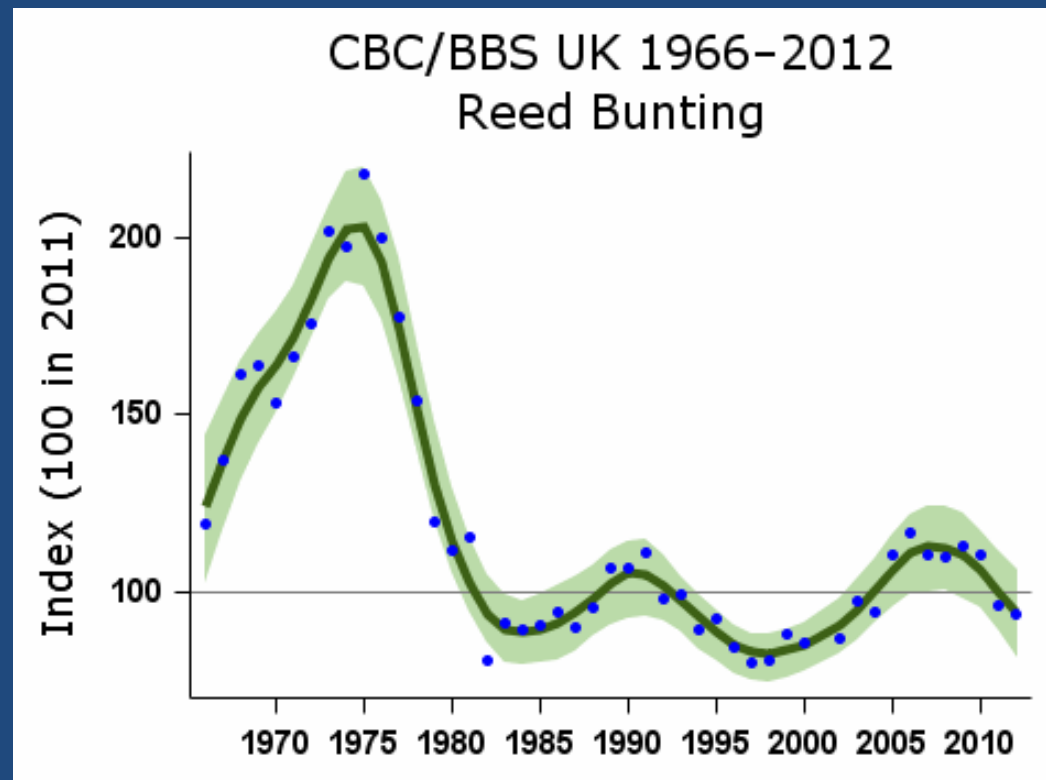
Reed Buntings **Amber-listed**

250,000 breeding territories

Reed buntings are predominantly farmland and wetland birds.



This year we have had a return to breeding in Fairfield with three males holding territories, and two pair breeding.



Song Thrush **Red-listed**

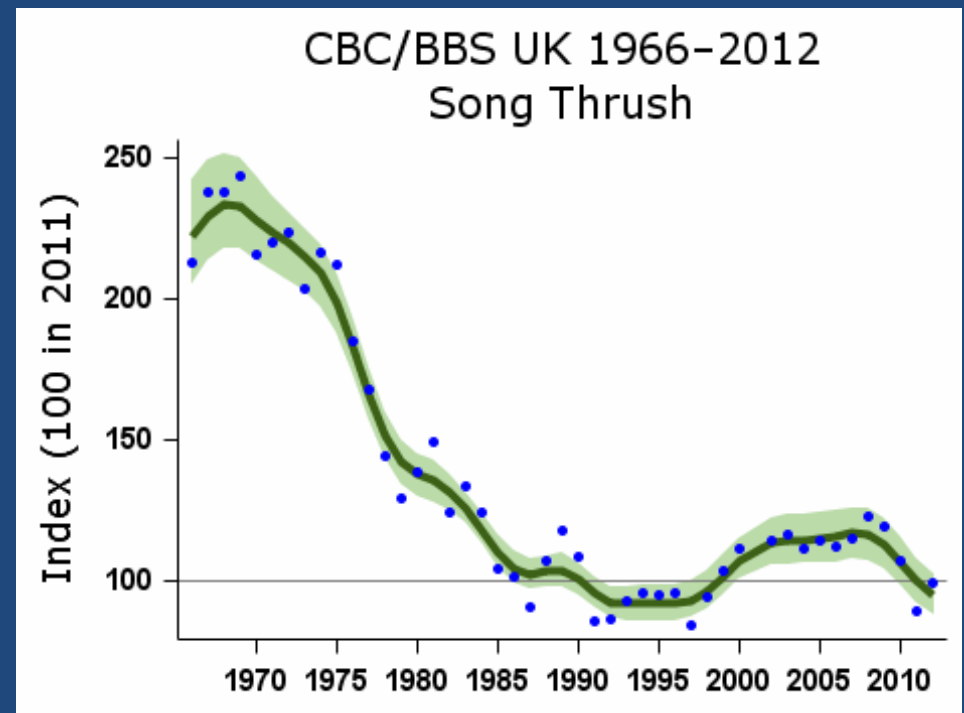
1,144,000 territories

‘That’s the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over’.

Song thrushes eat worms, snails and fruit.

Their decline is linked to first-year survival.

Two or three pairs have bred in Fairfield this year!



Wintering Fieldfare

Red-Listed

720,000 birds



- These are thrushes of Scandinavian and Russian origin.
- They are social birds, spending the winter in flocks of from a dozen or two to several hundred strong.



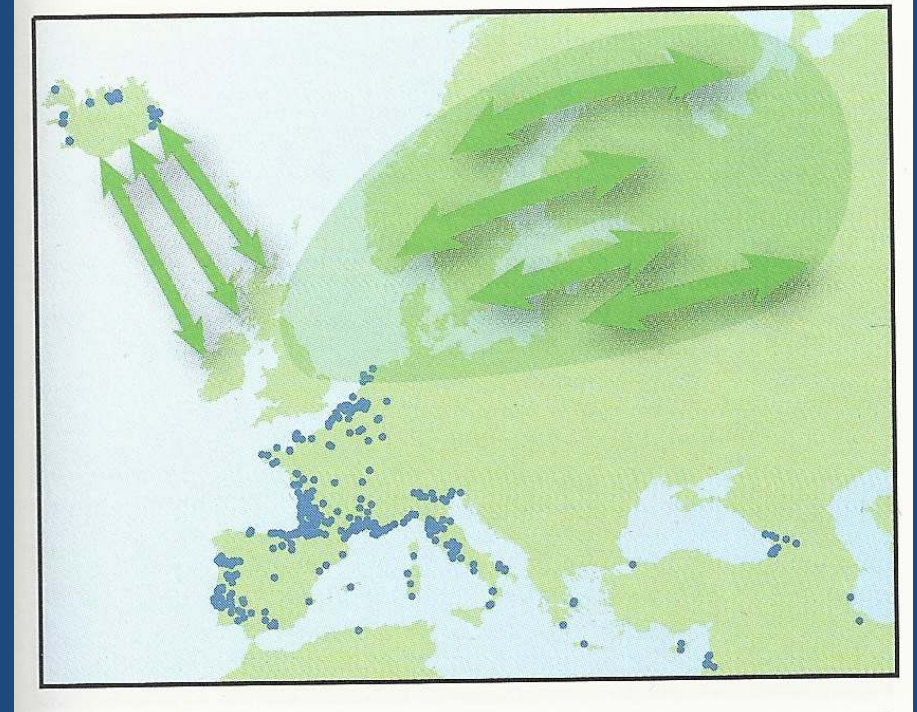
Wintering Redwing

Red-Listed

Breeding 4-16 pairs.
Wintering 690,000 birds.

Both of these thrushes
eat berries and fruit, as
well as, invertebrates.

We had a number of
these birds overwintering
in Fairfield last year.

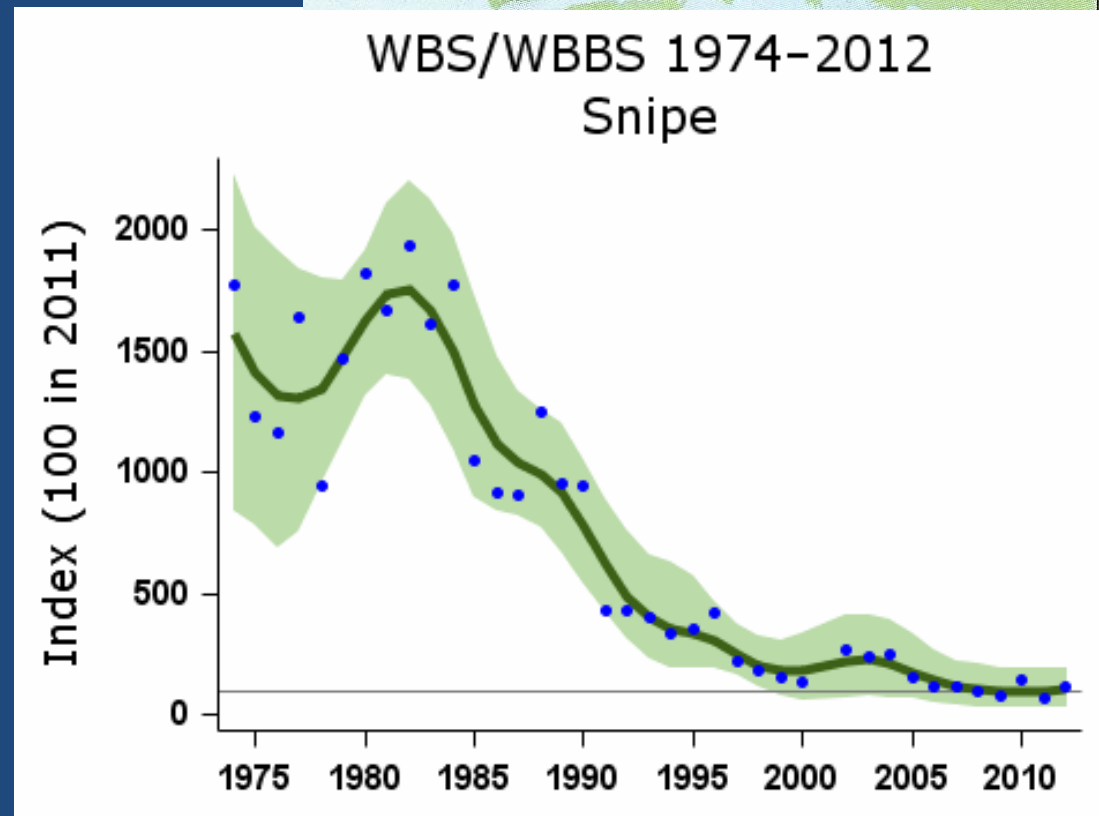
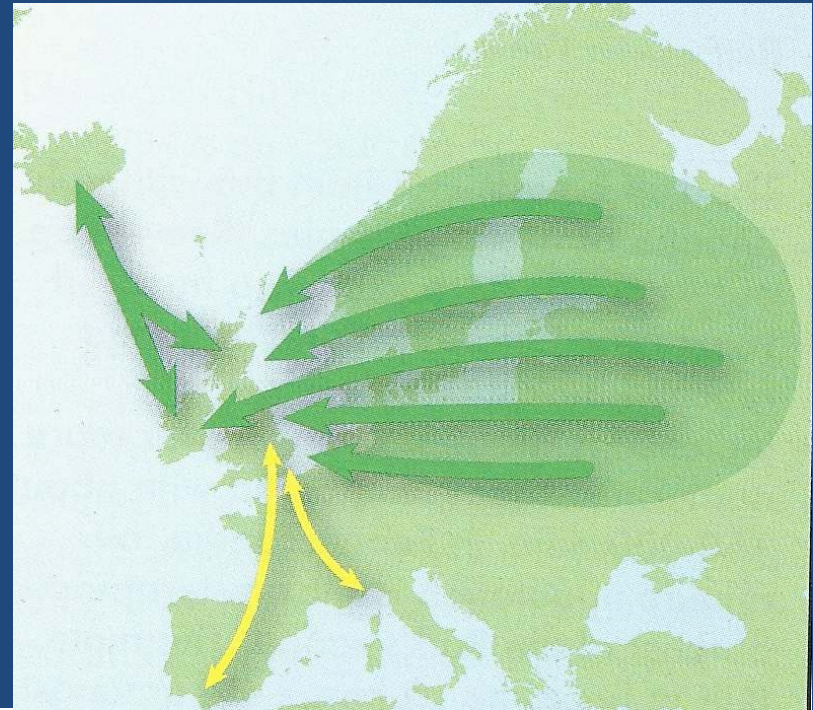


Snipe **Amber-Listed**

Breeding - 80,000 pairs.
Wintering – 1.1 million birds.

These small wading birds of marshes are in decline because of wetland drainage and prey abundance.

Our winter flush count was 91 birds!



Birding Nesting Surveys

Breeding bird morning surveys took place three times this year between April and late June. In total 36 species were recorded and 32 of these were breeding.

Summer visitors which bred include:-

Blackcap

Chiffchaff

Willow warbler

Whitethroat

Fairfield as Service Station

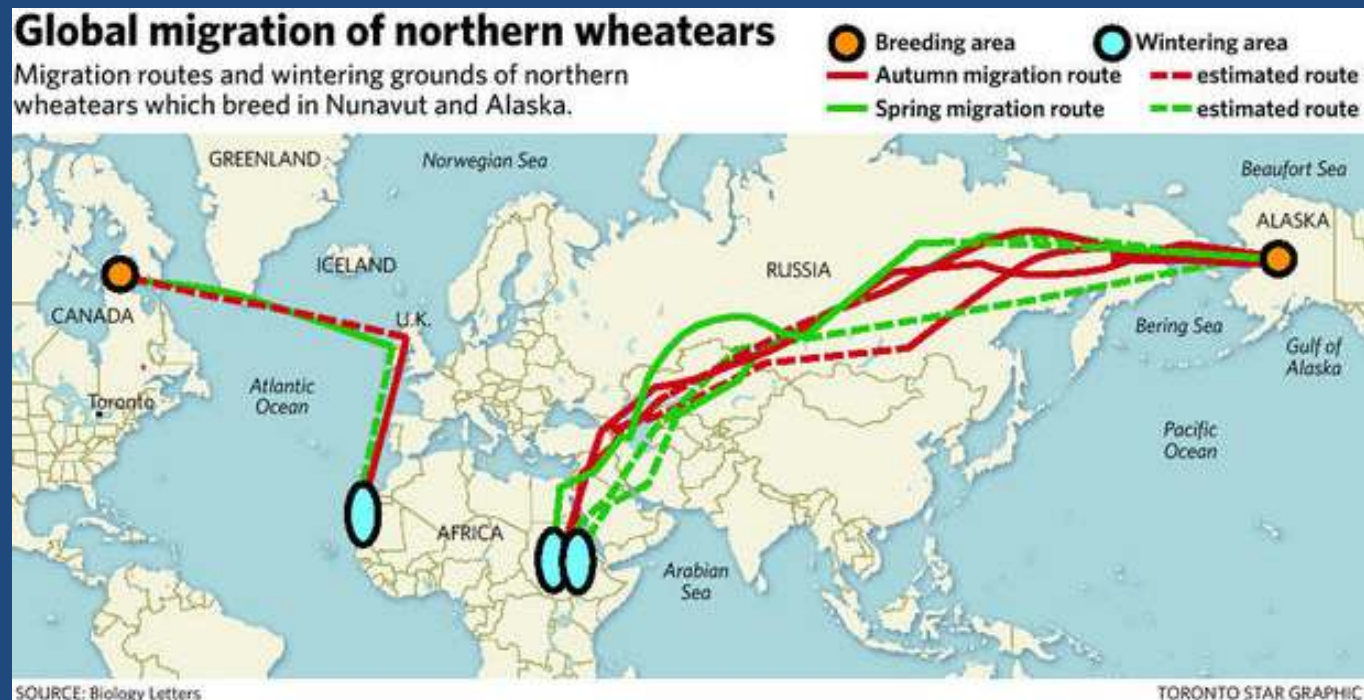


Northern Wheatears

These handsome birds winter in sub-Saharan Africa and migrate huge distances either NW to Canada or NE to Alaska.



In spring this year we had two dozen in Fairfield, presumably Canada-bound!



Other Migrants

Some species only migrate short distances and may be spotted in Fairfield.



Osprey over Fairfield!

On the 24th March this year I saw an osprey wheeling over the School Pond a couple of times before it headed off north to Scotland or the Lake District.





The End and Thanks!

It is important that we acknowledge the true bird experts like Richard Storton (RSPB), who has advised us, and Jon Carter (RSPB) who has led walks, and Dan Haywood who has carried out the breeding bird surveys.

In addition, we need to thank all of the volunteers who have developed and maintained this Reserve!

