

Tree Sparrow Action Plan

Introduction and Vision Statement

The tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*) is a smaller rural cousin of the more familiar house sparrow. Unlike that species, the tree sparrow's plumage is the same in both sexes and is distinguished mainly by its chocolate brown cap and a black cheek spot. It is semi-colonial, nesting in loose groups mostly in tree cavities. Pairs produce two or three broods in the course of the summer after which birds can congregate to form feeding flocks. Their preferred diet is of small-seeded weed species, which used to occur far more abundantly in arable areas than now. Tree sparrows readily use nest boxes and can be attracted to food put out in gardens. Populations are mainly sedentary but large-scale autumnal movements occasionally occur.



The population in Carmarthenshire appears to be the only significant one remaining in west Wales, amounting to possibly 70–80% or more of the whole Welsh population. Here tree sparrows are centred on the Tywi Valley between Llangadog and Carmarthen with outlying colonies near Pendine and possibly elsewhere. In the Tywi Valley they are virtually confined to the floodplain and are very rarely observed beyond sight of the river. This grassland habitat is an unusual one for the tree sparrow, which is usually found in areas of mixed or arable farming. The varied habitats of the Tywi Valley – the mature trees, hedgerows, shingle banks on the river and tall herbaceous and graminaceous vegetation found on the riverbanks and associated wetland areas – offer the required shelter and food for the sparrows.

Ditches and aquatic vegetation provide an abundance of invertebrate food – mosquitos – which is important when young birds are being fed. *Phalaris* and other tall grasses as well as low-lying seed-bearing species such as water-pepper attract adult and fledged birds, flocks of up to 50 being occasionally seen. Birds are also attracted to the increasing number of maize fields when these are harvested, although these usually only provide food for 2 or 3 weeks.

Changes in agricultural practice, which have affected a range of farmland birds; decline in numbers and productivity of weed species, more intensive grassland management, decline in insect species and abundance due to loss of wetland, continued drainage of the land and loss of nesting sites are all causes for their decline.

The vision for this species in Carmarthenshire is for an increased population using sympathetically managed habitat, allowing for an expansion in range.

Action Plan Objectives

- TS1SP** To maintain and increase the population of the tree sparrow in Carmarthenshire
- TS2DCM** To gather data on the distribution and status of tree sparrows in Carmarthenshire.
- TS3RA** To raise awareness of the importance of tree sparrows in Carmarthenshire and provide advice on habitat management

Actions

CODE	TEXT	START/END DATE	Lead partner	Action goal	Key partners	Funding	Priority L,M,H	Report Jan–Dec 2010	Report Jan–Dec 2011	
TS1SP1	Provide nestboxes for tree sparrows within their known range	2010–2015	CTSP	x boxes erected	CCC Landowners	✓		No report as yet		
TS1SP2	Through TAYO project provide nestboxes for tree sparrows within their known range	2009–2011	TAYO	x boxes erected	Landowners	✓		TS next boxes have been installed at sites within the Tywi valley as part of the TAYO project – exact no. not known specifically for TS but 228 boxes installed in total for birds.		
TS1SP3	Provide feeding stations for tree sparrows within their known range	2010–2015	CTSP	5 feeding stations established	CCC Volunteers	✓		Five feeding stations supplied by vols in sites along the Tywi valley. Feed supplied through CCW grant funding. Vols have been asked to monitor birds. SN580208, SN552205, SN541206, SN533205, SN640226		
TS1SP4	Aberdeunant Farm (SN671307). RSPB project to improve habitat for tree sparrows	2010–2015	NT	1 site established	RSPB			No report from National Trust		
TS2DCM1	Undertake annual monitoring of key populations along the Tywi valley (SN567200)	2010–ongoing	CTSP	Annual monitoring undertaken	Volunteers			Partial survey of Tree Sparrow nest boxes- 36 pairs in boxes- success rate of these first broods was good- no information on later broods-good numbers coming to feeding stations since.		
TS2DCM2	Identify areas with suitable habitats outside Tywi valley to target future survey	2010–2015	CTSP	Target list/map of sites produced	CCW, BTO, CCC			Not started		
TS2DCM3	Survey the sites identified on the target list	2010–2015	CTSP	Surveys undertaken	CCW, BTO, CCC, vols			Not started		
TS3RA1	Produce an information sheet for landowners providing advise on tree sparrow conservation and habitat management	2010– 2011	TAYO	Information sheet produced	CCC			Bilingual document produced. Available on www.carmarthenshirebio diversity.co.uk		

TS3RA2	Install permanent interpretation panel on tree sparrow at Dryslwyn car park site (SN552203)	2010– 2011	TAYO	Panel installed	CCC	✓			Not completed.	
TS3RA3	Through a press release and article in the Carmarthenshire biodiversity newsletter, encourage recording of tree sparrows in Carmarthenshire	2010–2015	CCC	PR Newsletter item					2011 action	
TS3RA4	Through TAYO project undertake TS survey training day	2010– 2011	TAYO	Training event held	CTSP Landowners				Not completed due to lack of interest, despite being advertised widely.	