

Local wildlife groups and councils in Gwent have come together to double their efforts to help the nationally threatened Tree Sparrow.

Once common in the Gwent area, the Tree Sparrow is now a very scarce sight. Some 20-years ago, Tree Sparrows were fairly widespread especially on the Gwent Levels. Just 10-years ago there were still good size winter flocks to be seen but sadly that's no longer the case and today you would be hard pressed to spot a Tree Sparrow anywhere locally. The scale of the decline is alarming: the Gwent Ornithological Society during its breeding birds surveys between 1981-85 & 1998-2003 has recorded a reduction in the species' range of over 80%.

To help encourage Tree Sparrows back from the brink the Gwent Ornithological Society, local landowners, the Gwent Wildlife Trust, the Goldcliff Ringing Group, Welsh Water, Newport City Council and Monmouthshire County Council have joined forces and launched the Spot the Tree Sparrow Project. The Countryside Council for Wales is providing funding towards the project under their Species Challenge Fund.

The Project will build on existing work by the partners. Seven key sites have been selected on the Caldicot Levels and Usk valley areas and at each, winter feed and nest boxes for Tree Sparrows will be provided. Such measures are aimed at addressing the loss of winter stubble and other feeding opportunities lost due to changing agricultural practices and the shortage of suitable nesting sites.

Key to the success of the project will be the support of volunteers. The partnership is keen to hear from anyone who might be able to help with feeding and monitoring at the key sites. An awareness day is being held on 8th October when full training will be given to those who can help and a presentation given on the successful Wiltshire Tree Sparrow. To register your interest in helping please contact [surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk](mailto:surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk) or telephone Richard Clarke on 01633 615581.

## NOTES

The Species has been declining nationally in both numbers and range for a large part of the last century and consequently it has been classified as a priority species in the UK and local Biodiversity Action Plans.

The key sites include the Gwent Wildlife Trust's reserves at Magor Marsh and Springdale Farm, near Usk and at Dingestow. In addition, Welsh Water's Llandegfedd Reservoir, and sites at Llanllowell and near Goldcliff will all provide winter feed and nest boxes for Tree Sparrows.

### **We need your sightings**

Have you seen any Tree Sparrows recently? If you have, please let us know, as we would like to hear from anyone who has knowledge of Tree Sparrows in the Gwent area.

Tree Sparrow & House Sparrow – what's the difference?

Details we need for each sighting are as follows:

Date bird(s) seen

Location of where seen

Map reference (6 figure if possible)

Number of birds seen

Any other comments (carrying food, at nest site etc)

Your name & contact details

Please submit your records to:

surveys@GwentBirds.org.uk or contact Richard Clarke on telephone: 01633 615581

Your participation in this project will greatly help us in trying to help the Tree Sparrow.

Tree Sparrow: what to look for

- Smaller, less stocky and brighter than House Sparrow
- Rich chestnut-brown crown
- Black spot on white cheek
- White neck band/collar
- Small neat black bib
- Back & wings a mixture of warm shades of brown
- In flight has two white wing bars whereas the House Sparrow has just one
- Sexes alike. Female House Sparrow lacks black bib
- Voice – similar, but the Tree Sparrow sounds a bit more cheerful