

This page offers advice on the conservation of Black Redstarts in London. More information is available at www.blackredstarts.org.uk which addresses the perceived conflict between development and nature conservation and offers innovative design solutions that can be implemented that are of benefit to Black Redstarts and more broadly, biodiversity.

Advice for its conservation in London.

The black redstart is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is listed as a priority species for the London Biodiversity Action Plan, as a Bird of Conservation Concern, and a Red Data Book species.



With less than 100 pairs nesting in Britain the black redstart is a rarer British breeding bird than the osprey or golden eagle. London is one of the UK's most important locations for this species; their population in the capital constitutes between 10 & 30% of the national breeding population. The species is now under threat from the planned regeneration of much of its breeding ground - the Thames corridor.

In Partnership with English Nature and the British Trust for Ornithology, the London Wildlife Trust has produced an advice note for planners, councillors, regeneration agencies, landscape architects and others, warning them of the presence of this spectacular bird in particular localities. It also provides advice on how to ensure that black redstarts may be conserved for the future. A copy of the note can be obtained from the [London Wildlife Trust](#).

What is a black redstart?

The black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) is an attractive robin-sized bird of the Thrush family with a characteristic red-brown coloured tail. It is one of Britain's rarest birds, with an estimated 27-74 pairs breeding nationally, although populations may fluctuate wildly¹.

Why is it important?

The black redstart is a nationally rare species and London supports a significant number of breeding pairs. The species is fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

This policy advice is being provided to local authority planning departments and planning committees, regeneration agencies, developers, and others interested in the conservation of the black redstart. It provides interim advice in advance of the biodiversity action plan for the black redstart currently being prepared by the London Biodiversity Partnership.

Where is it in London?

The black redstart has been recorded from nearly all London boroughs with confirmed breeding in 16 boroughs since 1990.

Monitoring and recording is difficult in some areas but the species is believed to be breeding in an additional number of boroughs, most of these alongside the River Thames and River Lea². So, the bird is generally under-recorded in London and may be present in greater numbers than the existing data suggests.

Boroughs where black redstart have been recorded breeding since 1990	Additional boroughs where birds have been recorded since 1990 (and may have bred)
<p>Bexley Brent Camden City of London Croydon Ealing Greenwich Hackney Havering Islington Lewisham Newham Richmond upon Thames Southwark Tower Hamlets Waltham Forest Wandsworth</p>	<p>Barking & Dagenham Barnet Bromley Enfield Hammersmith & Fulham Haringey Harrow Hillingdon Kensington & Chelsea Kingston upon Thames Lambeth Merton Redbridge Sutton City of Westminster</p>
<p>Boroughs in bold have had regular breeding pairs recorded since 1990.</p>	<p>The potential for any Thames-side borough to support breeding pairs of this species cannot be ruled out. Hounslow is the only borough where the black redstart has not been recorded since 1990 from the available data.</p>

Why the need for action?

It is believed that the distribution and numbers of the black redstart in London are controlled principally by the availability of suitable breeding habitat. The future regeneration of areas in which the black redstart currently breeds could lead to a significant reduction of such sites. Without its needs being accommodated, there is a danger that this bird could become very rare, if not extinct, within the capital, which in turn will threaten its national status.

This advice note is to help ensure that local planning authorities, regeneration agencies, developers and landscape architects are alert to the possible presence of this bird and can help to secure its future within London.

Advice is provided in four ways:

- Compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
- As a set of conditions to be used when determining planning applications under the Town & Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990
- As a Section 106 planning obligation (TCPA 1990)
- As a policy to be incorporated during the Unitary Development Plan review

Compliance with the legislation

The black redstart is a 'fully protected species'; it is listed on Schedule I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This protects the bird, its eggs and nestlings from killing and injury, and damage or destruction to its nest. Importantly, the Act also protects against any intentional disturbance to the bird while it is building a nest, or is in, on or near a nest containing eggs or young, or disturbance of the dependent young of such a bird.

The breeding activity of the black redstart usually covers a period from mid-March to late-July, although there may be exceptions to this; in some years they may produce more than one brood.

Therefore operations such as demolition and/or those requiring planning permission may affect this species adversely, and may therefore be controlled by the Act.

It is important that planning authorities consider the presence, or likely presence, of the species when determining planning applications. Given the bird's mobility and the knowledge of its full distribution in London is still incomplete, it is important that professional advice is sought for sites where it may be present.

We suggest that the following steps are always adopted to take account of the legislation:

- Require surveys for black redstarts and their habitat³, to accompany planning applications for sites where they may occur
- Seek further information and advice from London Ecology Unit, London Wildlife Trust, London Natural History Society and others
- If black redstarts are found to be present consult English Nature immediately.

English Nature is the agency responsible for the interpretation of the Act, whilst the Metropolitan Police are responsible for enforcing it. English Nature should be consulted at the earliest opportunity but bear in mind there are exemptions to the implementation of the Act.

Black redstart conservation status and the factors affecting its decline within the EC, UK and London.

The black redstart is listed in Appendix II of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, Listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), listed in the Red Data Book of Birds and it is listed as a Species of Conservation Concern on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (1995).

The black redstart is a relatively recent bird to Britain, as a result of a general northwestern spread of its European range since 1800. In Europe it is associated with rocky, mountainous terrain and cliffs but is also commonly found in gardens. Although some birds do breed on cliffs along the Kent and Suffolk coasts, black redstart distribution in the UK is concentrated in the built environment, primarily London and Birmingham.

The industrial infrastructure particularly along rivers and canals of these cities are the species' preferred habitat here. It is for this reason that the black redstart is sometimes known as the 'power station' or 'bomb-site' bird, the latter being a reference to the sites frequented by this species after the Second World War. Its conservation requirements are perhaps unique for a UK species.

Greater London is the most important UK breeding area for this species, with its range concentrated along the Thames corridor. First recorded breeding in Wembley in 1926, black redstart numbers increased from 1937, and significantly so from the early 1940s, as the birds bred on the bomb-sites and old docks of central London. As these sites were re-developed, its population moved eastwards into undeveloped areas along the Thames corridor, Lee Valley, industrial centres at Park Royal, White City and Croydon. Since then, its range has contracted to the Thames corridor, mainly eastwards from Wandsworth.

There is evidence to suggest the bird has adapted to the conditions provided by light industrial units, power stations, aggregate works, and areas where there are jetties and dilapidated flood defences⁴, provided that adequate foraging areas are close by. Preferred foraging areas include sparsely vegetated areas of rocky terrain with singing posts. This includes post-industrial land and areas undergoing or awaiting redevelopment.

Factors contributing to the decline of black redstart

1. Loss of habitat through re-development and 'tidying' of sites along the Thames corridor.
2. Incomplete knowledge of breeding sites and distribution of black redstart in London may contribute to the above.
3. Lack of awareness that development proposals need not be hindered by the presence of this species on site.
4. The replacement of dilapidated flood defences (used for nesting and foraging) without appropriate mitigation measures.
5. Decline in availability of singing posts in places away from high levels of human activity.
6. As a result of development, decline in areas of sparsely vegetated ground for foraging.

The following organisations in London are able to provide further advice:

English Nature

Devon House, 12-15 Dartmouth Street, Queen Anne's Gate, London. SW1H 9BL

Tel: 020 7340 4870- Fax: 020 7340 4880

London Wildlife Trust

Skyline House, 200 Union Street, London. SE1 0LW

Tel. 020 7261 0447 – Fax. 020 7633 0811

Greater London Authority

City Hall, Queen's Walk, London. SE1 2AATel. 020 7983 4000 – Fax. 020 7983 4057

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Note: The information from which this has been prepared has been of that which is currently available to the authors. London Wildlife Trust cannot be held responsible for changes that may occur subsequent to new information being made available, or of the action taken by others based on the contents of this advice note. Legal advice on black redstarts should always be sought from English Nature in relation to specific cases.

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References

- (1). Stone, B. H., Sears, J. Cranswick, P. A., Gregory, R. D., Gibbons, D. W, Rehfisch, M. M., Aebischer, N. J.. and Reid J. B., 1997. *Population estimates of birds in Britain and the United Kingdom*. British Birds 90: 1-22.
- (2). *London Bird Report, 1990-1997*, London Natural History Society, and additional unpublished information.
- (3) See Gilbert, G., Gibbons, D. W, and Evans, J., 1998. *Bird Monitoring Methods; a manual of techniques for key UK species*, RSPB and others.
- (4) Evans, K., 1997. A site action plan for black redstarts in the Deptford Creek Area, British Trust for Ornithology.