“Conservation must go beyond nature reserves and national parks” say GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count organisers

Thursday 15 December, 2022

The **10th GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count** – Friday 3 to Sunday 19 February, bfbc.org.uk

Sponsored by the NFU

“We will not achieve biodiversity recovery if conservation is confined to nature reserves and national parks,” said Dr Roger Draycott, from the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) ahead of the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count 2023. "72% of the UK’s total land area is used for agriculture, so farmers, land and woodland managers, and gamekeepers have a vital role to play in the future of wildlife.

“Now, more than ever, is the time for them to support the wildlife on their land and get involved in the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count,” continued Roger, who organises the nationwide focus on farmland birds.

2023 will be the tenth year of the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count – the first UK-wide citizen science project to involve farmers in monitoring the state of farmland birds. Since 2014, more than 11,000 counts have been carried out by people working on the land.

“There are multiple pressures on farmers, yet many of them do so much to support wildlife, often unnoticed by the public. The GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is an opportunity for them to see just what impact their efforts are having and for us to celebrate their hard work.”

The GWCT is asking land managers to make the count’s tenth anniversary in 2023 the best ever by signing up to take part. By spending just half an hour between 3 and 19 February in one spot on their land, counting the birds they see then submitting their results to the GWCT, they will help the charity to build a national picture of which species are benefiting from conservation efforts and which are most in need of help.

And the latest assessment of the status of the UK’s birds, the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 list (2021), suggests that our farmland birds need all the help they can get. More than one in four UK bird species is in serious trouble, and many of the struggling species are farmland and upland birds.

Land managers can make a real and immediate difference by adopting effective conservation measures, such as providing supplementary winter feed or growing crops specifically to provide seed for birds. GWCT-science-based advice on boosting biodiversity and supporting farmland birds is available at bfbc.org.uk .

Signing up for the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is free and no specialist knowledge or equipment are required. In many places, local bird and wildlife groups are working with farmers to help them do the count.

The GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is widely supported by farming and countryside organisations and for the fifth year the NFU is sponsoring the count. **NFU President Minette Batters** said:

“The annual Big Farmland Bird Count, which the NFU is proud to sponsor, provides a fantastic snapshot of the huge amount of work being carried out on the nation’s farms to encourage wildlife.

“Not only are farmers across the country producing sustainable climate-friendly food, they are also maintaining and protecting the great British countryside, creating habitats for biodiversity to flourish and additional feeding for farmland birds.

"I would encourage all farmers to get involved in the 2023 GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count.”

Find out how to get involved in the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count, 3 – 19 February 2023, at www.bfbc.org.uk where downloadable bird guides are also available.

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Note to editors:

The GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count is sponsored by the National Farmers' Union (NFU)

- It is also kindly supported by:
- CLA
- FWAG: Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
- NSA: National Sheep Association
- LEAF: Linking Environment and Farming
- Kings
- NFU Scotland
- NFU Cymru
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- CFE: Championing the Farmed Environment
- Ulster Farmers' Union

How to take part in the Big Farmland Bird Count:

Species guides, including short videos, are available at www.bfbc.org.uk.

- Download your count sheet from the BFBC website www.bfbc.org.uk

- Count your birds! On a day between 3 and 19 February, spend about **30 minutes** recording the species and number of birds seen on one particular area of the farm.
- Once you've completed your count, simply submit your results online at www.bfbc.org.uk

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust – providing research-led conservation for a thriving countryside. The GWCT is an independent wildlife conservation charity which has carried out scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife since the 1930s. We advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitats. We employ 22 post-doctoral scientists and 50 other research staff with expertise in areas such as birds, insects, mammals, farming, fish and statistics. We undertake our own research as well as projects funded by contract and grant-aid from Government and private bodies.

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