

Freezing conditions see GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count extended

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Heavy snow and freezing conditions have hampered land managers' efforts to complete the annual GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count across much of the UK. The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) has taken the decision to extend the wildlife survey to enable people to count safely. The event was due to run from 5 – 14 February, but people can now carry out the count until **Sunday 21 February**.

The GWCT's Dr Roger Draycott, who organises the event, said: "We have heard from a number of farmers and gamekeepers that they are keen to complete the count, but the weather has so far been unsuitable or unsafe. The wintery conditions also tend to mean that the birds take shelter and are harder to spot. We are extending the deadline for completing the count until 21 February to allow anyone who has not been able to complete the count so far to do so."

Jeremy Scott-Bolton has taken part in the count every year since it began in 2014. He said: "I am so pleased that GWCT has extended the Big Farmland Bird Count for another week. As an environmental consultant for FutureBiogas, I carry out a number of bird counts on sites across the East of England. This week's severe weather looked set to prevent me from completing this very important survey, leaving a gap in the annual data supplied to the GWCT."

Last year more than 1500 people took part in the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count. Keen to beat that number and with the weather forecast to warm up a little this week, the GWCT is encouraging land managers to get out onto their land for just half an hour and count the birds they see. Results are submitted to the GWCT, allowing the Trust's scientists to build a picture of the state of Britain's treasured bird species. The survey shows which species are doing well in which areas, and which birds need extra conservation efforts to ensure their survival.

Farmers and gamekeepers look after 71% of Britain's countryside. Many of them carry out vital work to support farmland birds, including winter feeding, planting bird seed mixes and maintaining hedgerows. The Big Farmland Bird Count gives them a chance to see the effects of their conservation efforts on bird numbers and variety. **Find out how to take part at www.bfbc.org.uk**

Notes to editors

View videos and updates on the BFBC launch day, 5 February, on Twitter at **#bfbc**

The National Farmers Union is the main sponsor of the Big Farmland Bird Count.

The Big Farmland Bird Count is kindly supported by:

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CBE Championing the Farmed Environment

NFA National Farming Wildlife Advisory Group

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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. The Trust is also responsible for several Government Biodiversity Action Plan species and is lead partner for grey partridge and joint lead partner for brown hare and black grouse.

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