

Disappearing Yellowhammers

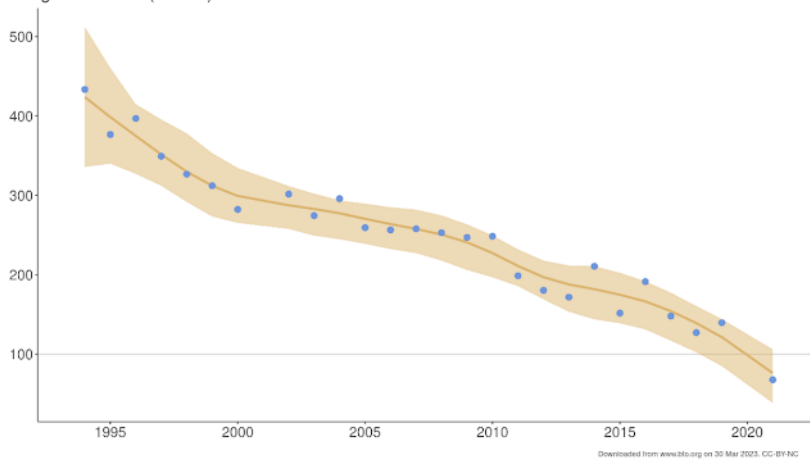
When we moved to Pembrokeshire in 2003 there was a male Yellowhammer who used to sing from the edge of the copse across the road. His “Little bit of bread and” with an optional “no cheese” song kept us company through the summer. By 2008 there was no Yellowhammer and we have not seen one here since. The same story is true whoever you talk to – Yellowhammers have simply disappeared from places they were common 30 years ago and still hanging on 20 years ago.

We don't fully understand why - it is thought to be due primarily to a lack of winter food. Improved agricultural tidiness (no spilt grain) and a much increased acreage of winter wheat and barley (which has significantly reduced fields of winter stubble) have it made it hard for Yellowhammers. Another problem could be hedge and verge cutting and flailing and ploughing “right up to the edge” – Yellowhammers nest in the long grass and tall weeds close to hedge bottoms and in many areas there is literally nowhere which meets this description.

So in order to try and get more information about our remaining Yellowhammers, Bob Haycock, the local BTO representative, writes on the Pembs Bird Blog:

“Yellowhammers in Pembrokeshire and elsewhere in Wales are in serious trouble. Over the last few decades their population has declined to an all-time low as indicated, for example, by county records and by the Breeding Bird Survey abundance trend in Wales.

Yellowhammer population abundance
Long-term trend (1994–) in Wales



In the wider countryside, in places where they were previously recorded during the 2007-12 winter bird atlas survey period, none were found at all which is quite a shocking situation!

In order to try and help yellowhammers, more information is urgently needed about the current distribution and abundance of the remaining breeding population.

*So, between **April and August** this year, there is to be a yellowhammer breeding population survey in Pembrokeshire. There will be targeted surveys of particular areas but in fact anyone can make a valuable contribution to the survey by posting sightings on the Pembs Bird Sightings blog (pembsbirds.blogspot.com), indicating where, when and how many yellowhammers were seen or heard – the number of singing males is particularly useful information. Records can also be submitted via BirdTrack or the West Wales Biodiversity Information Centre.”*

Or simply let me know and I will pass the information onwards.

Rosemary Royle