

How to help turtle doves

...in your garden

Provide nesting opportunities

You will dramatically improve the turtle dove's chance of finding suitable nesting habitats if you:

- Consider allowing hedges that back onto fields to grow as tall and wide as you can.
- Encourage & retain climbing plants such as traveller's joy (wild clematis), honeysuckle and bramble in hedgerows.
- Provide a water resource such as a bird bath or if your garden is large enough, a pond so that turtle dove and other birds have somewhere to drink.
- If you have a large rural garden, try to maintain any scrubby patches and encourage scrub to develop around ponds.

Encourage seed for feed

Simple changes can result in a good supply of the summer seeds which turtle doves rely on. This is best achieved by:

Providing cultivated strips or plots

- These can be created by repeatedly disturbing the soil through rotavating or simply digging over to prepare a fine tilth to sow the seed mix.
- After sowing, lightly rake the soil, then tread or roll to firm the seed bed.
- Cultivations should take place in the autumn between August – October.

Planting plots with species listed below may provide an important summer seed source for turtle dove.

- Fumitory
- Black Medick
- Red & White Clover
- Common Vetch
- Birds Foot Trefoil

www.operationturtledove.org



The turtle dove is a much more rufous (reddish-brown) on its back and wings than other doves and has a distinctive black tail with a white edge, which can be seen in flight.

Artwork: Ben Green



Garden ponds can provide a vital resource for Turtle Doves. Ponds should be accessible for birds and other wildlife (with shallow banks) and be close to suitable nesting habitat.

Photo: Danae Sheenan

Turtle doves

A bird on the brink

The turtle dove is Europe's only migratory dove. It arrives on its English breeding grounds in late April/early May and departs back to the non-breeding areas in arid sub-Saharan West Africa in August and September. As a breeding bird, it is closely associated with lowland arable/mixed farmland where tall, dense cover is available for nesting.

Once, the 'purring' of the turtle dove was the sound of the British summer, but turtle doves have declined by 91% since 1970*. We could lose them from the UK altogether within the next 10 years, unless we act now.

**Source: British Trust for Ornithology, JNCC and RSPB*

What do turtle doves need?

Seed for feed

The turtle dove is an obligate granivore (i.e. it only eats seeds). Young nestlings are fed a milky secretion called "crop milk", which is regurgitated by the parents and is high in protein and fat. Very little green matter and no invertebrates are taken. The seeds of plants associated with arable fields, such as fumitory, chickweed, common mouse ear and annual knotgrass, form the mainstay of their diet.

Scrub for nesting

Turtle doves prefer to nest in hedgerows or areas of scrub over 4m tall, especially those characterised by thorny shrubs. The nests are often associated with hawthorn, elder or conifers with climbers such as traveller's joy (wild clematis), honeysuckle or bramble.



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654



Photo: Dave Morris RSPB