



Spring 2010



Twite Recovery Project

Natural England and RSPB

Issue 2

Welcome to the latest Twite Recovery Project Newsletter

The Twite Recovery Project has now been up and running for 16 months and is about to enter the second year of monitoring, leading on from the in depth survey work undertaken in 2008.

There isn't as much to tell in this newsletter as the previous one, due largely to the time of year. However, there are some important and interesting updates that I hope you will enjoy reading about.

If after you have read it you have any comments or ideas about other things that could be included then please feel free to let me know, contact details are on the back page.

Please read on and enjoy.....

Our little feathered friend, the Twite,
photo by Ron Marshal



The Story so far–

Last year volunteers and RSPB research staff monitored many of the known colonies to try and identify the numbers of Twite, and at some sites to record more in-depth findings such as brood sizes, chick measurements and fledging success. Many surveys were carried out to record the field and vegetation types around known breeding locations, there is further information about the results later on. The project continues to work with an increasing number of farmers across the Twite area, putting in place management to improve food availability.

Work with local landowners

We now have 12 landowners in agreement tailored to provide foraging habitat for Twite, with a further 13 in the process of setting up agreements. Most of these agreements are stewardship agreements, which are funded and supported by Natural England. In total there are 50 fields either in agreements, or close to being signed up to agreements, covering 62 hectares of land. Contact has also been made with farmers who's previous stewardship agreements finished in Sept' 09, or have been recommended for some other reason. The types of management that are taking place vary depending on what the land area has to offer and what is practical. There are hay meadows that are being cut in late July or August, and left to wilt in the field for 36-48 hours, allowing seed to drop in order to encourage regeneration of the species favoured by Twite, as well as leaving some seed on the ground that can provide food for a little longer after harvest. There are fields that are grazed hard in early spring to encourage a flush of dandelion in late April and through May to help provide food for the beginning of the breeding season. And there are fields that are managed as pastures, using cattle and sheep to graze the fields in such a way as to allow an amount of the species that Twite like to reach maturity throughout the season.



Left: This field is being reseeded with a variety of species as it is being restored as a species rich hay meadow, here the land is being prepared for reseeding.

Right: After the seed has been spread the land can be rolled to help push the seed into the soil, it can also be grazed for a time by cattle, as they too help push the seed in. They also graze by ripping the grass out with their tongues, which allows seed to fall into the exposed patches of soil



Farm walk events

The Twite Recovery Project is being supported by Natural England's Land Management Advice Service Events team in organising and running farmland walks. These events provide an opportunity to contact local landowners and invite them to come to an event to find out more about stewardship, how it works and what it could mean for them, the project, and the survival of Twite in England. An event was hosted recently by Stephen and Rachel Hallos at their farm near Ripponden. Stephen and Rachel were some of the first farmers to get involved with the project and manage a number of fields in a way that provides food for Twite for most of the breeding season, whilst at the same time being of value to their business. Encouragingly these fields were found to be used frequently last year by Twite foraging for seed. A number of the people that attended the event have expressed a wish to find out more and the project or Natural



People attending a farm walk event near Ripponden

Twite Population and Field surveying

33 Twite colonies were surveyed in 2009 showing a further decline from 2008, this was expected as the project is still in its early days, and after the extensive moorland fires that took place in spring 2008 a large area of previous breeding habitat was left too severely damaged for many Twite to nest there.

RSPB research staff undertook some in-depth monitoring at some of the larger colonies, one finding was that a good number, around two thirds, of breeding pairs of Twite that successfully reared first broods went on to attempt to rear second broods,

this figure is similar to the recordings of Twite in western isles of Scotland. Field monitoring took place at 20 areas around breeding colonies to assess the foraging potential, this covered almost half of the overall farmed land within 2.5km of the colony sites. It was the first attempt at this and as such there were many lessons learned. There will be further field survey work to be undertaken this year and a number of training events will be organised to help make this a more straight forward task than last year. Also, a much smaller number of fields will be covered by individuals. Population monitoring will also take place at many sites again in 2010.



A Twite nest by Tim Melling

Staff changes

The Twite Recovery Project is undergoing some staff changes, so this would seem a good time to update you about these.

As some of you may know, Roy Taylor has been overseeing the project management over the past year and a half or so. Roy has recently taken on the role of Peak District Area Development Manager, which involves managing the development of a number of exciting projects such as setting up the new RSPB Dovestones Reserve. In light of this the management of the Twite Recovery Project has been taken over by Tim Melling, some of you will be familiar with Tim already. Tim has been involved with Twite for some 15 years or more and will prove to be a very useful addition to the project.

In addition I will be temporarily handing the reigns over to Jenny Oldroyd, who will be providing cover for myself over the next year as the Gowthorpe population increases by one. Jenny comes to us from the RSPB Oldmoor reserve where she has worked as assistant warden for the past 5 years.

We will also be recruiting a further person to assist the project primarily with organising reseeded works on those areas of land that are being reseeded as part of their agreements. This post will be seasonal for three years and is kindly being funded by Pennine Prospects as part of the Watershed Landscape Project. This post is due to be advertised shortly.

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Events

On June 13th 2010 Mr & Mrs Howarth at Ramsden Farm, Walsden, will be holding an Open Farm Sunday event. These events are organised by 'Linking Environment and Farming' and details will be available at www.leafmarque.com/leafuk or telephone enquires on: 0247 6413 911. The event is open to anyone interested in attending.

Training events to assist with the field monitoring will be held on May 13th at Jerusalem Farm Environmental Education Centre, Booth, Halifax, HX2 6XB. More details will be sent directly to those involved.

Volunteers, please note:

I realise that there were a few volunteers that wanted to help last year but were unable to due to location, which in some areas meant that there were more volunteers than needed, or personal reasons. If you weren't involved last year but would like to be this year then please confirm this with Jenny.

If you volunteered for the project last year but do not wish to do so this year please let Jenny know as soon as is convenient. If this is the case please also let her know if you would like to continue receiving updates such as the newsletters, we do have a number of people that for personal reasons can no longer be involved as they would wish, but who are all the same as interested as ever in what is happening. We do not want to remove your details completely from our records and have you miss out on things if you would prefer to be kept up to date.