

October 2009



Twite Recovery Project

Natural England and RSPB

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Welcome to the first Twite Recovery Project Newsletter

As I begin this newsletter it is nine months and seven days since I took up the post of Twite Recovery Project Officer. On the one hand I really do not know where the time has gone, and on the other, I cannot believe that it has not been longer.

There has been lots of learning involved, a new area, lots of new people, the project itself and not least of all, learning as much as possible, as quickly as possible, about the endearing Twite.

One aspect that hasn't escaped being noticed is just how many people have had their hearts stolen by this little bird, and just how many have been involved with them over the years in this area.

So it is hoped that a newsletter sent out twice yearly will help inform as many of you as possible about what is happening within the project.

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.....

What it is all about



The Story so far– January to October 09

This year the project volunteers have been very busy monitoring the numbers of Twite at various sites, and recording the field and vegetation types around all known breeding locations. There has been in depth monitoring of known colonies taking place and the project has been working with a number of farmers across the Twite area, putting in place management to improve food availability for Twite, whilst retaining the business focus of the farms.

Read on for the nitty gritty....

Work with local landowners

At the time of writing this, ten landowners have entered into stewardship schemes tailored to provide foraging habitat for Twite, with a further 13 in the process of setting up schemes. The response so far has been very positive, with only one landowner deciding it is not for them at present, due to changes in the business focus. The management techniques that are being put in place include managing areas to allow favoured plants to mature. There are fields that are being cut for hay, some that are still cut for silage, but later than previously, and others that are managed through the stocking levels. Reseeding has taken place on small areas on two holdings so far. The Higher Level Stewardship scheme operated by Natural England, which is the main tool in working with local farmers, is proving to be far more in tune with current farming practices and requirements than previous schemes. It is proving possible to tailor it to suite most farming practices.



Hay meadows in West Yorkshire

Case study—Mr and Mrs Howarth near Todmorden

Warren Howarth and his family have farmed in Calderdale for almost 50 years. Here are their comments. "Simple changes to the management of the land have been really easy to include. Three sections of land are closed off to the stock at different times of the year to provide early, mid and late season seeds for twite. The meadows are cut slightly later in the year and the swath is left in the field longer, and worked frequently to ensure a large proportion of the seeds are shaken out. We are currently working to restore more of the hay meadows with a carefully managed rush cutting and cattle grazing programme. This again is done at certain times of the year to avoid harming or killing any of the ground nesting birds that may be present there. As more hay meadows come back into production, so the seed to feed twite will increase. We are now looking at ways of encouraging the growth of plants such as common sorrel, which is a favoured food for twite. Whilst some of our work is done slightly differently, any additional workload has been easy to manage."



Yvonne Howarth and Kerry Gowthorpe in a Twite meadow

Pyromania — Moorland fires continue to be a major threat



The decimation of the Twites' main colony site

A large-scale fire in the spring of this year sadly destroyed almost all the suitable nesting habitat at the largest Twite colony, an area that in 2008 held 18-25 breeding pairs of Twite, around a quarter of the overall South Pennine, and indeed England, Twite population. Hopefully, at the time of the fire in early May not too many nests had been built, although it is likely that some will have perished. There were at least 2 other fires near Twite colonies, around the same time. The Twite Recovery Project is working to raise awareness of the effects these fires could have on the remaining England Twite population.

Twite Population and Field surveying

In 2009 population monitoring has taken place at known breeding sites, and the fields and plant species within 2.5 km of many of these sites have been recorded and monitored. The field recording proved to be anything but straight forward, so a big thank you to the volunteers that did all they could with this, it will help the project identify where there is, and is not, potential food available, which will in turn assist us in identifying those areas to concentrate our efforts.

The indication for the population is that numbers are slightly down on last year, this was somewhat expected, following the trend, and considering the previously mentioned fires. Some birds were found breeding at two previously unknown locations, although as these sites were not surveyed in 2008 it is impossible to say whether they were displaced from the burnt areas, or whether they had in fact already been there.



A field rich in Common Sorrell

RSPB Conservation Science work

In 2009 the conservation science team have concentrated on those colonies with the higher numbers of breeding pairs of Twite recorded in 2008, and also on a couple of further sites that were investigated this year. The table below shows the maximum and minimum numbers of breeding pairs observed at individual sites in 2008 and 2009. As earlier mentioned, the moorland fire around the Lighthazzles and Chelburn Moor area had a huge impact on that population, the other main decline has been at Lumbutts. On a more positive note, most other sites have seen little change, and in some cases a small increase. Two further sites were investigated and resulted in 10-12 further breeding pairs being identified, these may be previously unknown sites or displaced birds from spring fire sites. This table is useful for guidance, however it is worth noting that 2008 was a poor year due to the weather conditions, and also that the specifics of the monitoring in the two years was slightly different, so the comparison can only be a guide. More about 2009's monitoring can be found on the back page.....

Breeding Pairs of Twite in 2008 & 2009 at the Highest Populated

Id	Site name	2008			2009			
		Observation	min	max	Observation	min	max	
1	Worsthorne Moor	Consci	5	7	Consci	6	7	
2	Fly Flats	Consci	5	5	Consci	7	7	
3	Midgley Moor	Consci	0	3	Consci	0	0	
4	Lumbutts	Consci	9	10	Consci	6	8	
5	Walsden Moor	Consci	2	2	Consci	3	4	
8	Withens Clough	Consci	1	1	Consci	0	0	
9	Turvin Clough	Consci	1	2	Consci	2	2	
11	Rishworth Moor	Consci	9	10	Consci	9	9	
13	Buckstones	Consci	3	3	RSPB	2	3	
6	Chelburn Moor	Vol	23	30	Consci	6	8	
12	Cupwith Moor	Vol	7	7	Consci	6	7	
14	Pule Hill	Vol	5	6	Consci	5	6	
15	Deer Hill	Vol	6	7	Consci	7	9	
16	Wessenden Moor	Vol	4	4	Consci	4	6	
7	Blackstone Pasture	*	*	*	Consci	5	6	* 'New site' not surveyed in 2008
10	Manshead End	*	*	*	Consci	5	6	* 'New site' not surveyed in 2008
Total			80	97		73	88	

Natural England and RSPB

Westleigh Mews
Wakefield Road
Denby Dale
Huddersfield

Phone: 01484 861148

Mobile: 07841 317034

Email:

kerry.gowthorpe@rspb.org.uk

www.rspb.org.uk



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**We speak out for birds and wildlife,
tackling the problems that threaten our
environment. Nature is amazing—help
us keep it that way.**

Events and requests

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

It is planned that there will be some farm walks and further events through the course of next year, there will be more details of these in the next newsletter.

Most records of population monitoring and field monitoring have now been received, however there are a few that have not yet made it back, if yours is one of these please could you return it as soon as possible to help us finalise the findings. If you were unable to complete the work then please return the paperwork all the same. We are well aware that some of the work this year was not very straight forward, this is being addressed prior to next year's monitoring.

Rather than just one meeting at the beginning of next season's monitoring, it is aimed that there will be two or three options instead. These will be held across the project area and each will probably also involve some kind of training relevant to the monitoring being done.

RSPB Conservation Science work continued...

In addition to population monitoring the work undertaken by the conservation science team, lead on the ground by Nick Wilkinson, in 2009 included aspects such as recording nesting attempts, brood size, clutch size, chick biometrics i.e. weights and measurements, and fledging success. Individual ringing of adult birds was carried out in spring 2009, which helped assist in recording the nesting attempts of certain pairs, and has also been instrumental in learning more about the birds' movements. It has also brought to light some unexpected findings. In July Nick Wilkinson sent an update of their work so far, in which he wrote the following, "*One recent surprise was discovering a pair that had moved colonies (Lumbutts to Walsden Moor, a distance of 1.3 km) after two failed nests. another pair at Lumbutts moved quite large distances (>0.5 km) between each of their 3 or 4 failed attempts.*" A very interesting observation that without the individual rings would have been impossible to be sure of.

At the end of the season it was also possible to identify individual birds, both adults and juveniles, in among post breeding flocks frequenting various feeding areas, supplementary feeding sites, quarries and farmland. It has been very interesting to note birds travelling quite large distances between these sites, for example, one bird seen feeding near Ripponden was spotted a few days later at Whitworth Quarry. It was already known that Twite are far more mobile before and after breeding, but it was interesting to see just how much so.

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