

**CORN BUNTING**  
*Emberiza calandra*

BTO CODE: CB



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CORN BUNTINGS HAVE undergone a severe population decline, to the extent that, by the late 1990s, they had ceased to breed in Ireland. Occasional non-breeding records in southeastern Irish counties have been attributed to migrants from Britain or continental Europe (Taylor & O'Halloran 2002) but none were recorded during 2007–11.

In Britain a 90% breeding population decline during 1970–2010 (SUKB 2012) has been accompanied by contractions of 27% in winter range, since the 1981–84 *Winter Atlas*, and 56% in breeding range, since the 1968–72 *Breeding Atlas*. Corn Buntings are so highly sedentary that the heavily fragmented distribution is almost identical in winter and the breeding season. The remnant Scottish populations are isolated from those elsewhere, owing to extinctions in southern Scotland and northern England. With the loss of the species from the Northern Isles, Lewis, Coll and Tiree, the only remaining island population is that on the machair of the Uists.

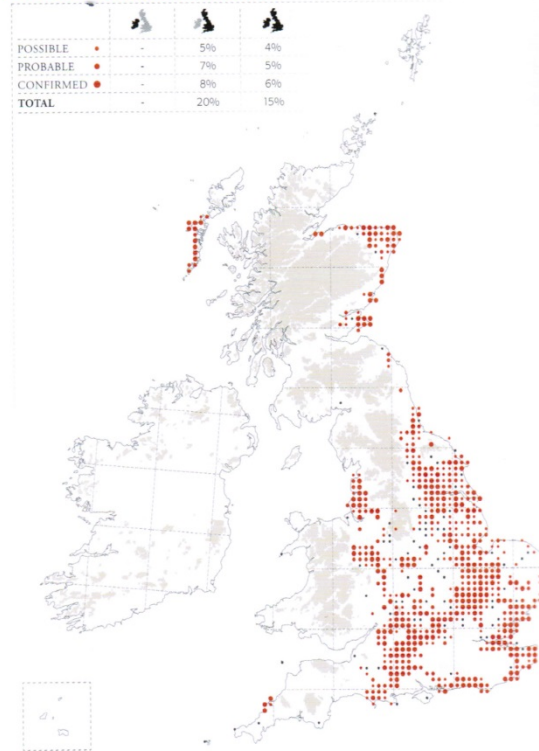
Major losses in England have fragmented the population into discrete clusters of occupied squares. These include groupings on chalk soils from Dorset to Cambridgeshire, on the coast between Kent and Suffolk and on low-lying arable farmland from the Fens northward to Durham. All these remnant populations have seen declines in abundance since 1988–91 and annual monitoring indicates that total numbers are still declining (BBS Report 2011).

Causes of decline vary geographically, owing to the species' use of different habitats. In lowland arable farmland, the switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals has reduced the availability of weed-rich stubbles for winter feeding (Donald 1997). Changes in cropping may also have caused a decline in the number of birds raising a second brood, with a consequent reduction in overall productivity (Brickle & Harper 2002). Productivity is probably affected also by the intensity of pesticide use (Brickle *et al.* 2000; Ewald *et al.* 2002). In the Hebrides, the practice of harvesting unripe cereal crops for silage has reduced overwinter food availability (Wilson *et al.* 2007). Population recovery can be facilitated by targeted management, for example by leaving crop patches unharvested for winter feeding or by delaying mowing for silage where birds nest in grass (Perkins *et al.* 2011).



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