

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

The Big Farmland Bird Count helps protect our most cherished species

Citizen science is a valuable means for many organisations to gather data these days and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is no exception. Indeed, one of our biggest citizen science projects, the Big Farmland Bird Count, takes place this month and we are urging farmers, land managers and gamekeepers to take part. We are also encouraging members of the public the length and breadth of the country with an interest in birds and wildlife to contact their local farm or estate and offer to do a count for them.

The BFBC was launched in 2014 to highlight the positive work done by land managers in helping to reverse the decline in farmland birds. The count offers a simple means of recording the effects of any conservation work currently being undertaken by farmers and gamekeepers on their land, such as supplementary feeding of birds through winter or growing crops specifically to provide seed for birds.

Back for the seventh successive year, all the count involves is to spend just 30 minutes spotting species on a patch of farmland on any day between 7 and 16 February 2020.

The results of this annual survey, which will need to be submitted by the farm or estate, will help to determine which farmland birds are benefiting from conservation efforts while identifying the ones that are most in need of help.

Those who make decisions on how



The results of the annual survey will allow conservation efforts to be focused on where they are needed most, writes **Dave Parish**

our farmland is managed, who are planning planting and cropping, or doing other work on the farm are vital in helping to ensure the future survival of many of our most cherished farmland bird species like skylarks, yellowhammers, corn buntings and wild grey partridges.

Farmers are responsible for managing the largest songbird habitat in this country but frequently their efforts to reverse bird declines are largely unrecorded and the Big Farmland Bird Count is the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's national project to help to remedy this.

There are many positive steps that farmers can take to encourage birds and wildlife – the new support measures replacing the Basic Payment outlined in the recently re-introduced Agriculture Bill south of the border, and which will no doubt be reflected in future Scottish policy will, it is anticipated, allow farm businesses to become even more involved.

Simple measures such as hedges, field margins, beetle banks, skylark plots and farmland woodland all help support bird life as well as providing the plants that birds need for cover

and the insects and seeds that they need for food.

Last year was a record breaker for the Big Farmland Bird Count with 1,400 returns made – a 40 per cent increase on the previous year, recording 140 species over 1 million acres. Encouragingly, a total of 30 red-listed species were recorded in 2019, with five appearing in the most-commonly seen species list. These included fieldfares, starlings, house sparrows, yellowhammers and song thrushes, with the first four seen by more than 30 per cent of the farms taking part in the count.

At the end of the count, the results are analysed by the Trust. All participating farms will receive a report on the national results once they have been collated.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is also a partner in the EU Interreg North Sea Region funded PARTRIDGE project which aims to give many farmland species a helping hand, especially during the colder winter months.

The Trust's specially developed wild bird seed mixes not only provide food for seed-eating birds, but also contain broad-leaved plants which provide



↑ Farmers are being asked to spend 30 minutes spotting species on a patch of

partridges, brown hares and other animals with a place to hide when other parts of the landscape are more exposed.

These mixes are constantly being assessed and improved.

During the last meeting of the EU PARTRIDGE project partnership in

Göttingen, Germany, many of the successes and problems that farmers across Europe have encountered were discussed, and a number of solutions proposed to help farmers and wildlife get the most out of the habitat provided for them including different soil preparations, adapt-

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ing seed mixes and providing a more mosaic-type habitat with more variety for wildlife.

GWCT's work for the PARTRIDGE project in Scotland includes supplementary feeding, providing wild birds and other farmland wildlife with a helping hand during October

to March when food is hard to source. For more information about the Big Farmland Bird Count and how farms and estates can take part see www.bfbc.org.uk

Dave Parish, head of lowland research, Scotland, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.



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THE SCOTSMAN

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If you're
always 'on',
then take
some time to
switch off

Kristen Bennie has
concerns about the
pressures of modern life

As the fireworks and Auld Lang Syne fade to a distant memory, I'm sure I'm not the only one who's fallen off the wagon with a few New Year resolutions, be it the gym membership gathering dust or the pile of unread healthy eating books. The fact is, we're all busy and it's easy to push things to the side and lose time for the things we really want to do.

In today's hectic world, it can be easy to become overwhelmed. Many people feel the need to constantly check emails outside work hours or keep up-to-date with the group chat so they don't miss out on the latest plans.

Latest research from YouGov on

behalf of Royal Bank of Scotland shows that more than 54 per cent of Scots are struggling to complete fundamental 'life admin' tasks such as booking appointments, managing savings and finances or household cleaning.

The 'always on' culture we live in can have serious impacts not only on our relationships but also on our own health. The research also revealed that the most common reason people failed to complete a life admin task was because of a 'lack of hours in the day' (56 per cent) followed closely by 'feeling overwhelmed' (54 per cent).

It's the latter that can potentially be the most dangerous, with people feeling more and more trapped by

the pressures of work deadlines and social deadlines, that they forget to take a little time to themselves. It's easy to cut yourself off when you feel like you've too much on and personal wellbeing can suffer as work-life balance is so closely related to our happiness.

Friendships are often the first thing to fall by the wayside and 42 per cent of Scots who struggle with life admin admit they've missed social events because of the pressures of modern life. The research shows that it's the younger generation who often struggle with their life admin the most, with 56 per cent of 18-24 year olds admitting they've missed a social event because of it and 69 per

cent of them saying they struggle to complete these tasks each month.

At Royal Bank of Scotland we commissioned the research to better understand the everyday pressures Scots face and the ways the bank can help. Personal banking is one of the most common tasks to drop off the priority lists of people who struggle with life admin, with 20 per cent failing to complete their personal banking in the average month.

Therefore, our Easy Wins campaign encourages people in Scotland to using the range of tools and services we provide to help with simpler, quicker and more efficient banking.

Whether it's using your banking app to temporarily freeze your credit

card when you think you've lost it, or using our new Aggregator app to see all your banking activity in one place, we're working hard to help make life easier for customers.

We know time is precious and that's why our Financial Health Check takes just 20 minutes with one of our senior personal bankers to make customers' finances work even harder for them – this can even be done from the comfort of their own home.

Our team of professionally qualified community bankers can also meet our customers at a place that's most convenient to them, whether that be at their place of work, leisure centres or library.

They help people understand how

to manage finances and make use of our digital apps to make life even easier. They also deliver important training on how to spot fraud, scams, and online security to help keep customers' money safe.

Our aggregation service means that all the customers' accounts can be put into one place – even if they're not with Royal Bank. We also allow customers to instantly freeze their lost or stolen credit card through our app while paperless mortgages mean people can take out a mortgage in days rather than weeks.

All of these measures have been designed with today's 'always on' world in mind and by using them, our customers will be able to get



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