

Forestry Statistics 2019

Chapter 5: Environment

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Introduction

This chapter presents a range of information about the woodland environment, mostly using sources that are outside the scope of National Statistics. They are included to provide additional context to the topic.

Estimates for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are included, where possible, in addition to UK or GB totals. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in the Sources chapter.

All of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released.

The statistics on the populations of wild birds (Table 5.1 and Figure 5.1) have been revised since "Forestry Statistics 2018". For further details on revisions, see the Environment section of the Sources chapter.

A copy of all environment tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the Data Downloads web page at www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/data-downloads/.

Key findings

The main findings are:

- The UK woodland bird index has remained relatively stable since the early 1990s, following a period of long term decline. Most of this decline has occurred in woodland specialist species.
- In 2019, 85% of the UK public agreed with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases".

5.1 Populations of wild birds

Bird populations provide a good indication of the broad state of wildlife in the UK. This is because they are a well-studied taxonomic group, enabling a more informed interpretation of observed changes, who occupy a range of habitats while still responding to the same environmental pressures that also operate on other groups of wildlife.

Indices of wild bird populations in the UK are produced annually by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and cover a range of species that are native to the UK. This data has been produced since the early 1970s for the majority of habitat groups, meaning there is considerable long-term data available on the changes in bird populations, which aids in the interpretation of more short term variation. The latest statistical release on Wild Bird Populations was published in November 2018 and includes data to 2017.

The index for woodland birds was expanded in 2007 to cover 38 species. A further change in 2015 resulted in a reduction to 37 species, of which 12 are generalists and 25 are woodland specialists (those that breed or feed mainly or solely in woodland).

Since the early 1990s, when the majority of species group indices stabilised, the UK woodland bird index has generally been about 20 per cent below the level of the early 1970s, with the decline predominantly in woodland specialist species (Figure 5.1).

Causes for the long term decline in the woodland bird index may include a lack of diversity in habitats and food sources, loss of habitats and food sources through damage caused by increasing deer populations, and a reduction in some migratory species following pressures in other parts of the world.

Table 5.1 UK populations of wild birds

Year	Total breeding birds	Farmland birds	Seabirds	Woodland birds	Woodland generalists	Woodland specialists
index (year 2000 = 100)						
2008	100.4	92.2	83.5	102.4	105.0	99.1
2009	95.9	89.5	89.4	89.8	98.0	83.8
2010	97.4	86.9	86.5	100.6	101.9	97.6
2011	95.8	86.5	80.8	103.2	98.8	103.3
2012	96.9	87.3	78.0	104.6	102.2	103.7
2013	89.6	79.1	76.9	90.5	89.7	88.6
2014	96.4	80.4	84.3	100.4	103.3	96.9
2015	99.5	85.2	81.6	100.9	105.3	96.6
2016	96.3	77.6	..	95.5	102.8	90.2
2017	97.5	80.6	..	92.8	104.0	85.7

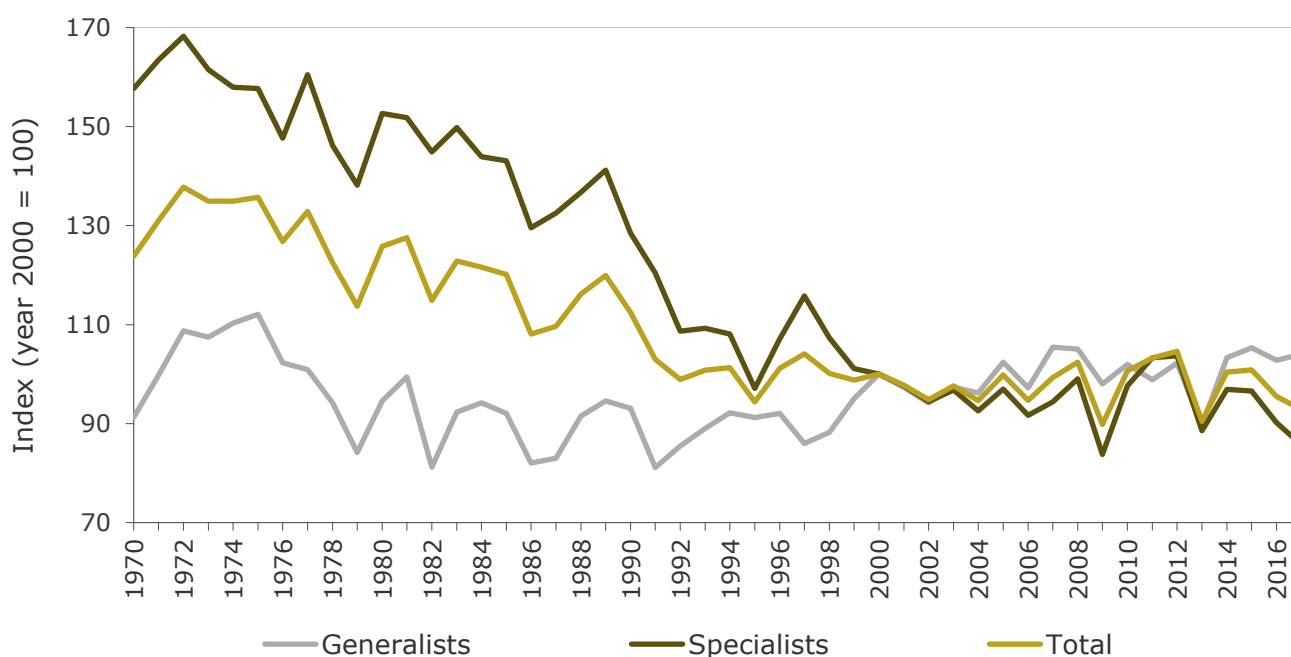
Source: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

1. Based on data in Wild Bird Populations in the UK, 1970-2017 statistical release (Defra, November 2018).

.. Denotes data not available.

Figure 5.1 UK populations of woodland birds



Source: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

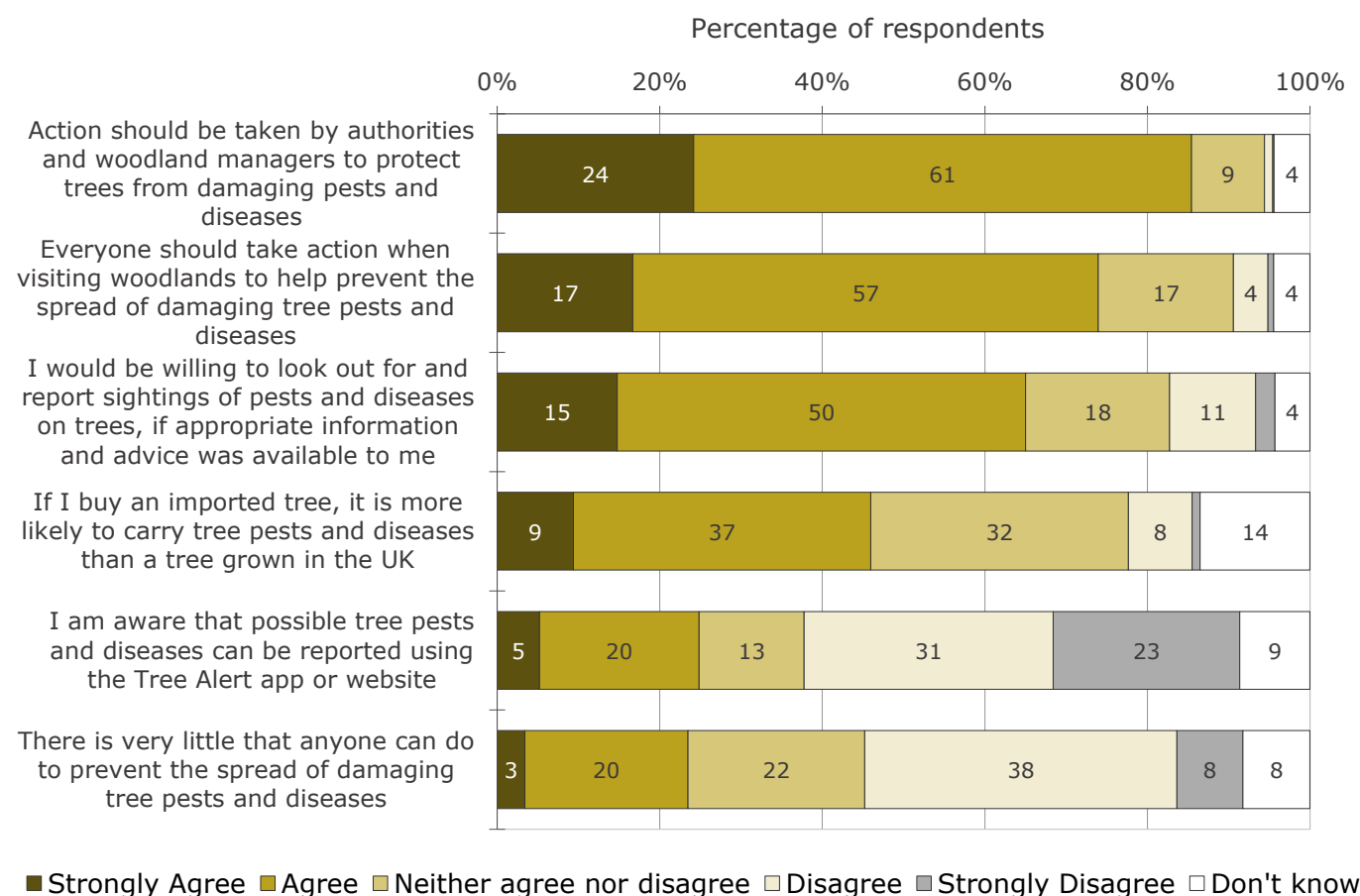
1. Based on data in Wild Bird Populations in the UK, 1970-2017 statistical release (Defra, November 2018).

5.2 Public Opinion of Forestry - tree health

Forest Research has conducted similar surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues every two years since 1995. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2019 (with separate surveys in Wales, Northern Ireland and across the UK as a whole) and in 2017 (in Scotland). Full results are available within the Public Opinion of Forestry reports available on our website at www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/statistics-by-topic/public-opinion-of-forestry/.

Respondents to the UK survey in 2019 were asked their views on a range of statements relating to tree health. The highest level of agreement was seen with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and disease", with 85% of UK respondents agreeing (agree or strongly agree) (Figure 5.2 and Table 5.2). This compares with only 23% agreeing with the statements "there is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases".

Figure 5.2 Public opinion on tree health



Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2019. Base: 2,000 UK respondents.

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 3.2\%$.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Table 5.2 Public opinion on tree health 2015-2019

	2015	2017	2019
Percent of respondents who agree or strongly agree			
Action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases	75	85	85
Everyone should take action when visiting woodlands to help prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	57	74	74
I would be willing to look out for and report sightings of pests and diseases on trees, if appropriate information and advice was available to me	55	65	65
If I buy an imported tree, it is more likely to carry tree pests and diseases than a tree grown in the UK	42	48	46
I am aware that possible tree pests and diseases can be reported using the Tree Alert app or website	22	23	25
There is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	21	23	23

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys.

Note:

1. Figures are based on all respondents: weighted totals = 2015 (1,804), 2017 (2,113), 2019 (2,174).
2. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 3.5\%$ in any of the years shown. To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.

5.3 Woodland Fires

The Home Office and Devolved Administrations produce estimates of the number and area of wildfires each year, using data recorded by Fire and Rescue Services using the Incident Reporting System. These figures were previously produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

By analysing the wildfire data with the National Forest Inventory woodland map, it has been possible to produce estimates of fires that occur within woodlands in Great Britain.

No update is currently available, so the results shown below are as published in Forestry Statistics 2018.

Table 5.3a shows the number of woodland fires in 2010-11 to 2016-17. There has been some fluctuation in the number of woodland fires in Great Britain over this period, with a high of around 9 thousand fires in 2011-12 and a low of around 2,500 in 2012-13. Most fires occurred in England.

The total number of woodland fires in Great Britain in 2016-17 (around 4,200) represents 4% of the total of around 119,000 outdoor fires in Great Britain in 2016-17 (Home Office, Welsh Government, Scottish Government).

Table 5.3a Number of woodland fires

Financial year	England	Wales	Scotland	GB
2010-11	6 182	618	1 186	7 986
2011-12	7 238	620	1 059	8 917
2012-13	1 794	176	484	2 454
2013-14	3 899	383	776	5 058
2014-15	2 360	288	490	3 138
2015-16	3 333	345	1 389	5 067
2016-17	2 570	193	1 423	4 186

Source: Fire & Rescue Service Incident Recording System, National Forest Inventory.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Table 5.3b shows the area covered by woodland fires between 2010-11 and 2016-17. There was a peak of around 8,700 hectares burnt in 2011-12, with the vast majority of this area occurring in Scotland.

Around 800 hectares of woodland in Great Britain were burnt in 2016-17.

Table 5.3b Area of woodland fires

Financial year	England	Wales	Scotland	GB
				hectares
2010-11	979	167	129	1 276
2011-12	278	416	7 982	8 675
2012-13	48	107	268	423
2013-14	101	1 089	318	1 508
2014-15	81	38	762	881
2015-16	117	757	536	1 410
2016-17	29	93	682	804

Source: Fire & Rescue Service Incident Recording System, National Forest Inventory.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.