

Stopping Bird Numbers Declining?



A group of ornithologists and farmers met to discuss plans for Honeydale Farm this week at the start of a study to determine whether growing bird seed mixes together with supplementary feeding of birds over the winter 'hungry gap' (Feb-Apr) can help to halt the continued decline in numbers.

The issue is that growing bird seed mixes is not making a big enough difference to bird numbers, which are continuing to fall over the winter months. So the experiment aims to test a theory that this is because the plants are not providing enough seed and feed to sustain the birds through the hungry gap, and so either eliminate or confirm supplementary feeding as a solution.

Farmer Mike Kettlewell grows significant plots of bird seed on his farm at Over Norton over winter, and similar percentage of land is given over to bird seed at Honeydale. Daily supplementary feeding will begin in December. Mike has been supplementary feeding a high volume for many years.

Bird numbers on both farms will be monitored over two years to look for patterns. If supplementary feeding proves to be key to birds' survival then more farmers can be encouraged to follow this practice, if however numbers continue to fall then another reason for this can be sought.

Present at the meeting were Louise Spicer from Bird Aid, ornithologists Dr Alan Larkman and Dr Richard Broughton, together with farmers Mike Kettlewell, Lyndon Cornwallis and Ian Wilkinson of Honeydale Farm, who also runs Cotswold Seeds.

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