

# Dartmoor Species Action Plan for Ring Ouzel

The ring ouzel is a migratory member of the thrush family which visits Britain to breed in areas of mountains or high moorland. On Dartmoor, the most southerly population, ring ouzels generally frequent disused quarries and mine workings, and the clutter-strewn slopes of tors within areas of upland heath. The British and Irish population is thought to be in the order of 8,000-16,000 pairs, with a recent marked decline in the core of its range in Scotland. This decline has led to the species being considered of high conservation concern nationally.

## Current status on Dartmoor

The population of ring ouzels on Dartmoor appears to have declined by around 30% since 1979. In 2006, the MoD survey of the north moor, plus other supplementary records, lead to a population estimate of 10-15 pairs for Dartmoor.

The majority of breeding sites are on the northern moor, in particular Tavy Cleave and the West Okement Valley.

## Current factors affecting the species on Dartmoor

Species such as blackbirds and Dartford warblers, which occur at Headland Warren (a site where recent declines have occurred), are indicative of this area becoming more lowland in character and is a possible indication of a climatic change impact. Ring ouzels are likely to become more vulnerable on

Dartmoor in future years under a climate change scenario.

Changes in agricultural practices may affect breeding habitat condition, as ring ouzels have very specific requirements. In particular, gorse and bracken growth may be reducing foraging areas near nest sites. Moorland burning could be highly detrimental at or near breeding sites, especially if carried out during the early part of the breeding season, i.e. late March and early April.

There is potential for significant human disturbance at breeding sites during the nesting season from recreational users, especially from those activities involving large numbers of people (such as large scale events) or constant disturbance (such as letter-boxing).

Military activities can also potentially disturb breeding sites during the nesting season. Live firing on the MoD ranges may have a local effect, but 'dry' training involving the use of blank ammunition and pyrotechnics may cause more disturbance because it takes place over wider areas and may therefore affect more sites.

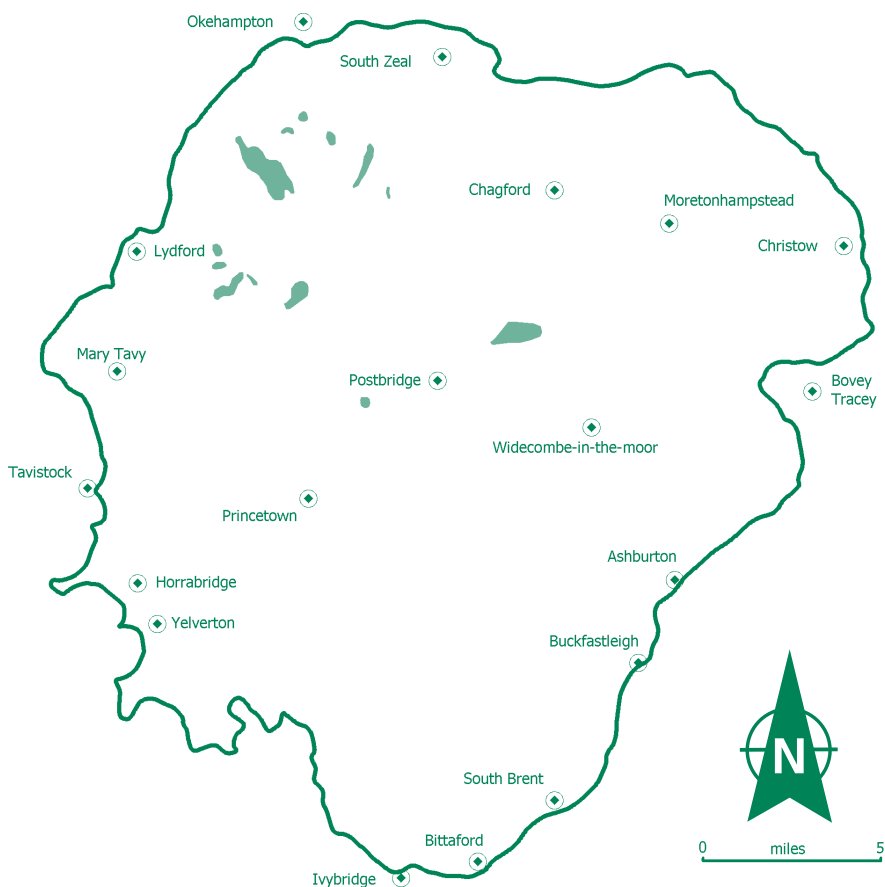
## Current action on Dartmoor

DNPA commissioned surveys of ring ouzels breeding on Dartmoor during 1997 and 1998, to determine the number of pairs, identify key sites, measure disturbance and consider appropriate conservation measures. Ring ouzels were also surveyed in 2006 as part of the MoD commissioned survey of north Dartmoor.

The MoD are assessing details of breeding sites within training areas in



## Dartmoor Ring Ouzel Distribution Map



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order to minimise disturbance. Locations being considered include Tavy Cleave, Steeperton Tor and Fur Tor.

An 'Integrated Land Management Plan' has recently been prepared for the Willsworthy Range which encourages measures to promote biodiversity. A management agreement between Natural England & the MoD has set out a management regime for Willsworthy which should maintain the population in Tavy Cleave.

During the breeding season, organised recreational activities such as letter-boxing, orienteering, guided walks and camping are asked to avoid the main breeding areas for ring ouzels. Following the 2006 survey, the Rare Bird Sensitive Areas

map has been produced, showing known breeding sites within which to avoid disturbing activities.

In an attempt to prevent uncontrolled burning on the commons, fire plans are annually drawn up by the Dartmoor Commoner's Council and individual Commoner's Associations in conjunction with the Moorland Fire Group. All commons with ESA agreements have agreed fire plans.

Grazing levels in the West Okement area have been reduced through agri-environment agreements with commoners. This should promote heathland recovery and enhance nesting habitat in the clitter, whilst sheep continue to graze the sweeter grassland lawns used for feeding.

## Ring Ouzel Key Conservation Objectives and Targets

### Ring Ouzel Objectives

#### Objective 1

*Ensure that Dartmoor remains a significant breeding area for ring ouzels.*

##### Dartmoor targets

- A** Maintain at least the same number of breeding pairs of ring ouzel as in 2006 (10-15 pairs) by 2016.
- B** Optimise conservation management of all ring ouzel nest sites by 2008.
- C** Minimise potential threats to future breeding population of ring ouzels from recreational, agricultural and military users of the National Park.

#### Objective 2

*Promote a greater understanding and awareness of ring ouzels on Dartmoor.*

##### Dartmoor targets

- A** Make recreational users more aware of the possible effects of their activities on nesting ring ouzels, if not planned appropriately.
- B** Ensure that landowners and managers are aware of breeding areas for ring ouzels and their sensitivity.



Ring ouzel

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### Actions for Ring Ouzel on Dartmoor

Monitoring responsibility: RSPB

Action	Meets Objective/Target	Deliverer		Complete by					Date achieved	
		Lead	Partners	2007	2008	2011	2016	On-going		
<b>Policy and Legislation</b>										
Include protection policies for all sites in all relevant statutory plans when reviewed	1	DNPA, EA								
<b>Site Safeguard</b>										
Safeguard sites against direct threats through planning controls and other consultation procedures	1	DNPA	MoD, DoC, NE							

Actions for Ring Ouzel on Dartmoor (cont.)

Action	Meets Objective/Target	Deliverer		Complete by					Date achieved
		Lead	Partners	2007	2008	2011	2016	On-going	
<b>Habitat Management</b>									
Establish management agreements over all known nest sites and associated foraging areas	1A/1C	NE	DNPA, DoC, MoD	●					
Encourage controlled burning to prevent damage to breeding sites	1	NE, DNPA, DaCC	DoC, MoD	●					
Ensure all breeding areas have agreed management in place that is being implemented to optimise conditions for ring ouzels	1B	NE, RSPB, DNPA	DoC, MoD		●				
<b>Advisory</b>									
Reduce disturbance during the breeding season by re-routing cross country activities and publishing details of advisory exclusion zones	1C	DNPA	MoD					●	
Annually meet recreational groups to clarify exclusion zones during the breeding season	2A	DNPA						●	
Contact landowners and managers of breeding sites to ensure they are aware of the birds and their sensitivity to disturbance	2B	DNPA, NE		●					
<b>Research and Monitoring</b>									
Establish a monitoring methodology to record trends in breeding numbers	1A	DBWPS, RSPB, DNPA		●					
Undertake monitoring to produce estimates of the Dartmoor population at least every 3 years	1A	RSPB, DNPA	MoD, DBWPS		●	●	●		
<b>Communication and Publicity</b>									
Inform the public, land managers and recreational users of the results of surveys and conservation management for ring ouzel on Dartmoor through the <i>Biodiversity Newsletter</i> and other media	3	DNPA, RSPB						●	

**Abbreviations used in the table opposite:**

DBWPS - Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society, DaCC – Dartmoor Commoner’s Council, DNPA - Dartmoor National Park Authority, DoC - Duchy of Cornwall, MoD - Ministry of Defence, NE – Natural England, RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds