



## Bullfinch - *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

**The bullfinch is a plump, compact and bull-necked finch that, along with its plumage details, gives it a distinctive appearance. In flight it is characterised by a white rump patch, black tail, grey back and broad white wing bar. Adult birds have a black crown and face, the sexes differ in their underparts colour. Male birds are bright red-pink and females are a duller greyish-buff. The bullfinch's most familiar call is a soft and plaintive 'pew' note, which is often repeated and functions as a contact call throughout the year. The song consists of several slowly recited varied parts, some similar to the call note. It is often only audible at close range.**

Bullfinches are unobtrusive and are easily overlooked, particularly in summer. They are often seen in pairs or in small, loose flocks. Bullfinches feed on fleshy fruits, herbs, buds and shoots, although invertebrates form an important part of the diet of the young.

The bullfinch is a fairly common and widespread species in the UK and is absent only from parts of north-west Scotland and areas where woodland is

scarce such as fenland. It breeds mainly in broad-leaved woods, but also in detached groups of trees, thickets, tall and dense hedgerows and large gardens.

Bullfinches are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as all birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law. They can, however, be killed under licence for the purpose of preventing serious damage to commercial fruit crops. Individual growers can apply to DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) for a licence where they can show that bullfinches are causing or likely to cause serious damage. Bullfinches are listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) Red List, which holds species whose breeding population has decreased and/or whose breeding range has contracted by 50% or more in the preceding 25 years. Bullfinches are also listed in the Kent Red Data Book as vulnerable.

A decline in the UK bullfinch population has been observed, with a loss of 54% over the period 1967 – 2000, with most of the decline occurring in the 1980s. It has also been shown that declines of

bullfinch

47% took place in woodland, while there was a 75% decline on farmland. In Kent, bullfinches are still widespread, but in reduced numbers. It is however scarce or absent from the north Kent Marshes, Thanet, Romney Marsh and Dungeness.

A definitive cause of the bullfinch decline has not, as yet, been identified. Proposed major contributing factors have included removal of farmland trees and hedgerows, so reducing quantity and quality of nest sites and also loss of winter food sources through the use of herbicides. A general licence was issued to commercial fruit growers in Kent during the winter of 1996/7 for the control of bullfinches. During this period 300 birds were taken, while over 100 were trapped in the winter of 1990/1. It is not thought likely that this would have an impact on the national population as a whole, but it is quite possible that impacts on the Kent population resulted from the trapping programme.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan aims to halt the decline of the bullfinch in the first instance and then to see a sustained recovery by 2008. The new Hedgerows Regulations are likely to protect habitat favoured by nesting bullfinches. Other proposed actions include seeking a more cautious and targeted use of pesticides and fertilisers and to review licensing procedures regularly so that they remain appropriate to the current status of the species.

## FURTHER INFORMATION:

**UK Biodiversity Action Plan:**

[www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=542](http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=542)

**Defra:** [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

**English Nature:** [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)

**Kent Wildlife Trust:** [www.kentwildlife.org.uk](http://www.kentwildlife.org.uk)

**Kent Biodiversity Action Plan:** [www.kentbap.org.uk](http://www.kentbap.org.uk)

**The Kent Red Data Book, available from Kent County Council:** [www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity)

**The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds:** [www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

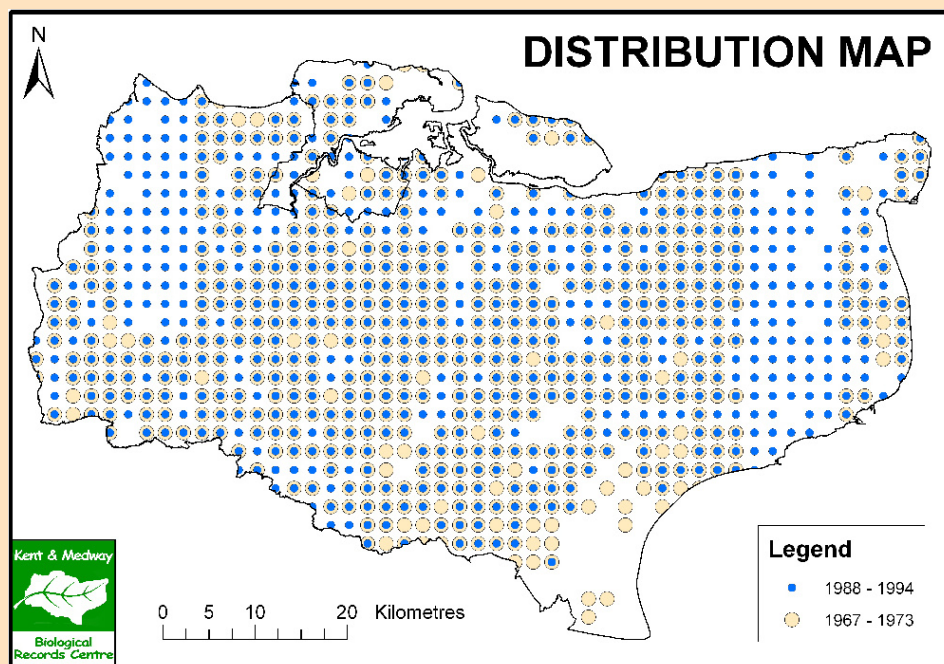
**British Trust for Ornithology:** [www.bto.org.uk](http://www.bto.org.uk)

**Kent Ornithological Society:** [www.kentos.org.uk](http://www.kentos.org.uk)

**Kent Landscape Information System :** [www.kent.gov.uk/klis](http://www.kent.gov.uk/klis)

**Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre:** [www.kmbrc.org.uk](http://www.kmbrc.org.uk)

Other methods can be promoted to fruit growers in order to reduce the effect of foraging bullfinches on orchards. For example, alternative sources of natural food could be provided.



Data courtesy of Kent Ornithological Society

