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Spotted Flycatcher - *Muscicapa striata*

The spotted flycatcher is a medium-small, greyish-brown perching bird, which has a characteristic habit of choosing prominent perches from which to feed. It is a broad-billed and lengthy flycatcher and lacks obvious features. The upperparts are dull grey-brown, whilst the off-white underparts are unmarked except for dark streaking on the breast and throat. It sits upright, often flicking its tail. The spotted flycatcher generally makes unobtrusive vocalizations, as the song is a quiet sequence of high pitched squeaky or scratchy notes. The call is a short, shrill 'zee' note.

Spotted flycatchers feed on mainly flying insects, especially Diptera (flies) and Hymenoptera (bees, wasps and winged ants), by making dashing forays from a perch, catching the insect and then returning to the perch to swallow it.

Spotted flycatchers are summer visitors and arrive from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa from late April. They are found throughout the UK (although they are scarcer in the north and west) during the breeding season, preferring well-wooded gardens, woodland and parkland

as nesting habitats. Nest sites are found on natural or artificial ledges, often with an overhang for shelter. Such suitable sites include tree crevices, the tops of flat branches or open-fronted nestboxes.

Spotted flycatchers are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as all birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law. It is also 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. Spotted flycatchers are also listed in the Kent Red Data Book as vulnerable.

The UK Population of spotted flycatcher has been in decline since the early 1960s. In the period of 1967-2000, 82% of the population was lost. Between 1968 and 1991 there was a population decline of 62% in woodland and 70% in farmland. In Kent, spotted flycatchers are widespread and absent only from marshland. However its continuing decline has meant that it is now

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absent from many formerly occupied areas and as a consequence, is becoming increasingly sparsely distributed.

It is thought that a major contributing factor in the decline of the spotted flycatcher is drought in the Sahel region of Africa, where the species passes through on migration. Spotted flycatchers facing this problem may then have trouble making up losses in wetter and cooler summers in the UK. It has been shown that clutch sizes are larger when temperatures are warmer. A loss of nest sites and changes in agricultural practice may also have been contributing factors.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan is closely monitoring spotted flycatcher populations, with the aim in the first instance of halting the decline in numbers and then to see a sustained recovery. Some aspects of current broadleaved woodland management, for example the creation and maintenance of clearings, may have benefited the species, as would the provision of nest boxes. No other action will be proposed until further research details become available; however it is likely that the spotted flycatchers would benefit from policy actions that were originally designed to assist other farmland birds.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

UK Biodiversity Action Plan: www.ukbap.org.uk

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds:
www.rspb.org.uk

English Nature: www.english-nature.org.uk

Kent Wildlife Trust: www.kentwildlife.org.uk

Kent Biodiversity Action Plan: www.kentbap.org.uk

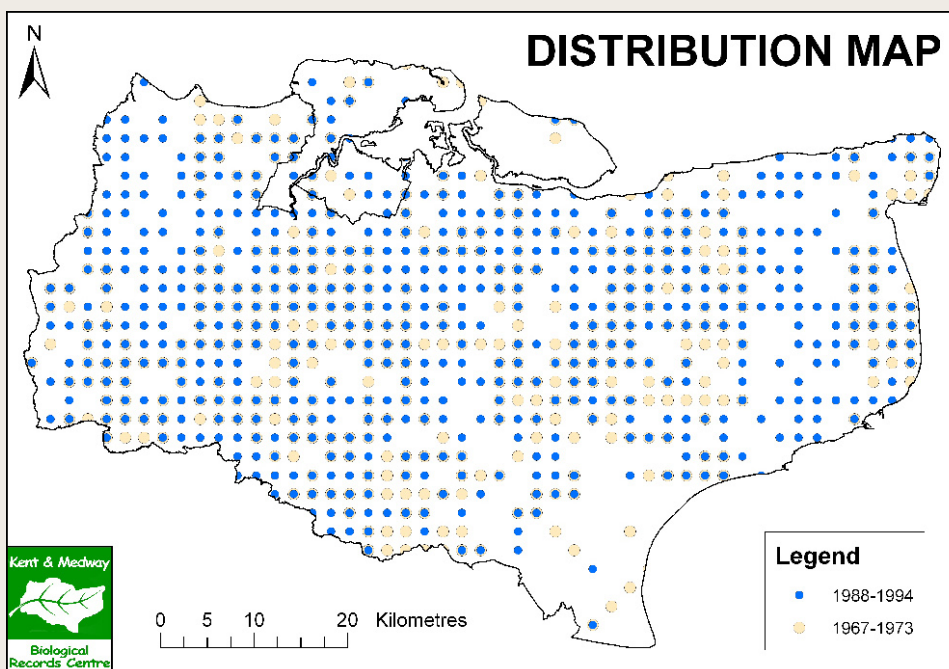
The Kent Red Data Book, available from
Kent County Council: www.kent.gov.uk/biodiversity

Kent Ornithological Society: www.kentos.org.uk

Kent Landscape Information System:
www.kent.gov.uk/klis

Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre:
www.kmbrc.org.uk

The spotted flycatcher is a species that adapts well to gardens and parks. Developers can encourage spotted flycatchers by ensuring that there is sufficient greenspaces within developments, with trees and shrubs that the flycatchers can use as perches, and a wide range of different plants, including flowers, to encourage their insect prey.



Data courtesy of Kent Ornithological Society

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