

## Why study House Martins?

House Martin populations are in decline but we don't know why, and we need to find out.

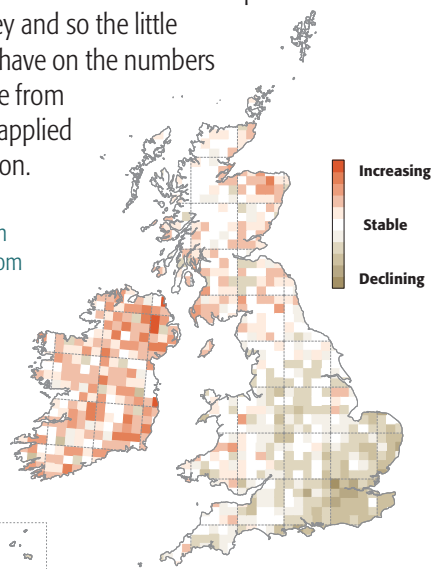
### Long-term declines

Our long-term monitoring work has revealed that the House Martin population in England declined by 69% between 1966 and 2013. There was a particularly pronounced period of decline that began in the early 1980s.

Information from *Bird Atlas 2007–11* and the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey show interesting geographical patterns to the declines, with declines in abundance in the southern half of Britain yet increases in the northern half.

The reasons for these patterns, and the wider decline itself, remain unknown. There has been no previous national House Martin survey and so the little information we do have on the numbers breeding here come from statistical methods applied to census information.

Change in House Martin breeding abundance from 1988–91 to 2008–11.



Data from *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, which is a joint project between BTO, BirdWatch Ireland and the Scottish Ornithologists' Club.



### The UK House Martin Survey 2015

BTO volunteers participating in the UK House Martin Survey are visiting a series of randomly-selected 1-km squares across the UK. During these visits the volunteers are searching all possible House Martin habitat, mapping the location of any active nest sites, and recording information about the nests.

Two or three visits will be required to each 1-km study square during June–July, the key breeding period. The breeding season itself can extend through to the very end of summer, the birds making one or more breeding attempts and with reports of young birds still in the nest as late as mid-October.

The information collected through this survey will be used to increase our understanding of this declining species. It will also help us to identify and support conservation action to halt House Martin decline. The work has been funded through the BTO House Martin Appeal.

### The UK House Martin Nest Study 2016

In 2016, the BTO is running a study that focuses on individual nests and we are looking for volunteers to help with this aspect of our work. If you have House Martins nesting on your property, or can easily and regularly view a nest elsewhere, register your interest online at:

[www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey](http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey)

This aspect of our wider project is examining the timing of nesting, the number of nesting attempts that are made and the behaviour of the birds while they are breeding.

## House Martin facts and figures



**Conservation Status:** Amber-listed

**Clutch size:** 4–5 eggs

**Incubation:** 13–19 days

**Young fledge at:** 19–25 days

**Number of broods:** 2

**Age at first breeding:** 1 year

**Typical lifespan:** 2 years

**Average date of first arrival:** 8 April

**Diet:** Flying insects, especially flies and aphids

**Maximum recorded age:** 7 years, 1 month and 12 days

**Migration:** Winters in Africa, south of the Sahara – the map shows the locations of ringed House Martins outside of the breeding season



# House Martins and the Law

House Martins undertake incredible journeys to reach our shores and we should acknowledge these efforts by respecting the birds and their nests.

## A legal obligation

House Martins are fully protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to kill, injure or take an adult bird, or to take, damage or destroy the eggs, young or nest of a House Martin whilst it is being built or in use.

Some householders object to the presence of nesting House Martins because the droppings produced by the birds can collect on window ledges or on the ground below the nest. There are things you can do to reduce the visual impact of these droppings. For example, attaching a temporary ledge above a window will prevent the droppings falling onto the window itself – the ledge can be removed once the birds have finished nesting.

Other householders remove the nests at the end of the breeding season in order to discourage the birds from returning the following year. Given the difficulties faced by this small bird, and the level of population decline, we should delight in having House Martins breeding on our homes rather than seek to deter them.



Each House Martin nest is made up of at least 1,000 beak-sized pellets of mud. A new nest may take up to 10 days to build, though birds will often re-use old nests or, as in this case, make use of an artificial nest cup.



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For more about House Martins and the work of the BTO

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## House Martins

Helping  
one of our  
summer visitors

