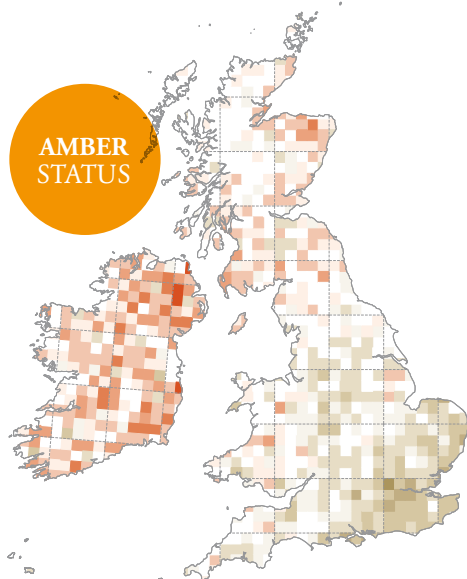


# House Martin

Help us keep our  
House Martins out of the red...



# The decline of the House Martin



**Left**  
The information we do have from *Bird Atlas 2007–11* and the Breeding Bird Survey show striking geographical patterns with declines in abundance in the southern half of Britain, yet increases in the north. The reasons for these changes are unknown.

The House Martin is a familiar species to many people and one which evokes a sense of wonder at the adaptability of this tiny bird; building nests made of mud on our homes and travelling thousands of miles to winter in Africa. Their populations in the UK have been declining since the mid 1980s but even in the last decade we have seen worrying declines in their overall population size.

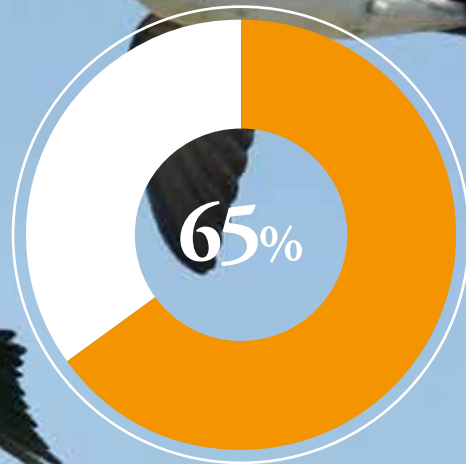
There has never been a national House Martin survey before and, since traditional monitoring methods aren't best suited to House Martins, a special survey is needed to provide an accurate population estimate. They are currently listed as amber status in the Birds of Conservation Concern listings, regularly compiled by the UK's leading conservation organisations.

But what's the cause of the rapid decline? The reasons are currently unclear. Crucial information about House Martin numbers and breeding activity is needed now. This information will be key to understanding more about the changes we are seeing in our House Martin populations.



*As a young boy I marvelled at the chattering flocks of House Martins that gathered on the telegraph wires in September ahead of their long journey to Africa. This behaviour lasted for a very short time before the birds departed and, sadly, is a spectacle that is now disappearing. We estimate House Martins have declined by 65% in just over 40 years but what we don't know is why.*

Professor Rob Fuller



*65% decline in England 1967-2011 (CBC/BBS England)\**

*\*The Breeding Bird Survey is jointly funded by the BTO, JNCC and RSPB.*

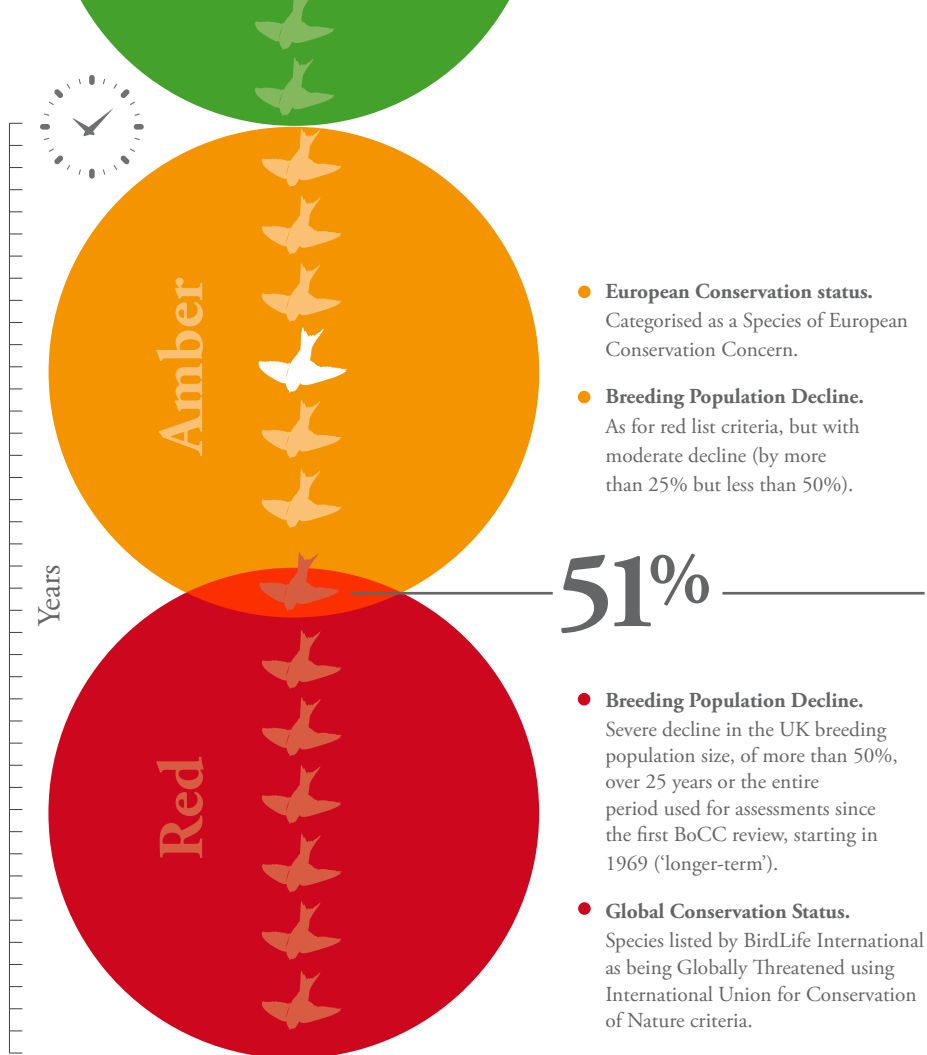


*Each nest uses 1,000 beak-sized pellets of mud – so are drought and climate change making it harder to find building materials?*

## BTO House Martin Appeal

The system used by the Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) listings are intended to reflect both the species' global and European status as well as that within the UK, and the importance of our populations in international terms.

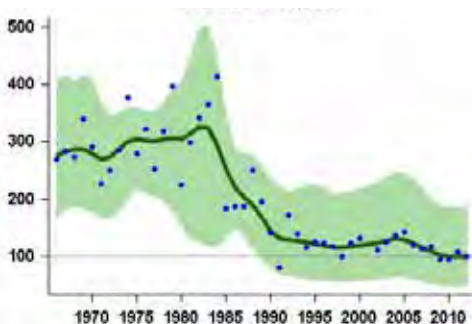
Currently listed as amber, due to a population decrease of between 25-50% in the UK and also due to declines in Europe, any further decrease could lead to House Martins being red listed, joining other species which have seen declines of over 50% over 25 years.



# The House Martin Survey

Sound science to inform conservation action.

Graph  
CBC/BBS England 1966–2012  
House Martin



**This specially designed survey will comprise of two parts over two years.**

## **2015: Establishing population estimates to monitor change**

The first element, the Random Square Survey in 2015, will involve volunteers across the UK surveying 1-km squares and mapping any nest sites. During two visits to the nests during June and July, the key breeding period, the volunteers will record more information on the nests and count how many nests are active. This Random Square Survey will provide a robust UK population estimate which will act as a baseline against which future changes can be measured.

## **2016: Monitoring nests and breeding activity**

The second element, the Nest Monitoring Study in 2016, will be an observation of nests which is ideal for those who have nests on their property. It will focus on watching the nest for a few minutes regularly during the breeding season and recording a small amount of information about what activity is seen. This Nest Monitoring Study will give us important information about site location, arrival dates, timing of breeding, number of breeding attempts and breeding success.

## **How will these surveys help?**

Once we have this information we will have a sound baseline against which future change can be measured and will be able to analyse the data to inform our understanding about what is causing the changes in fortune in the north and south. We hope to answer key questions about this charismatic summer visitor.

*House Martins need broad eaves to nest under – but is there a lack of suitable nest-building sites?*

*Each nest uses 1,000 beak-sized pellets of mud – so are drought and climate change making it harder to find building materials?*

*Have changes in local land-use affected insect numbers and led to a food shortage?*

With new information from these surveys, and analysis of environmental datasets, we hope that we can start to understand the key drivers of change and inform relevant conservation actions. We'll also be able to identify characteristics of preferred nesting sites and provide information to the building industry to give House Martins the best chance in the future.



# Why we need to act now

Keeping the House Martin  
out of the red.



Photo: Shutterstock

The two elements of this new House Martin Survey have been designed, and successfully piloted, to ensure we can gather vital information to establish population estimates and understand more about what is causing the drastic decline in parts of the country. Once we have these answers we can use evidence to inform policy and practice to make a difference in future.

Many will have seen and remembered the grand scale on which House Martins used to gather with Swallows on telephone wires, preparing to depart on their migration. The data collected through this survey will give us a clear picture of how they fare when they are in the UK. In the future we hope to complete the picture by tracking them to their over-wintering grounds and following their migration. Despite over a thousand House Martins being ringed in Britain each year, their wintering grounds remain a complete mystery and their migration strategies and routes are poorly understood. In the coming years suitable tracking devices may become available to track House Martins but until then it's vital we improve our understanding of the problems they face in the UK.


*Your support for the House Martin Survey is vital to ensure we can go ahead.*




*Their population trend in England is of high concern in comparison with the rest of the UK.*

*Please help keep our House Martins out of the red by making a donation.*

Visit [www.bto.org/house-martin-appeal](http://www.bto.org/house-martin-appeal) for more information.



  
*The reasons for the decline in  
House Martins is unclear and it's time  
we started to learn more about this  
colonial nesting species before it's too late.*

Dawn Balmer



# YES, I want to support the House Martin appeal

to gather vital information and help keep them out of the red.



Here is my gift: £15  £25  £40  or my choice of £

Please provide the following information if you would like to be contacted by BTO in either of these ways:

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

Email:

☐ I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to 'British Trust for Ornithology' OR ☐ Please debit the sum above from my account

Card No.

Start date:

Expiry:

Security code:

(Maestro Only)

Signature:

Date:

**Please return this form in the FREEPOST envelope provided or donate online at [www.bto.org/house-martin-appeal](http://www.bto.org/house-martin-appeal)**

Freepost RTJK-ABCB-UUEL, Dawn Balmer, British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU

*giftaid it*

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*Thank  
you*