

Forestry Statistics 2022

Chapter 5: Environment

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The Research Agency of the
Forestry Commission

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The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, technical support and consultancy services.

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Introduction

This chapter presents a range of information about the woodland environment, mostly using sources that are outside the scope of National Statistics. They are included to provide additional context to the topic.

Estimates for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are included, where possible, in addition to GB or UK totals. Further information on the data sources and methodology used to compile the figures is provided in the Sources chapter.

All of the statistics presented in this chapter have been previously released.

A copy of all environment tables can be accessed in spreadsheet format from the [Data Downloads](#) page.

Key findings

The main findings are:

- The UK woodland bird index has remained relatively stable since the early 1990s, following a period of long-term decline. Since 2015 woodland generalist species have fallen by 3% and woodland specialist species have fallen by 10%.
- Around three quarter (77%) of respondents to the UK Public Opinion of Forestry survey 2021 agreed with the statement "action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and disease".
- In 2020, the total area of native woodland in Great Britain is estimated to be around 1.51 million hectares (49% of all woodland in Great Britain).
- In 2020, non-native coniferous woodland is the single largest habitat type in Great Britain, accounting for 1.29 million hectares (42%).

5.1 Populations of wild birds

Bird populations provide a good indication of the broad state of wildlife in the UK. This is because they are a well-studied taxonomic group, enabling a more informed interpretation of observed changes, who occupy a range of habitats while still responding to the same environmental pressures that also operate on other groups of wildlife.

Indices of wild bird populations in the UK are produced annually by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) in conjunction with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and cover a range of species that are native to the UK. This data has been produced since the early 1970s for the majority of habitat groups, meaning there is considerable long-term data available on the changes in bird populations, which aids in the interpretation of more short-term variation. The latest statistical release on [wild bird populations in the UK](#) was published in November 2020 and includes data to 2019 (an update was published in December 2021, however, this covered only wintering waterbirds). The next release is expected in December 2022.

The index for woodland birds was expanded in 2007 to cover 38 species. A further change in 2015 resulted in a reduction to 37 species, of which 12 are generalists and 25 are woodland specialists (those that breed or feed mainly or solely in woodland).

Since the early 1990s, when the majority of species group indices stabilised, the UK woodland bird index has generally been about 20 per cent below the level of the early 1970s, with the decline predominantly in woodland specialist species (Figure 5.1).

Causes for the long-term decline in the woodland bird index may include a lack of diversity in habitats and food sources, loss of habitats and food sources through

damage caused by increasing deer populations, and a reduction in some migratory species following pressures in other parts of the world.

In recent years, woodland bird indices have largely decreased. Since 2015 woodland generalist species have fallen by 3% and woodland specialist species have fallen by 10%.

Table 5.1 Population of wild birds, UK, 2010 to 2019

index (year 2000 = 100)

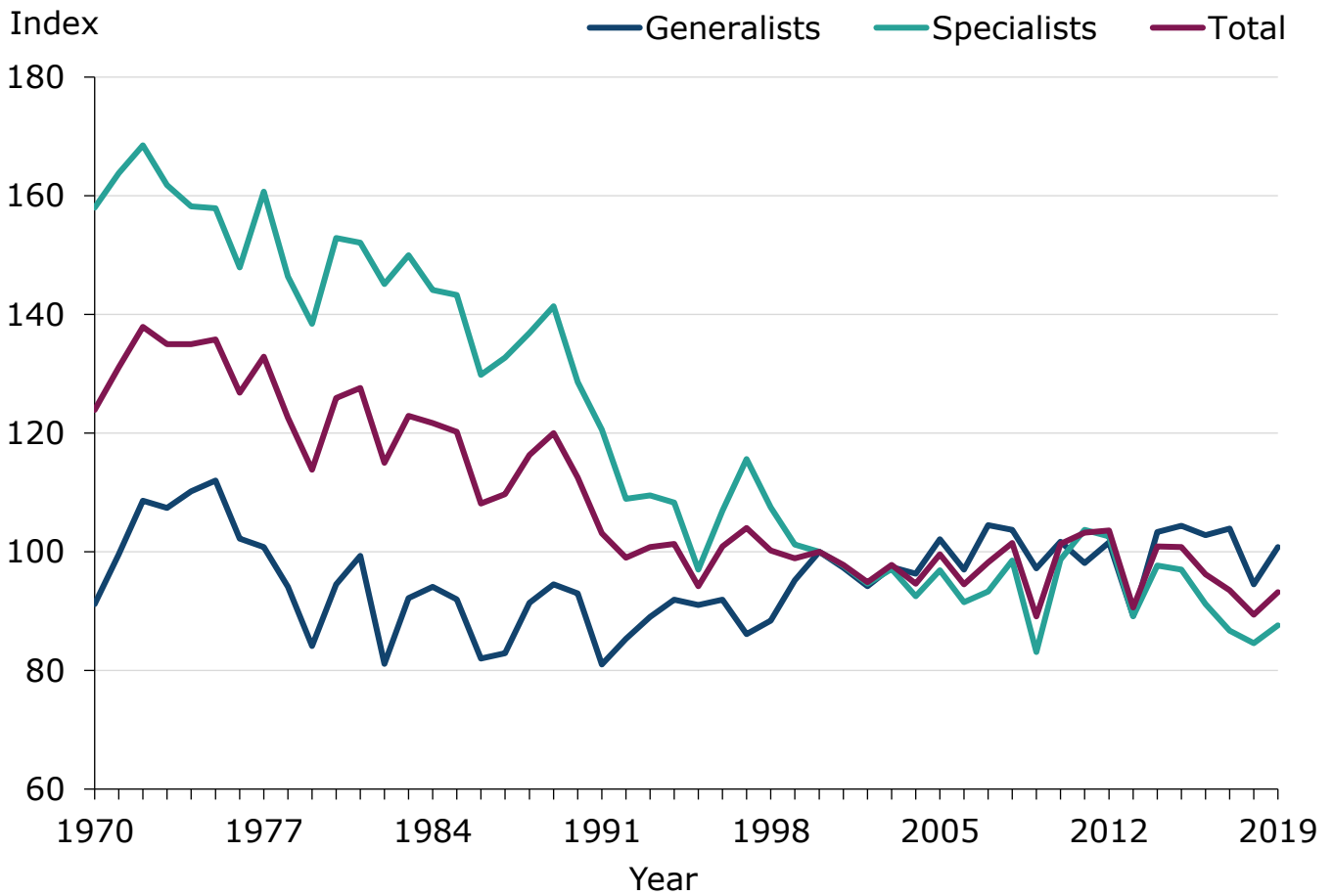
Year	Total breeding birds	Farmland birds	Seabirds	Woodland birds	Woodland generalists	Woodland specialists
2010	97.9	87.0	84.2	101.3	101.7	98.7
2011	95.6	86.4	78.0	103.2	98.1	103.7
2012	96.7	87.0	75.9	103.6	101.6	102.6
2013	89.3	79.0	72.9	90.6	89.2	89.1
2014	96.4	80.2	80.0	100.9	103.3	97.7
2015	99.3	84.6	77.9	100.8	104.4	97.0
2016	96.6	77.4	80.8	96.2	102.8	91.2
2017	97.7	80.7	82.4	93.5	103.9	86.7
2018	90.9	77.5	75.5	89.4	94.5	84.6
2019	93.3	77.7	79.7	93.2	100.8	87.6

Source: British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

1. Based on data in [wild bird populations in the UK](#) (1970 to 2019) statistical release (Defra, 2020).

Figure 5.1 Woodland bird index, UK, 1970 to 2019



Source:

British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Notes:

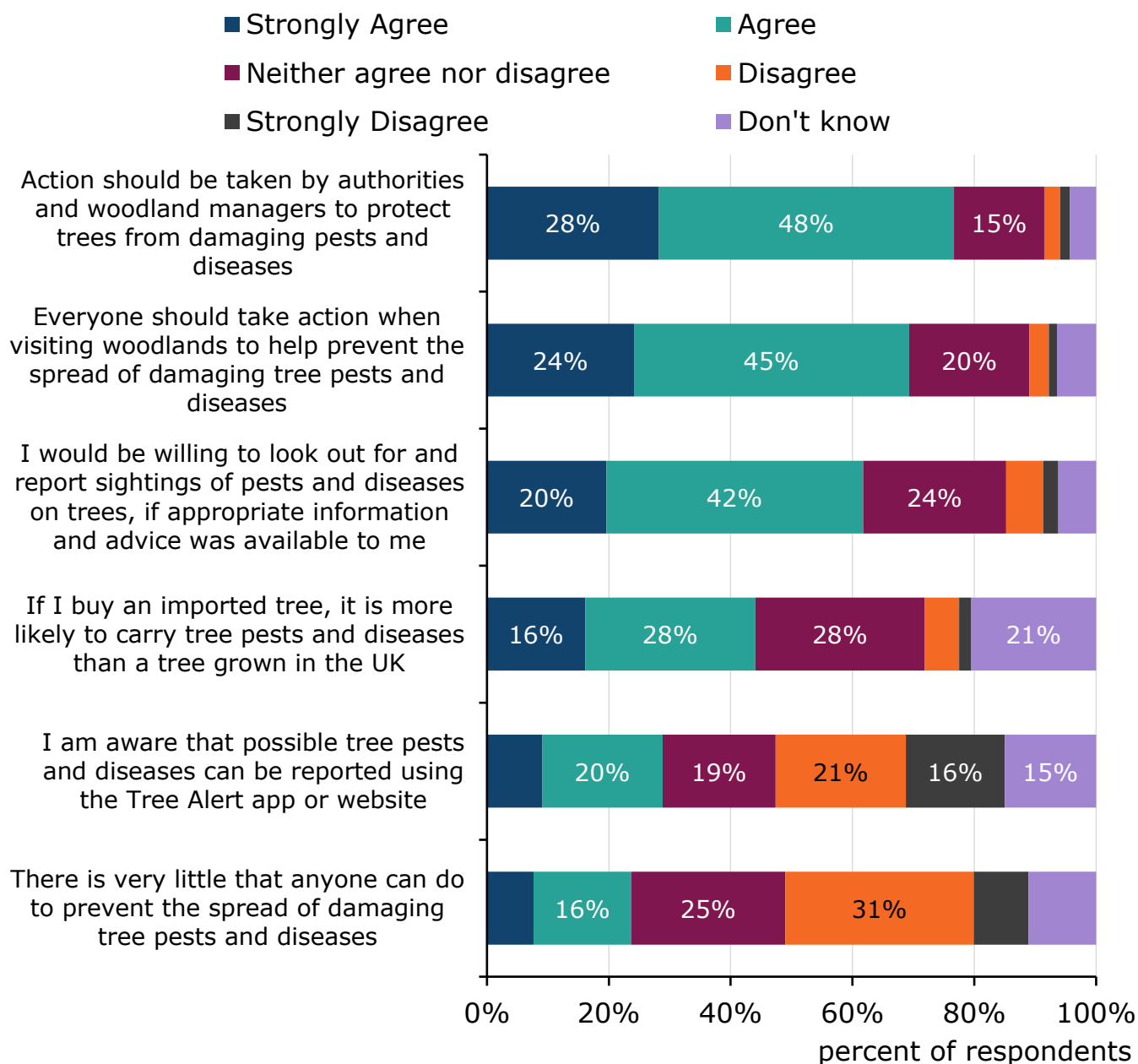
1. Based on data in [Wild Bird Populations in the UK](#) (1970 to 2019) statistical release (Defra, 2020).
2. Year 2000 = 100.

5.2 Public Opinion of Forestry - tree health

Forest Research has surveyed public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues since 1995. The most recent surveys were conducted in 2021 (with separate surveys in Wales, Scotland and across the UK as a whole) and in 2019 (in Northern Ireland). Full results are available on the [Public Opinion of Forestry homepage](#).

Respondents to the UK survey in 2021 were asked their views on a range of statements relating to tree health. The highest level of agreement was seen with the statement “action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and disease”, with 77% of UK respondents agreeing (agree or strongly agree) (Figure 5.2 and Table 5.2). This compares with only 24% agreeing with the statement “there is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases”.

Figure 5.2 Public opinion on tree health, UK, 2021



Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry Survey, 2021.

Base: All respondents (approximately 5,000).

Notes:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 2.1\%$.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Table 5.2 Public opinion on tree health, UK, 2015 to 2021

percent of respondents who agree or strongly agree

	2015	2017	2019	2021
Action should be taken by authorities and woodland managers to protect trees from damaging pests and diseases	75	85	85	77
Everyone should take action when visiting woodlands to help prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	57	74	74	69
I would be willing to look out for and report sightings of pests and diseases on trees, if appropriate information and advice was available to me	55	65	65	62
If I buy an imported tree, it is more likely to carry tree pests and diseases than a tree grown in the UK	42	48	46	44
I am aware that possible tree pests and diseases can be reported using the Tree Alert app or website	22	23	25	29
There is very little that anyone can do to prevent the spread of damaging tree pests and diseases	21	23	23	24

Source: UK Public Opinion of Forestry surveys, 2015 to 2021.

Base: 2,000 respondents (2015 to 2019); 5,000 respondents (2021).

Note:

1. The range of uncertainty around any result should be no more than $\pm 3.5\%$ in any of the years shown. To compare results over time, a difference of at least 5 percentage points is required to indicate that there is a significant difference.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

5.3 Woodland types and habitats

National Forest Inventory (NFI) reports on woodland ecological condition, released in 2020, provide estimates of the areas of woodland types and of woodland habitats in Great Britain.

Table 5.3a presents estimates of the extent of each type of woodland from this report. The total area of native woodland in Great Britain is estimated to be around 1.51 million hectares. This equates to around one half (49%) of the woodland area in Great Britain. The proportion of native woodland is highest in England (68%), followed by Wales (48%) and Scotland (32%).

Table 5.3a Woodland area by type, Great Britain, 2013

thousand hectares

Type of woodland	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
Native	914	150	443	1,507
Near native & fragments	29	7	20	57
Non-native	398	155	908	1,461
Not determinable	2	1	17	20
Total	1,343	313	1,388	3,045

Source: NFI Woodland Ecological Condition (2020)

Notes:

1. The report [NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Scoring Methodology](#) provides further details on woodland types.
2. Comparisons with woodland area should not be made as woodland area is defined differently to woodland habitat (with woodland area being greater than habitat area due to the treatment of land uses like open space and clear-fell).
3. Clear-fell and transition land are included in the estimates. Woodland type for some clear-fell and transition land cannot be determined and are assigned as not determinable.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

Non-native coniferous woodland is the single largest habitat type in Great Britain, accounting for 1.29 million hectares (42%). This is the most common habitat type for Scotland (59%) and Wales (46%). For England, lowland mixed deciduous woodland accounts for over one half (56%) of woodlands.

Table 5.3b Woodland area by habitat type, Great Britain, 2013

thousand hectares

Habitat type	England	Wales	Scotland	Great Britain
Lowland beech/yew woodland	54	6	1	62
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	748	79	82	909
Native pine woodlands	0	0	124	124
Non-HAP native pinewood	0	0	38	38
Upland birchwoods (Scotland), birch dominated upland oakwoods (England, Wales)	11	2	120	134
Upland mixed ashwoods	32	7	15	54
Upland oakwoods	44	26	33	103
Wet woodland	78	28	63	169
Wood pasture & parkland	8	0	3	11
Broadleaf habitat NOT classified as priority	19	12	21	53
Non-native coniferous woodland	328	145	819	1,292
Clearfelled and transition	22	6	70	97
Total	1,344	313	1,389	3,045

Source: NFI Woodland Ecological Condition (2020)

Notes:

1. The report [NFI Woodland Ecological Condition Scoring Methodology](#) provides further details on habitat types.

These figures are outside the scope of National Statistics. For further information see the Sources chapter.

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