

## Understanding hawfinch declines

Guest Blog by [Will Kirby](#), Co

Research carried out between 2012 and 2016 has revealed new findings about hawfinch

and nest monitoring are providing the scientific basis required to devise actions that could help reverse the decline of this bird of conservation concern.

**Hawfinch in decline in UK**

The hawfinch is the UK's la

breeding range, the hawfinch is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and the latest estimate suggests there may be less than one thousand breeding pairs remaining in Britain.

declines in 2012. The first part of the study focused on assessing wh

from the British Trust for Ornithology were used to compare areas where breeding  
hawfinch had been lost with those where they remained. The main finding (perhaps  
unsurprisingly) was that they are more likely to have persisted in landscapes with a high  
proportion of mature, broadleaved woodland. Within woodland they preferred nest sites  
close to glades and tracks over densely wooded areas. This section of the work has been  
published in the scientific journal *Bird Study: Breeding season habitat associations and  
population declines of British Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*.*



### Hawfinch radio tracking

whether poor nesting su


hawk nests is extremely difficult as they are usually sited high up in the tree canopy. In addition to this, the adult birds are not particularly territorial or vocal and there aren't many of them... To help us find a reasonable sample we teamed up with bird ringers in the Forest of Dean and North Wales during the pre-breeding season. This enabled us to fit radio-tags to females and, by tracking the signals, to locate their nests once they begin incubating their eggs. Although this sounds easy, it has proved a steep learning curve with many problems including loss and damage of tags, long distances travelled by the birds, sometimes taking them outside of the study areas and difficult terrain for the scientists to follow the birds.



## Monitoring methods

3m to 30m from the

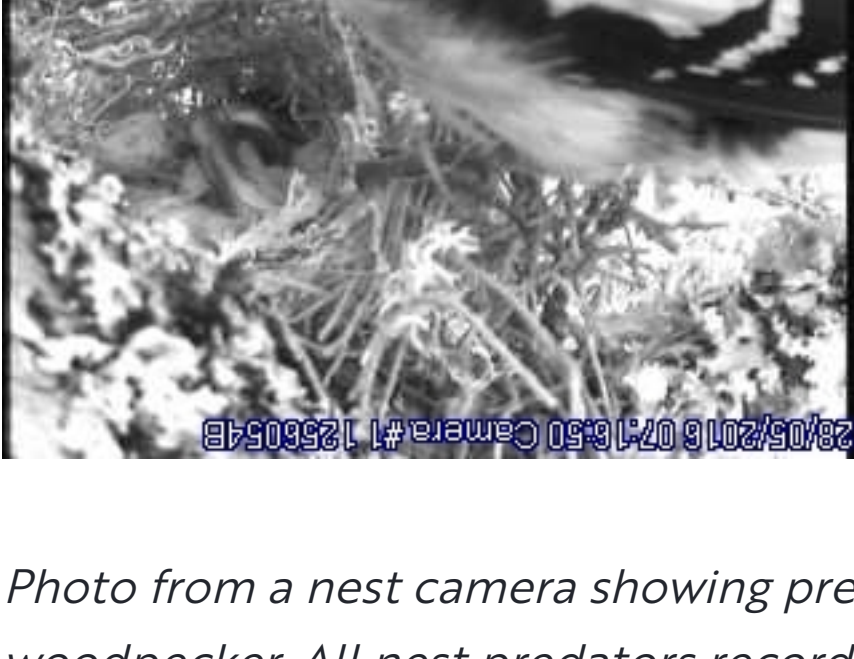
collected as it is not usually possible to see into the nest and we have to rely on adult behaviour to infer what is happening. In some instances trained climbers have been able to install cameras to view inside the nest, allowing for much more detailed monitoring.



**Nest predation**

## Nest monitoring

goshawks and great spotted woodpeckers. Interestingly, there have been no recorded instances of grey squirrel predation despite them being common within the study woods.



## Nest monitoring reveals new insights into breeding behaviour

nesting attempts in the same season. Females have also been

### Future plans – GPS tracking

of miniature GPS trackers w

We attached a small number of GPS tags to hawfinches. These tags store information about the birds location at hourly intervals during the day using information from Global Positioning Satellites and can track the birds movements over the course of several days. The recovery of our first tag has provided the first detailed map of hawfinch movements, confirming the wide use of the landscape in their daily foraging activity. Over the course of five days, the tagged bird was recorded in 12 different 1km squares and a range of habitats including woodland, farmland hedgerows and gardens. We hope that further use of GPS tags next year will provide evidence of important food resources available at different times of the year and help establish the foraging range of adults feeding nestlings. This will provide us with key information in the design of future conservation measures.

This work is funded by the Action for Birds in England partnership between RSPB and Natural England. The work wouldn't be possible without the input from many other individuals and organisations that provide access to woods and help with fieldwork.

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Jo over  
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It's that's been done to date. Thank

more, as I'm sure all the

It would be fantastic, so that we can have more opportunities to see such impressive birds :)

**We spend 90% of net income on conservation, public education**

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