

Species Action Plan

Stepping Stones project



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Last updated: January 2024

Common name: Tree Pipit

Scientific name: *Anthus trivialis*

Conservation status: Red. UK BAP.

Description: a small bird with brown-streaked upper parts, pale under parts and further streaking on the buff-tinged chest and flanks. The bill is heavier than the meadow pipit's, hind claws shorter and streaking finer on the flank. Tree pipits have a 'buzzy spihz' call, quite different from the high-pitched 'ist' of the meadow pipit.

Habitat: copses, wooded valleys, ffridd, heathland, and rough pasture with scattered trees. Recently felled conifer plantation with scattered, remaining deciduous trees is the favoured habitat.

Feeding: tree pipits feed mostly on invertebrates and habitat preferences reflect the open nature and mosaic of vegetation like ffridd which provides a diversity of food species. Autumn berries are also an important food source.

Distribution and threats: summer visitors to the UK and more so in the Western uplands, tree pipits arrive from the Sahel from mid-March onwards. Populations have dramatically declined since the 1980s, particularly in central and southern England. Tree pipits thrive in habitat mosaics and are threatened by scrub and bracken encroachment and dense tree planting. Climatic changes also appear to be affecting population distribution and numbers in the UK.



UK distribution (source from NBN Atlas)



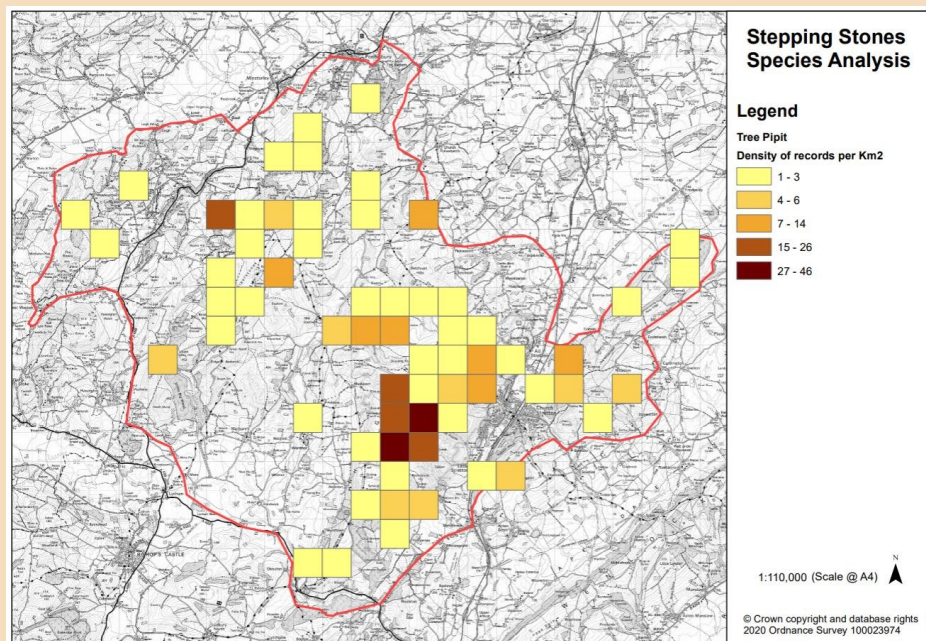
Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*



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Tree Pipit in the Stepping Stones Project Area



The Long Mynd, Stiperstones and Rea Valley have the largest populations of tree pipits in Shropshire.

On the Mynd their territories are located where trees and shrubs are scattered on the steep valley sides. This is the 'upland fringe' and the highest densities of tree pipits recorded are where the ground vegetation is a mix of bracken, heath and grass. The combination of these three elements appears to be particularly

important but the encroachment of further bracken into this habitat is a major threat. Invading bracken is the most likely explanation for the 20% decline in tree pipits between 1998 & 2008.

On the Mynd, between 2006 and '08, 70 tree pipit territories were recorded. In 2019 these decreased to less than 30 and in 2021 less than 15 territories were identified here. The reasons for the sharp decline appear to be further bracken invasion, a decline in invertebrate prey species and increasing desertification of the Sahel.

On the Stiperstones ridge numbers of tree pipits increased by 60% when conifer plantations were felled and heathland restored during the Back to Purple Project, on sites like the Gatten and Nipstone Rock.

BiOME recorded 25 territories in a 2018 breeding bird survey, a 56% increase in numbers recorded between 2004 to 2007 but in 2019, only 16 territories were identified. Territories were found to be widely distributed in the survey area and confined to hill slopes with scattered trees.

Tree pipits do appear to be arriving earlier each year.

Conservation for Tree Pipit

On the Long Mynd, gathering strips are cut through the dense bracken which both encourages natural rowan and hawthorn regeneration and opens up the vegetation. The bracken control improves tree pipit habitat but also helps commoners with stock management. Restoration of tree pipit sites will have multiple species benefits.

Deciduous tree regeneration in the previous Gatten plantation on the Stiperstones is good and correlates well with tree pipit numbers.

Other conservation actions include:

- Management of the Long Mynd and Stiperstones heathlands and ffridd with staff and volunteers to control gorse scrub invasion and conifer regeneration, thereby preventing progression to woodland
- Light grazing of heathlands on both the Long Mynd and Stiperstones to compliment the above management
- Planting of scattered hawthorn and rowan in ffridd to provide food sources, singing posts and ultimately a reduction in dense bracken
- Encouraging recording in habitat between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones

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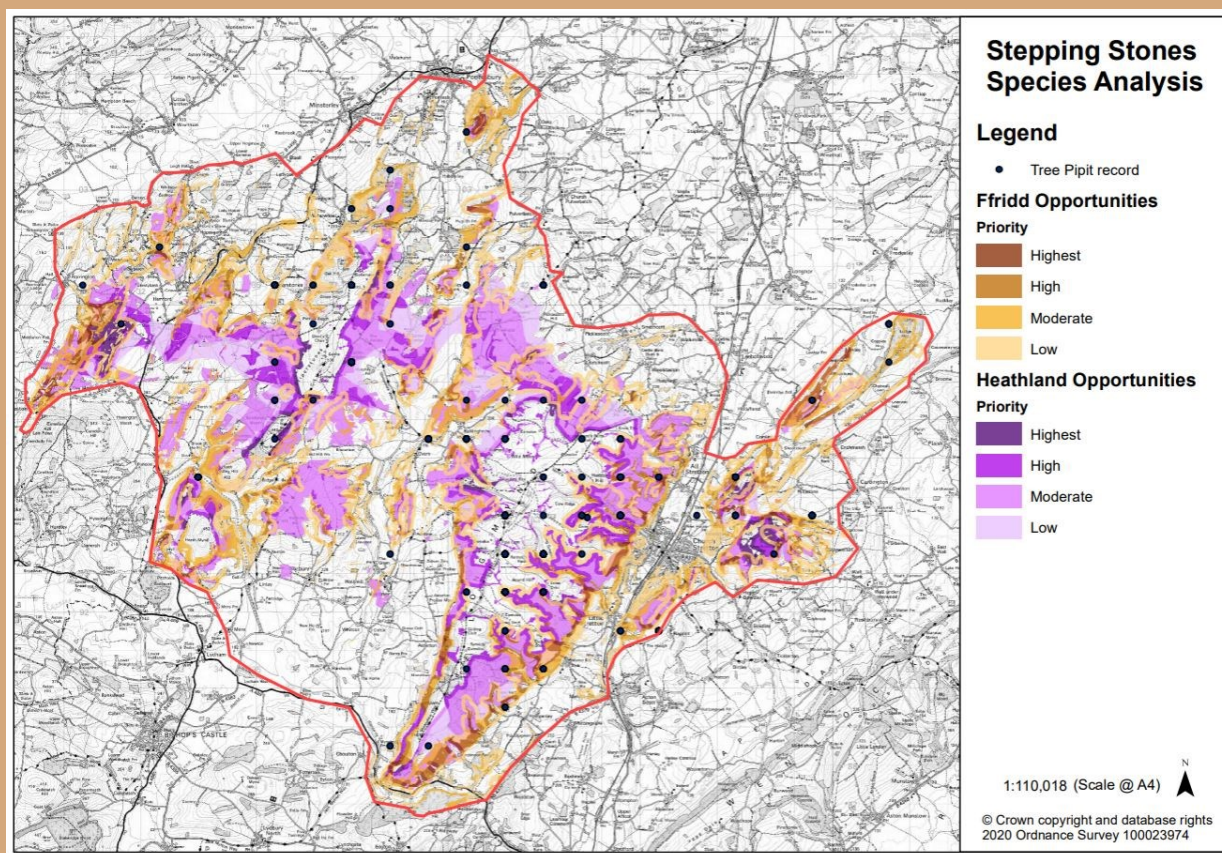


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Habitat creation and restoration for Tree Pipit in the Stepping Stones Project Area

The map below shows where opportunities exist for the creation and restoration of heathland and ffridd in the Stepping Stones project area. This is overlaid by existing tree pipit records.



A map of broad habitat types was overlaid by existing tree pipit records, enabling habitat preferences for this species in the project area to be worked out. Heathland and ffridd were both found to be key to the survival of tree pipits, which preferentially occupy this upland fringe habitat at an average altitude of 360 m.

The results of the analysis enabled the map above to be generated and it shows where the greatest opportunities exist for heathland and ffridd creation and restoration in the Stepping Stones project area.

Conservation objectives for Tree Pipit

- Maintain, accurate and up-to-date records of tree pipit across the whole of the Stepping Stones project area (the SOS/Birdtrack database, searched annually will aid this), with a list of sites (including habitat detail) that support this species.
- Increase the extent of suitable habitat for tree pipits using the habitat opportunity map above, which shows where ffridd and heathland restoration and creation is likely to be most successful.
- Raise awareness of both the status and habitat requirements of tree pipits among local communities and land managers through species promotion and management advice.



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Conservation actions for Tree Pipit

- During 2024 & 2025 land managers of the Long Mynd & Stiperstones to hold ID workshops for tree pipit and its niche habitats and to lead on conservation work. Tapping into existing volunteer and community wildlife groups in the NT, NE Stiperstones and SWT establish a 'Save Tree Pipits' group to carry out survey work and restore/create tree pipit habitat
- Ensure recording timetables are set to include tree pipit & increase recording effort on steep valley slopes in the Stepping Stones project area
- By 2025 land managers/surveyors to have undertaken a tree pipit survey of all heathland and ffridd habitat sites showing high predicted suitability in the project area, for example the Stretton Hills east of the A49
- Since the favoured habitat is 'recently felled conifer plantation with a few remaining deciduous trees,' liaise with the Forestry Commission to receive notification of felled plantations so that these can be monitored for tree pipit
- By 2026 to produce an inventory of all existing tree pipit sites, recording habitat condition and management requirements
- Land managers to undertake habitat management of existing tree pipit sites by e.g. bracken bruising on valley sides and scattered tree planting in ffridd. Target of 2 sites annually (followed by surveys to assess impact of these works)
- Land managers to restore tree pipit sites. Selection of sites to be informed by past records and predicted habitat suitability mapping. Target of 2 sites annually (again followed by surveys to assess impact of these works)
- By 2025 *tree pipit* to be listed with those priority species needing *tailored management & advice* in the NELMS Targeting Statement for the Shropshire Hills. Upland Fringe (Fridd) must be included as a priority habitat
- Integrate tree pipit habitat management and survey work into an overall plan for the Stepping Stones Project Area for all priority species

Actions to be reviewed and updated annually

Get further help and advice

Locally: Community Wildlife Groups in the Stepping Stones area (shropscwgs.org.uk); Shropshire Ornithology Society.

Nationally: rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/tree-pipit

BTO tree pipit page
bto.org/tree-pipit



About Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones is an innovative landscape-scale conservation programme. The aim is to connect wildlife habitats by strengthening or creating 'stepping stones' and corridors of habitat between the Long Mynd and Stiperstones, and beyond. In practice, this means creating and linking areas of heathland, flower-rich grasslands and broadleaved woodland by a network of wildlife-rich hedgerows, road verges, hillsides, streamside wetlands and river corridors.



Creating and linking wildlife-friendly spaces



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