

## Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*)

**Area and status:** Summer visitor to UK Lowland areas, mostly in east and south east England; range has contracted significantly in recent decades. Population decline in the UK (39% in England between 1995 and 2014). BoCC4 Red Listed species.

**Woodland type:** Lowland scrub, scrubby woodland edges (external edge and ride edges etc), dense hedgerows, and woodlands with particularly dense and varied understorey or suitable coppice. Some association with damp habitats.

- Dense vegetation, especially thickets up to around 2 m in height, including thickets with a closed canopy and open area underneath for foraging. Dense margins to this structure, such as tall grass, give protection.

**Preferred habitat:** Nests on or close to the ground within dense vegetation. Forages for insects on bare ground beneath scrub canopy, or in grassy margins and woodland rides.

- Males tend to return to the same small area of habitat each year, so habitat creation or management close to existing Territories is most likely to be beneficial.

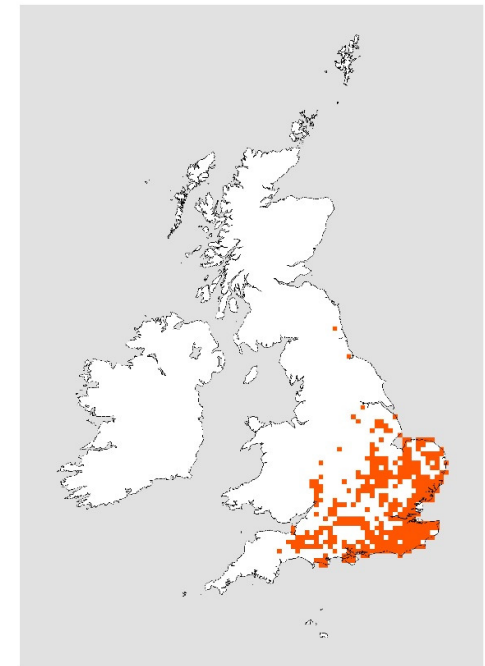
### Potential management issues associated with decline:

- Abandonment / over-maturing of coppice in woodlands
- Abrupt woodland edges with farmland etc. (lack of scrub edge) or along internal ride and glade edges
- Loss of suitable structure in woodland understorey due to shading / canopy closure
- Excessive deer browsing / intensive rabbit grazing
- Lack of rotational cutting / management of scrub
- Removal of scrub habitat and dense / scrubby hedgerows
- Drainage of damp woodland and scrub habitats
- Adverse effects from urbanisation, including cat predation and disturbance

Potential habitat management solutions:	
<i>Prescription</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Re-instate or initiate coppice of woodland (where appropriate)	Suitable rotation length may be around 10 to 15 years, depending on site conditions and tree species. Layering can help provide a denser structure. Allow bramble and scrubby vegetation to develop over coppice stools. Coppice adjacent areas in successive years to provide habitat continuity.
Encourage dense woodland edges (external)	Allow vegetation to expand outwards from the woodland edge, ideally alongside grassy margins. Where this is not possible, thin back edge trees allow scrub to develop within the existing boundary.
'Three zone' management of ride and glade edges	This can provide suitable dense vegetation structure along internal woodland



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■ Breeding

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	edges.
Thinning – encourage understorey	Allow a dense and varied understorey to develop where conditions are likely to favour this, through thinning for example 40 % of canopy trees. Where appropriate, rotationally manage areas of understorey. Allow bramble and thicket to develop suitable structure.
Manage deer and rabbit pressure	Excessive browsing / grazing can damage coppice and scrub habitats. Develop a suitable deer management plan in cooperation with neighbouring landowners. Also consider rabbit fencing to protect developing scrub.
Allow scrub to develop	The period before newly established scrub becomes suitable for nightingales depends on site conditions, but may be 15-25 years - longer than required in subsequent rotational cutting. Patches of half a hectare or larger are more likely to be occupied than smaller patches, and are easier to manage rotationally. Ideally around 50 to 75% of a single patch should be scrub, with the rest a mosaic of grass and developing scrub. Suitable species include blackthorn, hawthorn, wild roses, bramble, willow / sallow, and others than can form appropriate structure.
Rotationally manage scrub	Cut adjacent patches in consecutive years, on a 10 to 15 year rotation. Some controlled grazing may help maintain a patchwork of scrub and grassy habitat. Layering can help maintain a dense structure.
Plant / manage scrubby hedgerows	Suitable species include hawthorn, blackthorn, wild rose, and species diversity is important. Locate next to grassy margins. Allow bramble to become part of the hedgerow. Allow hedge to spread outwards at first, then rotationally cut e.g. every 5 – 15 years depending on speed of re-growth. Allow hedge to spread outward again each time, to a width of 5 – 10m.
Re-wet drained habitat / retain dampness on undrained sites	Re-wet sites by e.g. blocking drainage channels. Be sure to consider any possible effects on neighbouring land, and any permissions that might be required. Avoid draining damp sites.