

Advice: Twite in quarries, Derbyshire:

Nature After Minerals, April 2014

Introduction

The twite (*Carduelis flavirostris*) is native to Britain and Ireland. Formerly widespread in upland areas, recent serious declines in England mean it is now red listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern.

Most English twites are now confined to the southern Pennines. The breeding population here has declined by 90% in the last 20 years.

Around 5 pairs of Twite breed at the CEMEX Dove Holes Quarry near Buxton, Derbyshire. This population is vulnerable due to its small size and isolation from other twite colonies. With other quarries in the area, there is an opportunity to boost the population through habitat improvement and creation in and around the quarries – enabling them to move out across the landscape and recolonise former areas.



Twite. Steve Knell (rspb-images.com)

Nesting habitat

Twite will nest happily on cliff ledges and bare faces in quarries. At Dove Holes, the birds use the numerous fissures and holes within the extensive bare cliff faces. Twites can also nest close to the moorland edge, usually in plant leaf litter under small patches of bracken or in tall heather or bilberry.

Food sources

Twite feed almost exclusively on seeds. They need a constant supply of seeds is required throughout the breeding period. Preferred species include dandelion and coltsfoot in spring; common sorrel and annual meadow grass in summer; plus yellow rattle and purple moor grass, and in autumn, hawkbit and thistle are the main seeds. Hay meadows are an important because they often have an abundance of these species. And, disturbed ground can produce a crop of annuals, which in turn produce copious seeds.

Conservation actions for twite in / around quarries

Nesting habitat

- ✓ Retain areas of exposed rock faces and fissures, away from quarry operations. Keep clear of vegetation.
- ✓ Demark additional rocky areas and cut grass short to knock back tufted hair grass in August.
- ✓ Maintain patches of bracken, particularly on steeper slopes as twites will nest under these.

Hay meadow creation

- ✓ Identify potential new areas for meadow creation or choose grassland that is floristically poor with few flowering plant species
- ✓ Create a sward which contains key twite food. Sew a seed mix dandelion, sorrel, meadow grass, autumn hawkbit. Harvest from local meadow where possible and use green hay strewing technique.
- ✓ Harrow or scarify existing grassland, then over seed with sorrel and yellow rattle in September.
- ✓ Implement a hay cropping regime – cut and collect in August in order to prolong the seed source. Consider light winter grazing if possible.

Wild bird seed mixture plot

- ✓ An alternative to creating a hay meadow, create a plot containing plants that produce small seeds, such as rape, kale and linseed.

Habitat management

- ✓ Delay cutting until late summer to retain late flowering and seeding plants.
- ✓ Prevent encroachment of tufted hair grass by cutting in August.
- ✓ Where applicable, manage areas of tall heather – another seed source for twite.

Disturbed ground

- ✓ The edges of access tracks can provide the perfect conditions for a crop of annuals and weeds to grow, producing seeds for twite to feed on.
- ✓ In addition, identify and retain other areas of disturbed ground if annuals are noted growing.
- ✓ Access tracks also provide an important source of grit for the birds, which aids their digestion.

Supplementary feeding

- ✓ From April onwards, one cup of nyjer seed can be spread along a 100 metre section each week, unless food starts to accumulate.

Water source

- ✓ Twite will drink and bath in shallow puddles along access tracks.



Hay meadow
Nick Upton (rsps-images.com)

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