

Turtle Dove Advice for Quarry Managers

This advice note is adapted from the advice provided by Operation Turtle Dove, to apply to quarry operations and non-operational land. It is based on research carried out in Eastern England, but the key points have transnational application. For more information see www.operationturtledove.org



The turtle dove is Europe's only migratory member of the Columbidae (pigeons & doves) bird family.

It arrives on north west European breeding grounds in late April/early May and departs back to the non-breeding areas in arid sub-Saharan West Africa in August and September. As a breeding bird, it is closely associated with lowland arable/mixed farmland and dry species rich grassland mosaic landscapes where tall, wooded cover is available for nesting.

Turtle doves have declined by 93% since 1970*. We could lose them from the UK altogether within the next 10 years, unless we act now. (*Source: British Trust for Ornithology)

What do turtle doves need?

The turtle dove is an obligate granivore (it only eats seeds!). Young nestlings are fed a milky secretion called "crop milk", which is regurgitated by the parents and is high in protein and fat. Very little green matter and no invertebrates are taken. The seeds of plants associated with arable fields and semi-natural dry grasslands, such as fumitory, chickweed, common mouse ear and annual knotgrass, form the mainstay of their diet.

Scrub for nesting: Turtle doves prefer to nest in hedgerows or areas of scrub over 4m tall, especially those characterised by thorny shrubs – the nests are often associated with hawthorn, elder or conifers with climbers such as traveller's joy (wild clematis), honeysuckle or bramble.

In Quarries

Provide nesting opportunities:

You will dramatically improve the turtle dove's chance of finding suitable nesting habitats if you:

- Consider allowing hedges that back onto fields to grow as tall and wide as you can.
- Encourage & retain climbing plants such as traveller's joy (wild clematis), honeysuckle and bramble in hedgerows.
- Provide a water resource such as a pond so that turtle dove and other birds have somewhere to drink.

Maintain any scrubby patches and encourage scrub to develop around ponds.

Encourage seed for feed by providing cultivated strips or plots.

- These can be created by repeatedly disturbing the soil through rotavating or simply digging over to prepare a fine tilth to sow the seed mix.
- After sowing, lightly rake the soil, then compress / roll to firm the seed bed.
- Cultivations should take place in the autumn between August – October.

Planting plots with species listed below may provide an important summer seed source for turtle dove.

Key food species: Fumitory Black Medick Red & White Clover Common Vetch Birds Foot Trefoil

In agricultural non-operational land

Provide Nesting Opportunities: You will dramatically improve the turtle dove's chance of finding suitable nesting habitats on your land by:

- Maintaining hedgerows more than 4 metres wide and 4m high.
- Encourage & retain climbing plants such as travellers joy, honeysuckle and bramble
- Maintain existing scrub and encourage scrub to develop on woodland edges or near to ponds and ditches.

Encourage Summer Seed for Feed: Simple changes can result in a good supply of the summer seeds turtle doves rely on. This is best achieved by:

- Providing uncropped cultivated margins or plots.
- Sowing a bespoke turtle dove seed mix. Eg containing: 25% Early English vetch 20% Birdsfoot trefoil 20% Early white clover 20% Black medick 10% Early red clover 5% Fumitory 15kg/ha (6kg/acre)

