

Scientists study bird species's declines

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British researchers say they believe they've discovered why the number of birds in certain English countryside species is declining.

The study led by Mark Whittingham of Newcastle University suggests current British agri-environment programs providing financial support for farmers to improve the birds' habitats work well when targeted to the needs of such rare and localized species as corncrakes and stone curlews. However, the scientists said being able to reverse the declines of more widespread species such as skylarks and yellowhammers will depend on better matching of habitat management to the different landscapes in which the birds are found.

"We believe the design and implementation of agri-environment schemes needs to be more sensitive to regional differences," said Whittingham. "A menu of management options which suits the needs of wildlife in Devon, for example, may not meet the needs of biodiversity in East Anglia."

The research appears in the current edition of the academic journal *Ecology Letters*.

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