

# Farmland bird populations rise with nature-friendly farming

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Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, at the grassy edge of a small field. Cornwall, England. June. Credit: RSPB

In the latest *Journal of Applied Ecology*, researchers from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) say a more strategic

approach to wildlife-friendly farming schemes is required to recover England's farmland bird populations after monitoring their responses to different agri-environment scheme implementation levels.

A new study calls for a more strategic approach to wildlife-friendly farming schemes to recover England's [farmland](#) bird populations, with a greater emphasis on "higher-tier" style agreements that manage around 10% of land for nature. To recover [farmland birds](#) by 10% over ten years, approximately one-third of the lowland farmed [landscape](#) needs to be managed under these higher-tier agri-environment agreements. However, targeting these agreements to farmland that already holds the highest numbers of priority birds, means less land needs to be managed in this way making more efficient use of government spending.

A more strategic approach to wildlife-friendly farming schemes is required to recover England's farmland bird populations, according to a new study led by the RSPB.

A new paper published today in the British Ecological Society *Journal of Applied Ecology*, with support from the BTO and funding from Natural England, monitored how farmland bird populations responded to different levels of agri-environment schemes in arable, pastoral and mixed farming landscapes.

The U.K. government has recently introduced a legally binding target to halt species abundance declines in England by 2030, with similar timebound EU targets currently under discussion. With many of our previously common farmland birds such as Starlings and Skylarks in steep decline, there is a pressing need to rapidly implement effective conservation interventions across the farmed landscape, including through the new Environmental Land Management Schemes currently being developed and piloted in England.



A European starling perched on bramble in front of houses. Credit: RSPB

This 10-year study measured changes in the abundance of farmland birds on land managed under bird-focused lower- and higher-tier agri-environment schemes, as well as land no bird-friendly farming initiatives.

Under the higher-tier scheme, an average of 11% of the farm was devoted to bird-friendly measures, whereas

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