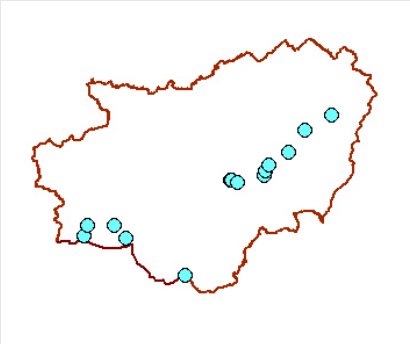
CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

TREE SPARROW/ *PASSER MONTANUS*



Conservation objectives:
• Maintain and enhance the tree sparrow population in the Tywi Valley, wherever practical.
• Carry out further surveys in Carmarthenshire and conserve any other populations found to occur in the county.
• Encourage population expansion through appropriate conservation measures.

What you can do to help:
• Report all sightings of tree sparrows to the county bird recorder.
• Provide nest boxes.
• Provide additional winter feed.
• Manage areas land for tree sparrows.

Further information:
www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.rspb.org.uk

The tree sparrow wasn't recognised as a separate species from the house sparrow until 1713.

Ecology
The tree sparrow is a bird mainly of open farmland with hedgerows trees or small isolated woods. Although similar to the house sparrow, it can be identified by its chocolate brown cap and black cheek spot. Tree sparrows nest in small colonies, mainly in tree holes but also occasionally in thick hedgerows and conifers. Two or three broods are produced during the summer after which birds can congregate to form flocks during the winter to feed. They feed mainly on seeds and insects. Tree sparrows readily use nest boxes and can be attracted to food put out in gardens. Surveys show that UK population of the tree sparrow underwent a drastic decline of 95% between 1970 and 1998.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire
The population in Carmarthenshire appears to be the only significant one remaining in west Wales – possibly 20% or more of the whole Welsh population. The main breeding population is found on the grazed pastures of the Tywi Valley. It is unusual to find tree sparrows on this habitat, as they prefer arable or mixed farmland. The varied habitats in the valley – mature trees, hedgerows, shingle banks on the river and tall vegetation found on the riverbanks and wetland areas – must offer the required shelter and food for the sparrows. Outlying colonies exist at Pendine and increased survey effort has identified tree sparrows elsewhere, e.g. near Bancyfelin.

Legal status
Protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Why have tree sparrows declined?
* Changes in agricultural practice such as autumn rather than spring-sown crops (resulting in a reduction of stubble fields in the winter where they feed) and increased use of herbicide.
* Loss of nesting sites in the form of mature standard trees, which fall and are not replaced.
* Loss of shelter, cover and roosting sites provided by small copses and hedgerows.

What is being done locally
* The Carmarthenshire Tree Sparrow Project has undertaken tree sparrow conservation work in Carmarthenshire since 1998, including surveys, putting up nest boxes and feeding.
* RSPB Cymru have provided feeding stations, nest boxes, posters, helped to fund cover crops for winter feed, and plan further surveys.
* The Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme in the Tywi Valley has looked to help the species through nest boxes and tree planting.

Where you can look for tree sparrows
Along the Twyi Valley – they are often seen at the car park at Dryslwyn Castle.

Cyngor Sir Gâr Carmarthenshire County Council
Bioamrywiaeth Cymru Biodiversity Wales
Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru Countryside Council for Wales
Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Welsh Assembly Government