

New long-eared owl survey

Research project in the south west

Long-eared owl numbers in the south west forests are being surveyed this year by Hawk and Owl Trust volunteers, thanks to a new alliance with the Forestry Commission.



Led by Chris Sperring, the Trust's SW Conservation Officer, trained volunteers will track down this scarce species, the smallest breeding owl population on the official British list. The species is notoriously difficult to survey. There are thought to be just 1,500-2000 pairs in the UK.

The research findings will help the Commission manage its land more effectively for the species.

Strongly associated with conifer plantations, the long-eared owl requires a dual habitat: dense forests in which to roost and nest, and open rough grassland for hunting. It particularly favours upland and moorland areas, the sort of landscape where the Commission has extensive forest in the south west.

Chris and the volunteer researchers will survey woodlands at Haldon Forest, Bodmin Moor, Exmoor, Dartmoor and parts of Neroche on the Blackdown Hills.

They will start with pre-breeding surveys between mid-February and mid-March, playing a recording of long-eared owl calls and noting the number of individuals responding. Follow-up surveys will take place during May and June to investigate breeding success.

Due to their elusive ways we don't know much at all about long-eared owls, points out Chris. They are strongly nocturnal, rarely seen during daylight and are well camouflaged and silent for most of the year.

This lack of knowledge has meant that the long-eared owl isn't afforded any special legal protection or conservation status and is entirely omitted from the UK Birds of Conservation Concern List (BCC). However, I don't believe this is a reason for doing nothing. It is really important that we do find out more about it and record numbers as it is such a rare species.

I am really excited to be working with the Forestry Commission on these surveys.

Steve Minton, Planning Manager at the Forestry Commission, says: Our forests provide important habitats for a range of species and the more we are aware of which species are using our forests the more we can tailor future land management to meet their needs.

see also

- [Long-eared owl](#)

species description