

THE LONG MYND BREEDING BIRD PROJECT

8 Welsh Street Gardens
Bishop's Castle
Shropshire
SY9 5BH

Telephone: 01588 638577

Email: leo@sy9-bh.freereserve.co.uk

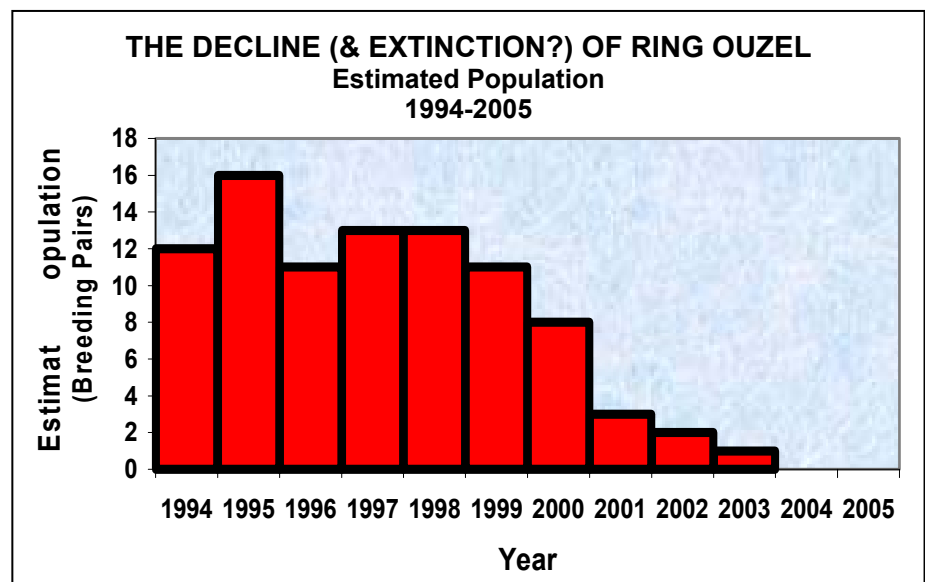
RING OUZEL 1994 – 2005 SUMMARY

A systematic study of Ring Ouzel on the Long Mynd, in Shropshire, has been made by the Project since 1994. The site totals 24 square kilometres, half of which is an upland heathland plateau undulating between 350 – 517 metres above sea level, and the other half is a scarp slope, and steeply sided valleys cut into the dip slope. The area is owned and managed by the National Trust. Ringing has been carried out since 1996, and colour-ringing since 1999, by Tony Cross, so birds could be recognised individually.

The distribution of all territories, and of all found nest-sites, over the period 1994 – 2003 has been correlated with habitat (vegetation mix, and heather condition).

Ring Ouzel is a *Shropshire BAP Target Species*, and is on the national *Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002-2007*.

The population was stable throughout the 1990s, at around a dozen pairs. This reduced to eight in 2000, three in 2001, two in 2002, and one in 2003. In 2004 only a single unpaired male returned, and only passage birds were seen in 2005. The species is now on the verge of extinction as a breeding bird in Shropshire.



This population crash has almost certainly been caused by predation. An RSPB research project compared the success and failure rates of nests found in eight different study areas around Britain. The loss due to predation on the Long Mynd was far higher than that found in any of the other study areas (Burfield 2002). In practice, nest loss locally must be higher than that actually recorded - no evidence of breeding was found, and no nests were located, for several of the pairs, or males holding territory, that were located each year. Their nests must have been predated before they could be found.

Nest loss due to predation 1995 – 99 was nine out of 30 nests monitored (30%). Nest loss due to predation has become much worse since – nine out of 14 nests (64%) in 2000 – 03.

The observed rate of nest loss correlated well with the observed rate of population decline, using a simple population model. A Feeding Areas Study showed that there was no shortage of food on the Long Mynd, and this situation had not changed over many years. Colour-ringing of birds, so they could be identified individually, showed that the percentage rate of return of the previous year's birds was usually sufficient to sustain the population, so other possible causes of the decline – conditions in the wintering areas in southern Spain and Morocco, or on migration – can also be discounted.

These specific studies have therefore discounted all possible causes of decline in this isolated population, except predation. They have been described in detail, along with evidence for an increase in predators (and accompanying decline in the numbers of other ground-nesting birds), and the underlying causes, in the *Report Of The Long Mynd Breeding Project: Ring Ouzel 2003*, and *Ring Ouzel 2004*.

The 2004 Report can be viewed in full on the Shropshire Ornithological Society Website www.shropshirebirds.com. Copies of this and earlier reports are available from the Project (contact details above).