

## ADVICE NOTE

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### Minimal effects of wind turbines on the distribution of wintering farmland birds



Ecological consultancy Baker Shepherd Gillespie (BSG) has sponsored a study into the effects of wind turbines on farmland birds. The results of this research, which was carried out by a team from Newcastle University, have recently been published and provide new information to be considered when assessing the impacts of wind farm developments.

The research team conducted bird surveys on arable farmland around two wind farms in the East Anglian fens over the winter period. During their studies they recorded almost 3000 birds from 33 different species, including five red-listed species of high conservation concern – yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*), Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*), corn bunting (*Emberiza calandra*), skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) and reed bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*).

The survey work indicated that the wind turbines had no effect on the distribution of seed-eating birds, corvids (the crow family), game birds and skylarks. Common pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) was the only species whose distribution was affected by the turbines.

Dr Mark Whittingham, who led the team, said: "This is the first evidence suggesting that the present and future location of large numbers of wind turbines on European farmland is unlikely to have detrimental effects on farmland birds."

However, further work needs to be done as this is the first study looking at this aspect of bird behaviour and it did not look at the risk of birds colliding with the turbines, or at disturbance linked to the size of the turbines or the noise produced by them during operation.

To date most terrestrial research into the effects of wind turbines on birds has focused on geese, waders and raptors. This recently published research has looked at the effects of wind turbines on other species, many of which are also of conservation importance.

#### Reference

Claire L. Devereux, Matthew J. H. Denny and Mark J. Whittingham (2008). Minimal effects of wind turbines on the distribution of wintering farmland birds. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 45 (6), pp.1689-1694.

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