



Press release

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Statistics Netherlands
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Larger numbers of rare breeding birds

Populations of many rare and very rare breeding birds have increased in the Netherlands in the last five years. Numbers of common birds have remained stable. New figures from Statistics Netherlands also show that among the very rare birds, species that have recently settled in the Netherlands have expanded most strongly, partly because of favourable food supplies, breeding locations and weather conditions.

Increasing newcomers

Of the very rare breeding birds, populations of species recently new to the Netherlands have increased most strongly. Most of these newcomers are water or marsh birds. Compared with 1990 nearly five times as many pairs of these birds were counted in the Netherlands in 2001. When a new species has established itself, and the conditions (food supply and breeding locations) are favourable, it will proliferate quite quickly. The warmer summers and milder winters of recent years have been favourable for west European populations of egret, black-winged stilt and Mediterranean gull.

Increase of rare birds in wetlands

Numbers of longer established rare birds in the wetlands are also increasing, although more slowly than those of newcomers. The increasing populations are a consequence of improved water quality, larger areas of water and water management measures (black-necked grebe), a number of mild winters in a row (bittern). The red crested pochard benefited from an increase in its main source of food, stonewort, as a consequence of clearer water.

Some species declining

A number of very rare non-wetland species are declining strongly. For example, the black grouse on heathland, ruff and corn bunting in agricultural areas, hen harrier, redpoll and short-eared owl in the dunes and tawny pipit in sand drift. Dune and sand drift areas are becoming overgrown with grass and shrub; fewer rabbits in these areas mean less food for hen harriers, and changes in agricultural land management are having an adverse effect on numbers of ruff and corn bunting. The black grouse can now only be found in one area of the Netherlands, the Salland hills in the east of the country, and is therefore very vulnerable.

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