

The Yellow Wagtail Project

The Yellow Wagtail Project is a long-term project based along a four mile stretch of the River Thames collaborating with Wild Oxfordshire, Earth Trust and Church Farm Partnership and private landowners. As the name suggests, the project aims to encourage breeding pairs of yellow wagtails to the area.

Yellow wagtails are strongly associated with riparian meadows. Historically, they have been described to feed around the feet of cattle and to snatch flies off a cow's nose. Over 60 years ago, this species would have been a familiar visitor in the area however, the yellow wagtail has declined by 70% in farmland habitats and by 97% in wetland habitats since 1970. In 2009, the species was added to the [Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern](#) and is a priority species on the [UK Biodiversity Action Plan](#). In Oxfordshire, the yellow wagtail still breeds in small numbers. This project has a great deal of potential not only to boost breeding pairs locally but to also benefit other bird species such as swifts and house martins, whose populations have also declined.



Part of the project is to determine what has happened to the insect populations. Is it the management of the land? The management of the cattle? A combination of both? Or something different altogether? In order to answer these questions, a baseline for invertebrate productivity is being set across a number of fields within the project area.

Invertebrates are a major food source for many bird species. It is likely that the long-term declines in invertebrate abundance are impacting yellow wagtail populations as well as other farmland bird species. Understanding invertebrate productivity within the area will be critical for the success of the project.

Not only does the project aim to improve habitats for the yellow wagtail and other bird species, but there is hope that it will set an example to other landowners to show them how they can sustainably manage wet pastures to promote biodiversity as well as produce profitable livestock.

Due to COVID-19, the official launch of the project has been delayed until May 2021, however, work is still being conducted to collect baseline data.



Make sure to watch our [short video](#) for more information.