

## 7.2 Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*) Lead Partner RSPB

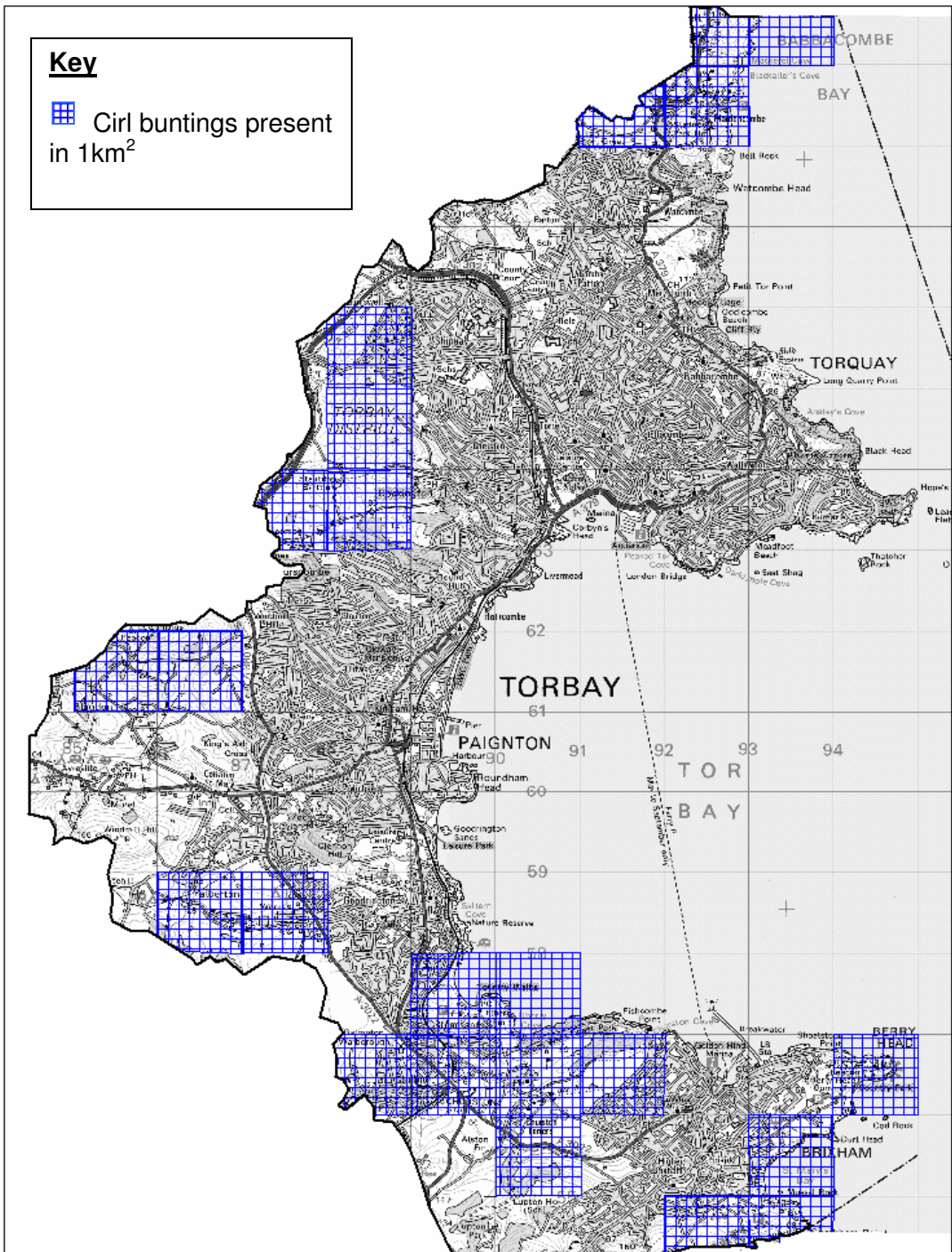
### Main Objectives & Key Actions:

- 1) **Maintain/increase population numbers in Torbay**
  - Establish where value can be added to existing agri-environment agreements to deliver improved management for cirl buntings by 2008.
  - Maintain and increase population by 30% by 2009.
- 2) **Maintain/increase geographical spread and reduce fragmentation.**
  - Maintain the current range and focus future management in buffer areas around hotspots – ongoing.
  - Create 50 ha of new appropriate habitat through agreements with landowners by 2012
- 3) **Maintain/increase the favourable management of sites for the cirl bunting.**
  - Ensure no net loss of winter stubble – ongoing.
  - Ensure Maidencombe, Cockington and Occombe continues agri-environment agreement for cirl buntings – ongoing.
- 4) **Improve knowledge of the cirl bunting population and range.**
  - RSPB/NE to continue to conduct 6 yearly Cirl Bunting Survey – ongoing.
- 5) **Raise awareness with the public and land managers of the importance of the cirl bunting as an indicator of the health of the farmed environment.**
  - Ongoing.

### 7.2.1 Background and Current Status

In the 1930's cirl buntings were widespread, found across most of southern England and parts of Wales. Cirl buntings started to decline as farming became more intensive and traditional mixed farmland was lost. By 1989 the range had dramatically contracted to South Devon with only 118 pairs left (UK BAP). Cirl bunting numbers are now recovering, through the work of the RSPB and partners, and the numbers recorded in the last 2003 survey showed 697 pairs. Torbay currently has approximately 60 pairs, which is 8.5% of the UK population. Its current range in Torbay is concentrated around Maidencombe, Cockington, Elberry and Brixham.

The cirl bunting is described by the RSPB as 'a bird of traditional mixed farmland. Thriving in a landscape characterised by a patchwork of small arable fields and grazed pasture, bounded by tall, thick hedges and abundant scrub on valley slopes and corners.' Cirl buntings rely on seeds and spilt grain left in stubble and feed their chicks predominantly on large insects, such as grasshoppers and crickets in the Spring and Summer.



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**Figure 9:** Map to show the presence of cirl buntings in 1km squares. Data was kindly provided from the RSPB 2003 Farmland Bird Survey, which was funded by RSPB, Natural England and Defra.

In 1993 the RSPB, funded by English Nature (from 1995), set up a Cirl Bunting Project which provided advice to farmers and landowners on how to gain grants for cirl bunting friendly management. The Environmental Stewardship (ES) Scheme, which has replaced the Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Areas will hopefully continue to be as successful in increasing favourable management for the cirl bunting. The Cirl Bunting Countryside Stewardship "Special' Project" has been very successful at increasing cirl bunting numbers and will be replaced by an option within the ES that includes a reduced herbicide, cereal crop management, over-wintered stubble and spring crop. These schemes help farmers and land managers by providing funding to deliver environmental management on their land.

Currently in Torbay Maidencombe , Naptor, Occombe and Cockington Farms are in Countryside Stewardship agreements to provide Cirl bunting habitat.

### **Current species and associated Habitat Protection**

Berry Head to Sharkham are designated as NNR, SSSI and SAC.

Occombe SSSI and CWS

Cirl buntings are listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, EC Birds Directive and listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

Hedgerow Regulations

### **7.2.2 Current problems/threats to this species:**

- Reduction in arable crops and left winter stubble – greatly reduces food availability in the winter months.
- Development pressures
- Improvement of grassland – decline in wildflower rich fields and insect food source.
- Wet, cool weather in the breeding season - results in poor breeding success.
- Disturbance – walkers, visitors during breeding season.

**Table 14: Cirl Bunting Action Plan table.** Actions that require further funding are shaded in grey.

**High priority actions** are proposed for completion within the next 3 years (to end of 2009).

**Medium priority actions** are proposed for completion within the next 6 years (to end of 2012).

**Low priority actions** are proposed for completion within the next 10 years (to end 2016).

<b>Actions for Cirl Bunting Priority Action Plan</b>	<b>Priority (High, Medium and Low)</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>Ongoing Action</b>
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>				
<b>CB1</b> - Ensure cirl buntings are taken into account in planning applications and the appropriate mitigation is put in place.	<b>H</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>TC, NE</b>	✓
<b>CB2</b> - Produce a strategic plan for cirl bunting habitat creation through planning gain and ES schemes.	<b>M</b>	<b>1,2,3</b>	<b>RSPB, TC</b>	
<b>CB3</b> - Ensure Hedgerows are not removed where cirl buntings are present – Hedgerow Regulations.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2,3</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB4</b> - Include cirl bunting guidance in Supplementary Planning Guidance.	<b>M</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB5</b> - Continue/improve consultation between TC and RSPB for planning applications affecting cirl bunting sites.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2,3,4</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB6</b> - Seek cirl bunting habitat creation and after-care as a condition of relevant planning permissions.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2,3</b>	<b>TC, RSPB, Developers</b>	✓
<b>Species &amp; Site Management</b>				
<b>CB7</b> - Seek to establish positive management programmes on SSSIs and look to include adjacent arable land to provide winter stubble.	<b>M</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>TC, TCCT, RSPB, NE</b>	
<b>CB8</b> - Continue to set up winter feeding stations in cirl bunting territory during periods of hard winter weather.	<b>M</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>RSPB, DBPS</b>	✓ (Yearly)
<b>CB9</b> - Seek to retain management of sites already undertaking	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2,</b>	<b>RSPB</b>	✓

sympathetic management for ciril buntings and look at HLS.				
<b>CB10</b> - Promote Environmental Stewardship as a good management tool and ensure that it is targeted at key areas for ciril buntings. Put emphasis on stubbles, 6m cultivated margins, hedgerows.	<b>H</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>RSPB, TC, TCCT, DEFRA</b>	✓
<b>CB11</b> - Seek to establish protection of key breeding and wintering sites and they are taken into consideration in respect to planning and land-use strategies.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,3,4</b>	<b>TC, NE, RSPB</b>	(Ongoing consideration)
<b>CB12</b> - Ensure that hedge cutting operations minimise disturbance to breeding ciril buntings and are carried out in a way which encourages suitable nesting sites.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2,3</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>Communication &amp; Publicity</b>				
<b>CB13</b> - Promote as farmland 'Flagship' species.	<b>M</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>RSPB, TCCT</b>	✓
<b>CB14</b> - Run ciril bunting events and talks for members of the public and schools.	<b>M</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>TCCT, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB15</b> - Promote favourable management of farmland for ciril buntings through demonstration farms.	<b>L</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>TCCT, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB16</b> - Promote the ongoing programme of advisory work of RSPB.	<b>M</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>TC, NE</b>	✓
<b>Advisory</b>				
<b>CB17</b> - Ensure ciril bunting population maps are available to all relevant parties.	<b>H</b>	<b>1,2</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB18</b> - Promote the use of the Devon Hedge Pack advisory literature, produced by Devon Hedge Group.	<b>L</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>TC</b>	✓
<b>CB19</b> - Liaise with bodies undertaking work near to known ciril sites to minimise damage and to maximise positive benefits for ciril buntings and associated habitat.	<b>H</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TC, RSPB</b>	✓
<b>CB20</b> - Ensure that relevant	<b>H</b>	<b>3,5</b>	<b>RSPB</b>	✓

landowners are aware of and take account of the needs of the cirl buntings in the management of their land.				
<b>Research &amp; Monitoring</b>				
<b>CB21</b> - RSPB to conduct breeding cirl bunting surveys every six years – next 2009.	<b>H</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>RSPB</b>	✓ <b>(every six year)</b>
<b>CB22</b> - Assess the success of ES agreements in delivering favourable management for cirl buntings.	<b>M</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>RSPB, DEFRA</b>	

Abbreviations: Torbay Coast & Countryside (TCCT), Torbay Council (TC), Natural England (NE), Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society (DBPS).