

WHAT TREE SPARROWS NEED

Nest sites

Tree sparrows nest in colonies using holes in trees, old buildings and walls. Their nests can also be found in dense hedges and scrub. They will take readily to artificial nest boxes.

Lots of seed all year round

Seeds are the main food of adult tree sparrows. They look for places where they can find lots of seed food. Such areas include rough grass areas, stubble fields, weedy areas and spilt grain in farmyards.

Insects and spiders to feed their chicks in spring and summer

Chicks are fed on insects for the first few weeks of life. These are found on hedges and grass areas near loughs, ponds and rivers. Arable crops can be another source of insect food.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

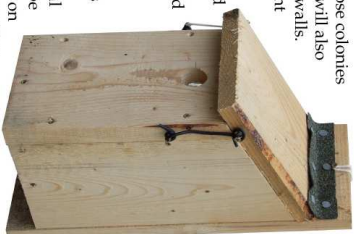
Nesting Habitat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain old buildings or walls that may contain nesting holes. Retain mature trees, hedges and scrub on the farm. Plant new hedgerows and woodland areas. Maintain tall thick hedges on the farm. Provide artificial nestboxes for tree sparrows. Try to identify any existing nest sites on your farm and protect them.
Summer Food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retain rough grass areas on the farm. Create rough grass margins along hedgerows, drains and rivers as a source of insects. Plant "conservation cereals" on your arable areas to minimise pesticide use. Conserve and create wetlands on the farm.
Winter Food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a plot of "wild bird cover" as a source of winter food for birds. Retain cereal stubbles (uncultivated and unsprayed) over the winter for as long as possible. Introduce arable crops to livestock farms. Operate a feeding station over the winter months.

NESTBOXES

Tree sparrows normally nest in loose colonies in the holes of mature trees. They will also nest in holes in old buildings and walls. Artificial nestboxes can supplement the number of sites available.

Suitable boxes have a 28mm round entrance hole and an internal box depth of at least 20cm. They should have hinged lids for cleaning and inspection.

Nestboxes should be sited in areas of woodland or in mature hedgerows. Because of the birds' colonial behaviour, several nestboxes can be placed close together, for example on adjacent trees. Tree sparrows are sensitive to disturbance so prefer to nest in a quiet location.



The nestboxes should be attached to trees at least 2 metres above ground. Aim to have them in place well before the breeding season which begins in April. Tree sparrows have a long breeding season from April to August, during which they can raise up to 3 broods of chicks. The nest, which can completely fill the nestbox, consists of grass and feathers (as shown below). There are 5 or 6 eggs which hatch after 2 weeks incubation. The young birds can leave the nest after a further 2 weeks.

The nestboxes should be cleaned out during the autumn after the young have fledged. The boxes should be left in place over the winter months as tree sparrows may use them for roosting.



FEEDING STATION

A feeding station will improve the birds' chances of winter survival. Tree sparrows will feed readily on grain (preferably wheat) or grain fallings.

The feeding station can be set up along a quiet farmtrack or unused part of a farmyard. A location near a hedge is preferred, as it will provide cover for the birds. Feeding should take place from late November until the end of March.

The feeding station should be visited once per week when approx 10 kg of grain (a large bucketful) should be scattered on the ground. The grain should be spread thinly over a length of the track. Try to make sure that there is always grain available on the ground.

A feeding station will keep the birds healthy in preparation for the following breeding season.

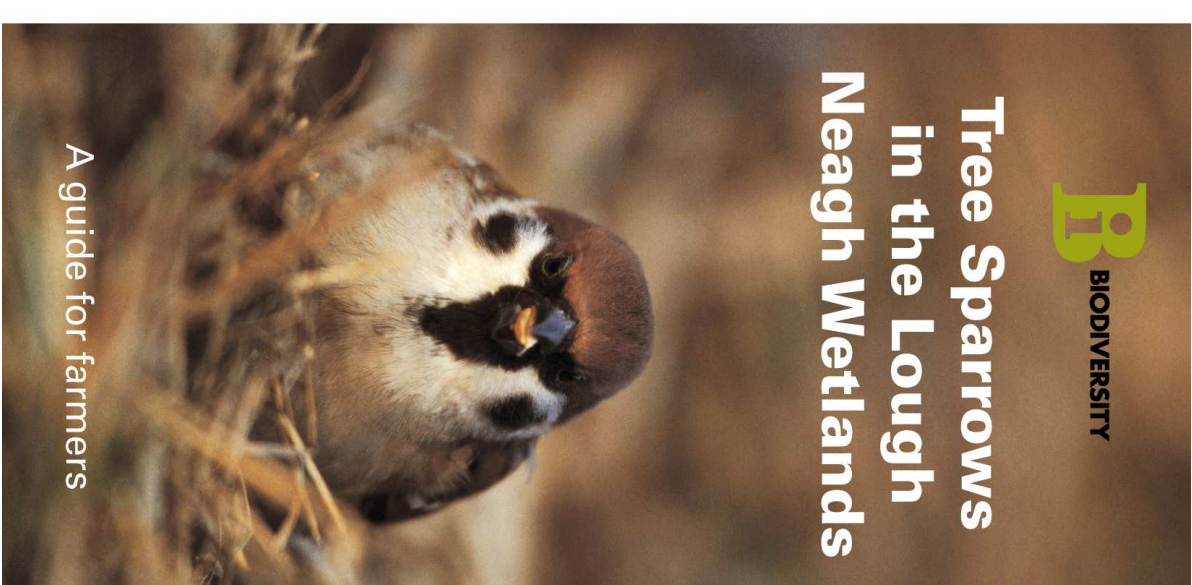
FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Help with conservation work is available through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Countryside Management Scheme. For more information on the scheme and for advice on wildlife friendly farming, please contact RSPB, Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast, N.Ireland, BT8 7QT
028 9049 1547, rspb.nireland@rspb.org.uk

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