

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*)

Areas and status: Core range now limited to mid Wales, the midlands, northern England and south-west Scotland; declining and now scarce/locally extinct in southern England including the south-west. Severe range contraction (82% reduction in the number of occupied 10km squares in the last 16 years) 94% population decline since 1970. BoCC red list. Section 41 species.

Woodland type:

- Primarily wet woodland, includes riparian scrub and damper areas in broadleaf woodland types, conifer plantation edges, damp scrub
- Preferred habitat niches: Wet woodland or damp woodland margins, where small diameter birch and shrubs such as hawthorn, willow and elder; deadwood required for self-excavated nests.
- Dense understorey and shrub layer preferred with foliage zone above 2m. Includes successional scrub, e.g. scrub edges to wetland habitats (reedbeds, bogs etc). Utilises scrub on post-industrial sites with suitable high water table and scrub cover.
- Occurs in mixed damp scrub on the edges of conifer plantations and young plantation.
- Populations more stable in wider wooded landscapes as a sedentary species.

Potential habitat management issues associated with decline:

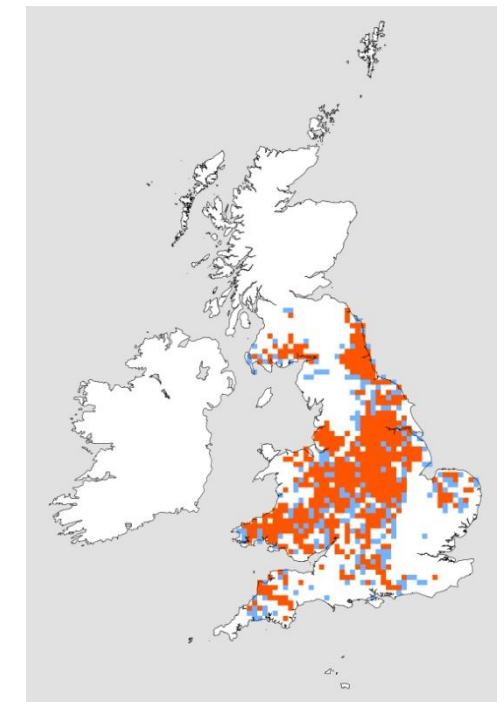
- Maturation of young woodland with increased trunk diameters and canopy closure increasing shade. Loss of shrub layer and scrub
- Decrease in soil moisture
- Lack of deadwood nest sites (note not normally a controlling issue)
- Succession within or redevelopment of post-industrial sites
- Overgrazing by livestock – damaging scrub structure
- Fragmentation of habitat; preventing movement through landscape

Potential habitat management solutions:

Prescription	Comment
Thin maturing closed canopy woodland to provide suitable <u>understorey</u>	Selective removal of large trees to generate abundant shrub layer – aim for 2 to 4 metre understorey height. Leave tall stumps (c1.5m) & existing deadwood.
Coppice to rejuvenate maturing wet woodland	Especially abandoned damp coppice for example along stream sides to provide at least 50% of coppice at 2 to 4m height. Produce tall stumps (c1.5m). Generally nest below 1.5m.
Restore high water table: block or restrict internal drains	To hold water within the habitat. NB - Environment Agency may need to be informed if major works planned. Protect woodland from drainage systems on adjacent agricultural land.
Retain deadwood for nesting	Retain/create standing, small diameter wood and high stumps 10 – 20 cm in diameter.
Manage conifer plantations:	Retain/enhance shrub/ <u>understorey</u> component especially along damp edges. Select and create a scatter of high stumps e.g. 2m height (10 – 20 cm diameter), for future nesting during thinning/clear fells in suitable areas.
Create new areas of scrub woodland to develop on wet ground to link habitat patches	Encourage natural colonisation and succession. NB Avoid wetland of existing ecological value such as species-rich mires or Culm grassland with important invertebrate interest.
Control grazing/browsing	Assess need – remove or modify where browsing or heavy trampling is negatively affecting tree and shrub regeneration or damaging wet soils. Some browsing/grazing may help suppress dense scrub below 2m and help create standing deadwood.
Provide nest boxes	Only utilise where birds present and deadwood options lacking. Box needs to be placed within an existing territory and be of specific design (sawdust filled). Maybe useful to provide several in each area to mitigate any usurpation by other tit species. An alternative and simpler measure is to attach birch logs of 10 – 20 cm diameter to existing live trees, or drive into ground, to provide extra deadwood resource for nesting.



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- Breeding
- Wintering

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