

3.32 Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Druid

Resident

Breeding population:	Population estimate (2011-2016):	2,066,904
	min – max population estimate:	1,437,631 – 2,803,162
	10-year trend (2006-2016):	-4.0
	18-year trend (1998-2016):	-7.1
Breeding distribution change (%):	10-year trend (2006-2016):	+10.0
	25-year trend (1991-2016):	+14.1
	44-year trend (1972-2016):	+10.8

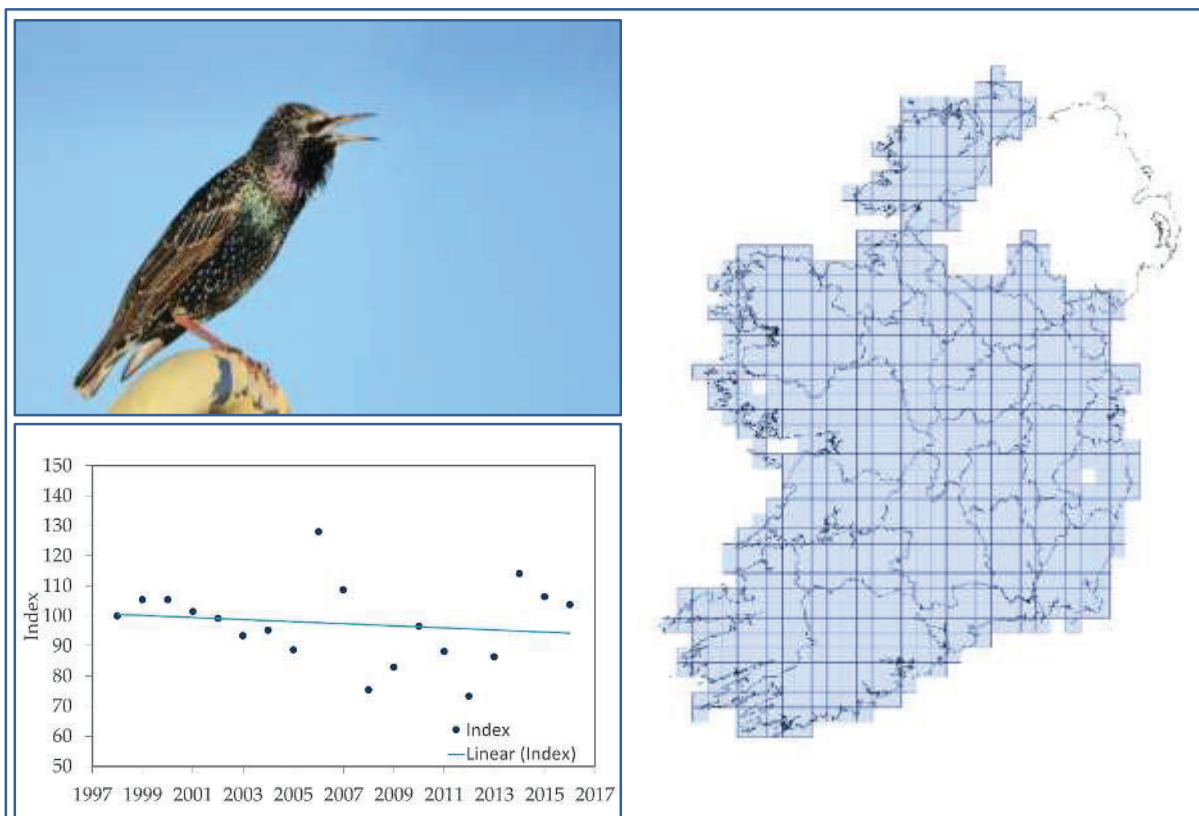


Figure 33 Distribution map and graphed population 18-year trend for Starling. The breeding distribution map is based on the Bird Atlas (2007-2011) (Balmer *et al.*, 2013). The population trend uses data from CBS 1998-2016 (Photo: Brian Burke).

The Starling (Common Starling on the EU Bird List) is a common and widespread resident bird species throughout Ireland and Britain. The resident population is supplemented by continental birds in winter. In Europe, it is resident from France to Denmark and throughout most of southern Europe. It is a summer visitor to eastern Europe and Scandinavia and a winter visitor to Iberia. Starling is a familiar bird, found in a broad range of habitats, including urban and suburban environments as well as farmland.

The Starling has shown a relatively stable trend (slight decline of -7.1%) during CBS (1998-2016). The recent population estimate of 2,066,904 (2011-2016) represents a decrease of almost 52,000 since 2010 (Crowe *et al.*, 2014). The UK BBS trends are -51% (1995-2016) and -30% (2006-2016) (Harris *et al.*, 2018), representing something of a crash in the population over quite a short time period. The European trend is showing a moderate decline since 1980 (PECBMS, 2019).

Starling is recorded in 220 1 km squares on average each year. The most recent Bird Atlas (2007-2011) (Balmer *et al.*, 2013), recorded Starling occurring in 97% of 10 km squares in Ireland. Starling was not always so widespread or common in Ireland. In the mid-nineteenth century, it was primarily a winter visitor and only bred in relatively small numbers, absent from or very scarce in west Cork, Kerry, Wexford and Waterford (Ussher & Warren, 1900). The breeding distribution of Starling has increased by 10.8% since 1972 (44-year trend), with similar increases over 10- and 25-years. The most recent Bird Atlas (2007-2011) (Balmer *et al.*, 2013), showed relative abundance increases over much of the country since the Bird Atlas (1988-1991) (Gibbons *et al.*, 1993), especially in southern counties, the midlands and Donegal. In contrast, the UK relative abundance change map shows declines throughout England and Wales and parts of Scotland since 1988-1991.

The reasons for the contrasting trends in Ireland and Britain may relate to food availability. The Starling largely forages in fields, especially pasture, where crane fly larvae (Diptera, Tipulidae) are a mainstay in the bird's diet (Whitehead *et al.*, 1995). Intensive improvement of grassland for the beef and dairy industry in Ireland has produced high soil fertility, conducive for crane fly larvae. As a result, the Starling may be benefiting from such agricultural intensification (Vickery *et al.*, 2001).