

Update for London House Sparrow Project partner websites October 2011

It is about three years now since the RSPB and eight London partners started out on an ambitious project to find out how to boost numbers of the well-loved - and sorely missed – ‘Cockney sparrow’. House sparrows have declined dramatically in London over the last few decades, and are hardly seen in the centre of the city now at all.

The SITA-funded project has seen twenty five trial areas of wildflowers and grasses created in nineteen parks across the capital, providing an attraction for park users as well as wildlife. The idea is to boost insect numbers, providing house sparrows and other birds with nourishment for their young chicks, which often seem to suffer from a lack of insects in their diet. Some of the trial areas also provide seed for grown birds.

The aim has been to see which of three different habitat types are used most by birds – especially sparrows. Insect numbers and diversity have also been recorded, and so has the amount of seed produced.

The trial areas have been monitored by RSPB staff, with help from an army of around 40 volunteers. The project has also provided study opportunities for five students, training opportunities for five interns, and opportunities for people to engage with wildlife in their parks through local events.

Results so far have shown that all three habitat types support much greater numbers of insects than the short grass often found in parks. Large numbers of bugs and grasshoppers have been found in some of them, with more spiders and beetles in others. Sparrows have used some of the trial areas to gather food frequently during the breeding season. Adult sparrows have been using the trial plots to collect insects, taking them back to their nests to feed their chicks. Young birds that have recently left the nest have also used them to feast on ripening seed.

The final results of the project are due out in May 2012. After that the plan is to make sure as many parks, gardeners and local people as possible know what they can do to help this unique bird survive. Together we want to bring the missing sound of cheerful chirping back to London, where it should be.

For more information about the project go to www.rspb.org.uk/londonsparrows

Partners in the project are:

Camden Borough Council
City of London
Islington Borough Council
Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
Southwark Borough Council
Sutton Borough Council
The Royal Parks
Wandsworth Borough Council