

Farmland birds, 1960-2015

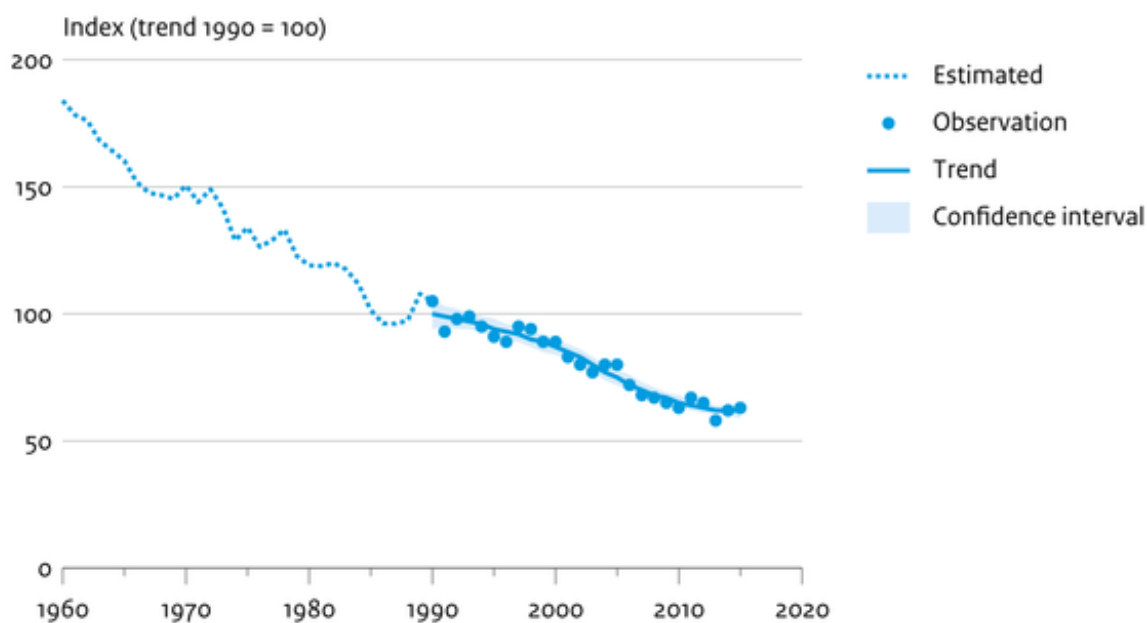
Indicator | 27 March 2017

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Changes in agricultural practices have caused the number of breeding birds to dwindle in agricultural areas in the Netherlands. This pattern is found across the entire EU.

[figuurgroep]

Farmland birds in the Netherlands

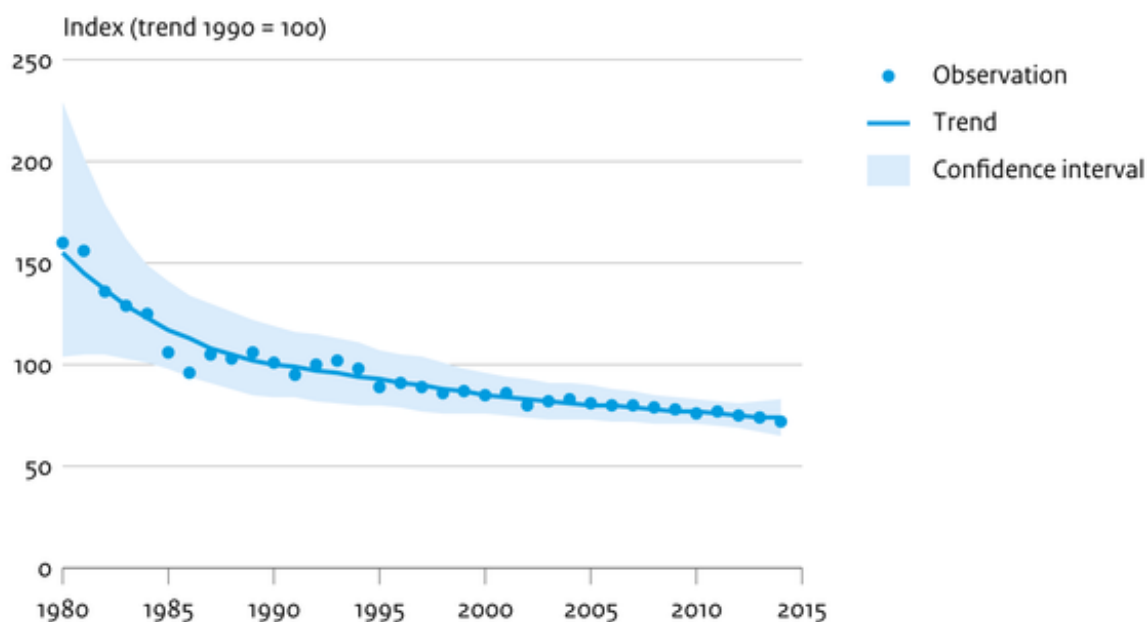


Source: NEM (Sovon, CBS)

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Farmland birds in the European Union



Source: European Bird Census Council

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Developments in the Netherlands

Populations of breeding birds typical of agricultural areas in the Netherlands are dwindling. The "farmland bird indicator" has declined by 30% since 1990. A historical reconstruction of farmland bird populations even shows a decline by more than 50% since 1960 (see figure on first tab page). Recently, the population decline has slowed, but not halted, despite focused policy measures. Nowadays, vast populations of geese dominate the agricultural landscape, at the expense of the rich diversity and large numbers of farmland birds of the past. Apart from increased number of geese in the winter season, an increasing breeding population has developed. This Dutch farmland bird indicator is the national equivalent of the "Farmland Bird Indicator" (FBI) of the European Union. For the Dutch FBI, 27 species frequently found in the Netherlands were selected. Most of these species are decreasing in numbers (see table trend indices per species).

Developments in the European Union

Development of farmland bird populations in the EU are largely the same as in the Netherlands, although since 2004 the downward trend appears to flatten out to some extent. The EU Farmland Bird Index covers 39 breeding bird species. The EU uses this FBI as a tool to measure biodiversity in agricultural areas. Changes in the farmland bird population also apply to many other groups of species in agricultural areas.

Causes for the decline in the Netherlands

The decline in farmland birds is predominantly due to more intensive farming methods, changes in the choice of crops and agricultural scale-up programmes. As a result of these developments, many small elements in the landscape, like hedge rows and small pieces of land unused on account of their location have disappeared. Breeding areas are also reduced due to urbanisation, infrastructural projects and busier road traffic.

Mowing of meadows has increased in frequency and intensity over the past decades, leading to loss of nests and nestlings: the combination of decreased cover, better access for predators and decreased general conditions to make it to adulthood renders survival prospects of farmland bird younglings slim. Measures taken in recent years, e.g. management of field edges have not been enough to halt the decline.

Causes for the decline in Europe

In north-western Europe roughly the same factors apply as in the Netherlands. A recent study showed that EU policies, such as agri-environmental schemes within the EU common agricultural policy, as well as special protected areas for birds, appear to generally attenuate the decline of farmland bird populations, but not enough to reverse them.

Furthermore, in eastern and southern Europe, natural habitats are lost as agricultural activities in poor agricultural areas are discontinued. Subsequently, the landscape will become more encroached by shrubs and bushes.

References

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Relevant information

Technical information

Reference for this page

CBS, PBL, RIVM, WUR (2017). [Farmland birds, 1960-2015](#) [9] (indicator 1479, version 08 , 27 March 2017). www.environmentaldata.nl. Statistics Netherlands (CBS), The Hague; PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Hague; RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Bilthoven; and Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen.

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