Background to Natural England

Natural England is the government’s adviser for the natural environment in England. Its purpose is to help conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Project Title: Agri-Environment Turtle dove GPS tracking for the Upper Beult and Marden Farm Clusters

Background to the specific work area relevant to this purchase

This contract will provide the GPS tags to be owned by Natural England and to be subsequently loaned out to a third party to study Turtle Doves in the 2025/26 breeding season.

Defra’s Agri-environment schemes include both the existing [Environmental Stewardship](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/environmental-stewardship-guidance-and-forms-for-existing-agreement-holders), [Countryside Stewardship,](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/countryside-stewardship-get-funding-to-protect-and-improve-the-land-you-manage) and the newer [Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)](https://farming.campaign.gov.uk/) and [Landscape Recovery.](https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2024/02/12/landscape-recovery-building-long-term-agreements/) Natural England's Agri-environment team is working closely with farmers and landowners to use the schemes offered by DEFRA to deliver nature recovery at a landscape-scale. Understanding how species respond to Agri-environment actions is crucial to target investment properly.

Turtle doves are a Red-Listed species and a species of European Conservation Concern (Vulnerable). Kent holds one-third of the UK's population and more than any other individual county. The project aims to investigate turtle dove use of agri-environment schemes in the Low Weald area including hedges and scrub creation for nesting and roosting, agri-environment feeding plots, cultivated margins and areas, and ponds, and to evaluate their distribution across agri-environment landscapes. An understanding of the population dynamics of these populations could potentially be generated as an outcome.

Using GPS/VHF trackers, we will investigate patterns of daily movement, habitat use, nest and roost sites, and supplemental food use. This research is part of a larger turtle dove conservation program hosted by Marden Wildlife and supported by Marden Farmer Cluster and Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT). The project supports local farmers and landholders to implement agri-environment schemes and through feedback of the data generated, validate turtle dove use of those schemes. In addition, the partners create and support multiple outreach and education activities to increase awareness of turtle doves among local residents, landholders, and schools including a citizen-science programme that reports turtle dove sightings and observations.

Tags will be deployed from mid-May when birds have arrived from migration and settled into their territories. The research will continue through to end-August when birds start to leave on their winter migration.

Requirement

The project requires six (6) turtle dove VHF/GPS tags that match all aspects of the specification to be delivered by the time frame set out below.

SPECIFICATION AND TIME FRAME FOR TURTLE DOVE TAGS:

- Small, waterproof, programmable archival tags, to weigh less than 3g

- Combined VHF and GPS capacity

- Remote download with Yagi antenna, Biotracker VHF receiver, and PinPoint Commander

- Battery only capacity

- Accelerometer

- Mortality sensor

- Suitable for glue-on attachment

Tags will be deployed on turtle doves at supplemental feeding and trapping stations in and around Marden, Kent, in May/June 2025.

OBJECTIVES:

[1] To generate GPS data points during the breeding / post-breeding season (May to August 2025). Based on presumed battery life and up to 15 fixes per day, each tag will last between 16-60 days, depending on the fix schedule. Tags will be deployed early in the season shortly after birds have arrived when it is easier to capture them at feeding stations. Data generated will address the priorities of Natural England agri-environment monitoring, the national Operation Turtle Dove group, and the European turtle dove species action plan.

[2] To evaluate turtle dove use of agri-environment funded hedges and scrub creation for nesting and roosting, agri-environment feeding plots, cultivated margins and areas, and ponds, and to assess their distribution across agri-environment landscapes. Data will validate successful use of these actions and demonstrate where further actions and agri-environment agreements may be needed. An understanding of the population dynamics of these populations could potentially be generated as an outcome.

Data collected in 2024 will be added to 2022 and 2023 data, and help to build the body of knowledge on use and validation of turtle dove agri-environment options and identify future priority sites for these options to support turtle doves.

Sustainability

Natural England protects and improves the environment and is committed to reducing the sustainability impacts of its activities directly and through its supply chains. We expect the Contractor to share this commitment and adopt a sound, proactive sustainable approach in keeping with the 25 yr environmental plan/our commitments compliant with all applicable legislation. This includes understanding and reducing direct and indirect sustainability impacts and realising opportunities, including but not restricted to; resilience to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, water use and quality, biosecurity, resource efficiency and waste, reducing the risk of pollution, biodiversity, modern slavery and equality, diversity & inclusion, negative community impacts.

As a delivery partner, the successful contractor is expected to pursue sustainability in their operations, thereby ensuring the Contracting Authority is not contracting with a supplier whose operational outputs run contrary to the Contracting Authority’s objectives. The successful contractor will need to approach the project with a focus on the entire life cycle of the project

Outputs and Contract Management

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference | Deliverable | Responsible Party | Date of completion |
| Outcome 1 | Schedule of works consultation and invoices received | KWT and Contractor | 28th February 2025 |
| Outcome 2 | Delivery of 6 GPS Turtledove tags. | Contractor | May 10th 2025 |

- W/C 13th February 2025. Online consultation with Contractor and KWT.

- W/C 18th February 2025. Contractor to send a Proforma Invoice

- W/C 25th February 2025 Project Officer approves Proforma Invoice, raises a PO and sends to Contractor

- Contractor returns a Sales Order Acknowledgement

- W/C 10th May 2025 Product (6 TAGS) will be delivered. Delivery date is scheduled to be as near to tag deployment date as possible to maximise battery life. Typically, delivery time is 8-12 weeks after Sales Order Acknowledgement but if this is sooner, product will still be delivered mid-May, about 10 days before requirement. Product should be Delivered to:

Elyse Ward

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