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Changes in some bird populations in upland Scandinavia

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Following a description of the principal bird assemblages of upland Scandinavia we describe some recent changes in bird populations. We have devised a multi-national bird indicator for the Fennoscandian mountain range in northern Europe (Finland, Sweden and Norway) based on 14 common species of montane, tundra and subalpine birch forest habitats. Data were collected at 262 alpine survey plots, mainly as a part of geographically representative national breeding bird monitoring schemes, spanning 10 degrees of latitude and 1600 km in a northeast–southwest direction.

During 2002–2012, nine of the 14 bird species declined significantly in numbers, in parallel with higher summer temperatures and precipitation (compared with the preceding 40 years). The population trends were similar in the three countries and among montane, tundra and subalpine birch forest species. Long-distance migrants declined less than residents and short-distance migrants.

Some potential causes of the declines are discussed, and we argue the importance of having long-term datasets in order to unravel climate-sensitive responses.