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M Lane (rspb-images.com)

This small finch is often seen in flocks. In the breeding season, the male has red on the forehead and breast.

CALENDAR

Breeding season:

Mid-April to early August, with two or three broods per season.

Nest:

Usually in hedges or patches of gorse, not more than 2 m off the ground.

Winter:

Linnets form flocks with other finches and buntings.

HABITAT

During spring and summer, linnets are found on farmland, particularly favouring gorse thickets, hedges and hillsides overgrown with shrubs. In winter, some migrate to warmer countries farther south, although many remain in Ireland, where they feed in flocks on winter stubbles and root crops.

DIET

Adults feed on small seeds found on the ground or in low vegetation, particularly those of dandelion, but also chickweed, sorrel, thistles and meadow grass, and recently, oilseed rape. The chicks are fed almost entirely on seeds.

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LINNETS?

- Keep winter stubbles uncultivated and unsprayed for as long as possible over winter, preferably to the end of March, to provide seed food. Linnets prefer stubble with plenty of broadleaved plants or which has been undersown with turnips and is strip-grazed through the winter.
- Create a wild bird cover strip along a field margin to provide seed food through the winter.
- Maintain some hedges between 0.5 m and 2 m high. Leave gorse, blackthorn and bramble for nesting sites.
- Create rough grass field margins or conservation crop margins to provide an abundance of seeds.
- Leave verges and waste ground uncut and unsprayed through the summer to provide seed food.
- Oilseed rape is particularly favoured by linnets during the later stage of the breeding season (July).

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



The RSPB,
Northern Ireland HQ,
Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT.
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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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Linnet distribution

Data provided by *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1988–1991*. British Trust for Ornithology, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now known as Birdwatch Ireland).



Filled dot = breeding

Open dot = present during the breeding season