

## 'Phone mast link to lost sparrows'

[Daniel Foggo and John Elliott](#)

SPARROWS may be disappearing from British gardens because of radiation from mobile phone masts, according to a new study.

Electromagnetic energy from the masts may be disrupting the birds' navigational systems, discouraging them from inhabiting areas with high numbers of the masts.

The researchers believe the pulses may also create an electrical charge in the birds' feathers, leading to a change in their behaviour.

The new study could help solve the mystery of why the previously plentiful birds have now vanished from many gardens and hedgerows.

Britain's population of sparrows peaked at about 13m pairs in the 1970s, but is now put at less than half that.

Other reasons previously suggested for the decline include changes in farming and loss of urban habitat.

The new research was carried out by Joris Everaert and Dirk Bauwens at the Research Institute for Nature and Forest in Belgium.

Their study, in 150 locations, showed that the stronger the signal from base stations, the fewer sparrows were found in an area.

The report, published in *Electromagnetic Biology and Medicine*, supports the notion that "long-term exposure to higher levels of radiation negatively affects the abundance or behaviour of house sparrows".

The research follows a recent study suggesting the collapse of bee colonies in America could be related to electromagnetic radiation from mobile networks. In Britain, there are 47,000 phone masts.

Ingrid Dickenson, a researcher into electromagnetic pollution, said the research was plausible. "Birds' sense of navigation is affected by this kind of radiation as they carry magnetised crystals in their brains," she said.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds welcomed the study, but a spokesman for the British Trust for Ornithology said: "I can't think of any reason mobile phone masts would affect them."

Further concerns over wireless technology were raised yesterday when a government adviser warned children should not place computers on their laps when using Wi-Fi internet connections.

Professor Lawrie Challis said this would be a sensible precaution until more was known on the long-term effects of the technology.

Another study advised against siting homes and schools near power pylons because of the possible risk of illness, particularly childhood leukaemia.