

The Black Redstart, whose chicks are rarer than a Golden Eagle's, may be making a comeback in London thanks to builders sticking rubble on the roofs of new properties. The bird's numbers are down to just ten breeding pairs and they could drop further due to the Government's policy of developing brownfield sites.

These are the Black Redstart's favourite haunts, but innovative projects to re-create their habitat on top of new buildings may ensure the bird's survival.

Dusty Gedge, chairman of the Black Redstart Working Group, said: "Rubble taken from rundown plots of land contains the seeds and stones needed to re-create the bird's habitat. You put this on the roof of a building and let nature take its course."

Two "brown roofs" have already been created at Deptford Creek – at the Laban Dance Centre and the Creekside educational building. Their roofs are topped with low mounds of rubble. London was once a favoured site of the birds. Dusty said: "They colonised the bombs sites after the war. In the City of London, their numbers rose to about 15 pairs. It was big news among naturalists in London."

The re-building of the capital reversed that growth, but bird-watchers are hoping that now re-development and the survival of the Black Redstart can go hand-in-hand.

The Black Redstart Working Group is disseminating good practice through a website, sponsored by Canary Wharf PLC, and local authorities are beginning to make habitat provision a condition of planning permission.

For example, the London Borough of Wandsworth is insisting on Black Redstart habitat at Battersea Reach, better known as the old Guinness site. It was occupied in the Nineties by protesters who wanted to save the diverse wildlife that had grown up there.

Development is going ahead, but the Black Redstart that live there will be keeping their home – although it will be a rooftop apartment, rather than a ground floor flat.

www.blackredstart.org.uk