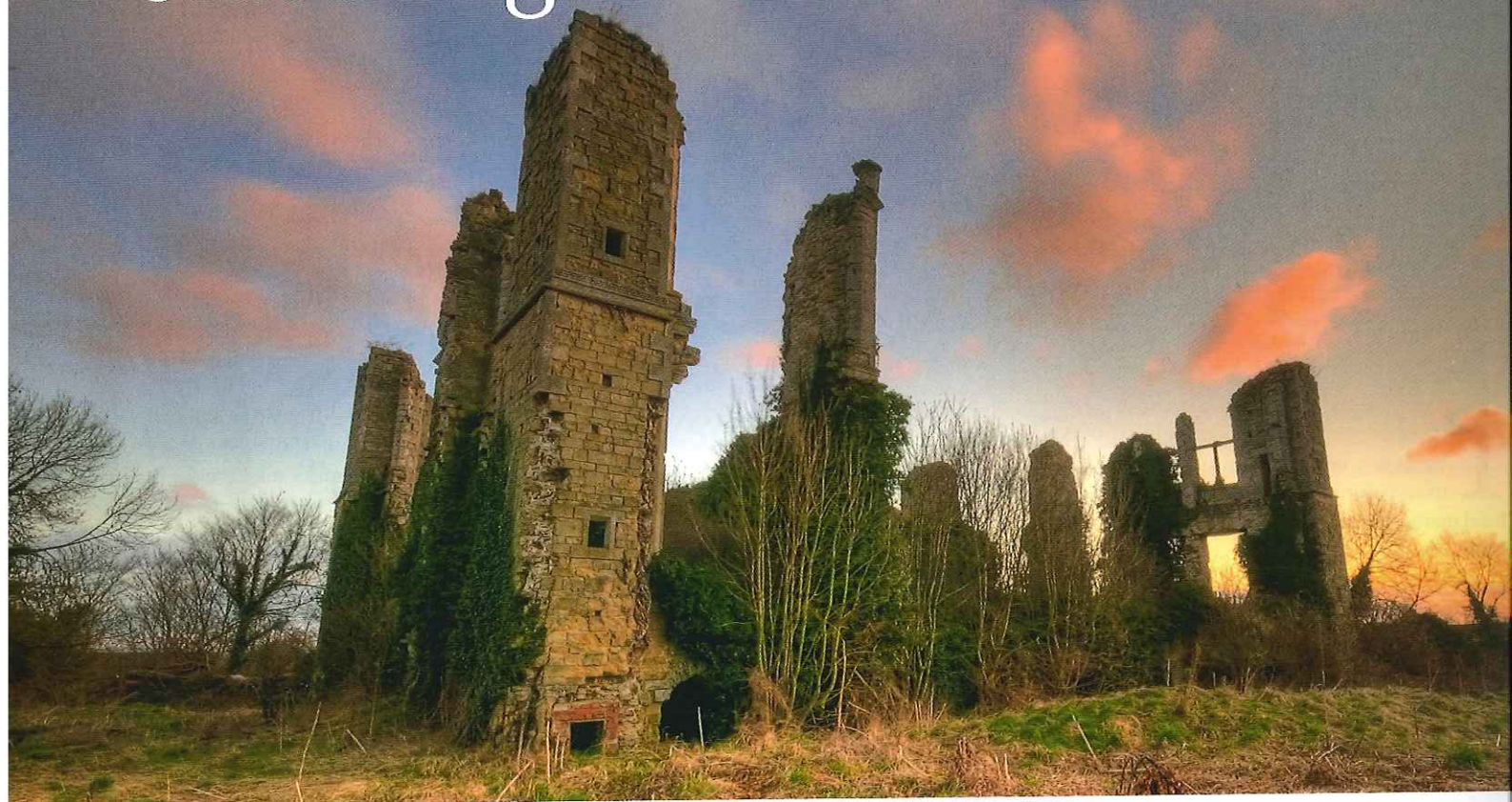




Unlocking our castles' secrets



Inaccessible and almost unstudied, the remains of Slingsby Castle in North Yorkshire are representative of a surprising number of castles

MANY of the most gripping episodes in British history took place within the walls—or ruins—of the country's several thousand castles, yet surprisingly little is known about some of them. A new charity is hoping to bring those histories to prominence and unlock yet further stories, even if the castle no longer exists, for the benefit of both the local community and the wider public.

The Castle Studies Trust is appealing for donations to enable it to award grants of up to £5,000 for study projects, which will, at first, focus on new work, such as architectural and geophysical surveys or scientific tests such as radio-carbon dating. Possible sites include the forgotten Baynard's Castle, near Blackfriars, London, originally a Norman fortification destroyed by King John and then a medieval palace burnt in the Great Fire of London, and Pleshey Castle in Essex, of which only the vast earthworks remain.

COUNTRY LIFE's Architectural Editor, John Goodall, who wrote the prize-winning book *The English Castle* (2011), points out that, despite public interest, most castles are very little studied. His joint patron of the charity, Edward Impey, who works for English Heritage and is an authority on the Tower of London, adds: 'Castles are with us everywhere: in reality, in the imagination and in literature. They are mighty reminders and documents of the past. What they can tell us is staggering, but so much remains to be learned.' To donate to the appeal, visit www.castlestudiestrust.org

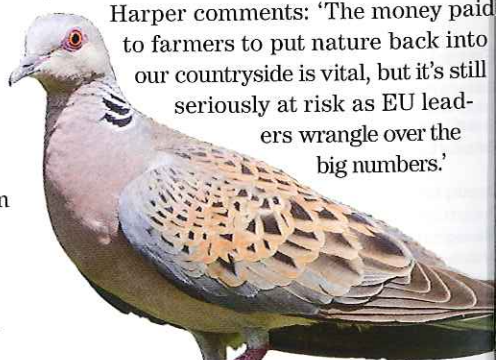
Operation Turtle Dove lifts of

THE softly cooing turtle dove is now—along with the hen harrier—the bird causing most alarm to the RSPB. Defra statistics have shown a 60% loss of population between 2005 and 2010; numbers currently stand at some 14,000 pairs and RSPB scientist Mark Eaton warns that, if the downward trend continues, there will be fewer than 1,000 pairs by 2025, followed, ultimately, by extinction.

Operation Turtle Dove (www.operationturtledove.org), a three-part project with farmers, was launched last year to provide the seed-rich habitats the birds need in summer. This year, 10 birds will be tagged before their migration back to sub-Saharan Africa. 'With skylarks or chaffinches, we know the problems are here, but to help the turtle dove, we need to know more

about its lifestyle in Africa,' explains an RSPB spokesman. 'We think we've got about 10 years to save it, and then it'll be too late. It's the one species we really think we could lose.'

Defra Secretary Owen Paterson this month reiterated his commitment to agri-environmental schemes as debate about CAP reform rumbles on. RSPB conservation director Martin Harper comments: 'The money paid to farmers to put nature back into our countryside is vital, but it's still seriously at risk as EU leaders wrangle over the big numbers.'



Turtle doves are vanishing at an alarming rate

Philip Silverman/Rex Features; Brian Ewan/Ardea; Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales; John Daniels/Ardea