

Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)



Lapwing
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Lapwings are highly distinctive in appearance. The adult bird is about 30 cm long with glossy green upperparts, white underparts and black markings under the wings, below the throat and on the head. A long, thin, black crest of feathers sweeps back from the top of the head.

The name 'lapwing' evokes the bird's jerky, flapping flight, while its upper plumage has caused it to be called the 'green plover'. Other characteristics have led to further alternative names. For example, its loud two-note "pee-wit" call has led to the bird being called 'peewit' in some areas. In Lancashire, it has commonly been known as the 'tewit' for the same reason.

Lapwings nest on bare ground or where vegetation is short. Wherever the nests are situated, it is imperative that there is a rich supply of invertebrate food for the chicks nearby. These feeding areas are usually (but not always) wetlands. The male's spectacular tumbling display flight over a particular field may indicate that the area is being used for breeding, but the nests themselves are seldom obvious to the casual observer.

Main Habitat(s): (Breeding sites) Grazed pasture land; Spring-sown arable fields close to pasture or wetland habitat.

National status

Lapwing is a resident breeding species whose numbers increase during winter, due to an influx of birds from northern Europe.

Following a national survey in 1987, the breeding population was estimated at 190,000-240,000 pairs. The rate of decline in breeding numbers shown by this survey and by national

monitoring schemes resulted in the lapwing being added to the 'amber list' (i.e. it was considered to be of moderate conservation concern). However, a repeat survey in 1998 indicated an additional decline of almost 50% in breeding numbers which would qualify lapwing as a 'red list' species. It is included on the UK BAP's 'long list'.

Like most British birds, the lapwing is granted legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). They are not listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive but on Annex II/2 which means that they can be hunted in certain (indicated) member states of the EU. They can be shot in the UK only under licence (which may be granted, for example, for safety reasons at airfields).

Regional status

The species is still widespread in suitable habitat throughout the North West region. Data from the RSPB indicates that the North West lapwing population has mirrored the national decline.

Local status

Lapwing is still a widespread breeding bird in the county. It is likely that the Lancashire population is considerably larger than that in arable-dominated counties in the South and East of England.

There are still reasonable populations in upland pasture throughout Lancashire, especially in the Forest of Bowland. An RSPB survey of agricultural land in Bowland in 1998 estimated the breeding population there to be 2470 pairs. Large populations also exist on arable land and pasture on the Lancashire plain and on grazed saltmarshes of the Ribble and in Morecambe Bay. The total population for Lancashire and North Merseyside is estimated at 7000 pairs.

The coastal mosslands and saltmarshes are major wintering sites. Particularly important are the coastal fields in around Over Wyre, from Fluke Hall to Pilling Marsh and those in the Cockersands area. Formerly, Lytham Moss was important for wintering birds but the numbers have declined markedly in the last decade.

Current factors affecting the species

The lapwing tends to choose nesting sites in short vegetation away from hedges, walls or trees. The general shift from spring sown to autumn sown cereals has resulted in loss of much suitable nesting habitat, since by the time pairs start to raise broods the crops are taller than ideal for the birds.

The species has always suffered some loss of early clutches due to routine farming operations such as rolling and chain-harrowing because of their ground-nesting habit. On pasture, trampling of eggs by stock is always a threat and this is exacerbated by high stocking densities. Increased predator numbers may also be having an effect on reproductive success.

Soon after hatching, the adult lapwings lead their chicks to invertebrate-rich feeding areas. The decline of mixed farming has separated suitable chick feeding habitat from arable nesting habitat. In addition, the drainage of farmland has reduced the number of suitable feeding areas, as has the improvement of pastures by ploughing and reseeding with rye grass.

It is also possible that the widespread use of pesticides is having a negative effect on food sources. In particular, the disposal of sheep dip and the presence of Ivermectin (a livestock endoparasite treatment) in animal dung may be killing invertebrate food on pastures.

Current Action / Mechanisms

Countryside Stewardship options for sensitive management of pasture will benefit lapwing. Stewardship options include provision for low spring/summer grazing levels and water level management. However, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, whilst it encourages the improvement of field margin habitats in arable farmland, offers little direct benefit for lapwings because they generally frequent open areas away from field edges. Arable Stewardship options, were they to be introduced to Lancashire, would potentially offer greater benefits for this species.

Lapwings increasingly use rotational set-aside for nesting but this is not considered optimal habitat for them.

The county's FWAG adviser can visit farms to advise on management that can benefit wildlife. FWAG and English Nature have developed a 'Farm Biodiversity Action Plan' scheme, which is sponsored by Sainsbury's, targeting the supermarket's suppliers to offer conservation advice on a whole farm basis. The RSPB has produced management guidelines that suggest measures that can be taken to manage habitats for a range of lowland farmland birds including the lapwing.

National surveys for lapwings are undertaken periodically which include survey plots in Lancashire. The lapwing is still widespread enough to be monitored by the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey. The distribution of lapwing was surveyed by Lancashire Bird Club during 1997-9. The distribution and population of the species were surveyed for Bowland by the RSPB in 1998.

RSPB has publicised the problems faced by lapwings at a national level and this has involved press releases to news media in Lancashire.

Objectives, targets and proposed actions for lapwing in Lancashire

Broad Objective:	A. Establish baseline information on lapwing abundance and local distribution throughout the bird's current range in the county.			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Establish a centralised lapwing database to be used to enable assessment of population changes.	1. Collate all available data for Lancashire for lapwings. (High)	LBC, BTO, WT, All bird clubs	S	RM
	2. Identify and map areas known to support high concentrations of breeding lapwing. (High)	LCC, BTO, WT, All bird clubs	M	RM
	3. By 2005 organise a sample survey of areas of Lancashire not identified in 1.2 to gather baseline population data. (High)	LBC, BTO, WT, All bird clubs	M	RM

	4. Use BTO Breeding Bird Survey data to keep up to date the estimate for overall breeding population size for Lancashire. (High)	BTO, LBC	M	RM
	5. Before end of 2005 assess results of A.1.1 - 1.4. and formulate targets by which to increase numbers of breeding lapwing in the county. (High)	LBC, LCC, BTO, WT, All bird clubs	M	RM
	6. Identify and map areas of high concentrations of over-wintering lapwing. (Medium)	LCC, LBC, BTO, WT, All bird clubs, WWT	M	RM
Broad Objective:	B. Ensure that breeding lapwings remain present in good numbers throughout their range.			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Seek to secure sympathetic management of farm habitat for lapwings. (Particularly ensure that suitable nesting opportunities exist on arable land and pasture throughout the county.)	1. Liaise with landowners and land managers to promote low-intensity management of pasture, mixed arable farming and the retention of winter stubbles. (High)	BHSP, FWAG, MAFF, RSPB	O	A, LM
	2. Highlight the vulnerability of lapwing nests to rolling and harrowing operations. (Medium)	RSPB, BHSP, FWAG, MAFF	O	A, LM
	3. Promote the use of nest guards to prevent trampling in areas of high stock density. (Medium)	RSPB, BHSP, FWAG, MAFF	O	A, LM
	4. Lobby for extension of Arable Stewardship scheme to Lancashire or to have Arable Stewardship options included in Countryside Stewardship. (Medium)	RSPB, WT	M	PR, P

	5. Lobby for reform of CAP that will reward lapwing-friendly farming. (Medium)	RSPB, WT	O	PR
Broad Objective:	C. Encourage research into aspects of lapwing ecology relevant to its conservation in Lancashire.			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Determine relative importance of factors affecting lapwing numbers in pasture.	1. Investigate the possible effects of factors such as anti-parasitic livestock treatments and livestock trampling. (Low)	HE/FE	L	RM
Broad Objective:	D. Promote the lapwing as a flagship species in the Lancashire BAP			
Operational Objective	Action Required (Priority)	Partners	Time-scale	Type
1. Promote the lapwing as a 'flagship' species to highlight the decline in certain lowland bird species.	1. Work with community-based groups to raise awareness of lapwing conservation issues amongst the general public and landowners. (Medium)	RSPB, WT, FWAG, land-owners, land managers	O	PR
	2. Encourage public participation in Breeding Bird Surveys, and other monitoring. (Medium)	BTO, RSPB, LBC, All bird clubs	S	PR, RM
	3. Encourage submission of records to Lancashire Bird Report. (Medium)	LBC, All bird clubs	O	PR, RM
	4. Include information about the lapwing in press releases, newsletters and leaflets. (Low)	RSPB, WT	O	PR

Related Action Plans:

- Brown hare SAP
- Skylark SAP;
- Arable farmland HAP

References & additional reading:

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