

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

DESCRIPTION

The lapwing is a medium-sized wader and can be distinguished by the thin crest and black and white plumage, which is especially noticeable in flight. The green tinge to the back and wings leads to one of the local names for lapwing, “green plover”, whilst the characteristic ‘peewit’ calls uttered during the tumbling display flight are responsible for the other commonly used local name.

Lapwings are closely associated with damp grassland where there is a diverse sward structure. Preferred nest sites are normally where there is an uneven sward height close to areas of taller vegetation in which to raise chicks. The peak egg-laying period is mid-April although some birds will begin nesting in mid-March.

LOCAL BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANCE

National survey work has shown that lapwing populations declined by 48% between 1987 and 1998. The current national population is estimated at 125,000 pairs. The population estimate derived from the Moorland Bird Survey carried out across the National Park between 1992 and 1995 was 2,636–2,942 breeding pairs. Between 889 and 1591 breeding pairs of lapwing were recorded in 88km² of land below the moorland boundary surveyed as part of the Yorkshire Dales Enclosed Upland Breeding Wader Survey in 2000. The total number of breeding lapwings found within the Yorkshire Dales National Park is clearly of national importance.

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANCE

The lapwing is on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List and receives general protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

CURRENT ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

The main cause of lapwing population declines is poor breeding productivity with too few young produced to maintain the current population. One of the main causes of the population decline is the loss of unimproved grassland through land drainage and inappropriate levels of grazing. High stocking rates also increase the risk of nest trampling, which has been identified as a major cause of nest failure. The effect of nest losses on breeding productivity depends on the availability of suitable habitat for replacement nesting attempts. The loss of wet marshy ground by land drainage has also reduced the availability of chick rearing habitats.

There are incentives for land managers to reduce grazing rates and to undertake a variety of habitat management work through the uptake of agri-environment schemes. Currently there is no specific re-wetting option available under ESA schemes. This needs to be addressed at the forthcoming agri-environment review. The majority of land in these areas is some of the most important from a farming and farm business perspective and agri-environment incentives should reflect this.

Nests can also be lost as a result of agricultural activities such as rolling or chain harrowing. However restrictions on the timing of these practices included in agri-environment scheme prescriptions will reduce the potential for this to happen.

Levels of predation, mainly at the chick and egg stage, have also been cited as a potential cause of population declines. Predation rates are likely to be related to habitat quality with an increase in predation in areas where there is a lack of suitable cover. A number of organisations are currently undertaking research to examine whether predators affect ground nesting bird populations. Any research findings or recommendations should be included in future management guidelines.

Historically, extreme winter weather has resulted in high adult mortality whilst in recent years cold, wet spring weather is likely to have increased chick mortality.

A PhD project at Lancaster University is examining breeding wader distribution in relation to habitat. The results of this work will hopefully further our knowledge of wader habitat requirements and assist in making conservation recommendations for breeding waders.

AIMS OF THE SPECIES ACTION PLAN

- To ensure a sustained increase in the breeding population of lapwing in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

OBJECTIVES

To achieve these aims we need to:

- Identify core breeding sites for lapwing in the Yorkshire Dales National Park by end 2003.
- Ensure that core breeding areas or sites for lapwings are in appropriate management by end 2003.
- Encourage enhanced management in areas of potentially suitable breeding habitat by 2010.

ACTIONS & TARGETS

To achieve these objectives the following actions should be carried out and the targets achieved within the time-scale given:

Actions	Target date	3 year cost £
Determine core areas for breeding lapwing in the Yorkshire Dales National Park through the use of existing data.	2003	Officer Time
Identify areas in the National Park that may require additional survey work.	2003	Officer Time
Devise and implement a regular monitoring programme to determine lapwing population trends in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.	2003	2,000
Where appropriate, encourage landowners and managers, through the use of advice and management grants, to implement appropriate management for lapwing in the core breeding areas (80% of core area)	2010	Agri-environment Scheme Funding
Where appropriate, encourage landowners and managers, through the use of advice and management grants, to improve areas of suitable habitat for the benefit of breeding lapwing.	Ongoing	Agri-environment Scheme Funding

WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACTION PLAN?

Lead Agency	Key Partners
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Landowners and managers DEFRA/RDS Yorkshire Dales Upland Bird Study Group English Nature Moorland Association Moorland Gamekeepers Association