

Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus



Description

With its slow, flappy flight of flickering black and white and 'pee-wit' call, the Lapwing is hard to mistake. In spring, males have a tumbling display flight.

Close inspection reveals the iridescent green of the upper parts, purple and copper at the wing bends, a black and buff facial pattern, a wispy black crest and pink legs.

In spring and summer, breeding birds prefer mixed farmland, avoiding trees and hedges. Preferred nesting crops include spring-drilled cereals, legumes, roots and rotational set-aside. Lapwing do not nest in autumn- or winter-drilled cereals as these become too tall by the start of the breeding season.

Wet grasslands are an important breeding habitat and particularly if there is a nearby shallow area containing water. In winter, permanent grassland, winter stubble and fallow fields are preferred by flocks of Lapwing, but if the weather is too harsh they move to Ireland, south-west England or to continental Europe.

National Status

The Lapwing was a common and familiar breeding species of bare ground and short vegetation throughout the British Isles.

The decline of the species started in the 19th century due to changes in agriculture such as drainage, enclosures and egg collecting.

The Lapwing Act (1926) put restrictions on egg collecting which greatly reduced the scale of egg gathering and, combined with agricultural depression at that time, there was a rapid recovery in numbers. However, as agricultural intensification increased during the 1960s, there was a parallel decline in breeding Lapwings. Between 1987 and 1998 the breeding population dropped by 48% in England.

Local Status

The Lapwing is protected under the EC Birds Directive and also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. It is an offence to kill or injure Lapwing or to disturb it while nesting.

Legal Status

The Lapwing is 'amber listed' in *Birds of Conservation Concern in the UK* because it winters in internationally important numbers.

Links with other Action Plans

- HAP7 Floodplain Grazing Marsh
- HAP8 Lowland Meadows
- HAP9 Lowland Dry Acidic Grassland
- HAPI3 Purple Moor Grass and Rush Pasture
- HAPI7 Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land

Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

In a survey in 1987, over 90% of Lapwings found breeding were on agricultural land. A number of changes in farming practices have had a serious effect on Lapwing populations. These changes are highlighted as follows:

- Loss of spring-sown cereals.
- Loss of unimproved grassland and intensification of grassland management.
- An increase in livestock numbers and trampling rates.
- A reduction of mixed farming.
- Drainage of marginal grasslands.

Current Local Action

- The landscaping of RSPB Old Moor in the Dearne Valley has created an improved and safe habitat for breeding Lapwing and has provided a safe winter roost site for large numbers of birds.
- Recording is carried out by Barnsley Bird Study Group as part of the forthcoming *Breeding Bird Atlas*.
- A survey of the borough's population was done in 2001 by volunteers and published by Barnsley Biodiversity Trust in 2008, entitled, *Birds of Conservation Concern*.

Proposed Local Action

- Assess current coverage of DEFRA Stewardship Schemes that support Lapwing options (with Natural England).
- Extract information from the *Barnsley Bird Study Group Breeding Bird Survey* to provide populations and mapping of breeding Lapwing.
- Encourage landowners to take up a Stewardship Scheme to benefit Lapwing (Natural England lead).