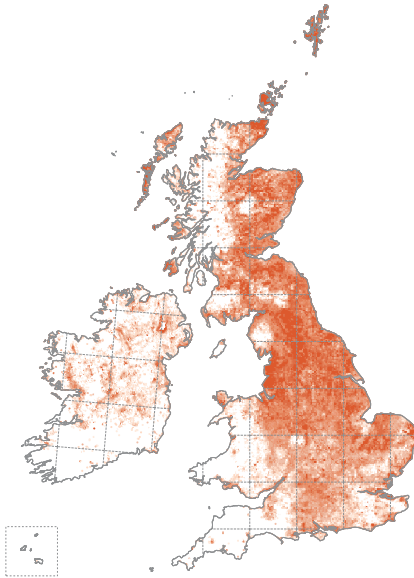




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LAND MANAGEMENT FOR WILDLIFE

LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*)



Breeding abundance map reproduced from Balmer et al 2013 Bird Atlas with permission from British Trust for Ornithology.



Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

Lapwings can be found on all types of farmland, although they are primarily found in upland and lowland wet grasslands, and on moorlands. They are scarcer in purely arable or intensive grassland systems, and on heathland. The UK population of the lapwing fell by 50% between 1970 and 2013. This decline has been largely caused by the loss of mixed farming and spring cropping, and the intensification and drainage of grassland. It is likely that the effects of predation have been exacerbated by smaller numbers of birds returning to site. Declines in the west of the UK have led to local extinctions.

WHAT DO LAPWING NEED?

Nesting habitat

Lapwings select fields with a wide, open view and short vegetation so they can spot approaching danger early. On arable land, spring crops provide the bare or sparsely vegetated ground needed for nesting, particularly where this is associated with damp pastures. Grassland with short, sparse vegetation and areas of open water is used for nesting; scattered taller patches and tussocks provide chicks with cover in the event of danger. Lapwings are site faithful, often returning to the same fields year after year.

Food

Lapwings feed mainly on earthworms, leatherjackets, soil surface insects and their larvae. They generally feed where they can find lots of these, primarily in grazed pasture.

Wet grassland and the shallow, muddy edges of water are particularly important food sources for the chicks, which feed extensively on chironomid larvae. Arable nesting birds often walk their chicks onto grazed pasture to feed, and locating cultivated plots in the right place is essential for chick survival.

ANNUAL LIFECYCLE

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Flocks feed in fields with soil invertebrates	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Breeding pairs take up residence in fields			█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
Birds form large flocks and move to the coast								█	█	█	█	█

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LAPWING?

Nesting habitat: general

- Look out for nests in fields during cultivation, drilling, muck-spreading or rolling operations between mid-March and June; where a series of operations is required, try to undertake them all within one week, because pairs will not re-nest within a week of losing a nest.
- Avoid planting new trees or hedges near fields used by nesting lapwings as they like to be able to see and actively avoid nesting where there are lots of hedges and trees.

Nesting Habitat: grassland

- Create or maintain suitable nesting habitat where birds have nested before, or in large open fields away from tall hedges or woodland. This can be lowland wet meadows, damp rushy pastures in the uplands or traditional water meadows.
- Keep the sward short—lapwing like the grass to be between 5-10cm at the beginning of the season, and will avoid longer grass.
- Adjust stocking rates during the nesting season in fields used for nesting to maintain a short sward, with some tussocks or taller patches to provide cover for chicks. Raise stocking rates in late summer to graze sward down for the following spring.
- Take measures to control rush levels below 30% of field area.

Nesting habitat—arable

- Maintain or restore spring cropping in areas used by nesting lapwings where possible, as lapwing like to nest in fields with bare earth or short crops (no more than 5-10cm)
- Where possible, plan cropping so that some spring crops are adjacent to areas of grazed pasture as lapwing will walk their chicks to the pastures to feed and the shorter the distance

they have to go the better

- Where spring cropping is no longer a viable option, or in arable fields particularly favoured by nesting lapwings, you can create a 2-ha fallow plot by ploughing in autumn, or ploughing and discing in February, then leave undisturbed until mid-July

Summer and winter food

- Arable reversion to grazed pasture in large or open fields will boost feeding opportunities for lapwings in predominantly arable farming areas.
- Buffer strips and field corner management may boost insect abundance in arable fields. Beetle banks in larger arable fields provide insect food and good cover for chicks.
- Maintain or restore areas of wet grassland in fields where lapwings nest.
- Create small wet features in grasslands used by nesting lapwings, such as wader scrapes or damp hollows created by blocking field drains, or re-profile ditch banks and raise the water levels.

Predator management

- Lapwing nests and chicks are vulnerable to predation when there are only a few pairs on a site.
- Monitoring to assess the main predators is essential to understand the best control mechanism
- On some sites predator fencing may be a solution, particularly from mammalian predators
- Legal control of some predators may be necessary for breeding success

KEY POINTS

- Maintain suitable nesting habitat in fields traditionally used for nesting.
- Look out for nests and chicks during agricultural operations between mid-March and July
- Keep a short sward through the breeding season and allow temporary water features to dry out by the end of August
- Predator management may be necessary on some sites

Contact Conservation Management Advice at:

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