



Above: This distinctive green and white bird gives a tumbling display flight over breeding territories in spring. It has a distinctive 'pee-wit' call.

The range of breeding lapwings has declined as a result of the loss of mixed farming and spring cropping, and because of increased drainage and the intensification of grassland management although the abandonment of farming can also have a negative effect. The distribution of lapwings breeding in the UK declined by 9% between the early 1970s and the early 1990s. In parts of upland southern Scotland, numbers of breeding lapwings declined by 87% between the early 1980s and 1998 while declines of 47% have been reported across Scotland since 1994*. The large flocks that can sometimes be seen are pre- or post-breeding, passage or wintering lapwings, and include immigrants from Europe.

*Data source: British Trust for Ornithology

WHAT DO LAPWINGS NEED?

Bare ground or short vegetation for nesting from mid-March to June

Lapwings nest on spring-tilled arable land and short grassland, including moorland margins and in-bye. Lapwings nesting on arable land tend to move their chicks to adjacent wet areas and suitably short vegetation, such as grazed pasture, to feed.

An abundance of soil and ground invertebrates throughout the year

Lapwings feed mainly on earthworms, leatherjackets, insects and their larvae. These are generally most abundant in wet grassland and grazed pasture.

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LAPWINGS?

Agricultural activity

- Look out for lapwing nests during farming activity between mid-March and early May. Ideally, leave untouched an area of at least five metres all the way round a nest.
- Timing is important. Prepare the ground and sow over the shortest period possible. Avoid rolling in May.
- Nests should not be marked as this can attract predators.

On fallow ground

- Lapwings will nest in these areas if the sward is short or sparse.
- In subsequent years, subject to current regulations, cultivate the field, or a two-hectare plot in the centre. This should be ploughed in November, or ploughed and disced in February, to create a short sward for nesting from mid-March onwards. Do not cut or cultivate the plot between mid-March and June.
- Try to avoid cultivating the field before the end of May.

On arable land

- Sow crops in spring wherever possible to provide nesting habitat. Winter-sown crops will be too tall for nesting by the following spring.
- If spring crops are planted, provide fields next to these with short vegetation for lapwing chicks to use.

- If possible, leave some wet corners or hollows for feeding.

On grassland, in-bye and moorland margins

- Unimproved pasture should be managed with no, or very limited, use of fertiliser. Where fertilisers are used, phased-release and leach-resistant types avoid excessive growth and allow application during the autumn rather than the nesting season. Organic (and organic-based) fertilisers tend to increase soil invertebrate numbers, which makes for better feeding.
- Graze from late summer to late winter to create a short sward for nesting the following spring. Ideally, avoid grazing from mid-March to early May to reduce nest trampling (although grazing may be required to keep the sward short) below about 15cm (6inches).
- Remember to adjust your summer grazing rates to compensate for any reduced grazing in the spring.
- Avoid or limit drainage, and block drains or hold water back in grips where feasible to create areas of standing water and to provide wet flushes, damp grassland and shallow areas for chicks to feed.

Tree cover

- Lapwings avoid nesting and feeding in areas close to tall tree and shrub cover. Avoid planting trees, shrubs or hedges

within 30 metres of lapwing nesting and feeding areas. The minimum viable area of open ground is approximately three hectares, but the ideal is to have more than ten hectares of open ground.

Contacts and advice

The best way to help lapwings on your farm/croft is to walk the ground with an adviser and discuss options for management and funding. Much of the management suggested in this leaflet can be funded by agri-environment schemes.

Nesting Habitat

- Bare ground, or ground with sparse vegetation, or ground with short grassland with good all round views.

Summer food

- Soil invertebrates, earthworms, leatherjackets, beetles etc. in damp grassland or fallow ground.

Winter food

- Soil invertebrates on land with short and/or sparse vegetation.

KEY POINTS

- Provide short swards on unimproved grazed pasture or spring tillage for nesting.

WET HABITATS

- Retain or create rushy areas on pasture and damp areas on or near any fields with short vegetation.

CHICK-REARING

- Leave or create damp areas, flushes or small shallow pools with muddy margins as feeding areas for chicks.

See also the RSPB Scotland advisory sheets on:

- Snipe
- Redshank
- Managing water levels to benefit birds
- Managing grassland for waders
- Rush management
- Curlew

For answers to all of your farm wildlife enquiries, visit www.farmwildlife.info

RSPB Scotland is part of the RSPB, the UK charity that speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

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You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



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