

AGEING AND SEXING OF LAPWINGS (Vanellus vanellus)

by Mark Fletcher

From an examination of Lapwings that have been killed in 'bird strike' incidents involving aircraft, it has been found possible to age and sex birds from their plumage.

As reported in the Handbook of British Birds (Witherby et al. 1940), by examining the wing formula and particularly the relative position of the tenth (outermost large) - to the other primaries, adults males and juvenile females can be distinguished. Using this method adult females and juvenile males cannot be differentiated.

In the adult male the tenth primary (the eleventh being small) is equal to between the fourth and fifth primary (rarely fifth or between fourth and third). With the juvenile female the tenth primary is equal to between the eighth and ninth (rarely eight and seventh) and always shorter than the seventh. The adult female and juvenile male both have tenth primaries equal to between the sixth and seventh, always greater than the seventh.

By examination of the tail it is possible to distinguish adults and juveniles. The adult tail is tipped light buff or white, and the outer pair of feathers are white with an irregular black mark towards the tip. With the juvenile the tail is tipped buff with no white and the outer pair of feathers are entirely white or occasionally lightly marked black. This black when present covers a very small area towards one edge of the feathers, any substantial black indicating an adult tail. The buff or white tips to the tail feathers are soon abraded and this characteristic cannot be safely used after October. Occasionally an odd tail feather is moulted between July and December in the juvenile. An examination of both outer tail feathers is therefore necessary. One bird (a juvenile female from the wing formula) had an apparent adult outer tail feather on one side and a pure white feather on the other. This bird had probably moulted the one outer tail feather. Hence, if a juvenile outer tail feather is present on one side only, it is a juvenile bird.

Using the tail as an indicator of age and the relative position of the primaries, it is possible to distinguish both the sex and age of the birds.

<u>Adult</u> ♂ :	Primaries	-	10 = 4/5 (3/4, 5)
	Tail	-	Outer tail feathers with black mark (tail feathers tipped buff and white)
<u>Adult</u> ♀ :	Primaries	-	10 = 6/7 (7
	Tail	-	Outer tail feathers with black mark (tail feathers tipped buff and white)
<u>Juvenile</u> ♂ :	Primaries	-	10 = 6/7 (7
	Tail	-	Outer tail feathers white (or small black area towards edge) (tail feathers tipped buff only)
<u>Juvenile</u> ♀ :	Primaries	-	10 = 8/9 (7/8) 7
	Tail	-	Outer tail feathers white (or small black area towards edge) (tail feathers tipped buff only)

All birds were aged and sexed by looking at the wing formula and examining the gonads.

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Other criteria for ageing such as the length of crest and buff fringing to the coverts, were examined and although many birds correlated with these factors there were examples of birds not conforming.

REFERENCE

Witherby H.F., Jourdain, F.C.R., Ticehurst, N.F., and Tucker, B.W. 1940. Handbook of British Birds, Vol. IV; H.F. & G. Witherby Ltd. London.

NOTE: I should be grateful if anyone catching known age lapwings would examine the tail feathers and inform me of their findings at MAFF, Pest Infestation Control Laboratory, Tangley Place, Worplesdon, Guildford, Surrey GU3 3LQ.

MIST NETTING FOR LAPWINGS AT AN INLAND GRAVEL PIT

by C. M. Hemmings

Between 9th October 1975 and 7th January 1976 sixteen attempts were made to mist net Lapwings Vanellus vanellus using three shelf, 14 metre, wader nets, at Holtsand and gravel pits, Ombersley, Droitwich, Worcestershire, 52° 15' N - 20° 15' W. 63 birds were caught and the purpose of this note is to show that persistent inland netting can give good results, given a suitable site.

The land for 2 km to the south shows the effect of gravel extraction over many years. Although some parts are now cultivated, and crops such as sugar beet are grown, many parts are too low lying and damp for grazing cattle or sheep in winter. During autumn and early winter flocks of up to 2,000 Lapwings gather in this area.

The habit of Curlews, and later Lapwings, of visiting one of the gravel pit pools during the evening towards dusk was observed whilst netting a hirundine/wagtail roost during August. The birds landed in shallow water close to a 30 metre wide sandy beach which divided a 500 x 35 metre channel. Steep banks 5 metres high bordered the long sides. Two nets, 14 metres wide were set across the channel, 10 metres into the water from the beach see Fig 1.

As the Curlews before them, Lapwings visited the area during the evening and after dark. Whether to roost, bathe or drink I am not sure but there was probably little food there. They flighted in low across the water between the 5 metre high banks on either side towards the sandy beach, encountering the nets on the way.

FIG.1. Part of Holt Sand & Gravel Pits.

