

After the first few mid week outings because the days were becoming shorter it was impossible for me to go to the area before dark. There was no alternative but to set the nets in the dark. Although this created a disturbance, birds always returned to the area within half an hour. During the daytime they usually disappeared completely if disturbed. No attempts were made to catch birds after mid-night although I am confident that successful catching could have continued until dawn.

The maximum number of birds seen over the gravel pit area at any one time was 15, although flocks totalling up to 2,000 were present within half a kilometre. It seems as if small numbers from the flocks continually visit the gravel pits, perhaps to drink.

The number of Lapwings trapped per visit changed little with weather conditions. Increased movement on light nights compensated for the less obvious appearance of the nets on dull, wet nights when birds preferred to stay on the nearby fields. Peak catches were between the 22nd and 29th October with a maximum of 13 on the 26th October, and between 25th November and 10th December with 6 on 4th December. Outside these dates no more than three were trapped on each occasion. However, over the whole period 63 Lapwings were caught (none re-trapped). Other birds included 10 Snipe, 1 Jack Snipe, 1 Curlew and Teal.

In all 16 visits were made which averaged 4 Lapwings a visit, or to put it another way, one every $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. But leaving my job after dark and wanting to go netting (convincing my wife of my good intentions was one problem!) I could be confident the birds would be there, and it proved to be possible to catch Lapwings a few at a time over a long period. Apart from becoming more familiar with the species (all the caught birds were aged, sexed, weighed and measured), slowly increasing the ringing total may turn up an unexpected bonus. Like DR 19207, ringed at Holt Gravel Pits on 14th October 1975 and found dead in northern Hungary on 9th March 1976.

When I visited the gravel pits again in mid June 1976 I found a dramatic change in the appearance of the area, with new channels dug, some places completely filled in and other areas exposed. Flocks of Lapwings were again present in a similar but recently formed area and Curlews and moulting Lapwings (one a re-trap from 26th October 1975) have been caught in less obvious, recently acquired, Scottish made nets.

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CATCHING LAPWINGS WITH CANNON NETS

by C D T Minton

Introduction

For some years it has been the intention of Wader Study Group members to devote more attention to the study of inland waders, especially Lapwing and Golden Plover, and in particular to see whether the cannon netting technique, now employed so successfully on coastal waders, can be used effectively at inland sites. In the past a few small cannon net catches had been made (including one of 12 Snipe!) on an ad hoc basis, but in December 1974 the opportunity arose to make some more significant catches of Lapwing. This has triggered off a concerted study programme and 700 Lapwing have now been caught. A number of interesting aspects of Lapwing feeding and roosting behaviour have already become apparent and since these are highly relevant to catching techniques they are documented here so that others contemplating Lapwing studies may benefit.

SUMMER (June to September)

Small flocks of adult Lapwings begin to appear as early as the end of May and from early June onwards fairly large numbers can be seen coming into eastern Britain from the Continent so that by the end of June congregations of a hundred or more are not infrequent. At this time of year most land is under cultivation and the amount of suitable Lapwing feeding and roosting habitat is small. In the English Midlands and The Fens (where most of my experience lies) it is confined to short grass (grazed) fields, gravel pits, the perimeters of reservoirs and the occasional fallow (or early-cleared potato) field.

Lapwing habits depend very much on the weather and, to a lesser extent, on the moon. On a normal warm and dry summers day birds congregate to roost between 0900 and 1100 and remain relatively inactive until 1800 - 2000, when they again disperse to feed. These daytime roosts are most frequently close to water and some bathing, preening and drinking takes place, though most of the time is spent sleeping. If, however, the weather is wet, or the ground is wet following rain, then this daytime roosting period is largely dispensed with and the birds will actively feed for much of the day.

Over and above the effects of weather, the state of the moon also affects Lapwing behaviour. At periods of full moon a much greater proportion of the daytime is spent roosting (e.g. flocks can form as early as 0700 on a hot day). Conversely when there is no moon Lapwings spend a greater proportion of the day feeding and then congregate at dusk, often squatting down to become almost invisible on a ploughed field.

Since Lapwings can best be caught in numbers when they are concentrated at roosts - being well spread out usually when feeding - it follows that the most successful time to cannon net them is during period of hot, dry weather at the time of the full moon. Nets should ideally be set by 0900 and the first catch can often be made before 1100, with other catches later in the day at good sites. Decoys are helpful in getting the birds to land in the right area. Catches are typically of 20-40 birds, but one catch of 80 (in a single net) was made.

WINTER (November to February)

In winter Lapwings have a very much wider choice of habitat, but they still seem to follow fairly regular patterns of behaviour. The most common routine in the Midlands is for birds to feed on grass pastures and to congregate to roost on ploughed fields, though some feeding on the latter (particularly when newly ploughed) does occur.

The moon appears to have a relatively greater effect in winter, for even in wet weather daytime roosts will form. However, in 'no moon' periods birds often spend most of the day feeding and only congregate to roost at or after dusk. Catching, with cannon nets set of ploughed fields one day to catch soon after dawn the next day is therefore much more successful in the winter at periods of full moon. Catching at roosts prior to dusk is less successful.

On frosty mornings Lapwings will often roost, whatever the state of the moon, until the sun has melted the frost sufficiently for them to be able to feed. Such mornings therefore give an increased chance of making a cannon net catch.

Apart from the above, which refers primarily to farmland habitats, an interesting pattern of behaviour has been noticed at Blithfield Reservoir, Staffs., and this has provided the opportunity for some nice winter catches. Soon after dawn Lapwings tend to come down to favoured parts of the shoreline to bathe, preen and drink in some concentration. They may only stay for perhaps half an hour before dispersing again to the surrounding fields to

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feed, although some may return, at irregular intervals, during the day. As before, nets are set the previous day and decoys are sometimes used. However, on moonlight nights some birds may arrive before dawn and care should be taken not to disturb these when getting into the firing position.

OTHER POINTS

Nets should be set at a comparatively low angle (10-15°) because Lapwings are extremely quick at taking off and escaping before the net comes to the ground. Their large wing area may enable them to do this. This can also lead to them falling awkwardly in the net, however, and the occasional unexpected wing injury has occurred (please note the circumstances of any such occurrences and report back to Bob Spencer/Tony Prater).

Lapwings (and Golden Plover) seem comparatively unwary of nets, but camouflaging where practicable is desirable. A "jiggler", to remove birds standing too close to the net, is very necessary. "Twinkling" works surprisingly well on fields - especially with a vehicle, but also with someone walking or crawling. Fetching birds from further afield can sometimes be very frustrating - they can fly high and far in the wrong direction!

After catching, birds are best covered with light weight material in the same way as shore waders, before extraction from the cannon nets and put in keeping cages.

GLOSSARY

"jiggler" - string with rags just in front of the set net, fastened by elastic to peg at far end of net and moved by pulling from firing position or other hide in line with net.

"twinkling" - gently moving flock by approaching slowly. Ideally, "flashes" (twinkles) of wings are seen as the near birds fly to far side of flock.

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LAPWING WEIGHTS AND MOULT

By L R Goodyer

INTRODUCTION

A preliminary analysis has been made of Lapwing (Vanellus vanellus) weight and moult data, mainly collected between December 1974 and February 1976 in the West Midlands. Although the study is still continuing the interim results are presented here and comparisons are made with similar data on Lapwing presented earlier (Kennedy 1973), and on coastal waders (see Wash Wader Ringing Group Report 1973/4).

WEIGHT

Fig 1 shows the mean monthly weights of 749 Lapwings (658 adult and 91 juvenile/first winter) caught in the period late June to mid February (no samples have yet been obtained in March, April or May). Mean adult weights remain relatively constant at 220-230 gm (average 227 gm) in the period June to September when the annual moult is taking place. Adult weights then rise to a December peak of 284 gms - an increase of 30% - before falling quite

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