THE STATUS OF GOLDEN PLOVERS IN THE PEAK PARK, ENGLAND IN RELATION TO ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL DISTURBANCE

by D.W.Yalden

A survey of all Peak Park moorlands in 1970-73 located approximately 380-400 pairs of Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis apricaria*); on the present county boundaries around half of these are in Derbyshire, a few in Cheshire, Staffordshire and Lancashire (16, 6 and 2 pairs, respectively), and the rest in Yorkshire (Yalden 1974). There are very sparse populations of Golden Plovers in S.W. Britain and Wales. On Dartmoor, an R.S.P.B. survey found only 14 pairs, and in the national breeding bird survey this species was only recorded in 30 (10 km) squares in Wales, (Mudge *et al.* 1981, Sharrock 1976): the total Welsh population was estimated at 600 pairs. Further north in the Pennines, and in Scotland, populations are larger. Even so at average densities of around 2-3 prs./km ^{2} the bird is nowhere especially numerous. It is a very typical moorland bird, but a sparsely distributed one. The Peak District population is, then, the southernmost viable population (Ratcliffe 1976).

In 1981, the R.S.P.B. carried out a partial survey of the Peak Park moorland; they recorded 159 pairs, with birds present in a further 18 1-km squares. Their survey criteria were somewhat more restrictive (or rigorous) than mine, and I suspect I would have scored most of these additional birds as territorial; thus for comparison with mine the total can be estimated as 177 pairs. In the areas which they surveyed I found 183 pairs. Thus, within the limits of survey accuracy, there appears to be no change in status between my 1970-73 survey and their 1981 survey (Campbell 1982), Table 1. However, this assessment overlooks substantial change in distribution. The R.S.P.B. divided their survey area into six sub-areas. In the two southern-most sub-areas, covering Kinder Scout and the Snake Pass area, they recorded 43 pairs where I found 89 - a reduction of 52%. Conversely, in the northern sub-areas, covering Bleaklow north to Holme Moss and Black Hill, they recorded 134 pairs where I had 94, an increase of 43%. Some of this increase concerned birds which had moved onto the then recent fire site of Torside Moss - I recorded only 2 pairs in those 1-km squares, where they found 11 pairs. Also the S.E. Cheshire moorlands have recently been thoroughly studied during the preparation of a breeding bird atlas for the county. Where I found 15 pairs in 1970-73, there seem to be only eight pairs now (A. Booth, D.W. Yalden pers. obs.).

Table 1. Comparison of Golden Plover populations (estimated nos. of pairs or territories) for 6 areas of the Peak District, censused in 1971-73 (Yalden 1976) and 1981 (Campbell 1982).

Area	1971-73	1981
Holme Moss	23	42
Wike Head	16	12
Bleaklow	44	52
Ronksley	11	17
Snake	48	20
Kinder	41	16
Total	183	159

The Pennine Way long distance footpath runs along the ridge from Snake Summit south to Mill-Hill and consequently this area has been subjected to disturbance from hill-walkers. Here the Golden Plover population has been censused annually since 1972. The population averaged 20.3 pairs from 1972 to 1977 (Table 2). In the 4 years from 1978-82 (omitting 1980) the population averaged 6.8 pairs (only 33% of the previous total). In 1980, when the moors were closed for most of May because of the fire risk (May is the main incubation period), the population was assessed at 24 pairs (Yalden 1983). In 1984 the moors were again closed to the public, but for a shorter period than in 1980, and the number of Golden Plovers rose to 17 pairs. During these years Dunlin *Calidris alpina* populations in this area were apparently unaffected (pers. obs.), perhaps reflecting their tendency to sit tight during incubation, which may make them less susceptible to disturbance. Parr (1980) has noted that Golden Plovers in Scotland are extremely wary of disturbance on their breeding grounds. Birds would often leave their nests if people were working anywhere nearby. One particular female even flew away if one particular vehicle (a white Landrover used by the researcher when he visited her particular nest) appeared on the nearby road; and she would not return to her nest while it was in the vicinity (A. Watson, pers. comm.).

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that the Golden Plover is a typical, albeit sparsely distributed, member of the Peak Park Moorland fauna; that the population is not large (380-400 pairs), but that the population is nevertheless important as it is the southernmost viable one in England. The species is known from work in Scotland to be very vulnerable to disturbance, and there is good evidence in the Peak Park for a decline in the population in that area (Kinder etc.) which receives the heaviest recreational use. In two years when the recreational disturbance was reduced, the breeding population was higher than in other years. It follows that any increase in recreational disturbance of moorlands where this species occurs can be expected to lead to yet further reductions in its population. This would be regrettable. There seems to be a case for establishing sanctuary areas, in which it would be agreed that no recreational activity should be encouraged, to conserve this population.

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Table 2. Breeding populations (pairs or territories) of Golden Plovers and Dunlins in an area of moorland south of Snake Pass, Peak District, censused in two halves, Featherbed Moss (F.M.) and the ridge to Mill Hill (M.H.).

YEAR	Golden Plover			Dunlin		
	F.M.	M.H.	Total	F.M.	M.H.	Total
1972	1	11	12	4	4	8
1973	11	13	24	4	4	8
1974	15	10	25	3	5	8
1975	6	21	27	4	3-5	7-9
1976	7	13	20	3	5	8
1977	4	10	14	4	3	7
1978	5	1	6	2	5	7
1979	4	4	8	3	3	6
1980	10	14	24	3	8	11
1981	2	3	5	2	6-7	8-9
1982	3	6	9	1	6	7
1983	4	7	11	3	4	7
1984	5	12	17	3	3	6
1985	4	8	12	3	4	7

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THE TAFF ESTUARY UNDER THREAT

by Shelley Hinsley

The Taff Estuary in Cardiff (South Wales) is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its wintering waders and wildfowl. It is part of the larger Severn Estuary which is of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and is a Special Protection Area under the terms of EEC Directive 79/409.

Although the intertidal area of the Taff comprises only 2% of that of the Severn as a whole, it supports up to 10% of the Severn Dunlins and 26% of the Redshanks. The feeding densities of waders in the Taff are comparable to those of the very best wader habitat in Britain. The wintering population of Redshanks in the Taff has so far remained stable, despite the national decline in winter numbers of this species.

Part of the attractiveness of the Taff to waders and wildfowl lies in the presence of high level mudflats. These are the last areas to be flooded by the incoming tide and the first to be exposed on the ebb, and so are available for the birds to feed on for the longest time. This area, and the saltmarsh above it is used also as a roost site by several species of waders including Dunlin, Redshank and Curlew on all but the highest spring tides. A previous roost site adjacent to the Taff disappeared several years ago under a rubbish tip, and alternative roost sites are now about 6 miles away. At present many of the Redshanks avoid having to leave the estuary by roosting on two derelict jetties or, exceptionally, in calm conditions, by roosting out into the water.