

REFERENCES

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Jeff Kirby and Mike Moser, British Trust for Ornithology, Beech Grove, Tring, Herts., HP23 5NR, U.K.

N.B. Staffing of the estuaries programme is currently in a state of flux. Mike Moser has left the section to take up his position as the BTO's Director of Development. Jeff Kirby started as Asst. Estuaries Officer on 1st September 1986, and Dr. Robert Prys-Jones will take up his post as Estuaries Officer on 1st January 1987.

1987 BTO SURVEY OF NESTING LAPWINGS *VANELLUS VANELLUS* IN BRITAIN

Michael Shrubbs

Many birdwatchers believe that Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* are declining rapidly as nesting birds in Britain, particularly in lowland farmland. The evidence is ambivalent: the National Common Birds Census index shows no very sharp decline but there are marked regional differences. My own experience over 25 years in SW Sussex is of reasonably constant numbers - a statement which covers wide fluctuations and a great diminution in breeding distribution. To gain a better insight into these problems the BTO is doing a sample survey of nesting Lapwings in England and Wales in April 1987.

The survey requires one complete count of nesting pairs in a randomly selected tetrad in each 10 km square in England and Wales. The aim is to record both the number of pairs nesting and full details of the habitats used. In farmland, the nesting habitat often differs from that used to rear chicks and loss of preferred nesting habitats may partly account for declines in farmland populations of this species. We are not asking observers to check nests. Counts will be based on incubating birds (which are often easy to spot on short vegetation or bare ground), birds standing guard near nests or displaying birds, with counting done as much as possible from paths, tracks and roads to minimise disturbance; accurate counts are also easier to obtain in this way.

Inevitably this exercise demands careful habitat recording. The objective in counting a strictly random selection of tetrads is to make it possible to compare the results with the MAFF June census. This records cropping on every farm of more than one acre in England and Wales annually, on a county basis and, in some cases, a parish basis. Pilot work for the Lapwing Survey in 1986 suggested that the habitat recording required poses comparatively few problems and definitions of technical farming terms are provided. The most difficult problems arose with autumn cereal fields and

the identification of grass fields. Autumn cereals may or may not be 'tram-lined' and the difference is possibly significant, as it affects the density of crop stands. Lapwings also tend to nest in autumn cereals only if bare patches are present, perhaps as the result of flooding in winter. Observers need to specifically check and record these points in any occupied autumn cereal fields. In grassland, correctly identifying leys, permanent grass and rough grass poses problems for everyone, including farmers! The differences are important, however, and should be made whenever possible. The presence or absence of livestock (cattle, sheep or horses or combinations thereof) is also needed. Otherwise crop recording proved very straightforward. The presence of spring cultivation, for example spring cereals, sugar-beet (or similar crops) or stubble or plough is probably important to nesting Lapwings and accurate details on this subject are quite scarce. Space is also provided to record non-agricultural nesting habitats. A detailed instruction and recording card has been devised and all observers taking part will be supplied with a copy of the 1:25 000 Ordnance Survey maps of their tetrads, on which to record occupied fields and the field boundaries.

The total number of tetrads involved is about 1 600, of which a proportion are in urban or other areas unlikely to attract nesting Lapwings. Realistically I believe we shall need about 500 observers to guarantee full coverage. I know that some regional organisers' observer forces are thinly stretched and help from interested Wader Study Group members would therefore be very welcome. Can you please get in touch with me, as national organiser, at the address below:

Michael Shrubbs, Hillcrest, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys, LD5 4TL, U.K.