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FARMING FOR BIRDS

Lapwing



Andrew Hay (RSPB Images)

This distinctive bird gives a tumbling display flight over breeding territories in spring.

Lapwings can be found on all types of farmland, but are scarcer in purely arable or intensive grassland systems. The UK population of the lapwing fell by at least 40% between 1970 and 1998. This decline has been largely caused by the loss of mixed farming and spring cropping, and the intensification of grassland management. Declines in the west of the UK are leading to local extinctions.*

*Data source: British Trust for Ornithology

WHAT DO LAPWINGS NEED?

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

Lapwings breed between mid-March and July. They nest on spring-tilled arable land or on short grassland with a low stocking rate. Arable nesting birds often walk their chicks onto grazed pasture to feed.

Lots of soil and ground invertebrates throughout the year

Lapwings feed mainly on earthworms, leatherjackets, insects and their larvae. They generally feed where they can find lots of these, such as in grazed pasture. Wet grassland is a particularly important source of food.

GUIDELINES OVERLEAF

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LAPWINGS?

ON SET-ASIDE

- In areas with breeding lapwings, seek a derogation from the set-aside rules to cultivate a field or a two hectare plot. This should ideally be located adjacent to grazed pasture, and should not be near a wood or tall hedge. It should be ploughed in November, or ploughed and disced in February, to create a fallow area for nesting from mid-March onwards. Avoid cutting or cultivating the plot between mid-March and mid-July.
- In purely arable areas, lapwings can make use of a set-aside derogation plot if the vegetation remains short or sparse through until mid-July. It may be necessary to spray the plot to control the regeneration in May or June.

ON ARABLE LAND

- After mid-March, try to avoid destroying lapwing nests during cultivation, hoeing or rolling operations. If a series of operations is necessary, try to undertake them all within a week, so that failed pairs can re-nest safely.
- In mixed farming areas, plan the rotation to ensure that some spring-sowing or a set-aside derogation plot is located next to grazed pasture every year.

ON GRASSLAND

- Do you have any unimproved pastures where a short, tussocky sward can be maintained with a low stocking rate throughout the spring? A high proportion of lapwing nests will be trampled if stock levels exceed one cow per hectare between mid-March and the end of June. Heavy grazing from late summer onwards will provide a short sward for nesting lapwings the following spring.
- Create or keep damp meadows or pastures. Lapwings find more food on areas that have damp soils throughout the summer. You can wet areas by raising ditch water levels or blocking field drains. Even small wet areas in field corners can create feeding areas for chicks.
- Growing spring-sown arable fodder crops will benefit lapwings in areas that are largely improved grassland. The spring tillage provides nesting habitat for lapwing and adjacent grazed pasture provides good feeding habitat. Try to avoid destroying lapwing nests during operations after mid-March.

Many of these guidelines may be funded by agri-environment schemes. In England, new arable options to benefit lapwings can be funded by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme from 2002. You can get further information on these and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



Agricultural Adviser, The RSPB, UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: 01767 680551



Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, NAC, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2RX. Tel: 024 7669 6699



The Game Conservancy Trust, Fordingbridge, Hampshire SP6 1EF. Tel: 01425 652381

PRIORITY ACTION

Provide spring tillage or short, extensively grazed pasture for nesting.

SET-ASIDE MANAGEMENT

If spring crops are not a practical option, you can create a lapwing plot on set-aside using a derogation.



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