



# Lapwing

(*Vanellus vanellus*)



*“See them fall wailing over high hill tops with hue and cry,  
like uneasy ghosts slipping in the dishevelled air”*

Rex Warner

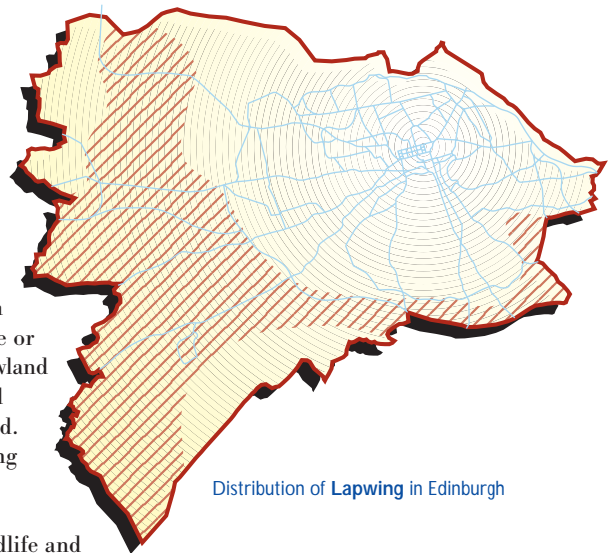
## STATUS & ECOLOGY

The lapwing is a bird of open farmland. It has a marked preference for mixed farms with extensive areas of arable/improved grassland and unimproved grassland. The bird has experienced a catastrophic decline in numbers over the last twenty years, most noticeably on lowland arable areas of England south of the Mersey and the Humber. In Scotland the story is not so bleak, south-east Scotland being home to an estimated population of 12,500 pairs, about 5.5% of the British population. The population in the immediate area of Edinburgh is one of the most abundant in Britain. Efforts must be made to safeguard this and ensure its continuation in the light of the dramatic crashes elsewhere.

Lapwings form large mobile flocks in winter, often being bolstered in number by birds migrating from eastern Europe. They feed on earthworms and other invertebrates on or close to the surface, which accounts for their preference for invertebrate rich, free draining, less acidic soils. Although preferring grassland to arable areas, they can be found on winter-drilled cereals, winter stubble, rotational set-aside and fallow fields. Some winter sites are favoured year after year, although activities which make invertebrates more accessible, such as local flooding, muck-spreading or ploughing, will be exploited.

The preferred habitat during the breeding season, between mid-March and early July, is a mix of tilled ground with grassland rich in insects close by for the young. A typical clutch consists of three or four eggs in a scrape excavated on the ground. Away from typical lowland farmland areas lapwings will nest on badly drained or abandoned pastures, hay fields, lowland grazed moorland or upland grassland. They rely on mass mobbing to deter predators during the breeding season.

The lapwing is protected under the general provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and is listed under Appendix II of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. It is an offence to injure, kill or capture the bird, to disturb nesting birds and to take their eggs.



Distribution of Lapwing in Edinburgh

## FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

### Impacts

The national decline in lapwing numbers and distribution has arisen as a consequence of the general decline in mixed farming practices and the subsequent loss of arable and grassland mosaics in the British countryside. Other changes in agricultural practice, which have had a detrimental effect on lapwings, include autumn/winter sowing of cereals, denser crop production and increased silage production. Increased fertiliser use, land drainage, earlier planting, use of quick growing strains and predominance of rye-grass monocultures has also reduced the value of the grasslands as chick foraging habitats.

Building and infrastructure development on farmland close to the city has removed suitable habitat. Increased extraction associated with these developments have lowered the water table and meant the drying out of other sites.

### Threats

Continuing agricultural intensification and improvement, coupled with the further advance of the built environment, remain the principal threats to the lapwing.

## CURRENT ACTION

The lapwing is identified by the UK Biodiversity Group as a 'Species of Conservation Concern', but no UK Action Plan is to be produced. However, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has launched a national 'Lapwing Appeal' that aims to highlight the plight of farmland birds and lobby for changes in government agricultural policy. Locally there is no current conservation action aimed specifically at the lapwing.

The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) have organised a winter farmland bird survey for three successive winters from 1999/2000. This aims to encourage members of the public to record winter numbers and locations of winter farmland birds, including lapwing. The Pentland Hills Rangers currently record lapwing sightings along a series of commonly patrolled transects in the Regional Park.

## ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

### Objective

To maintain the population and distribution of lapwing in Edinburgh.

### Targets

To determine the distribution of lapwing in Edinburgh and encourage the implementation of farm management practices that will benefit breeding and wintering lapwing.

## Actions

**Circulate existing RSPB management guidelines for lapwing to farmers and other relevant landowners, by Summer 2000, and encourage the implementation of these, from Autumn 2000, through linkage to farm biodiversity plans, agri-environment schemes and on-going farmland conservation work.**

(Actioned by: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Edinburgh Green Belt Trust)

**Encourage, from Winter 2000, the recording and monitoring of lapwing on farms through the development and use of farm biodiversity plans.**

(Actioned by: Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Edinburgh Green Belt Trust)

**Encourage local farmers, landowners and land users to become involved in the BTO/FWAG Winter Farmland Bird Survey over the Autumn/Winters of 1999/2000, 2000/2001, 2001/2002.**

(Actioned by: Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership & British Trust for Ornithology)

**Identify a site in Edinburgh that could act as best practice for lapwing habitat management, by Summer 2003.**

(Actioned by: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group)

### Key Contacts

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group  
Edinburgh Green Belt Trust  
British Trust for Ornithology

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## CHAMPIONS



The Edinburgh Green Belt Trust

