

Lapwing

Description

The lapwing is a popular bird of farmland and wetland. Once the lapwing was a widely distributed bird but has been in decline in recent years. The upper parts have a metallic green and purple sheen, especially in bright light. The underparts are pure white with rich buff under the tail and a broad black breast band. The lapwing's head is crowned with a long thin wispy crest. It has a short bill, and gathers most of its food from the ground, but has typically long red legs. The lapwing has broad, rounded wings, which it flaps noisily during its dramatic, plunging display flight, giving the bird its common name.



The lapwing's nest is a simple lined scrape on the ground, in which four legs are laid. On hatching, the chicks become mobile rapidly, feeding themselves within hours. The adults remain in attendance until fledging and the whole breeding cycle takes under 70 days. The chicks are extremely vulnerable in the first two weeks. Changes in crop regimes, drainage and poor rush management are huge threats to this species.

Distribution

A breeding wader survey across NI in 2013 estimated that Lapwing have declined by an alarming 89% since 1987. Core areas in Northern Ireland where the lapwing can still be found breeding on open wet grassland, include managed farmland around Lough Beg, Lough Neagh and Lough Erne. The polders along Lough Foyle are also a stronghold for this special bird.

Action

DARD's Countryside Management Scheme and Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme include measures to protect and enhance lapwing habitat.

Some key sites have been designated ASSI (including the Lough Neagh/Lough Beg shoreline). Positive management under the MOSS has been carried out.

The RSPB manage large parts of their reserve network aimed at providing suitable habitat, including a short sward for lapwing in the spring. RSPB's Conservation Advisors also work with over 400 farmers providing them with specialized habitat management advice for this species.

Further Information

<http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/species.asp?item=27>

MLA Species Champion