

Lapwing Habitat 1960

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

The 1920s were a period of depression in British agriculture and this was apparent from the general untidiness of the countryside, eg overgrown hedges, blocked ditches, waterlogged ground often with rushes, and declining pasture quality. By the mid 1930s (the setting for the 1937 Lapwing Habitat Enquiry) there was a marked improvement in technical efficiency, but still insufficient confidence to stimulate longterm projects such as drainage and land reclamation. But World War Two effectively gave the countryside a gigantic 'springclean' – hedging, ditching, drainage, reclamation, ploughing of commons, increased use of fertilizers and machines, and generally much more intensive use of the land.

The Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) Habitat Enquiry of 1937 had aimed to determine the main factors governing the distribution and numbers of the species. The new survey was designed as supplementary to this and set out primarily to discover whether there had been any recent major changes.

In all, 135 observers or teams of observers took part, about 80% from farmland, but the figures were not sufficiently robust to allow more than indications of any changes. Local gains and losses were remarkably evenly balanced and it seemed there had been no marked general change in status. Also although protection, egg-stealing, predation, disturbance and others had all been cited as possible factors affecting numbers of Lapwings, evidence showed that the most important factors were changes in the habitat itself, and by far the most important of these were the use of new and improved methods of farming, all tending towards greater efficiency and productivity. But to claim that modern agricultural methods were alone responsible for declines was an unwarranted generalisation.

In some study areas Lapwings were present throughout the year, while in others they were absent during certain periods. This regular attachment to a place at certain seasons was noted as an important feature of the Lapwing's distribution, but why certain areas should be regularly used year after year at a certain season, while other land, apparently equally suitable, was used only irregularly or not at all, even to the extent of adjacent fields, was noted as warranting further investigation. For breeding at least the height of the vegetation was clearly important, but it did not explain a preference for particular fields at other seasons.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were asked to look for Lapwings in their chosen area all through the year and ideally to make at least two visits each month. On each visit they were asked to note (on a supplied form) the numbers of Lapwings present and to record which habitat they were in. Unlike the 1937 enquiry when 45 habitat types were listed, observers were asked to classify their study area in accordance with W B Yapp's 'Classification of the habitats of British Birds'

(*Bird Study* 2: 111-121). It was also hoped to obtain some information on flocking behaviour and other points.

Purpose of Data Capture

The primary aim was to determine if there had been any changes to the habitat preferences of the Lapwing through the year, especially following the major changes which had occurred in agricultural practices since the 1937 enquiry.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The twelve month period from 1 April 1960 to 31 March 1961.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO as a Trust-aided enquiry. Some staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, particularly R.F. Giles and F.C. Hirst, supplied information on various points.

Organiser(s)

Michael Lister

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Lister, M.D. 1964. The Lapwing habitat enquiry, 1960-61. *Bird Study* 11: 128-151.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* vol.6 no.4 (December 1959), vol.7 1-4 (1960) and vol.8 nos 2-4 (June, September and December 1961).

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

3 Transfer Cases containing data and letters. All data and correspondence have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis