

Cropped land for breeding waders



Nigel Blake (rspb-images.com)



Tom Marshall (rspb-images.com)

Lapwings (left) and oystercatchers (right) prefer to nest on bare or sparsely vegetated ground.

From the tumbling display of lapwings over a newly cultivated field to the characteristic call of curlews across grasslands, waders are a familiar and much-loved feature of our farmland.

Worryingly, numbers are declining in Scotland for a range of reasons. We are asking if you can do your bit to help ensure that we don't lose these wonderful birds from our countryside.

This worksheet aims to show a number of techniques that allow you, as a farmer, to improve the chances for nesting waders to breed successfully on your land, at minimal cost to yourself.

CROPPED LAND FOR BREEDING WADERS

We have included some immediate suggestions about what you can do if you have birds in a field that you are just about to operate on. There are also some ideas that might allow you to develop a part of your farm to enhance habitats for breeding waders.

Two species of breeding wader, lapwings and oystercatchers, are commonly associated with cropped land and fallow. Both species prefer to nest on bare or sparsely vegetated ground, and so are most commonly found on land that has, or will be, cultivated in spring. Clearly, this can result in birds losing nests as




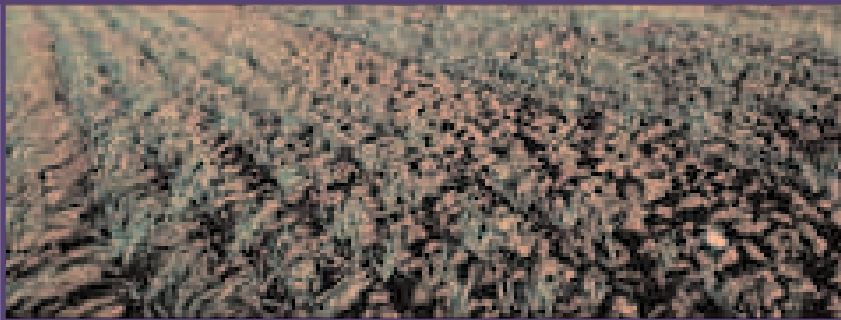
a result of mechanical operations undertaken in the fields.

You can determine whether you have any waders nesting in a field that you plan to cultivate by walking to the centre of the field looking for any birds taking off from the ground. Lapwings and oystercatchers will tend to fly when you get to within 200m of the nesting area. Therefore, as long as you can see all parts of the field, you should be able to determine whether there are birds present. If the birds are sitting on eggs they will fly away to an adjacent field and return between 20 and 50 minutes later to resume incubating. If they have chicks,

they are more likely to fly overhead, calling anxiously. You should ideally walk the field on the evening before you plan operations because if birds are sitting they have plenty of time to get back on the nest before you start working the field. When you are in the tractor working the field the birds will sit much more tightly, often not flying off until you are 5–10 m away from the nest. So, by checking the evening before you know where, in the field, you need to be particularly vigilant for locating birds sitting on nests when you are on the tractor

OPEN UP FOR MORE ADVICE

WADER-FRIENDLY FARMING MANAGEMENT CALENDAR FOR CROPPED LAND

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
<p>ACTION: Consider creating fallow plots in centre of fields by ploughing or discing</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides vital nest sites</p>		<p>ACTION: Consider growing a spring cereal or root crop in large, open fields</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides vital nest sites</p>	 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Chris Knights (rspb-images.com)</p>				<p>ACTION: Plan future crop rotations so any spring cropping is adjacent to either wet/boggy areas, or extensively grazed pasture</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides ideal mix of nesting and feeding sites</p>	 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Nigel Blake (rspb-images.com)</p>				
	<p>ACTION: Try completing all machinery operations, particularly in all large, open fields</p> <p>BENEFITS: Minimises disturbance of future nests</p>		<p>ACTION: If machinery operations are necessary, try to complete within 10 days (and then leave for six weeks). Consider marking or moving nests (under licence) during operations</p> <p>BENEFITS: Minimises disturbance of any replacement nests</p>				<p>ACTION: Consider leaving stubbles over winter followed by a spring crop*</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides bare vegetation in the following spring, which is ideal for nesting lapwings</p>					
 <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)</p>			<p>ACTION: Try to maintain some damp areas or wet flushes*</p> <p>BENEFITS: Provides vital insect food for adults and chicks</p>									

This leaflet is supported by the following organisations:



RSPB Scotland Headquarters,
Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace
Edinburgh, EH4 3TP
Tel: 0131 311 6500
www.rspb.org.uk/scotland



Scottish Agricultural College,
King's Buildings, West Mains Road,
Edinburgh EH9 3J
Tel: 0131 535 4000 www.sac.ac.uk



NFU Scotland, Head Office, Rural
Centre – West Mains, Ingliston,
Midlothian EH28 8LT
Tel: 0131 472 4000 www.nfus.org.uk



Scottish Crofting Federation
Lochalsh Business Park, Auchtertyre
Kyle of Lochalsh, IV40 8EG
Tel: 01599 566 365 www.crofting.org

*There may be opportunities to support these management practices through agri-environment schemes.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.

For further information about improving conditions for farmland waders, contact the RSPB on 0131 311 6500 or via waderfriendlyfarming@rspb.org.uk

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WADER-FRIENDLY FARMING ON CROPPED LAND

