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for people
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Lapwing (peewit, peesweep)



The lapwing is a distinctive, black-and-white wading bird with a wispy crest. In spring lapwings have a tumbling display flight and distinctive 'pee-wit' call.

CALENDAR

Breeding season:

Late March to early July.

Nest:

On open ground with short or no vegetation. Ideally, lapwings prefer to nest in groups for collective nest defence.

Winter:

Lapwings are numerous in winter, with large numbers migrating to Ireland from other areas of Europe.

HABITAT

In spring/summer, lapwings breed on lowland wet pastures with short grass and on heath or bog with short vegetation. In arable areas, they also nest in spring-sown crops. In winter, they congregate in lowland areas, on estuaries and short, permanent grasslands.

DIET

Adults feed mainly on earthworms, beetles, spiders and a range of insect larvae, although a wide variety of invertebrate prey can be taken. Chicks feed on small beetles, flies and insect larvae, earthworms become increasingly important as chicks develop.

HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE LAPWINGS?

- Create a mosaic of cereals and grassland in areas of mixed farming. Spring-sown crops provide nest sites and grassland provides feeding habitat for chicks. Winter-drilled crops are too tall and thick for nesting and chick rearing.
- When cultivating, look out for and mark nests, for example with canes. Nests are destroyed during harrowing, sowing and rolling. The markers should be at least 20 m away from nests to avoid attracting predators. Alternatively, complete all agricultural operations within 7–10 days. The field should then be left for six weeks to allow lapwings to complete nesting and chick rearing.
- Avoid broad spectrum insecticides on crops-insects are an important food source for adults and chicks.
- In grasslands, heavy grazing from late summer onwards will provide a short sward for nesting lapwings the following spring. Cattle grazing creates the more diverse vegetation structure preferred by lapwings.
- Remove livestock or reduce numbers during the breeding season (late March to June).
- Create or keep damp meadows or pastures. Damp areas provide an abundance of food, particularly earthworms, throughout the summer. You can wet areas by raising ditch water levels or blocking field drains.
- In grass-dominated areas, try to introduce spring-sown arable fodder crops to the rotation, preferably adjacent to cattle grazed pasture.

You can get further information on this and other ways of managing your farm for wildlife from:



The RSPB,
Northern Ireland HQ,
Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT.
Tel: 028 9049 1547

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Countryside Management Division
Annexe D, Dundonald House,
Upper Newtownards Road,
Belfast BT4 3SB Tel: (028) 9052 0922

Lapwing distribution

Data provided by *The New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1988–1991*. British Trust for Ornithology, Scottish Ornithologists' Club and Irish Wildbird Conservancy (now known as Birdwatch Ireland).



Filled dot = breeding

Open dot = present during the breeding season