B-A1 LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus* SPECIES ACTION PLAN

1. Introduction

An unmistakeable bird, well known to country people with its large wispy crest and black and white flight pattern, at close range its beautiful iridescent green and blue plumage can be seen.

Lapwing nest on the ground in short grassland or on bare patches where they can see approaching predators. Chicks are led to damp grassland or longer grass areas that provide cover and an abundance of small invertebrates such as worms and beetle larvae.

Flocks are commonly seen in the autumn, winter and spring but these flocks contain migrants from the Continent, which are not part of our breeding population.

2. Current status

In England and Wales, lapwing populations remained stable until around the mid 1980s, but a marked decline has become apparent since then. A Welsh survey in 1987 gave an estimated population of only 7,448 pairs. There was a 70% decline in this Welsh breeding population between 1987 and 1998 to fewer than 1700 pairs. Less than 33 sites in Wales now have more than 10 pairs, only five have more than 20 pairs and only two areas were found with a breeding population of more than 50 pairs.

Very few sites in Monmouthshire now support breeding birds, those few sites with lapwing generally have only one or two pairs and nesting success may consequently be low. The only sites with ten or more pairs, known to the RSPB's Lapwing Recovery Project in 2000, were in the Usk Valley, at Llangybi and near Chain Bridge. The Llangybi colony had 23 pairs in 2000 and 2001 but in 2002 was reduced to just four pairs. Other sites with smaller colonies are in the Usk Valley near Llanellen, and in the Tregare/Penrhos area.

Over-wintering lapwing flocks are frequent along the Severn Estuary, and in severe weather these flocks may move inland, sometimes to reservoirs such as Llandegfedd.

Lapwings, their nests and eggs, are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. It is also included in the Section 74 list of the CROW Act. As the species is widely dispersed on agricultural land and may move site each year (depending on the timing and nature of the crop), it is difficult to protect it through SSSI legislation or nature reserve status. However, acquisition of substantial areas of farmland and enhancement of such farmland through creating wetter fields, by conservation bodies, can be effective. In the Newport City Council area,

flooding of areas of farmland at the Newport Wetland Reserve (NWR) has greatly increased the numbers of nesting lapwing and other waders. In the 1990s only three or four pairs nested here, but in 2001 there were 17 pairs and this increased further, to 37 pairs, in 2002.

Lapwing is declining nationally and is a UK BAP species of conservation concern. It is now recognised by the RSPB as of Red List status following the 1998 national survey, which revealed a 48% reduction in ten years; and the RSPB has produced a species action plan for this species. In Wales the decline has been greater than in England. Neighbouring counties, to Monmouthshire, all support small, scattered populations. Caerphilly and Torfaen County Borough Councils and Brecon Beacons National Park have also identified the lapwing as a priority species.

3. Associated Habitats

Although lapwings are primarily birds of arable farmland and river valley grasslands in Monmouthshire, they can also be found on species-rich grassland, Rhos pastures, upland moors, lowland heath and around wetland edges.

4. Associated Species

Creating the right wetland conditions for lapwings will ensure that suitable habitat is available for other declining ground-nesting waders such as redshank, snipe and curlew. Wetter habitats such as ditches and ponds will attract small birds such as reed bunting as well as amphibians and dragonflies.

An increase in areas of spring-sown crops (thereby leaving winter stubble), or of set-aside areas or strips, could be highly beneficial to lapwings and to other declining farmland birds. Species such as tree sparrow, linnet and yellowhammer depend on farmland habitat where there are good supplies of seeds of wild plants. Stubble crops (with associated weeds) and set-aside (where no herbicides are used and wild plants can set seed) will provide good feeding sites for seed-eating birds in the winter months. Intensively farmed land, with heavy use of pesticides, provides little food for these birds.

5. Current factors affecting the species

5.1. The widespread practice of sowing in the autumn rather than the spring results in the grassland or crop being too long by the spring to be suitable for nesting. The 1987 survey in England and Wales showed that 96% of birds nested on spring-tilled land where there is much bare ground or very short vegetation.

5.2. Sowing of crops in the late spring and spraying of crops with herbicides, both have detrimental effects on breeding birds. Maize planting in particular often coincides with the period when birds are already on eggs whilst spraying of other crops occurs when birds may have chicks. Tractors or other machinery can crush eggs and chicks. Ideally crops

should be left untouched from March until late June to allow lapwings to lay eggs and rear their chicks without facing the hazards from agricultural activities. However, this is not always possible with maize. Set-aside strips are readily used by nesting lapwings, but if the strips are sprayed, then the nests will be destroyed.

5.3. Heavy use of pesticides will reduce insect and other invertebrate food for the chicks and adults.

5.4. High stocking rates, and a change from cattle to sheep grazing, have also contributed to the decline. High stocking rates result in high nest losses from trampling or desertion. The numbers of sheep in Wales increased three fold between 1945 and 1992, and stocking rates per hectare have doubled in this period. Cattle grazing is the optimum grassland management for lapwing. Areas of taller grass, cattle footprints in the mud and cowpats help make lapwing nests better concealed. Sheep produce an even low sward where nests of lapwings can be very conspicuous, and susceptible to predators.

5.5. Drainage schemes lower the water table, dry out grasslands and lead to loss of ponds. Damp ground is favoured by both adult lapwings and their chicks for feeding. Edges of even small wetlands can provide excellent feeding opportunities and cover for chicks.

5.6. High numbers of crows and other predators can have an adverse effect on low populations of lapwings through causing heavy nest (eggs and chicks) losses. Lapwings prefer to nest in colonies of up to 20 or more pairs. Large numbers of lapwing can then mob predators and drive them away from the nest sites. Where only one or two pairs nest in a field, they are much less effective at deterring nest predators.

5.7. Disturbance by people and dogs or vehicles can keep adult lapwing off their nests; eggs become chilled and are exposed to predators.

5.8. Inappropriate land management (such as planting of trees on damp grassland) or lack of hedgerow maintenance reduces the suitability of the land for lapwing. Open farmland (without tall hedges or copses), is preferred by lapwings, because visibility is better and there will be fewer crows or other predators, that require trees to nest in.

6. Current action

6.1. Nationally the RSPB and BTO have drawn attention to the catastrophic recent decline in lapwings and the agricultural changes that have brought about this decline. The RSPB has been lobbying for agricultural grants for farmers who farm in sympathy to conservation requirements.

6.2. Some Welsh nesting sites grazed by cattle or horses already gain support from the Tir Gofal agri-environment scheme, to offset the costs of lapwing friendly management.

6.3. Sympathetic stock management is also eligible for consideration for support under Tir Gofal.

6.4. All known breeding sites holding more than 10 pairs are monitored annually by the BTO and RSPB.

6.5. The RSPB Lapwing Recovery Project (Wales) has identified areas of importance. The project also provides information packs for landowners on management for Lapwing (packs available from RSPB). These include advice such as removing stock when lapwing are found to be displaying and/or breeding in a field and re-wetting areas to help provide good feeding habitat.

6.6. The RSPB, in partnership with other ornithological organisations, are undertaking research towards better understanding the reasons for successful nesting. They are identifying the optimum distance between swards of rush vegetation and open areas, and the optimum density of the swards. They are also looking into the breeding success of lapwing colonies by counting the number of juveniles in a post-breeding flock rather than the number of chicks (because of the high mortality rate of chicks before achieving juvenile age).

6.7. At a local level, nesting sites can be identified as SINCs or LNRs, which can give some protection and encourage better management.

6.8. MCC provides biodiversity grants, which could be available for enhancement work or monitoring.

6.9. Monmouthshire County Council ran a successful scheme in 2003 and 2004 to reward farmers who manipulated land management so that lapwings nested successfully. The proposal by the Gwent Recorders Forum to include this project in a Species Challenge Funding bid for 2005 had to be dropped because the application window of the bid was after the 2005 breeding season.

6.10. The RSPB produce an Operation Lapwing Pack, which brings together what has been learnt through scientific research and from the experiences of landowners. Advice includes a management calendar for lowland mixed farms.

7. Action plan objectives and proposed targets

7.1. UK Objectives and Targets

Not relevant to this species although the RSPB is giving high priority to lapwing

7.2. Welsh objectives and targets (Lapwing Recovery Project)

1 To arrest the declines on the major lapwing sites in Wales by 2001

2 To increase the Welsh population by 10% by 2004

3 To begin the re-colonisation of the wider countryside by 2010

7.3 Monmouthshire Objectives and Targets

1 Halt the decline in the breeding population in Monmouthshire

2 Enhance breeding success on farmland. Persuade farmers to enter the Tir Gofal scheme and thereby, with financial incentives, encourage lapwings to breed on their farms. Measures might include sowing spring instead of autumn crops, avoiding damage by vehicles to lapwing nests, leaving areas of set-aside (unplanted ploughed land) where lapwings can nest, raising water levels in valley pastures or creating wetland areas.

3 Acquire and manage land for wetland birds. This should be a priority but is costly in terms of land purchase. It can however, attract birdwatchers and other visitors (as at Newport Wetland Reserve) and confer economic benefits on local communities close to the wetland reserve.

4 Re-create wet grassland in river valleys and on the coastal levels, and create new ponds, lakes and marshes adjacent to breeding sites.

5 Establish distribution and monitor the status of lapwing in Monmouthshire.

8. Proposed actions and key partners for lapwing

Action	Key Partners		Timescale	Meets Target
	Lead	Partners		
1. Policy and legislation				
1.1 Ensure policies and strategies do not adversely affect existing breeding populations.	MCC	CCW	Ongoing Projects	1
1.2 Consider the requirements of the lapwing when reviewing agri-environment schemes.	CCW	NAWAD	Ongoing	1 2
1.3 Have regard for the significance of sites supporting breeding lapwing when considering any proposed developments.	MCC	WDA NAWAD, CCW	Ongoing	1 2 4
2. Site protection and management				
2.1 Ensure that important breeding sites are designated as SINCs or LNRs.*	MCC, CCW	GWT, RSPB, GOS	At least 1 site by the end of 2005	1
2.2 Seek to secure appropriate management for this species on at least one site of importance	MCC	Landowners occupiers, GOS, RSPB, GWT	At least 1 site by the end of 2005	1 2 3 4

2.3 Investigate ways of reducing disturbance from walkers, motorbikes and off-road vehicles on vulnerable sites.	Gwent Police	MCC	Ongoing	1 2
2.4 Ensure lapwings are fully considered when assessing any development, which may impact upon the species, paying particular attention to its protection under UK and European legislation.	MCC	CCW, MCS, Dev Plans, Dev control	Ongoing	1
2.5 Ensure opportunities for appropriate mitigation during development are used when avoidance is not an option.	MCC	MCS, Dev Plans, Dev control	Ongoing	1
2.6 Ensure opportunities for enhancing habitat for lapwing are used during the planning process.	MCC	MCS, Dev Plans, Dev Control	Ongoing	1 4
3. Species protection and management				
3.1 Determine factors limiting productivity on key sites and manage accordingly.	MCC	RSPB	Ongoing Projects At least 1 site by the end of 2005.	1 2 4
3.2 Continue to implement wildlife legislation.	Gwent Police	NFU, FUW, CLA	Ongoing	1
4.Advisory				
4.1 Raise awareness of landowners and managers of lapwing requirements in order to promote appropriate management for this species.	MCC	CCW, GOS	Ongoing	2 4
5. Research and monitoring				
5.1 Monitor lapwing populations annually, to improve baseline data and monitor trends. Coordinate a regional survey.	GOS, GBC	GGBAG, Glam BAG	Ongoing Regional Survey 2007	5
5.2. Surveys to find new lapwing colonies	GOS, GBC		Ongoing	5
5.3 Encourage farmers and members of the public to report breeding lapwing to local recorders	FUW, NFU, CLA	Local press	Ongoing	5
6. Communications and Publicity				
6.1.Promote surveys, information about habitat requirements and funding opportunities to the farming community and to the general public.	GOS, GBC, RSPB		Ongoing	1 2

* It is difficult to designate sites for Lapwing in Monmouthshire as most of the sites are cultivated (maize) fields. Due to the rotational nature of arable farming the location of suitable habitat will change frequently.

7. Links with other plans

The plan should be considered in conjunction with the species rich grasslands and floodplain pastures action plan (marshy grassland and seasonally flooded pasture) and any future plans prepared for wetland habitats or arable farmland.

The Communications and Publicity actions are linked to the Public Awareness Action Plan.

8. Sources of information

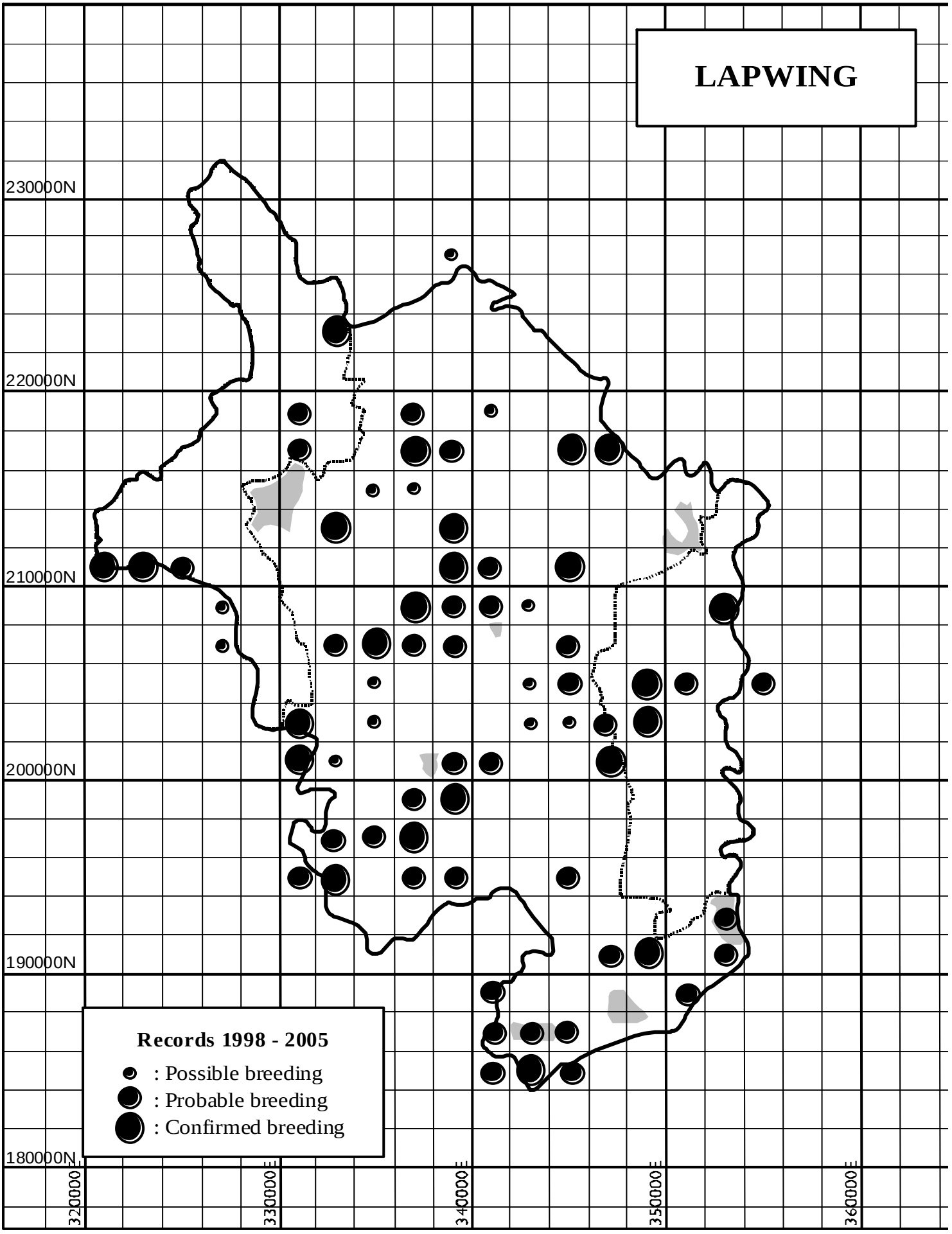
Shrubb, M. 1990. Effects of agricultural change on nesting lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* in England and Wales. Bird Study 37: 115-127

Shrubb, M. & Lack, P. 1991. The numbers and distribution of lapwings *V.vanellus* nesting in England and Wales in 1987. Bird Study 38: 20-37

Tyler, S.J., Lewis, J.M.S., Venables, A. & Walton, J. 1986. Atlas of breeding birds in Gwent. Gwent Ornithological Society.

9. Consultations

The Gwent Ornithological Society was consulted during the preparation of this plan and Dr Al Venables provided the data on distribution from the GOS Atlas surveys 1998-2003.



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