



**Working
for
Waders**

Preventing the loss of
Scotland's wading birds



THE STORY SO FAR

INTRODUCTION

Many of our most iconic wading birds are in steep decline across Scotland. Without urgent action, they could soon be lost.

Responding to this emerging crisis, Working for Waders was set up in 2017 by a range of people involved in wader conservation.

The project has three specific aims:

- To raise awareness of wader declines
- To show that declines can be reversed
- To demonstrate the importance of working in partnership

Working for Waders takes a dynamic approach which has been designed to bring people together to share ideas and collaborate. We have already started to build connections across Scotland, supporting networks and engaging with important stakeholders in conservation and land management.

Working for Waders has a flexible membership and management structure. It is currently co-chaired by SRUC and SNH and includes public bodies, conservation organisations, research organisations and individual farmers and gamekeepers. If you're concerned about the decline of waders in Scotland, please get involved!

Together we are

**Working
for Waders**

www.workingforwaders.com
#workingforwaders

THE WADERS

Wading birds come in all different shapes and sizes. Some species live in Scotland all year round and others only visit for a few months in summer or winter. Working for Waders has a specific focus on five wading birds, but we also work for all waders and wader habitats across Scotland.



LAPWING

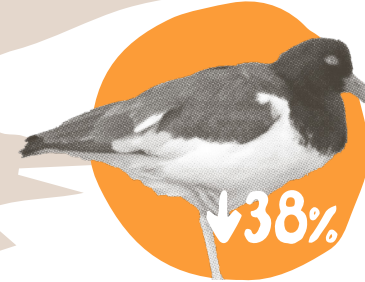
Lapwings are easily identified from other wading birds on account of their striking metallic plumage, their acrobatic courtship display flights, and their distinctive call, which has given them a number of names in Scotland, including peewit, peewee, peesie and teuchat.

Lapwing numbers have dropped by an estimated 55% since 1994.

CURLEW

Curlews are the biggest British waders, and their lonely calls mean that they have featured prominently in folklore and myth. Curlews are also called whaups, and they are often found on estuaries and coastal habitats across Scotland.

The number of curlews breeding in Scotland has declined by 61% since 1994.



OYSTERCATCHER

Oystercatchers are bright and obvious birds with orange beaks and a distinctive, bickering call. They are often found along the seaside, and their traditional habitat is based around beaches and coastlines.

Over the past 22 years, the population of Oystercatchers has declined by 38%.

GOLDEN PLOVER

Golden plovers are shy, elusive birds which breed in moorland habitats across Scotland. Beautifully marked with yellow and golden feathers, the birds develop black bellies during the breeding season.

Large flocks of golden plover from continental Europe over-winter in Scotland, favouring coastal areas in the east and south, as well as several island groups.



REDSHANK

The redshank is a small and dainty wader with bright red legs and a loud, repetitive call. Redshanks breed in rushy grassland around the fringes of remote streams, marshes and wetlands.

Not enough Redshanks are encountered in the Breeding Bird Survey to calculate a population trend for Scotland, but at a UK level their breeding population has declined by 44% over the past 22 years.

BACKGROUND

Wading birds have played a major part in the history and culture of Scotland's countryside. Our ancestors marked the changing seasons by the coming and going of curlews and lapwings, and it's hard to think of any birds which have been so well loved by so many people. But wading birds are in serious trouble, and their numbers have started to dwindle.



The science and ecology of waders is complex and varies widely between different species. Some wading birds naturally migrate across nations and continents during the course of a year, and several of the challenges they face take place on a global stage. However, there is evidence that wader declines in Scotland are linked to problems around breeding.

Many waders come to lay their eggs and raise their chicks on farms and moors across the country, but our countryside has been changing over the last few decades. Traditional breeding habitats are less welcoming for waders than they used to be, but it's hard to point out any single reason why. The reality is complex and it tends to vary wherever you go in Scotland.

Several species are now struggling to produce enough youngsters to replace natural mortality, and that means that they cannot hold on for much longer without active help.

The decline of wading birds has become a national concern, and we must work together to ensure that waders will continue to brighten our countryside for future generations.

I NEVER HEARD THE
SOLITARY WHISTLE OF THE
CURLEW...
WITHOUT FEELING
AN ELEVATION OF SOUL
~ Robert Burns ~



FARMER ENGAGEMENT



When it comes to wader conservation, farmers have many of the answers. Working for Waders depends upon support from farmers and land managers in Scotland, and we began a conversation about wader conservation in the summer of 2019.

In June, forty people attended a meeting at Threeewood Farm near Galashiels, which has won awards for conservation in agriculture. Discussion centred on lapwing conservation, and farmers were shown how to make the most of wetland habitats as part of a mixed arable and livestock business.

Later in the year, a second meeting took place for upland farmers at Falnash Farm near Teviothead with a specific focus on curlews and hill grazing in a landscape where waders have gravely declined over the past few decades.

At both events, farmers were only too keen to offer suggestions and take the initiative on wader conservation. Conversation ranged from seasonal grazing to the process of woodland creation and future funding schemes and there was always an emphasis on working together to deliver change across multiple properties at a landscape scale.

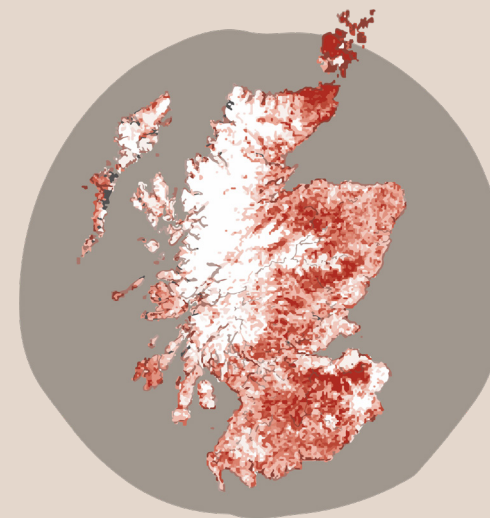
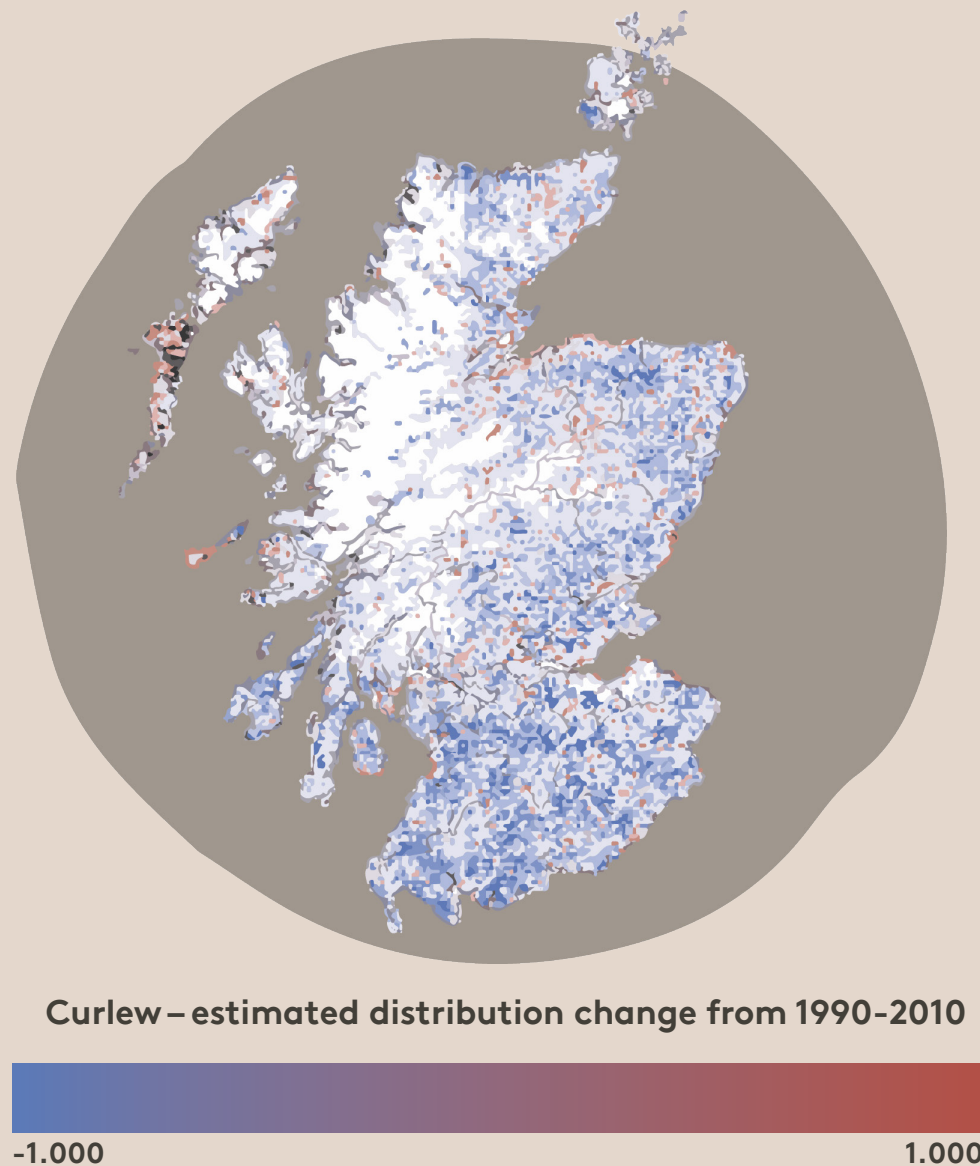
Agricultural intensification has driven wader decline in some parts of the country, but the conservation of waders is rarely about removing productive land from use. Some of the best habitat results come from targeting effort towards rougher, wetter land and making sure that it delivers for wildlife. Farmers can make decisions which represent a win:win for conservation and profitability, and Working for Waders is keen to drive on that discussion, acknowledging that every farm is different and there always has to be space for local conditions.

"WE NEED TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND MAKE SURE THAT CONSERVATION WORKS ALONGSIDE PRODUCTIVE FARM BUSINESSES"

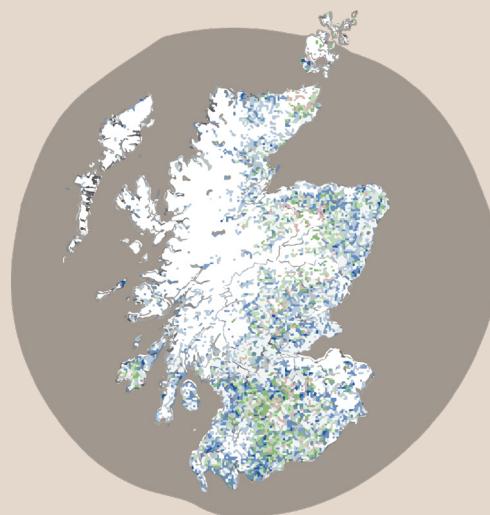
- Sandy Fleming,
Farmer at Falnash



MAPPING



Curlew – Modelled relative abundance in 2010



Curlew – estimated population cooling (percentage decline in occupancy and remaining population)

It's becoming clear that in order to be effective, wader conservation has to be rolled out across large areas, with collaborative projects involving multiple farms, estates and landholdings. There are some excellent models for this kind of work in Scotland, but it's important to target priority areas of particular concern.

Working for Waders has set up wader maps in order to show what work is being undertaken and where resources could be targeted. Farmers and land managers agreed that this is a useful piece of work in itself, particularly when it comes to integrating land use, mapping wader bird hotspots and planning for the future of Scotland's countryside.

British Trust for Ornithology and James Hutton Institute have produced wader hot spot/ cold spot maps showing changes in wader populations across Scotland. A second map is now live on the Working for Waders website, and the project is encouraging people to respond to a survey about wader conservation on their land. Work is also underway to ensure that information gathering is a two-way-street. Farmers have enough forms and paperwork to fill in every day, so the project has begun to innovate and work with land managers to create a flow of information back and forth between the laptop and the field.



If you're working on a wader conservation project, please let us know by filling in a form on our website – we might be able to help put you in touch with other projects in your area.

INSPIRING OTHERS



Working for Waders has been supporting action on the ground across Scotland, backing projects which engage and inspire people to get involved with conservation work.

The RSPB Thrumster Wader Project has focused on curlews across 2,300Ha of Caithness, working with around forty local farmers, crofters and land managers to get an accurate picture of where wading birds are breeding. The survey results are then being used to provide advice and support for local action on the ground. At a community level, kids from Thrumster Primary School thoroughly enjoyed the chance to get out on a farm walk to visit curlew habitats and learn about conservation during the summer.

Further South, Working for Waders also contributed to the Strathspey Wetlands and Waders Initiative which supports wader projects on farmland in the Cairngorms National Park. This initiative has been running since 2009, using various mechanisms to deliver the goods for waders: advisory visits, habitat improvement capital works, support for agri environment applications and provision of

machinery for soil health and soft rush control. Funding from Working for Waders supported the deployment of a part time Project Officer post, the first time this initiative has had a dedicated member of staff.

IT WAS REALLY
INSPIRING
TO HEAR THE WORK
OTHER PEOPLE ARE DOING.
YOU CAN'T UNDERESTIMATE
THE VALUE OF
NETWORKING LIKE THAT

- Norrie Russell, Thrumster Wader Project



FARMER FOCUS

Joe Scott Plummer farms at Blakelaw near Kelso, and he is one of almost forty people who came along to the first Working for Waders farmer event held in association with Soil Association Scotland in June 2019.

In the weeks which followed, Joe used information he gathered on the day to design and create wader scrapes on his farm.

Speaking about the work, Joe said:

"We had a really good discussion at the event. Our host had done a great deal of proactive conservation work on his farm, and it was interesting to see a range of different techniques being used to attract and protect lapwings and curlews.

It was really useful to hear the theory behind wader scrapes. I can understand why farmers might be turned off by the idea of letting water stand on good land, but this is more about making the best of areas which have always been boggy and of limited value.



Having seen some wader scrapes at the event, it was pretty straightforward to take that idea and roll it out at home. Now we have two scrapes at Blakelaw, and it'll be exciting to see how they help waders over the next few years.

Working for Waders helped us feel like we're part of a wider network of action, and it's so encouraging to realise that many farmers are just as concerned about these birds as we are".

"HAVING SEEN SOME WADER SCRAPES AT THE EVENT, IT WAS PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD TO TAKE THAT IDEA AND ROLL IT OUT AT HOME"

- Joe Scott Plummer, Farmer



RESEARCH

Waders are in real trouble because their breeding productivity is often unsustainably low. Working for Waders supported two studies in 2019 to find out more detail about how, why and at what stage breeding birds are failing.

Support went to the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's Demonstration Farm at Auchnerran in Aberdeenshire to tag and record the movements of lapwing chicks during the spring. This enabled researchers to follow individual birds in order to find out how they were using the farm and what became of the youngsters. In the event, ten chicks were tagged - eight fledged but two were not found again. This work should help to build a wider understanding of how birds can be built into the running of an upland farm.

Meanwhile in Lanarkshire, as part of the Clyde Valley Wader Initiative, RSPB Scotland teamed up with a Glasgow University masters student to study the difference in wader nesting success between agri-environment fields and land which is not being actively managed for waders. Seven adjacent farms took part and 139 nests were found. It was encouraging to find that daily nest success was two and a half times higher for lapwings and curlews on fields managed under the agri-environment scheme, but no benefits were apparent for success amongst oystercatchers.



Future work will try to expand the dataset and begin to unpick questions around oystercatcher productivity, and it will also explore the number of nests which need to be managed on agri-environment land to reach sustainable nesting success across the local population.

THESE FINDINGS
ARE USED TO HELP
BETTER MANAGE
THE LAND
AND TO TRY TO
INFLUENCE
GOVERNMENT
GRANT-AID
SCHEMES TOO.

- Dr Dave Parish, Scientist



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Bruce Cooper is the Estate Manager at Glen Prosen near Kirriemuir in Angus, and he is also a co-chair of the Working for Waders Raising Awareness and Sharing Best Practice Action Group. Glen Prosen is managed as a grouse moor and upland sheep farm, and Bruce hosted an event on the estate to share ideas and experiences of wader conservation in June 2018.

Although concerned about the decline of wading birds across Scotland, Bruce has a broad understanding of practical conservation. When it comes to waders, he can draw on over thirty years of hands-on experience.

"Everybody loves wading birds, and it's shocking to see their numbers falling through the floor. We're proud to have good numbers of curlews, lapwings and oystercatchers at Glen Prosen, but it's not a matter of luck.

We work very hard on predator control and habitat management to make sure we keep hold of these birds, and I've no doubt that we would soon lose them altogether if we stopped doing what we're doing. Predators can wipe out broods of young lapwings, and curlews can be very vulnerable when they're young.



Working for Waders has supported some really good science around wader breeding productivity, but the reality is that we already have some of the tools we need to reverse the decline of wading birds. We need farmers and land managers across the country to start working together for waders, and we need help from the government too. Alongside all the work currently being undertaken, we need new measures of adaptive management to be introduced before it's too late"

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IT'S SHOCKING TO SEE THEIR NUMBERS
FALLING THROUGH THE FLOOR"

- Bruce Cooper, Estates Manager





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find out more and get involved at
www.workingforwaders.com



THE STORY CONTINUES...