



**Working  
for Waders**

Preventing the loss of  
Scotland's wading birds



**THE STORY SO FAR...**







**Working  
for Waders**

# 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.

Working for Waders 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 NatureScot (formerly 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

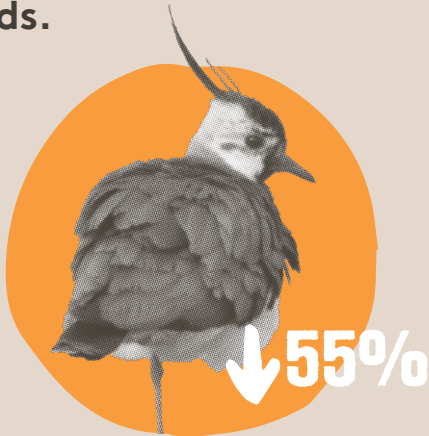
**Working  
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[www.workingforwaders.com](http://www.workingforwaders.com)

#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. While we work for all waders and wader habitats across Scotland, Working for Waders has a specific focus on five species of wading birds.



## 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.

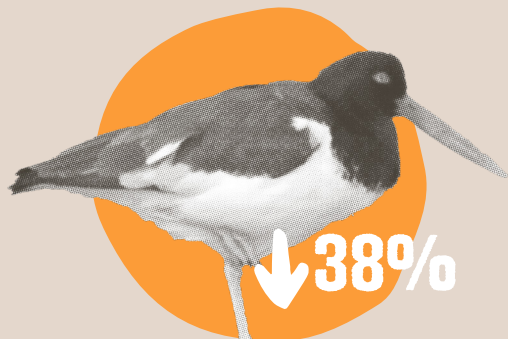


## CURLEW

Curlews are the biggest British waders, and their haunting 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 around Scotland in winter, but nest on moorland and damp fields and bogs.

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





## OYSTERCATCHER

Oystercatchers are bright and obvious birds; black and white with orange beaks and a distinctive, bickering call. They winter on the coast and some remain to breed along the seaside, where their diet includes molluscs and bristleworms. Other populations breed inland, where their diet is mainly based on earthworms.

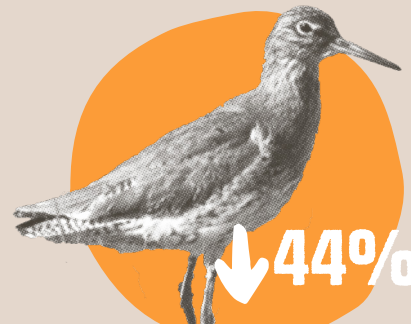
Over the past 22 years, the population of Oystercatchers has declined by 38%.



## 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 slender 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 are dwindling.

The science and ecology of waders is complex and varies widely between different species. Some wading birds naturally migrate across nations and between 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 agricultural land and upland habitats across the nation, 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.



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**“and in my time of dying, I long to hear the  
peewees crying, and hear no more at all”**

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- Robert Louis Stevenson





# STAKEHOLDER engagement



Working for Waders began to deliver a series of engagement events across Scotland during 2019. These events had a specific focus on farmers and land managers, and they were designed to gather and share ideas for practical conservation.

There were plans to build on this initial work during 2020, but the sudden arrival of Covid-19 during March put paid to these proposals.



# #FarmWaderClub

Instead, Working for Waders moved much of this engagement work online, hosting a number of virtual events on social media during the lockdown. These events specifically focussed on wader breeding cycles, encouraging farmers to record and follow the success or failure of birds on their land.

Lively discussions took place during specific wader-themed discussion events, and ideas were circulated under the new hashtag #FarmWaderClub. As a result of these events, specific themes and ideas were developed and turned into videos and podcasts. This allowed farmers to explore technical issues in more depth in their own time, particularly regarding predator control, peatland restoration and the effect of

livestock wormer treatments on soil invertebrates. These useful and practical resources help farmers and land managers who want to do more for wading birds.

We cannot hope to replace the importance of meeting face-to-face, but a fresh approach towards virtual communication allowed Working for Waders to deliver valuable work during the pandemic.



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**“REMOTE CAMERAS CAN BE USED TO MONITOR  
BREEDING ACTIVITY AROUND THE CLOCK”**

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# RESEARCH

**Senior Scientist in Lowland Research at GWCT Scotland**  
**Dr. Dave Parish explains how camera traps have helped to improve their understanding of wader breeding behaviour at the demonstration farm on Deeside.**

“Auchnerran supports high densities of breeding waders. Figures for lapwing and oystercatcher suggest we are in the top 1% of lowland breeding sites for these species in Scotland, and this provides us with a rare opportunity to study these species and contribute to our understanding of the problems they face.

Extensive monitoring has allowed us to see that wader nests at Auchnerran have a very high success rate, with between 71 and 87% of all monitored nests hatching. This is testament to the good predator control work that the local gamekeepers and staff have done over the years, coupled with the shepherd’s vigilance when working around wader nests. However, it also means that we have relatively little information on the causes of clutch and chick loss.



This is where remote cameras have come in handy, since they can be used to monitor breeding activity around the clock. Information captured from our cameras have revealed that fifty percent of clutch losses over the years were from predation, and the footage has also allowed us to identify the culprit in most cases. Two of the nests lost since 2018 were raided by badgers, and common gulls were responsible for the loss of two other clutches. A fifth nest was predated by a hedgehog”.

While shedding light on nest predation, the remote cameras also produce lots of pictures of chicks too, and this kind of monitoring provides an important strand to the work that GWCT Scotland is carrying out at the demonstration farm.

# SUPPORTING action



**During the autumn of 2020, Working for Waders set up a Small Grants Fund to contribute towards practical works to improve wader habitats.**

The Fund generated a great deal of interest from farmers, many of whom were keen to build wader scrapes, manage rushy grassland, carry out predator control and develop signage to raise awareness of wader conservation.

Limited to a maximum grant of £1000, the Fund seeks to demonstrate that small projects can deliver a significant boost for wading birds, and show it is possible to integrate conservation and agriculture without a major cost.



There was a wide geographic spread of applicants from Lockerbie to Shetland and the first Small Grants of up to one thousand pounds were approved early in 2021. We will report further on the success of these projects as they progress into Spring.

We often hear from farmers and land managers who are trying to help wading birds, and we are always happy to help with advice and information on wader-friendly farming.

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# WADER CHAMPIONS

**Gundog enthusiast Luise Janniche spent the spring of 2020 on a mission – protecting a brood of oystercatchers on a farm near her home in Aberdeenshire.**

Alongside a great deal of work to control crows in the area, Luise also set up trail cameras near an oystercatcher's nest in order to learn more about the birds and their habits. Speaking about the project afterwards, she explained that "it was great to see how the birds took turns with the incubation, and also how the adults responded to a variety of 'visitors' at the nest – particularly hares, which often passed by".

After twenty six days of catching crows and monitoring the nest, Luise was delighted when the eggs finally hatched. She was then able to follow the progress of the grey puff-balls, each one immaculately camouflaged against their rubbly stone nest. Two chicks disappeared within a few days, but it was unclear why they should have failed. A third chick (named "Ray") continued to do well, and Luise monitored its progress for thirty five days until it finally fledged and moved away with the parent birds. Her photographs and video footage have been widely shared online, generating some important publicity for wader conservation in Scotland.



After the spring of 2020, Luise is now on a mission to encourage others to help wading birds. She is actively working to collaborate with local farmers, and she also hopes to bring in support from bird ringers and ornithologists to ensure that her local oystercatchers prosper into the future.











# FARMER SURVEY

**Working outdoors throughout the spring and early summer, farmers are often well placed to gather information about breeding waders. Looking to harness this local knowledge, Working for Waders designed a Farmer Survey based on a straightforward system of ticks, crosses and numbers in order to build up a picture of the breeding season in a series of week-by-week updates.**



2020 was treated as a pilot for the survey, but it clearly has the potential to become a valuable tool for improving our understanding of farmland waders. Speaking about the Farmer Recording wader survey, BTO's Mark Wilson said "In some ways, 2020 turned out to be an awkward year to try out a survey like this, but we were pleased to receive ten completed survey forms from all around Scotland - from Dumfries & Galloway to Shetland. Participating farms ranged from 7.5 Ha up to 800 Ha in size, and variation in breeding wader concentrations was even greater - from less than 1 wader reported per square kilometre, to more than 100!

Although all participants encountered some waders during the survey, evidence for successful breeding varied greatly from farm to farm. Combined with information about location, habitat and management on each farm, these kinds of findings could tell us a lot about what works for waders in farmed landscapes. We are now following up with the farmers who took part to try and find ways to make this survey more effective in future years."

# LOCAL KNOWLEDGE



**Scott Mackenzie is the head keeper/stalker on the 23,000 acre Fearann Eilean Iarmain estate in the south of Skye. He is the last gamekeeper on the island, and he works hard to promote and conserve wildlife on the estate.**

Skye is home to a wide variety of wader species, but Scott is worried by the fragmentation of traditional habitats and the decline of traditional land management techniques. In a podcast for Working for Waders which was recorded in the autumn, he also highlighted the challenge of controlling common predators in a landscape which has changed rapidly over the last few years.



"The biggest hurdle is getting people together to formulate a plan and then sticking with that concept through to delivery. Landholdings are so fragmented on Skye, and it sometimes feels like people are pulling in different directions. Some landowners and crofters understand the value of predator control, but others are massively disconnected from the idea. Unless people can start to grasp how important it is to keep on top of foxes and crows, it feels like wading birds are going to struggle badly.

The way forward has to be based on education and partnership working. Skye looks wild and rugged, but in reality it's a working landscape and a place which needs to be actively managed for wildlife and people. Waders are an important part of Skye's culture and heritage, but we need to act fast if we're going to save them".

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find out more and get involved at  
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# THE STORY CONTINUES...

Photos provided by Norrie Russell, Duncan Ireland, Patrick Laurie, Luise Janniche and other Working for Waders contributors.  
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