

Wales Upland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Elenydd Golden Plover Project

Project background

In Wales golden plovers breed in mire, heath and acid grass communities on unenclosed moor, where their nests are placed in short tussocky vegetation. Once hatched, broods feed on invertebrates, such as emerging *Tipulids*, in the nesting area. In contrast, adults may feed much further away. For example, birds fly up to 7km to feed on *Tipulids* and earthworms on or close to the soil surface in the south Pennines, where they often use favoured unimproved and semi-improved enclosed pasture, and are sensitive to their management (Pearce-Higgins & Yalden 2003). Golden plovers in Wales favour lower lying farmland outside the breeding season, using a range of habitats to feed on earthworms and other invertebrate prey (Lovegrove *et al* 1994). Birds that breed in Britain also winter within NW Europe, sometimes within 100km of breeding areas (Wernham *et al* 2002), although there are no data on the movements of birds breeding in Wales.

Golden plover was upgraded from green to amber listing in the UK (Eaton *et al* 2009). In Wales, it remains red-listed due to their >50% decline in breeding population over the last 25 yrs (Johnstone *et al* 2010). The Welsh Assembly Government also listed golden plover as a species of Principal Biodiversity Importance. The first target in the Welsh Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is to increase the population to 80 pairs by 2015, with 40 of these on the Elenydd.

Elenydd SSSI has always been the most important area in Wales for breeding golden plover; a survey in 1982 recorded 112 pairs. However, numbers have fallen quite considerably; just 11 pairs were recorded in 2007 (Johnstone *et al* 2007). The precise reasons for this decline are a little unclear but there is evidence that vegetation density and height is now unsuitable for golden plovers (Johnstone *et al* 2010).

Objectives

For golden plover management outcome should be a contiguous flat (or gently undulating) open moorland with unrestricted views of at least 200m, at least 400m from conifer plantation with a mosaic of grasses/sedges (30%) and heathers (70%) of <5 - 15cm (25% 5cm or less and 75% up to 15cm) in a fine-scale mosaic, bog pools, and bare ground. Availability of short sward (5cm or less) invertebrate-rich permanent pasture within 7 km (5cm or less 15th March – 30th June, and a sward of greater than 10cm 1st July-30th September) is crucial.

The Important Upland Bird Area project has identified a short-term target of 11 pairs of golden plover on the Elenydd as a short-term target. This is based on the population found on the site in the 2007 survey. Management, in the short term, should therefore focus on the areas that held golden plover territories in 2007. However, as appropriate management is already underway at two locations – Abergwesyn Hill and Trumau – the continuation and expansion of this work should be considered the highest priority. The areas identified for management work in the short term are indicated in the following maps.

This project will link in with the wider requirements for large-scale management on the Elenydd to restore habitats (particularly heath & blanket bog) and species which have been damaged over many years. It is a small start on a very large site, but if this approach is successful, then it may

be possible to apply similar ideas over a much larger area to develop truly integrate landscape scale management.

Action Required

- Management of *Molinia* vegetation by mowing/cutting
- Enhanced grazing management

Species Interest

S42 species

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| Golden plover | <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> |
| Skylark | <i>Alauda arvensis</i> |