

Wales Upland Ecosystem Group Priority Action

Hiraethog Wader Project

Project Background

The RSPB has been involved with breeding upland birds in the Hiraethog area (about 285 square km stretching south from Mynydd Hiraethog itself to the northern edges of Migneint) on and off since the mid 1980s. It is now probably the last place in Wales to have a sizeable population of curlew (up to 100 pairs), as well as lapwing (up to 85 pairs - the largest population of breeding lapwings remaining in the Welsh uplands) and golden plover (2 pairs in 2007).

In recent years¹ RSPB have focused on lapwing and curlew, both species experiencing rapid declines across Wales; lapwing -77%, curlew -81%. Since 2007, the number of curlews in this area seems to have remained reasonably stable; based on a CCW/RSPB surveys in 2010, as well as RSPB surveys in 2008 and 2009 and from general observations from 2007 onwards. Lapwings have also appeared to remain stable based on surveys undertaken by RSPB since 2007. No systematic surveys of golden plover have been undertaken on Hiraethog since 2007.

Though the adult lapwing population appears to have remained stable the productivity has consistently been poor, with fewer chicks fledging than evidence suggests is required to maintain a viable population (0.6 chicks per pair on average). However, encouragingly there has been an upward trend in lapwing productivity in recent years.

For curlews there has been quite a lot of variation in both pair density and hatching success between sites. Comparing some of the recent data with that for comparable areas surveyed some time ago, it seems that there has also been variation in population trends between sites, with declines in many parts of the 'moor' proper and much more 'stability' on some sites adjacent to it.

In 2010, RSPB/CCW carried out a combined curlew and habitats/vegetation survey, in order to try to determine if the right mix of features were still present, where they were and at what scale, in order to develop Hiraethog curlew conservation plan in early 2011 and direct management actions thereafter.

Overall Objectives

To halt declines of lapwing and curlew in Hiraethog area and ensure a stable population of both species through adequate breeding success (i.e. to ensure the populations are not 'sinks')

The overall project area has already been identified. Existing lapwing management units will be used; curlew management units will be defined by assessment of curlew territory data and habitat availability.

Within identified management units:

- Lapwing – ensure at least 10ha of contiguous suitable habitat in a predominantly flat (e.g. slopes $\leq 20^\circ$) and open (clear view of $\geq 500\text{m}$) landscape containing damp grassland or spring cultivated arable habitats.

¹ RSPB Cymru with support from CCW, EAW, Snowdonia National Park (SNP) and Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) has been helping lapwing for four years now within a discreet project area (about 216 square km just to the south of the main Hiraethog moor). The aim of this project, which comes to an end in March 2011, has been to implement and evaluate management for lapwing in an upland farming landscape. It is part of a UK wide programme with five trial management sites across the four countries.

- Curlew – ensure at least 10ha of contiguous open, flat (or gently undulating) landscape with unrestricted views of >200m with damp extensively grazed rough pasture, hay meadows, frequent damp habitats e.g. flushes, scrapes, damp depressions and adjacent areas of improved pasture of 5cm or less in height on average.

Within overall project area:

- Assess the populations of both species (through monitoring) to determine the appropriate level of breeding success (productivity) is reached to maintain the populations.
- Adapt management to account for best available knowledge and evidence and ensure achievement of overall project aim.

Action Required

- Enhanced grazing management
- Management of grassland vegetation
- Creation/management of scrapes/damp depressions
- Cultivation of spring-sown arable crops

Species Interest

Key Section 42 Species

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| Curlew | <i>Numenius arquata</i> |
| Lapwing | <i>Vanellus vanellus</i> |

Map of Project Area.