
WADERS AT THREEPWOOD FARM

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My interest in "waders" really started about 12 years ago when we ploughed out a grassland field at Threepwood with a view to putting it into spring barley. Within a week of the field being ploughed lapwings started arriving on it and ever since they have been seasonal visitors. The field has never been put back into grass and has either been sown down to spring barley or put into a forage crop. This means that when the lapwings start to arrive in mid-February the field is either in stubble or is bare as the fodder crop will have been eaten off. Since the arrival of the first lapwings we have undertaken a number of measures to try and help them as well as other waders. Several "scrapes" have been created which are intended to hold water in the spring for their offspring, but this spring in particular the scrapes dried out well before hatching. As a result, we have carted containers of water out to fields where lapwings have been nesting and emptied them into what have become dust bowls.

On a particularly rushy, wet and unproductive part of the farm we have established a "wetland " area which consists of a series of interconnecting shallow ponds and adjoining scrapes. Livestock grazing continues to the edge of the ponds to ensure that the grass is kept short and in the last year five Blue Grey bullocks have been brought in to eat off the roughest grass and make it more palatable for sheep.



In order to see what is happening on the ponds and surrounding area without causing disturbance to livestock or wildlife an "observation platform" has been erected. From this we have watched curlew, lapwing, oyster catcher, redshank, snipe, greylag and Canada

geese, mallard , teal , tufted duck, not to mention smaller birds like swallows, meadow pipits, skylark and yellowhammer, as well as plenty of roe deer.



While it has been particularly exciting and rewarding to see these waders returning annually to the farm, this would never have happened without continuous and rigorous predator control. Being ground nesting birds, waders are highly susceptible to every type of predator from badgers to foxes and crows to gulls. The lapwings spend a huge amount of energy and time in driving off would be predators and if they manage to rear any young to fledgling stage this represents a considerable achievement even when predator control is being carried out. A few years ago, a lapwing here was seen to be taken down in flight by a sparrow hawk, another of the "protected" species like the badger.

It is really disheartening to see what these lovely birds have to endure if they are to stand any chance at all of producing any young, and it is hardly surprising that their numbers continue to decline, with curlews in particular following this downward trend, when there are so many predators going unchecked or untouchable as a result of legal protection. There is now such a wide imbalance between predator and prey that something will need to change rapidly if this downward spiral is to be checked before it becomes too late for some birds. A countryside without the call of curlews or lapwings is unthinkable, but it may not be far from reality without drastic action.

