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# Bowland Wader Project

2015 NEWSLETTER



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## The Bowland Wader Project

Hello, I'm Gavin Thomas, the RSPB's conservation adviser for Bowland. I run the Bowland Wader Project, just one of a number of nationwide projects delivering face-to-face targeted advice and support to landowners and farmers who want to help wildlife thrive on their land.

Bowland is nationally important for breeding wading birds and local farmers are at the forefront of efforts to conserve the area's lapwings, curlews, redshanks, snipe and oystercatchers.

If you would like to be part of this landscape-scale conservation initiative then call me on 07814 462429 or e-mail me at [gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk](mailto:gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk)



## Back to the future - introducing Countryside Stewardship

Agri-environment schemes have been key to helping Bowland's farmers deliver for wildlife in recent years. Defra have now developed an entirely new scheme to replace Environmental Stewardship (ES) which ended last year, and in a fit of slightly confusing nostalgia, have decided to call it Countryside Stewardship (CS). That may ring a bell with some of you - it was indeed the name of the predecessor to ES. In many ways, the new scheme attempts to combine the best bits of ES with the original version of Countryside Stewardship.

To replace Entry and Higher Level Stewardship (ELS and HLS), CS will have a higher-tier and middle-tier. In addition to these, there will be a small Hedgerows and Boundaries Capital Grants Scheme. The higher-tier will look and feel much like HLS, but will be slightly simpler in its design. The middle-tier though will be

quite different, with steps taken to iron out some of the design flaws that hindered the value of ELS as a scheme.

So where ELS allowed total free choice and offered the same £30 per hectare payment rate for all, regardless of the options chosen, the CS middle-tier will be targeted, with payments made per option. Applications will also be competitive and made in a single annual window from July to September. These will then be 'scored' against each other, with those applicants that selected the options identified as a priority for their holding likely to fare best. Basically, the more you are willing to do for wildlife and the environment, the more chance you have of securing an agreement.

The aim of this change is to ensure that those who deliver the most for the environment get priority for what is a reduced

budget, with a shift to 'pounds per option' rather than per hectare. This will help steer applicants towards the options that will be most effective.

The ultimate ambition is that a better targeted, competitive scheme will lead to the right management in the right place, providing better outcomes for the environment and better value for money.

These changes are essential if the worrying declines in our wildlife are to be halted. We're hoping that farmers will embrace CS to continue to deliver for Bowland's wildlife and we are here to help. The Bowland Wader Project will continue to offer support and a free application service, so if you are interested, call Gavin Thomas on 07814 462429 or e-mail him at [gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk](mailto:gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk).

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

## Bowland Wader Surveys - measuring success

Every year, breeding wading birds are surveyed on around 30 Bowland farms. This allows us to monitor how waders are doing on each farm and over time is helping to identify trends for each species more widely across Bowland. When combined with datasets from elsewhere around the UK it will also demonstrate how effective our advice is in helping to reverse farmland bird declines nationally and whether we need to adapt or modify our

approach. For the farmer, surveys can help highlight ways in which areas of the farm can be made more attractive to nesting waders. Survey data is also useful to support applications for grants through Countryside Stewardship.

If you'd like a wader survey on your farm then call Gavin Thomas on 07814 462429 or e-mail him at [gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk](mailto:gavin.thomas@rspb.org.uk).

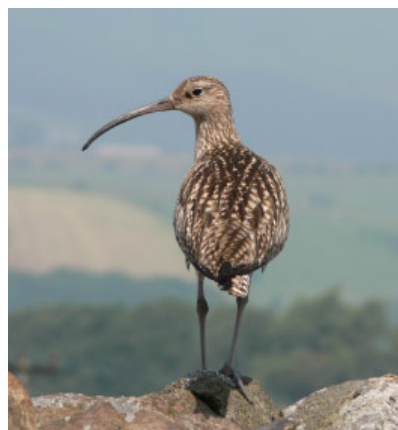
## Attracting Lapwings to your farm

Lapwings returning to Bowland's pastures and meadows is a sure sign that spring is not too far away. But this welcome sight is becoming rarer in many areas of Bowland.

As we enter the latter part of the winter and look forward to spring, it's worth thinking about what you can do on the farm to attract lapwings, or 'tewits' as they are known locally. They can be inspecting potential breeding sites as early as late January if the weather is good and can be back on territory and displaying by mid February.

Lapwings like short grazed grassland, especially more structurally diverse cattle-grazed pastures with scattered tussocks of rushes. Wetter, less agriculturally productive fields with flushes, muddy edged ditches or shallow muddy pools are particularly attractive. By doing the following three things, especially on your least productive, rougher, wetter fields in the run up to spring you can help attract lapwings to nest:

1. A light application of bedding muck can be a lapwing magnet. This breaks up the uniformity of green fields, provides camouflage for nests and chicks and provides a source of invertebrate food for them. It's best to spread it before late March when birds are settling to nest as freshly spread muck can attract predatory crows and gulls.
2. Top your rushes. Lapwings will not nest in rush dominated fields as they rely on a good all round view to protect their nests and chicks from predators. A scattered cover of rush tussocks across a field with thicker patches left in the wettest areas is most attractive to Lapwings and other breeding waders.
3. Create shallow-edged pools or 'wader scrapes' and chamfer off the edges of ditches. Natural, wet features such as flushes and springs provide vital feeding sites for wader chicks. If these aren't available then creating a few muddy-edged, shallow wet areas across the farm provides a good alternative.



Above from top to bottom: Curlew, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Redshank with chick, Snipe  
all photos (C) Gavin Thomas RSPB

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# Farmer's View

Stephen and Alison Kelsall and their children, Josh and Hannah, farm at Higher Landskill Farm in Calder Vale. This 100 acre livestock farm has been owned and run by the Kelsall family for over a century. As well as the day to day management of the farm and its livestock, Stephen works for Farm Plastics Recycling Ltd, is a relief driver for Dugdale Nutrition Ltd and does silaging for a local contractor. Alison runs the on-farm holiday cottage business and works as a Teaching Assistant in the local primary school. They also somehow manage to find time to give their farm wildlife a helping hand!....



The Kelsalls have been working closely with the RSPB Bowland Wader Project and partner organisations for a number of years now to conserve the important population of lapwings, curlews, redshanks, oystercatchers and snipe that nest on their farm.

Natural England's Entry Level Stewardship scheme provides annual payments for basic grassland management for these birds but it is the additional work that has really boosted the wader population on the farm. Targeted cattle grazing, management of rushes and retention of shallow pools, scrapes and ditches provide abundant sources of invertebrate food for chicks.

Stephen and Alison's son, Josh, studied the Extended Diploma in Agriculture at Reaseheath College in Cheshire prior to gaining full-time employment on a dairy farm in Ribchester... "When I was in school I did an Environmental and Land-Based Studies Diploma which included learning about wading birds and their links with farming. Lapwings, in particular, love wet, boggy fields so we created scrapes on our farm so that the lapwings have more areas to feed. We also stock the fields

with cattle as these create the ideal varied sward structure for the birds".

The conservation work at Higher Landskill has increased the numbers of breeding waders on the farm to such an extent that it now has one of the highest densities in Bowland. Lapwings in particular are numerous with well over 30 pairs nesting annually. Alison continues:

"In addition to attracting wading birds, we have also taken steps to encourage other wildlife by installing bat and bird boxes around the farm and various bug habitats made from wooden pallets, drain pipes, garden canes, logs, straw and moss. We have left the gaps behind the barge boards on the farmhouse alone so that the swifts can nest and other wildlife regularly seen on the farm includes numerous garden and countryside birds, bats and brown hares".

"Since 2008 we have offered on-farm accommodation in Caldertop Cottage. We have had several repeat bookings from both British and European visitors who have made particular reference to our commitment to looking after the environment. One guest commented: 'Your focus on nesting birds

incorporated with your farming was one of the main reasons I chose to stay with you'.

"As well as a farm walk which takes guests from the front door, through prime wader habitat, we also have an all-terrain tramper route for those with limited mobility and a bird hide has been built complete with interpretation materials. This provides visitors with a wealth of information on the wildlife and importance of our conservation work. We also have a website and blog and visitors can report their wildlife sightings in the notebook in the bird hide. Our commitment to our farm wildlife, the environment and sustainable tourism has been recognised by several awards and commendations including a Gold Award from the Green Tourism Business Scheme".

"We love our livestock and wildlife and our sympathetic farming style has really helped our business and quality of life. Others should explore the opportunities and enjoyment that nature can provide on their own farms!"

Stephen and Alison Kelsall  
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