Breeding waders on the New Forest – PROGRESS Project.

Introduction

A survey of breeding waders was carried out in 2006 on eight areas within the New Forest, selected sites being Crockford, Pig Bush, Hincheslea, Longwater Lawn, Clayhill, Longslade View, Stonyford Pond and Godshill. The survey, initiated by the Forestry Commission, was designed to provide baseline data as an element of the PROGRESS Project. Fieldwork however was carried out in June only and it is probable that a significant number of breeding attempts particularly by Northern Lapwing Vanellus vanellus, were missed.

Survey methods 2007

Nine areas were selected for a similar survey in 2007 i.e. Stonyford Pond, Crockford (sub-divided for survey purposes into Crockford and Crockford Clump), Pig Bush/Denny, Longwater Lawn, Fulliford Bog, Hincheslea (Longslade View in 2006)?, Holmhill, Clayhill (Burley), and Ditchend Brook (Godshill in 2006)?

Accepted methodology for wader surveys of lowland wet grasslands is to walk to within 100m of 'suitable' habitat within each site. As an attempt was made to standardise 'effort' on each site, by allowing an average of ca. three hours per visit only to each site or sub-site, this stipulation was hard to accomplish in the Forest terrain. Therefore a combination of walking as close to possible to suitable habitats and overlooking specific areas from selected vantage points for varying periods of time, was adopted. I believe, however that this deviation from 'accepted practice' in no way affected the accuracy of the results.

The 2007 survey was carried out between 4th April and 4th July with at least three visits A, B and C to each area. Ideally, cold, windy and very wet conditions should have been avoided. Unfortunately weather conditions during the six-week period from the middle of May to the end of June rendered this difficult to achieve. Consequently a number of the visits were made in less than suitable conditions.

Population estimation

Estimations of breeding wader populations on the selected plots are based on the following criteria.

Northern Lapwing: The counting unit for this species is the incubating bird (Colin J. Bibby et al 1992). For the purposes of this survey numbers were estimated using a combination of ads sitting on nests and/or pairs considered to be on territory.

Common Snipe: The counting unit for this species is the displaying (drumming) male. Ideally these should be counted on at least three occasions during the display period (April and May in Britain) and within 3 hours of dawn or dusk -Green 1985a – (Colin J. Bibby et al 1992). In situations where all known nests have been found in a study plot indications are that 'the true nesting population can be calculated by doubling the mean of April/May counts of drumming birds' (Colin J. Bibby et all 1992). For this survey Snipe were difficult to detect in April and May and the population has been

estimated by adding the sum of drummers and other birds considered to be on territory.

Eurasian Curlew: For this species the counting unit is the displaying bird, ideally counted on three visits in late May-early June (Colin J. Bibby et al 1992). For this survey the population was derived from a combination of displaying birds and pairs considered to be on territory.

Common Redshank. The counting unit is the flying bird showing alarm in late May to early June in Britain (Colin J. Bibby et al 1992). For this survey pairs apparently on territory during the season, were considered to be a breeding pair.

Survey results

Wader population estimates on the nine selected survey areas are shown below.

Survey area	Lapwing	Snipe	Curlew	Redshank
Stonyford Pond	1	0	2	0
Crockford	16	4	3	1
Pig Bush/Denny	6	1	2	1
Longwater Lawn	4	1	2	0
Fulliford Bog	0	2	0	0
Hincheslea Bog	3	3	0	0
Holmhill	0	1	2	0
Clayhill (Burley)	3	6	2	0
Ditchend Brook	0	1	0	0

A more detailed account of the data, including dates, timing and approximate number of hours spent on site is shown on accompanying maps and in Appendix 1 **'New Forest wader study data 2007'**

Discussion

It is considered that 2007 population estimates for Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew and Common Redshank are reasonable reflections of breeding wader numbers on the survey areas. It is very probable however, that Common Snipe were under-recorded particularly at Stonyford Pond, Crockford, Pig Bush/Denny and Holmhill.

It was noticeable that, as they have done for many years, Northern Lapwing feed extensively on formerly sown grasslands and other grazed grass areas close to breeding sites especially around Beaulieu Heath. Such sites e.g. at Crockford (SZ 345990), where at least 30 adults were feeding on 11th April and at East Boldre (SZ 365995), remain particularly attractive to Lapwing. No nest sites were detected in this habitat. It is understood that management of such areas is to allow continuing reversion to heather heath and it will be interesting to observe possible effects of this policy on Lapwing feeding behaviour and numbers. No specific work was carried out on feeding Curlew but on at least one occasion a single bird was seen to fly off high from Crockford towards the coast. Although not recently observed this was common behaviour of breeding Redshank at this site in the mid-late 50's. During surveys undertaken in 1993/94 (Colin R. Tubbs and Jennifer M Tubbs) Eurasian Curlew and

Redshanks were still habitually feeding on the coast until young had hatched, but specific sites are not mentioned in that paper.

Conclusion

Wader territories were recorded on all areas in 2007. The most numerous species was Northern Lapwing (recorded on six areas), followed by Common Snipe (eight areas), Eurasian Curlew (six areas) and Common Redshank (recorded on two areas only).

Additionally, the following territories were detected outside but within 100m of study plot boundaries. Northern Lapwing: 3 territories at Crockford at SZ 345987 and Eurasian Curlew: single territories at Crockford at SU 345003 and at Ditchend Brook at SU 188146.

Although not a requirement of this survey the whole of Beaulieu Heath was searched for breeding waders in 2007 and totals other than those on the study area are shown in Appendix 2. Expressed as percentages of wader numbers for the entire heath the study plot held at least 44 % of Northern Lapwing, 66 % of Common Snipe, 37 % of Eurasian Curlew and 25 % of Common Redshank.

References

Bibby. Colin J, Burgess. Neil D, Hill. David A & Mustoe. Simon H 2000. *Bird Census Techniques.*

O'Brien, M & Smith, K W 1992. Changes in the status of waders breeding on wet lowland grasslands in England and Wales between 1982 and 1989. *Bird Study* 39: 165-176

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