



Laying Low

Ground nesting birds of the New Forest



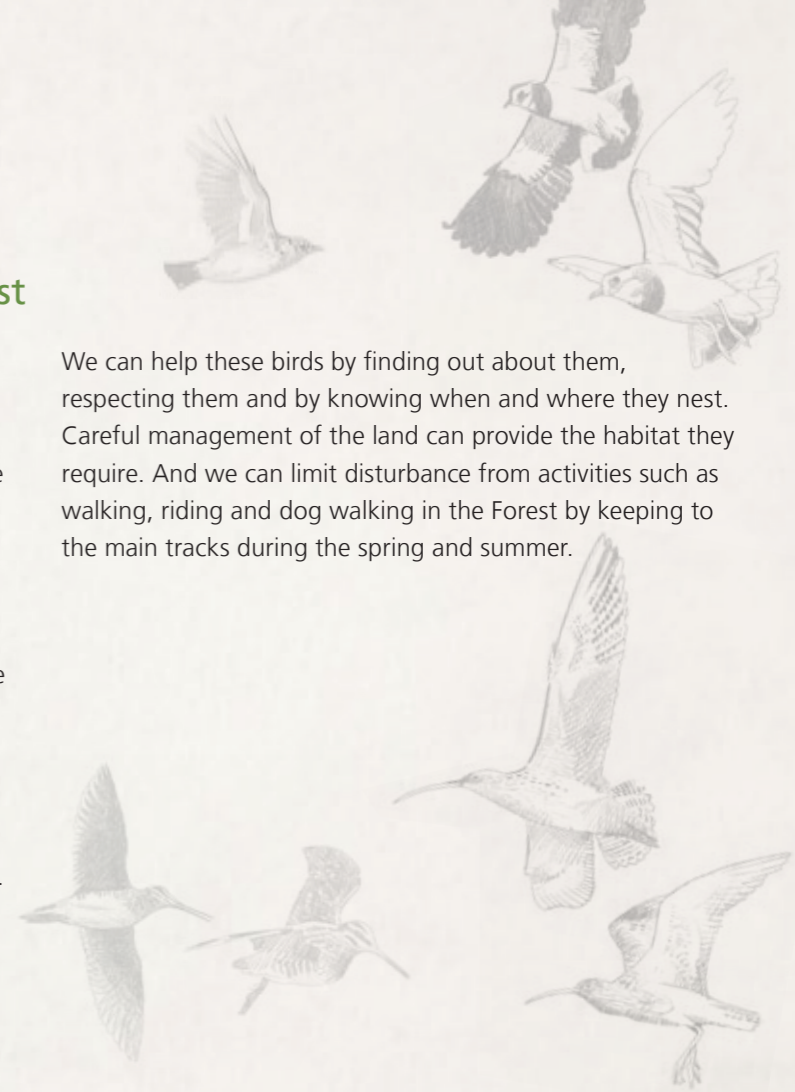
Laying Low

Ground nesting birds of the New Forest

Ask most children where a bird makes its nest and they will probably say 'in a tree'. But in open spaces like the heathland and wetland of the New Forest, they do not. Instead they have evolved superb camouflage and distinctive behaviour to take their chances nesting on the ground.

This booklet is a celebration of these birds, and how important they are to the Forest. They typify what is special, fascinating and fragile about the National Park. It is a privilege to experience such unspoilt landscapes where these birds still thrive.

We have highlighted several birds here to show the variety that breed on or close to the ground in the Forest. There are many more, all worthy of a closer look, including the stonechat, skylark, meadow pipit, warblers and a few ducks.



Amber list: Medium conservation priority

Woodlark

Scientific name:

Lullula arborea (lullula for the bird's fluting, 'lu lu lu', arborea meaning related to trees)

'So tiny a trickle of sŏng-strain'

These secretive and rare birds build their nests in heather and the felled woodland areas of the Forest. Woodlarks are best seen and heard singing in February and March early in the morning, staking out their territory from a perch or when flying high above. They often over-winter in the area rather than migrating to the continent in the autumn and returning in the spring. Surveys have shown that the New Forest holds a significant 16% or so of the UK population.



*Teewo cheevo cheevio chee: O
where, what can thát be?
Weedio-weedio: there again! So
tiny a trickle of sŏng-strain;*

From *The Woodlark*
by Gerald Manley Hopkins



New Forest woodland and heathland breeding records 1997 and 2006

Amber list: Medium conservation priority

Curlew

Scientific name:

Numenius arquata (Numenius from the Greek for new moon (crescent-shaped); arquata means bow-shaped, referring to the bill)

*"Now curlew cry me down to kiss
the mouths of their dust."*

From *In the white giant's thigh*
by Dylan Thomas

The mournful calls and melodious song of the curlew can be heard in the spring as it lays claim to its breeding areas, or if disturbed. These large wading birds with their majestic beaks nest in scrapes on the ground. Their plumage is beautifully camouflaged to help disguise them from potential predators. The chicks are able to run around just hours after hatching. By mid summer the adults and young return to the coast where they are joined by birds from much further afield.



*"It is not only fine feathers
that make fine birds"*

Aesop



New Forest heathland breeding records 2004

Amber list: Medium conservation priority

Dartford Warbler

Scientific name:

Sylvia undata (Sylvia - forest, Undata to undulate / wave)

'the punk rocker of the bird world'

Dartford Warblers are true heathland specialists, sometimes known as *furze wrens* (*furze* means gorse). They are secretive birds but can be seen bobbing in and out of scattered gorse and heather bushes. Males perch prominently on scrub to sing their scratchy song, when the characteristic long upright tail becomes visible. Their nest is not on the ground, but close to it in gorse or heather. In very cold winters the population can crash to just a few pairs. Good heathland management can help numbers recover.



New Forest heathland breeding records 1994

Red list: High conservation priority

Lapwing

Scientific name:

Vanellus vanellus (vanellus is Latin for "little fan")

'scattered pell mell, diving, with side-slip suddenly wailing'

Rex Warner

Lapwings defend their nesting area in spring by flying at and around potential predators. Adults also display away from the nest to attract predators' attention, a behaviour which has given them a historical reputation for deception (the collective noun is 'a deceit of lapwings'). Lapwings are also called peewits, after the calls which are given in swooping display flights. Breeding lapwings have undergone widespread and marked declines in the UK over the last few decades, making the New Forest increasingly important for them.



New Forest heathland breeding records 2004

*... 'tis my familiar sin,
With maids to seem the
lapwing, and to jest, Tongue
far from heart.'*

From 'Measure for Measure' by Shakespeare, reflecting the lapwing's reputation for deception.

Amber list: Medium conservation priority

Redshank

Scientific name: *Tringa totanus* (tringa is rooted in Greek for 'a bird' and totano, Old Italian for a kind of moor-hen)

'sentinels of the marsh'

Redshanks are the 'wardens of the marsh' calling out noisily when they are disturbed or feel threatened. This alarm often warns other birds nearby. The parent birds make a 'tent' out of the grass around the nest to help camouflage it. The birds are vulnerable to cold winter weather, drainage of habitat and disturbance. They are now very rare in the Forest away from the coast with only a few breeding records in the last few years.



New Forest heathland breeding records 2004

Red list: High conservation priority

Nightjar

Scientific name: *Caprimulgus europaeus* (meaning 'European goatsucker')

'bird of ill omen, the lychfowl'

Nightjars bring a flavour of Africa with them to the New Forest summer. The male's evocative 'churring', containing up to 40 notes per second, can be heard several kilometres away on still balmy evenings. They hunt for insects on the wing at dusk and dawn, and possess breathtaking mottled, streaked and barred camouflage. They have a mythical ability to steal milk from goats, a superstition dating back over 2000 years and based on their wide, soft mouths and habit of feeding near grazing animals. They have also been called 'lych-fowl' (corpse fowl); it was considered bad luck in medieval times to have one perch on your house (which fortunately is rare!). Recent research suggests the truth is just as fascinating, with egg-laying synchronized to the cycle of the moon to maximise insect availability. They breed in heathland, around woodland edges and in recently cleared forest and the New Forest is a stronghold for them with around 15% of the UK population.



"nocturnal robber who finds his way into the goat-pens, sucks the dugs of the goats, poisoning them to such an extent that the animals themselves are blinded"

Rev. Johns (1876)



New Forest woodland and heathland breeding records 2004

Amber list: Medium conservation priority

Snipe

Scientific name:
Gallinago gallinago (from gallina, a hen)

*'Suddenly
Some scrap of dried fabric rips
Itself up
From the marsh-quake, scattering'*

From 'The Snipe'
by Ted Hughes

This small wader skulks in the Forest's bogs and mires. They are relatively widespread but difficult to see. When disturbed they fly off rapidly in a zig zag pattern. This rapid flight meant that when hunted they were notoriously difficult to hit, resulting in the word sniper becoming used by 18th century British soldiers in India. Their high display flights feature 'drumming', the noise of outer tail feathers vibrating in the air as the bird swoops down.



New Forest heathland breeding records 2004





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