

Dartmoor Species Action Plan for Golden Plover and Dunlin



Golden plover and dunlin are wading birds which breed in upland areas of Britain. During the winter months, dunlin move to estuary mudflats, whilst golden plover use a wide variety of habitats including farmland. Flocks of 100-200 golden plover are regularly seen on Dartmoor throughout the winter. These birds are thought to breed further north, possibly in Scandinavia. However, both golden plover and dunlin also breed on the highest parts of Dartmoor in the summer months. Dartmoor lies at the southern edge of the world breeding range for both species, and whilst our breeding populations will always be small due to a restricted area of habitat, they are important in maintaining the international breeding range.

Both species are of medium conservation concern nationally; golden plover because numbers are declining and dunlin because it breeds in internationally important numbers in Britain and is threatened in Europe.

The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile describes the importance of blanket bog for these species and objectives for this habitat are given in the Dartmoor Action Plan for Moorland. As these birds have specialised habitat

requirements, a specific set of objectives and actions is set out below to help safeguard their future on Dartmoor.



Current status on Dartmoor

Dartmoor National Park Authority surveys (1997/98/99) found 3-5 pairs of golden plover and 3-14 pairs of dunlin breeding on the blanket bog of northern Dartmoor. In 2006 a survey by RSPB for the MoD, recorded two golden plover territories and 11-16 dunlin territories. These populations are therefore at precariously low levels. Golden plover have declined significantly from the 14 pairs recorded in 1979, while currently, dunlin appear to be stable.

Golden plovers were first confirmed breeding on the Dartmoor blanket bog in 1950, although previous unconfirmed records exist. The species' presence appears to be linked to the increased intensity of use of the moorland over recent decades. Areas of short, burnt vegetation have provided suitable breeding habitat. It is probable that recent changes in management, such as reduced number of burns and alterations in stock grazing patterns, have allowed vegetation to recover, leaving few suitable areas for the golden plover. In this case, the species' needs are in conflict with the goals of sustainable management of the blanket bog habitat.

Dunlin have been recorded on Dartmoor for many years, breeding exclusively on wet blanket bog, where they use short vegetation and runnels for feeding.

Potential management works such as swaling or cutting are constrained by the danger to workers of unexploded munitions from former military activities.

Current action on Dartmoor

All of the breeding areas for these species are within the Dartmoor Forest ESA agreement area. Management and fire plans exist for the whole area as part of this scheme.

The Rare Bird Sensitive Areas have been updated through the 2006 MoD Bird Survey and will be used to limit disturbance from recreational and military activities.

Peatland restoration plans to reduce surface run-off from the blanket bog are being developed and considered, in part based on dunlin breeding sites.

Survey and monitoring data for the last twenty years is available for both species through surveys undertaken jointly by Dartmoor National Park Authority, RSPB, Dartmoor Study Group and the MoD funded 2006 survey.

The use of heavy munitions has been phased out by the MoD and a clean up operation is underway to remove debris and munitions from around the fringe of the training area (this does not yet cover bird nesting areas).

Dartmoor Action Plan for Golden Plover and Dunlin

Key Conservation Objectives and Targets

Golden Plover and Dunlin Objectives

Objective 1

Maintain and if possible enhance the breeding population of golden plover.

Dartmoor target

- A** Maintain golden plover as a breeding species on Dartmoor.

Objective 2

Maintain and if possible enhance the breeding population of dunlin.

Dartmoor targets

- A** Maintain dunlin as a breeding species on Dartmoor.
- B** Seek to increase the dunlin population to 15 pairs by 2011, through appropriate management of the blanket bog.

Objective 3

Raise awareness of the habitat needs of golden plover and dunlin in order to minimise disturbance and promote the conservation of these species on Dartmoor.

Dartmoor target

- A** Increase the awareness of the conservation measures in place and the status of golden plover and dunlin on Dartmoor among the public and user groups.

Actions for Golden Plover and Dunlin on Dartmoor

Monitoring responsibility: RSPB

Action	Meets Objective/Target	Deliverer		Complete by					Date achieved
		Lead	Partners	2007	2008	2011	2016	On-going	
Policy and Legislation									
Ensure that agri-environment schemes take account of the needs of these species	1A, 2A, 2B	NE	DNPA, RSPB						●
Site Safeguard									
Ensure the requirements of golden plover and dunlin are taken into account when the conservation objectives for the international features of the Dartmoor SAC, i.e. blanket bog and wet heath, are defined	1A, 2A, 2B	NE	DNPA, RSPB	●					
Habitat Management									
Identify suitable areas for channel blocking based on the distribution of dunlin, and implement	2	NE, RSPB, DNPA	MoD, DoC, EA		●				
Ensure that golden plover and dunlin breeding areas continue to be excluded from disturbing military activities and recreational events between 1 March and 15 July	1, 2	DNPA, MoD	DoC						●
Seek to achieve suitable grazing and burning levels in the breeding areas	1, 2	NE, DaCC	MoD, DNPA, RSPB						●
Advisory									
Provide information to landowners, users and the public on the vulnerability of golden plover and dunlin to disturbance. Ensure all breeding areas are included in mapped information	All	RSPB, DNPA	NE, MoD						●

(cont.)

Actions for Golden Plover and Dunlin on Dartmoor (cont.)

Action	Meets Objective/ Target	Deliverer		Complete by					Date achieved
		Lead	Partners	2007	2008	2011	2016	On-going	
Research & Monitoring									
Monitor populations of both species thoroughly at least every three years	1, 2	DSG, RSPB	DNPA, DoC, MoD		●	●		●	
Collate records of both species annually	1, 2	DSG, RSPB	DNPA, DoC, MoD					●	
Communication and Publicity									
Inform the public, land managers and recreational users of the results of surveys and conservation management for golden plover and dunlin on Dartmoor through the <i>Biodiversity Newsletter</i> and other media	3	DNPA, RSPB						●	

Abbreviations used in the table opposite:

DaCC – Dartmoor Commoners’ Council, DoC – Duchy of Cornwall, DNPA – Dartmoor National Park Authority, DSG – Dartmoor Study Group, MoD – Ministry of Defence, NE - Natural England, RSPB – Royal Society for Protection of Birds