

How we can all help moorland nesting birds

Many factors play a part in influencing the success of breeding birds including climate change and human disturbance. Even short-term disturbance can be fatal. When a bird is forced to leave its nest, the eggs or newly fledged young can chill and die very quickly, or predators can move in and take eggs or nestlings.



Moorland bird walk © DNPA

During the bird breeding season, (the months of March, April, May, June and July), you can minimise disturbance by:

- keeping to tracks and paths as much as possible, particularly in areas of dense heather, clitter and wetlands;
- keeping your dog on a lead - especially as most lambing takes place at the same time that birds are nesting;
- avoiding young birds on the ground or distressed parent birds, by walking around the area and moving away quickly, allowing the parents to return;
- spreading the word by telling others how they can help too.

Organising events

Events involving large groups are considered to represent an increased risk of disturbance. Many major walking, riding and orienteering events have been rescheduled in recent years. The organisers of these events have thus taken positive steps to help safeguard moorland breeding birds. The Dartmoor National Park Authority (NPA) also strictly regulates its own walks for the public and school groups.

If you are planning an event on moorland involving over 35 walkers or 20 riders please:

- avoid the main bird breeding season (1st March to 15th July);
- contact the National Park Authority during the early planning stages for further guidance.

The NPA, RSPB and Natural England are working together with many other people to conserve Dartmoor's moorland birds, including landowners, the MOD, commoners and recreational user groups. The NPA and the MOD also brief all Ten Tors participants on minimising disturbance during training and ensure that environmental safeguards are incorporated into the event. Discussions continue on ways to reduce impact.

Swaling, the burning of heather and grass, when undertaken at the right time of year, is a lawful land management activity. It is carried out from the beginning of October and, by custom, on Dartmoor it is completed before the end of March because of its potential disturbance to moorland breeding birds. Swaling during January and February is preferred but current weather patterns make this difficult. Properly carried out, swaling promotes the growth of young heather and is important for maintaining moorland habitats. Particularly sensitive areas for vulnerable bird species are now avoided through annual Fire Plans prepared by the Dartmoor Commoners' Council and local Commoners' Associations, assisted by the National Park Authority, Natural England and Defra.

The future

With your co-operation and careful management, future generations will still be able to enjoy the sight and sound of moorland birds such as skylarks and ring ouzels on Dartmoor. Monitoring of breeding birds will continue.

Other guidance on enjoying Dartmoor with 'Moor Care and Less Wear' can be found in a series of leaflets available from the National Park Authority and on its web site.
www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

Finding out more

Publications available from Dartmoor National Park Authority Information Centres:

Dartmoor Pocket Guides
A series of laminated cards depicting birds, plants, insects and habitats.

The Nature of Dartmoor: A Biodiversity Profile

Action for Wildlife:

The Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan

Information, guided walks and local activities:

Dartmoor National Park Authority
Parke, Bovey Tracey, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ13 9JQ
Tel: (01626) 832093 www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Keble House, Southernhay Gardens, Exeter,
Devon, EX1 1NT

Tel: (01392) 432691 www.rspb.org.uk

Natural England
Renslade House, Bonhay Road, Exeter, EX4 3AW
Tel: (01392) 889770 www.naturalengland.org.uk

Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society
PO Box 17, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1WF



For south west England timetable enquires phone
Traveline: 0871 200 2233

Dartmoor

- a special place for moorland birds



Dartmoor

- a special place for moorland birds

Dartmoor's moorland birds are a cause for celebration but they need our continuing care!

Dartmoor is the largest upland area in southern England, offering many different habitats to a wide variety of breeding birds. In particular, moorland areas are home to a fascinating range of birds all of which contribute to the richness of the area and our enjoyment of this special place.

Recent surveys have shown that

- Dartmoor is a stronghold for species that have declined elsewhere, such as snipe and skylark;
- familiar Dartmoor birds, such as meadow pipit and stonechat, are present here in nationally and even internationally important numbers;



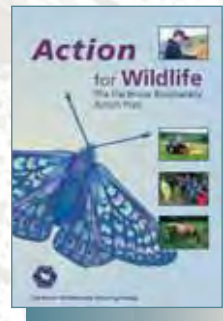
Lapwing on nest © Ernie James, rspb-images.com



Ecologist carrying out a bird survey © DMPA

- some birds which evoke the spirit of Dartmoor, such as curlew and lapwing are now in serious decline and under threat of extinction within the National Park.

As part of *Action for Wildlife: the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan*, specific Action Plans have



been prepared to help conserve Dartmoor's birds and their habitats. The success of these Plans depends very much on the co-operation of many organisations and individuals, including land managers and the public.

The nesting season

The dates when birds breed varies between species, and from year to year. This can depend upon the weather on Dartmoor and, for migrants, on weather conditions abroad. However, past records of breeding behaviour on Dartmoor indicate that most activity connected with setting up territories, nesting and fledging young takes place during the months of **March, April, May, June and July.**

Ground nesting birds



© Phillip Newman, rspb-images.com

Skylark

This bird has declined drastically in lowland Britain in recent years making the Dartmoor population of around 13,000 pairs particularly significant



© RSPB

Wheatear

Nationally important numbers on Dartmoor of around 3,000 pairs



© Mike McKavett, rspb-images.com

Meadow pipit

Dartmoor's most common moorland bird with a stable population (around 20,000 pairs) and internationally important



© Jan Halady, rspb-images.com

Ring ouzel

Dartmoor is the main area where this upland bird breeds in southern England (around 15 pairs). Declining rapidly nationally



© Mark Hamblin, rspb-images.com

Curlew

Now threatened with extinction as a breeding bird on Dartmoor (1-3 pairs). Declining nationally (30% in last 30 years)



© Ray Kennedy, rspb-images.com

Lapwing

Less than 20 pairs now breed on Dartmoor - a decline of 70% over the last 20 years. Declining nationally but particularly in south west England



© Roger Wilmshurst, rspb-images.com

Golden plover

Now threatened with extinction on Dartmoor (1-3 pairs) and nationally declining



© Chris Gomesall, RSPB

Dunlin

The 15 or so pairs on Dartmoor are the most southerly breeding dunlin in the world! Another bird in national decline



© Andy Hay, RSPB, rspb-images.com

Snipe

The 150 pairs on Dartmoor are now probably the only breeding birds in Devon following a dramatic decline in lowland England

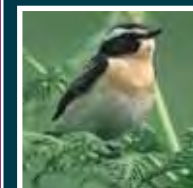


© Chris Knight, rspb-images.com

Red grouse

The small breeding population on Dartmoor has declined slightly in recent years and is declining nationally

Other moorland birds



Whinchat - Dartmoor's population is of national importance

Whinchat © Mark Hamblin, rspb-images.com



Stonechat numbers on Dartmoor (around 1,600 pairs) have increased in recent years despite a national decline and are now internationally important

Stonechat © Collin Carver, rspb-images.com



Dartford warbler has recently expanded its range across southern Britain to include Dartmoor. Over 50 pairs now breed in the National Park, a nationally significant number

Dartford warbler © Collin Carver, rspb-images.com