

Important request to ELOC members for information

Dear ELOC members

As most of you will be aware, the West Pennine Moors (WPM) was notified by Natural England as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in November 2016. The main notified features of the SSSI being its priority-habitat blanket-bog and its assemblage of upland breeding birds. Whilst the 'upland breeding bird assemblage' includes species such as Short-eared Owl, Cuckoo, Red Grouse, Stonechat and Reed Bunting, it is the breeding waders of the WPM SSSI which are perhaps its most important feature.

In recent decades, the wish to plant trees to sequester carbon in the battle to address climate change has grown apace and many landowners, especially those with stated environmental credentials, have launched ambitious projects to increase woodland cover across their estates. Such tree-planting schemes are in the main a positive move, but in some areas the existing value of the flora and fauna of sites needs to be assessed against any potential change of habitat to woodland...a case of '*let's get the trees in the right place*'.

Breeding waders and trees largely don't mix, with recent research indicating that many wader species suffer population declines and reduced productivity out to 0.7km from new woodland planting; this largely due the predators that new woodland can attract into previously open landscapes.

Given the diversity and numbers of breeding waders in the WPM, the creation of any new woodland in the SSSI, or within a kilometre from its boundary, needs careful consideration to ensure that plans to retain breeding waders are included in any future woodland planning.

I am an ornithological consultant who has worked for United Utilities, Natural England and others in the WPM for over 20 years and have recently been awarded the contract from Natural England for a desk-top project to map the breeding waders of the WPM SSSI. This is an important study that will aim to plot all known breeding wader territories within the SSSI (and up to one km from its boundary) recorded in the last six years from 2019 to 2024. The project will run until March 2025 when the mapping, data and report will be communicated to Natural England for use in decision making processes in the WPM SSSI moving forward. The data will also be invaluable to Natural England for their 'condition assessment' of the SSSI and also in their discussions with farmers when countryside and environmental stewardship schemes are in planning to facilitate management for waders in key areas.

This is where ELOC members can provide invaluable help as this is an opportunity for wider participation.

The species we require records for are:

Curlew

Lapwing

Snipe

Golden Plover

Dunlin

Redshank

Oystercatcher

Little Ringed Plover

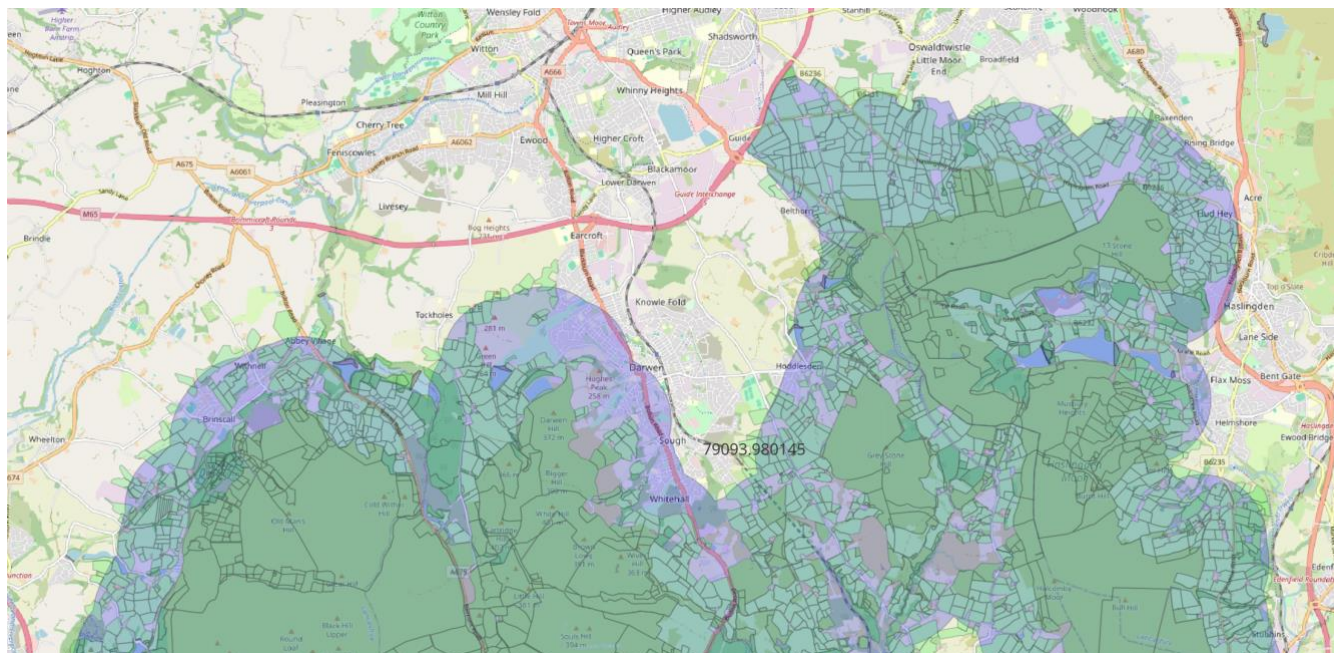
Common Sandpiper

(but not Woodcock)



The area

Basically, all those parts of the ELOC recording area from Withnell in the west, through Darwen, Hoddlesden, Grane and surrounding moors in the east (all the areas coloured blue on the map below). The study area also includes the fringing in-by fields around the moor edges plus the pasture land from the M65 at Guide through to Haslingden. It doesn't matter if the habitat is moorland, fields or reservoirs, if there are breeding (or feeding) waders, there...we need the records!



The rationale

We need to plot not only the breeding sites or territories of these waders, but anywhere else that the species are using during the breeding season. So, as an example, Curlew not only need an area to nest but will fly several kilometres to feed on in-by pastures and will also take their young a good distance (often a kilometre or more) to better feeding sites on in-by fields. So, the fields they use are as important to breeding Curlew as the actual place of the nest itself and all need recording. So, whilst breeding records (including territory, singing and display) are needed, records of feeding birds (particularly Curlew, Oystercatcher and Golden Plover that can feed well away from the nest site) are equally important.

What we need

For the years **2019 to 2024 inclusive**, we need records please of territorial, breeding or feeding waders in the period of **mid-March to late June** (or **mid-July** in the case of **Curlew**).

It would be great to have the data below for each record:

Species

Date

Number of birds

Location (grid reference if possible)

What was the bird/s doing (display, alarming, mobbing a predator, with young, feeding etc.)

However, if you can only recall **the species** and a **broad location** and **month** (or **year** if you are reporting an **annual territory record**) that will still be of great use to the project. To give four examples (below) which all would give adequate information for the project:

Lapwing – 5/5/24 – 1 pair – Fields N of Belthorn (SD71672529) – pair displaying

Curlew – April 2023 – fields N of Holden Wood Reservoir, Grane – one feeding

June 2021 – Pair of Curlew mobbing Crows on E Haslingden Moor

Common Sandpiper – 2023 – pair seen multiple times to N of Ogden Resr., Grane (an 'annual territory record')

All records received will be in confidence to be only shared with Natural England. All records will be acknowledged, and the observer will be credited in the final report to Natural England (unless anonymity is requested). All those who contribute will receive a copy of the abridged final report too.

So please, dig out your notebooks and send us some wader records. Don't assume that all sites for Curlew, Lapwing, Snipe and other waders are already known...they are not! Your records will undoubtedly highlight further sites to help in habitat planning in the WPM and could also help Natural England and farmers to apply for funding to manage more sites for waders.

Please send any records (by the end of December please) or questions to:

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Many thanks for your help

Steve