

Bird of the Month
by Suzy Sharpe

LAPWING

Vanellus vanellus



April

Facts

Scientific name: *Vanellus vanellus*

Habitat : pasture, wet meadow, on migration estuaries

Diet: Invertebrates from ground, will feed at night, esp when bright moon

Maximum Age from Ringing 22 years, 7 months old in Nova Scotia BTO.

Typical Lifespan 10 - 15 years, with breeding typically at 3 years

Measurements Length: 30 cm, Wingspan: 84 cm, Weight: 230 g

Number in Britain 98000 pairs (summer) Red List

Conservation Status in the UK is RED

Local British Names: Peewit, Green Plover, Hornpie, Flopwing

Collective Noun: Deceit (or Desert)



Breeding

They need rough grazing and unimproved pastures, but often not arable land or improved grassland. The nest is a scrape in the ground, lined with a variable amount of plant material. They need a good all round view to spot predators, and nest on bare ground or in short vegetation.

First Clutches Laid: 12 Apr

Number of Broods 1

Egg Size 47 x 33 mm

Weight 26.0 g Clutch Size 4 eggs

Incubation Period 25 - 34 days

Fledging Period 35 - 40 days



What can we do...

1. Join conservation groups
2. Support Charities who protect habitat and wildlife
3. Encourage good practice in farming and land management.

In Farming switching to sowing crops in autumn meant they couldnt nest where the crops were high in Spring. The change from hay to silage meant the earlier grass-cutting demolished their nests. Also the increased use of pesticides/fertiliser meant fewer of the larger insects for their chicks to feed on. As a result there was a population crash of 46 per cent between 1970 and 2004, 21 per cent from 1994 to 2005 alone.

4. Vote with your purse, dont support bad practice
5. Sign petitions to protect Birds and habitat
6. Share your love of wildlife with friends and family
7. Sign petitions to end their persecution
8. RSPB are running a number of Lapwing COnservation Projects

Some links for further information:-

[British Trust for Ornithology](#)

[RSPB](#)

[Birdlife](#)

[The Wildlife Trusts](#)



Behaviour

The name Lapwing is thought to derive from an Old English term meaning ‘leap with a flicker in it’ because the dense winter flocks appear to flicker between white and black when the birds flap their wings.

As well as ‘Lapwing’ and ‘Peewit’, this bird is also known as the ‘Green Plover’. Its Latin, *Vanellus*, name means ‘little fan’ and actually refers to its floppy, flapping flight.

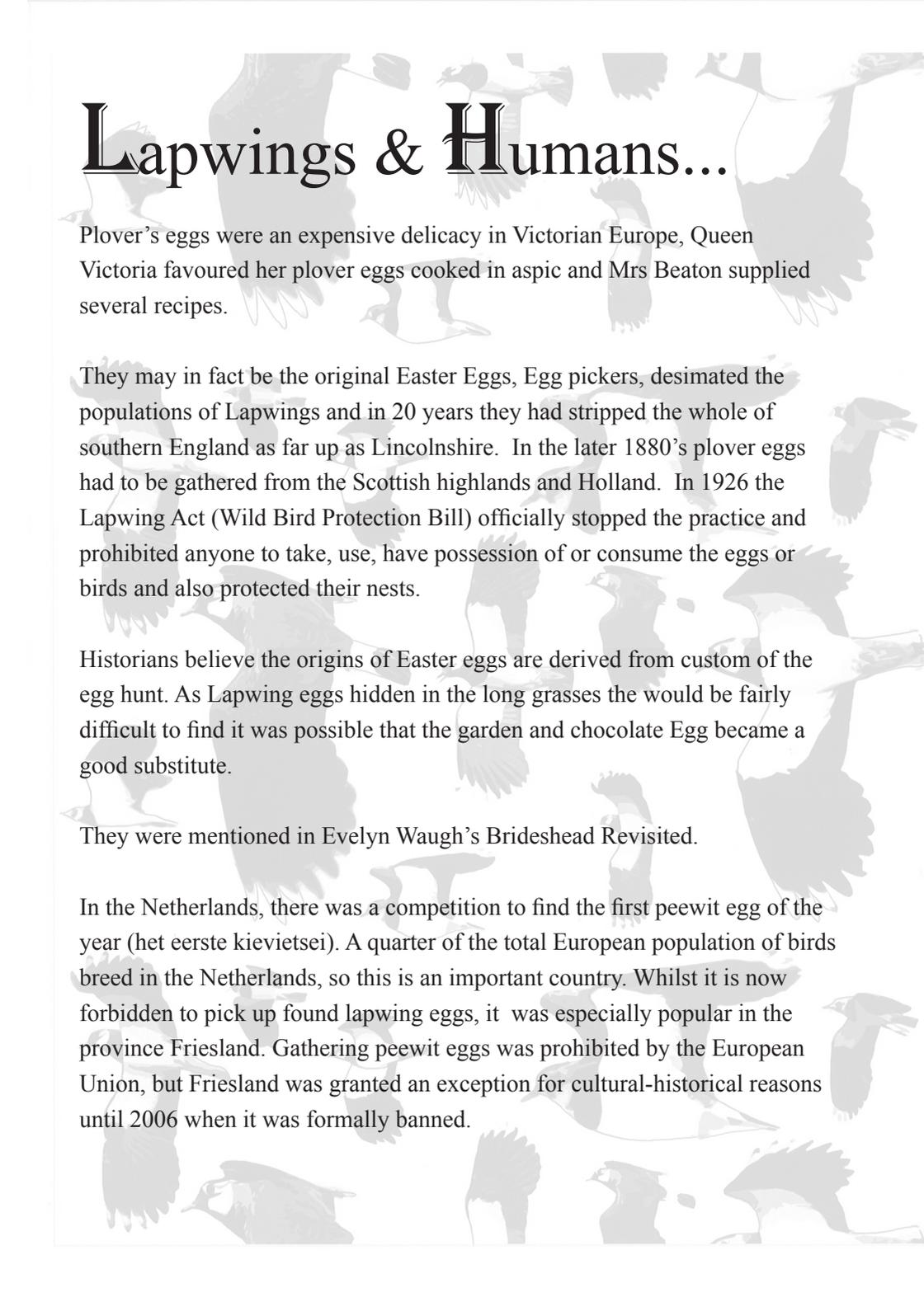
The nest and young are defended aggressively against all intruders, including horses and cattle.

They feed, on invertebrates and worms, mainly by night, to avoid competition from Black-headed Gulls.

In winter, they form huge flocks on open land, particularly arable land and mud-flats.



Lapwings & Humans...

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of bird silhouettes in various shades of grey. The birds are depicted in flight, with their wings spread, and are scattered across the entire page, creating a textured, avian backdrop.

Plover's eggs were an expensive delicacy in Victorian Europe, Queen Victoria favoured her plover eggs cooked in aspic and Mrs Beaton supplied several recipes.

They may in fact be the original Easter Eggs, Egg pickers, desimated the populations of Lapwings and in 20 years they had stripped the whole of southern England as far up as Lincolnshire. In the later 1880's plover eggs had to be gathered from the Scottish highlands and Holland. In 1926 the Lapwing Act (Wild Bird Protection Bill) officially stopped the practice and prohibited anyone to take, use, have possession of or consume the eggs or birds and also protected their nests.

Historians believe the origins of Easter eggs are derived from custom of the egg hunt. As Lapwing eggs hidden in the long grasses the would be fairly difficult to find it was possible that the garden and chocolate Egg became a good substitute.

They were mentioned in Evelyn Waugh's Brideshead Revisited.

In the Netherlands, there was a competition to find the first peewit egg of the year (het eerste kievietsei). A quarter of the total European population of birds breed in the Netherlands, so this is an important country. Whilst it is now forbidden to pick up found lapwing eggs, it was especially popular in the province Friesland. Gathering peewit eggs was prohibited by the European Union, but Friesland was granted an exception for cultural-historical reasons until 2006 when it was formally banned.

Links to Easter

The more I read about this the more confusing and spurious it all became... it seems we need a reason to celebrate (a non Christian association) and we are trying to justify it in ancient tradition. So this can all be seen as folktale I think... Easter is said to have come from the Old English word *Ēastreor*, *Ēostre* or *Eoaster* and from the word *east* which associates *Eostra* was the goddess of dawn because the sun rises from the east. *Eoster* represents rebirth of nature during April. The Anglo-Saxon calendar is broken up into summer and winter. Summer begins in the 7th month known as April or *Eosturmonath*. According to the Venerable Bede an 8th century English Christian monk (who died in 735 CE) feasts held in *Ēostre*'s honour during *Ēostur-monath* had died out and been replaced with the Christian custom of Easter.

You can also read connections to *Ishtar* (*Ishhara*, *Irnini*, *Inanna*, *Anunit*, *Astarte*, *Atarsamain*, and *Esther*) who is the Assyro-Babylonian goddess of Fertility, Love, Storms, and War and mother goddess of Mesopotamia.

Hare or Bunny

It is thought that the Easter bunny was originally a Hare but it was so steeped in Pagan folklore that it was deemed 'unfitting' for Christian purposes.

The Hare is also at its most visible at this time of year in Northern Europe, they become more social as part of their mating behaviour. Hares can be seen in the fields boxing. The sight of groups of hares in the fields would have been a sign of the onset of spring (and therefore Easter) probably then connected with the German and Dutch tradition of the Easter Hare

Link to a Lapwing

I feel we have now come full circle back to the Lapwing. Which given the historical tradition for Plover Egg hunts this part seems to be closest to a possible truth. The link to Easter and the Lapwing may be that Hares, (unlike rabbits who have burrows) hide from predators by making a shallow indentation in the soil known as a form. Lapwings often inhabit the same territories as hares and make a scrape of a nest on the ground. Lapwings were known to use a hare's form as a nest and so eggs were often found in a form and therefore assumed to have been laid by the Hare.

Poetry

in *We Should Be Well Prepared* (which seems particularly but unintentionally poignant) Mary Oliver says...

“The way the plovers cry goodbye.

The way the dead fox keeps on looking down the hill with open eye.

The way the leaves fall, and then there’s the long wait.

The way someone says we must never meet again.

The way mold spots the cake,

The way sourness overtakes the cream.

The way the river water rushes by, never to return.

The way the days go by, never to return.

The way somebody comes back, but only in a dream.”



The Plover

The plovers' wind is blowing
A lusty wind and strong
In viewless torrents going
The leafless boughs among.

It shakes, it fills with riot
The bent and groaning pine,
And stirs a pulse unquiet
In nature's veins and mine.

The plovers' wind is blowing,
It fills the brimming springs,
And sets the hot life flowing
In all created things.

To all it brings renewing
The sap to bush and tree
The plover to his wooing,
And the ghost of love to me

Cicely Fox Smith [1882 - 1954]

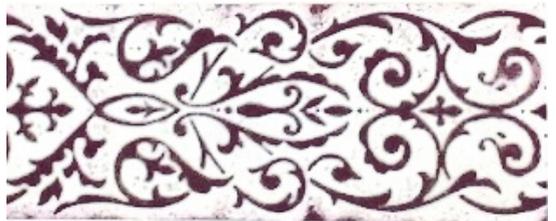


Hares at Play

(Because I spoke earlier of Hares)

The birds are gone to bed, the cows are still,
And sheep lie panting on each old mole-hill;
And underneath the willow's gray-green bough,
Like toil a-resting, lies the fallow plough.
The timid hares throw daylight fears away
On the lane's road to dust and dance and play,
Then dabble in the grain by naught deterred
To lick the dew-fall from the barley's beard;
Then out they sturt again and round the hill
Like happy thoughts dance, squat, and loiter still,
Till milking maidens in the early morn
Jingle their yokes and sturt them in the corn;
Through well-known beaten paths each nimbling hare
Sturts quick as fear, and seeks its hidden lair.

John Clare



Two Pewits

Under the after-sunset sky
Two pewits sport and cry,
More white than is the moon on high
Riding the dark surge silently;
More black than earth. Their cry
Is the one sound under the sky.
They alone move, now low, now high,
And merrily they cry
To the mischievous Spring sky,
Plunging earthward, tossing high,
Over the ghost who wonders why
So merrily they cry and fly,
Nor choose 'twixt earth and sky,
While the moon's quarter silently
Rides, and earth rests as silently.



Edward Thomas:



Aesops Fables

A Lapwing Preferr'd - Abstemiuss Fables

Upon a general invitation to the eagle's wedding, there were several birds of quality among the rest, that took it in heavy dudgeon to see a lapwing plac'd at the upper end of the table. 'Tis true, they cry'd, he has a kind of a coxcomb upon the crown of him, and a few tawdry feathers; but alas, he never eat a good meals meat in his life, till he came to this preferment.

'Tis a scandal to a government, and there goes envy along with it, where honours are conferr'd upon men for address, beauty, and external advantages, rather than for their good qualities and virtues.

(Sir Roger L'Estrange) 297. (Abstemiuss 45)

I found this took a few readings through to understand... and I thought it best not to try to reword it...

Bestiary

From the aberdeen bestiary

The bird called caladrius, (Louis Reau believes it was most likely a white plover.) as Physiologus tells us, is white all over; it has no black parts. Its excrement cures cataract in the eyes. It is to be found in royal residences. If anyone is sick, he will learn from the caladrius if he is to live or die. If, therefore, a man's illness is fatal, the caladrius will turn its head away from the sick man as soon as it sees him, and everyone knows that the man is going to die. But if the man's sickness is one from which he will recover, the bird looks him in the face and takes the entire illness upon itself; it flies up into the air, towards the sun, burns off the sickness and scatters it, and the sick man is cured. The caladrius represents our Saviour. Our Lord is pure white without a trace of black, 'who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth' (1 Peter, 2:22). The Lord, moreover, coming from on high, turned his face from the Jews, because they did not believe, and turned to us, Gentiles, taking away our weakness and carrying our sins; raised up on the wood of the cross and ascending on high, 'he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men, (Ephesians, 4:8). Each day Christ, like the caladrius, attends us in our sickness, examines our mind when we confess, and heals those to whom he shows the grace of repentance. But he turns his face away from those whose heart he knows to be unrepentant. These he casts off; but those to whom he turns his face, he makes whole again. But, you say, because the caladrius is unclean according to the law, it ought not to be likened to Christ. Yet John says of God: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up' (4:14); and according to the law, 'the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field' (Genesis, 3:1). The lion and the eagle are unclean, yet they are likened to Christ, because of their royal rank because the lion is king of the beasts; the eagle, king of the birds.



The aim of this project is to research a different bird each month, gathering poetry, songs, facts, stories and information to further understand, discover and share ways in which we can help them in the wild. I have tried to link my findings to poems on the internet but these may disappear in time. An internet search may still help you to find another version. All the books are free to download in the month that they are produced after which there may be a small charge for back editions. More of my work can be found on my website including greetings cards, prints, printmaking and original drawings and paintings.

Suzy Sharpe

www.suzysharpeartist.com

SEE YOU IN



May

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