

# 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.



During the bird breeding season, from 1st March to 15th 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 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 English Nature 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 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 agricultural burning of heather and grass, though lawful between 1st October and 15th April, by custom on Dartmoor 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, English Nature 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 website.

## Finding out more

Publications available from Dartmoor National Park Authority Information Centres:

Dartmoor Nature Cards

- a series of laminated cards illustrating birds, plants and insects of Dartmoor habitats including Moorland Birds, Farmland Birds and Woodland Birds

*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](http://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](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

English Nature

Level 2, Renslade House, Bonhay Road, Exeter, EX4 3AW

Tel: (01392) 889770 [www.english-nature.org.uk](http://www.english-nature.org.uk)

Devon Birdwatching and Preservation Society

PO Box 17, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1WF



For south west England timetable enquires phone  
Traveline: 0870 608 2 608

# Dartmoor

- a special place for moorland birds



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Cover photograph: Curlew at nest with chick © Mark Hamblin, rspb-images.com

Leaflet © Dartmoor National Park Authority 2002



# 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.



Lapwing on nest © Emile Jantse, rspb-images.com

## 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;



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 between the **beginning of March and the middle of 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 Halaady, rspb-images.com

### Ring ouzel

Dartmoor is the main area where this upland bird breeds in southern England (around 35 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 Wilmschurst, rspb-images.com

### Golden plover

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



© Chris Gomesall, RSPB

### Dunlin

The dozen 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 © Colin Carver, rspb-images.com



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

Dartford warbler © Colin Carver, rspb-images.com