

Annex 3 onwards – supplementary material.

Article published in RSPBs Fellows News (sent to all RSPB Life members)

SOCIABLE LAPWINGS



Hanna & Jens Erikson (naturepic.com)

This rare plover reveals an eye-catching wing pattern.

Our work on the sociable lapwing is at a critical stage after three years of research on the species' breeding and habitat needs, says ecologist **Robert Sheldon**.

The sociable lapwing – you may have books that call it the sociable plover – is a Critically Endangered species that has suffered a large population decline in recent years. The total breeding population may be as low as 200-600 pairs. These are believed to be concentrated in the steppes of Kazakhstan with small numbers in south-central Russia. A large-scale sociable lapwing research project was initiated in 2005, in Kazakhstan, by a team from the RSPB collaborating under the BirdLife International partnership with the Association for Biodiversity Protection in Kazakhstan (ACBK), to understand the causes of the decline. In 2006, the RSPB secured funding through the UK Government's Darwin Initiative programme that will allow work to continue, primarily on the breeding grounds, until 2009.

The team has been investigating the decline at a breeding site in the

Korgalzhyn region of central Kazakhstan. The results suggest that the cause may not be associated with the breeding grounds, but could be found on either the migration routes or the wintering grounds.

Exciting finds in Stavropol, south-west Russia, in September 2005 and 2006 proved that the area is an important stop over site for migrating sociable lapwings from central Kazakhstan on their way to wintering grounds in north-eastern Africa and Middle East. A flock of up to 600 was seen in September 2005, and two colour-ringed birds, from Korgalzhyn, were seen in September 2006.

In spring 2007, conservationists hit the jackpot with further large flocks found by teams, partly funded by the RSPB, surveying areas in Syria and Turkey. A team of Dutch ornithologists, local conservationists and guides searched for wintering sociable lapwings in Syria. In the last week of March, the project team discovered large flocks in north-eastern Syria, counting more than 1,200 birds in one day – equaling the total known adult world population! There was real concern that the flocks were close to a hunting party, but conservationists from the survey team, with the support of BirdLife Middle East and the RSPB, collaborated with

the hunters to ensure that the lapwings were not disturbed.

Following this discovery, a team of Turkish ornithologists from the local BirdLife partner, Doga Dernegi, surveyed an area adjacent to the Syrian border in southern Turkey. On the third day, they had their biggest count of 1,017 sociable lapwings. Co-ordinated counts by the two teams showed that these flocks were different birds – highlighting the importance of the general area and also their susceptibility to factors such as hunting.

We are keen to increase both survey work and site protection measures to protect this Critically Endangered species. Conservationists need to increase co-operation between scientists, local conservationists and BirdLife International to secure the future of the sociable lapwing in the areas it uses on migration and in the winter.

The findings in Syria and Turkey have given a burst of optimism to conservationists. The discoveries of such large numbers of birds, and the realisation that the decline may not be wholly associated with the breeding grounds, present a number of challenges. The project team is currently looking at ways to expand winter survey work to help identify and protect key sites along the migration routes and wintering grounds. This summer, three sociable lapwings were fitted with satellite transmitters to allow us to track the birds to their wintering grounds. We're trying to get funding to enable us to set up a team that can undertake survey work in whichever countries the satellite tagged bird migrate to. This will enable us to unravel the mystery of where these birds migrate to, and identify what we can do to secure the future for this superb steppe species.

**For more information contact:
Robert Sheldon at the RSPB
robert.sheldon@rspb.org.uk**



media *release*

Sociable lapwing finds some friends

Hopes are rising for one of the world's rarest birds after the discovery of the largest flock seen for more than 100 years.

More than 3,000 critically endangered sociable lapwings have been found in the Ceylanpınar district of south-eastern Turkey after a satellite tag was fitted to one of the birds migrating from breeding grounds in Kazakhstan.

The tracked lapwing had flown more than 2,000 miles from its nesting site, where numbers of the species have plunged following the collapse of Soviet farming. The bird flew north of the Caspian Sea, then down through the Caucasus and south into Turkey.

Other birds including geese, albatrosses and bald ibis have been fitted with satellite tags before but the sociable lapwing is the smallest bird yet to carry such a tracking device.

The RSPB's Dr Rob Sheldon, who tagged the bird in Kazakhstan, said: "This discovery is something we didn't dare dream of. The sociable lapwing is one of the rarest birds on earth and suddenly it's been found in these large numbers.

"It shows just how important both Kazakhstan and Turkey have become for the survival of this species. The next step is to protect the bird, both on its breeding grounds and at all the key sites on its migration route."

Only 200 pairs of sociable lapwing were thought to remain in 2003 when the bird was classified as critically endangered, the highest level of threat there is.

Nests at breeding sites were being trampled where land was still farmed and elsewhere, vegetation was too dense for young chicks to survive. Breeding has improved more recently, however, and conservationists feared that hunting and habitat change on migration routes were reducing the bird's numbers.

Then, last Friday, researchers from the Turkish conservation group Doğa Derneği found 1,800 sociable lapwing in Ceylanpınar and the next day, a total of 3,200 of the birds. They were following the co-ordinates provided by satellites for the bird that had flown from Kazakhstan.

Özge Balkız, a scientist at Doğa Derneği, said: "This is a major breakthrough in efforts to help these birds and will be enormously significant in planning their protection. They could still move on to Iraq or East Africa but if they stay in Turkey, it will be much easier to make them safe. We can keep an eye on them here, raise awareness amongst local people and work with the Turkish government to protect the areas they are using."

The tagging project is partly paid for by the UK government's Darwin Initiative and conservationists from Britain and Kazakhstan hope to win new funds to tag more birds next summer.

The long-term hope is that other migrating flocks will be found and that researchers can relax their efforts to help the bird.

Maxim Koshkin of the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan, said: "Understanding the migration from breeding sites in Kazakhstan is essential for the future protection of this species, so the news of such a large flock is a great cause for celebration."

Guven Eken, Executive Director of Doğa Derneği, said: "By tracking a single bird from its Kazakh breeding grounds, we have found the location of most of the world population of these birds in Turkey. Sociable lapwings are finally living up to their name."

Contact:

Cath Harris, Media Officer, RSPB: 01767 693554 / 07739 921464.

Notes to editors:

- The sociable lapwing, *Vanellus gregarius*, or sociable plover, at 30 cm long is slightly smaller than the northern lapwing. It has a striking white eye stripe and black crown and a harsh call. Unlike the northern lapwing, it is not dependent upon water, breeding on dry grassland where pairs lay three or four eggs in shallow scrapes.
- The last evidence of large flocks of sociable lapwing was published in 1890 when between 8,000 and 10,000 were seen in Kazakhstan.
- Sociable lapwings are occasionally seen in the UK, most recently at the RSPB's Rainham Marshes reserve in east London in December 2005.
- The Darwin Initiative is a small grants programme that aims to promote biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of resources around the world. The Initiative is funded and administered by Defra.
- The tags used for the sociable lapwing weighed just 9.5 grammes. Previously, a bar-tailed godwit, a large wading bird, was the smallest bird tracked by satellite. The RSPB and Syrian conservationists last year tracked three bald ibis to find their over-wintering sites. The tags attached to those birds weighed 12g. Tracking equipment is expensive. Each tag costs £1,500 with data collection costing another £50 per month.
- The bird tracked by scientists left the breeding grounds near Korgalzhin in central Kazakhstan on August 3 and arrived at Viranşehir, Turkey around October 8.
- Level of threat for wildlife is graded by the IUCN – World Conservation Union. More details at <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>



media *release*

I would fly 5,000 miles...

Rare Asian birds have turned up in Sudan for the first time in 50 years.

Two sociable lapwings, satellite tagged in Kazakhstan last summer, have flown more than 5,000 miles to central Sudan where they are spending the winter before their return flight to breeding grounds in the central Asian republic.

The species is one of the smallest birds ever to carry a tracking device and its journey has revealed far more about its migration than scientists expected.

Only now are conservationists realising how important African countries are to sociable lapwings. There are few recent records of the birds in Africa but new surveys could find more. The last sighting of sociable lapwings so far south in Africa was by the RSPB's Dr Mark Avery, who saw a small flock in Kenya 20 years ago.

The tagging project began last year when scientists from the RSPB and Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan fitted satellite-tracking devices to three birds on their breeding grounds on the barren steppe expanses of central Kazakhstan.

Their journey will be featured on BBC Radio 4's World on the Move series, being broadcast on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

Dr Rob Sheldon, an RSPB ecologist, said: "The fact that these birds have reached Sudan is remarkable because we had no idea that they would fly that far.

"A Sudanese team is going out to find them this week and if they see more birds, our efforts to help them will become more complicated but also more gratifying. Their appearance in Sudan is fantastic news and has turned the whole tracking project into a hugely exciting conundrum."

The sociable lapwing, closely related to the northern lapwing seen in the UK, was given the highest threat status by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in 2003, after numbers fell 95 per cent to just 200 pairs.

A flock of more than 3,000 in Turkey last October was the largest seen for more than 100 years and a huge boost to efforts to reverse the bird's fortunes.

Conservationists from the Sudanese Wildlife Society, part funded by the UK government's Darwin Initiative, will try to locate the Sudanese birds, count them and find out more about the sites they are using.

Dr Sheldon said: "The more we know, the easier it will be to improve their protection and help them increase their numbers."

Dr Avery saw eight sociable lapwings near the Kenyan coast in 1988. He said: "I had stopped by a water hole in the middle of no-where and the birds were just standing there. It was fantastic to see them but it's only now that I'm

appreciating how lucky I was.”

Ibrahim Hashim, a Research Professor at the Sudanese Wildlife Society, said: “Finding these birds will not be easy because they are in a remote region where few people go. But that will benefit them because it means they should suffer little disturbance.

“We feel privileged to have these birds in Sudan and are very happy that we can play a part in increasing their numbers. These birds are now being protected on their breeding grounds in Kazakhstan and we hope very much to give them equal protection in Sudan.”

Contact:

Cath Harris, Media Officer, RSPB: 01767 693554 / 07739 921464.

Notes to editors:

- The sociable lapwing or sociable plover, *Vanellus gregarius*, has rarely been studied. It is the same size as the northern lapwing but its markings, call and courtship display are quite different. It has a striking, white eye stripe and black crown and a harsh call.
- The birds tracked by scientists left breeding grounds near Korgalzhin in central Kazakhstan on August 3, 2007 and arrived at Viranşehir, Turkey around October 8. They left Turkey in late October, arriving in Sudan on November 3.
- The tags used for the sociable lapwing weighed just 9.5 grammes. Previously, a bar-tailed godwit, a large wading bird, was the smallest bird tracked by satellite. The RSPB and Syrian conservationists last year tracked three bald ibis to find their over-wintering sites. The tags attached to those birds weighed 12g. Tracking equipment is expensive. Each tag costs £1,500 with data collection costing another £50 per month.
- The last evidence of large flocks of sociable lapwing was published in 1898 when between 8,000 and 10,000 were seen in Kazakhstan.
- Sociable lapwings are occasionally seen in the UK, most recently at the RSPB’s Rainham Marshes reserve in east London in December 2005.
- Sociable lapwings last bred in Europe in the 1980s. They continue to breed in the Asian Russian regions of Orenburg and Chelyabinsk although about 95 per cent of the world’s population is thought to breed in Kazakhstan.
- The Darwin Initiative is a small grants programme that aims to promote biodiversity conservation and the sustainable use of resources around the world. The Initiative is funded and administered by Defra.
- Level of threat for wildlife is graded by the IUCN – World Conservation Union. Critically endangered is the highest level of threat there is. More details at <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

Rare bird turns out to be sociable after all

Lewis Smith

Hopes for the survival of one of the world's most endangered birds have been boosted by the discovery of a huge and previously unknown flock.

Sociable lapwings were thought to be down to their last 400 breeding adults four years ago, but a flock of at least 3,200 has been found in Turkey.

The flock was detected when ornithologists tagged a sociable lapwing with a satellite tracker in Kazakhstan and followed it to Turkey. It was the smallest bird to have been fitted with the device.

When researchers set out to check on the bird feeding in a remote area of Ceylanpinar they were astonished to come across thousands of them.

Researchers from the Turkish conservation group Doga Dernegi counted 1,800 sociable lapwings last Friday and 3,200 a day later.

"This discovery is something we didn't dare dream of. The sociable lap-

wing is one of the rarest birds on Earth and suddenly it's been found in these large numbers," said Rob Sheldon, of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), who tagged the bird in Kazakhstan. Özge

● The fortunes of Britain's farmland birds have reached their lowest point since records began in 1970, with populations cut by more than half (Lewis Smith writes).

Skylarks, corn buntings and turtle doves are among the worst-hit.

Specialist farmland birds have suffered the severest decline though generalists such as wood pigeons have increased in number.

Woodland species have suffered similar declines. However, the overall number of birds in Britain is slightly up, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said, due to rising numbers of seabirds and wetland species.

Balkiz, a Doga Dernegi scientist, said: "This is a major breakthrough in efforts to help these birds and will be enormously significant in planning their protection."

"They could still move on to Iraq or East Africa, but if they stay in Turkey, it will be much easier to make them safe. We can keep an eye on them here, raise awareness among local people and work with the Turkish Government to protect the areas they are using."

The tagged bird flew 2,000 miles to reach the Turkish feeding ground. Its route took it north of the Caspian Sea, through the Caucasus and southwards into Turkey.

Güven Eken, the director of Doga Dernegi, said: "By tracking a single bird from its Kazakh breeding grounds, we have found the location of most of

the world population of these birds in Turkey. Sociable lapwings are finally living up to their name."

The sociable lapwing, *Vanellus gregarius*, below, is slightly smaller than the northern lapwing, which can be found in Britain. It got its name because it used to be seen in huge flocks and with so many birds calling at the same time it sounded as if they were chattering to each other.

The RSPB said that the last evidence of large groups of the sociable lapwing was published in 1890 when up to 10,000 were seen in Kazakhstan.

The bird was tagged in a project part-funded by the Darwin Initiative, which is controlled by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.



Photo 1 – satellite tag being fitted to an adult sociable lapwing in June 2007.

