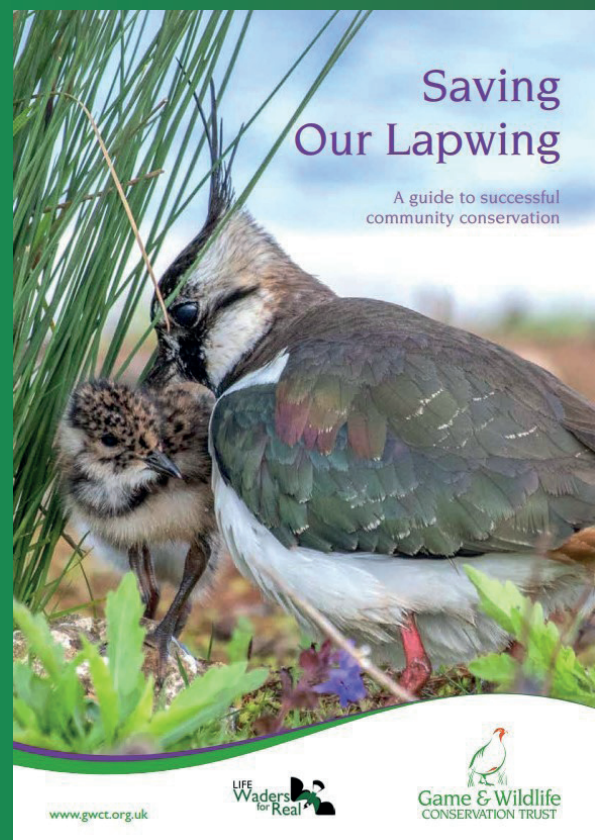


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LIFE WADERS FOR REAL

# After-LIFE Communication Plan 2020-2024

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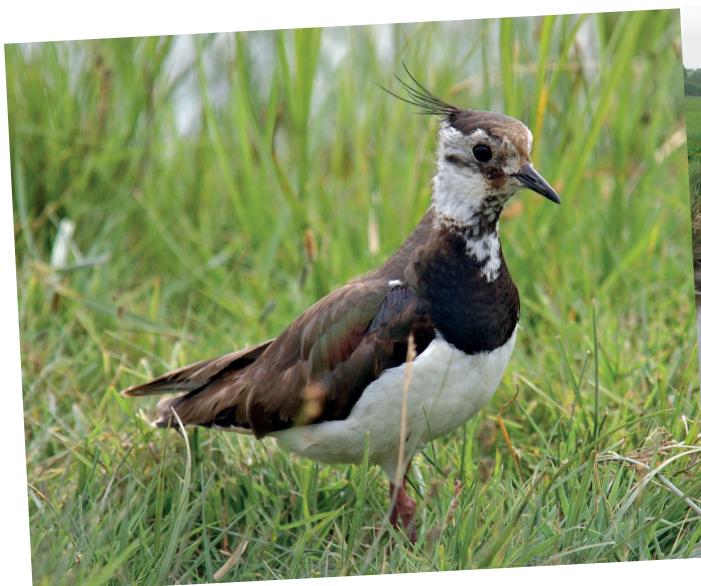


## Introduction

The aim of the LIFE Waders for Real project was to start to reverse the long-term decline of breeding waders in the Avon Valley through engaging stakeholders and implementing effective habitat and predator exclusion measures. The project has been very successful, with targets for habitat creation exceeded and a greater number of wader pairs achieved than expected: lapwing 105 pairs (target 80-90 pairs), redshank 35 pairs (target 30 pairs). Snipe have started to reappear in the valley in summer. Nevertheless, to maintain this positive trend and fully restore breeding wader numbers to early 1990s levels will require continued use of electric fences to exclude foxes and badgers from nesting areas, along with periodic renewal of ditches and scrapes, and clearing of willow scrub.

### The Avon Valley

The Avon Valley is a river floodplain comprised of meadows and pastures running between Salisbury and Christchurch in southern England. The valley is privately owned and made up of many relatively small farms. It is recognised for its high biodiversity and the lower half is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA). In common with many other lowland river valleys and wet grasslands, breeding wader numbers in the Avon Valley declined dramatically from the mid-1980s, with declines of 66% in lapwing pairs, 81% in redshank pairs and 97% in numbers of displaying snipe between 1990 and 2010. The LIFE Waders for Real project aimed to kickstart wader recovery by engaging stakeholders and implementing targeted habitat and predator management at four hotspot sites.





## Project publicity

### Target audiences

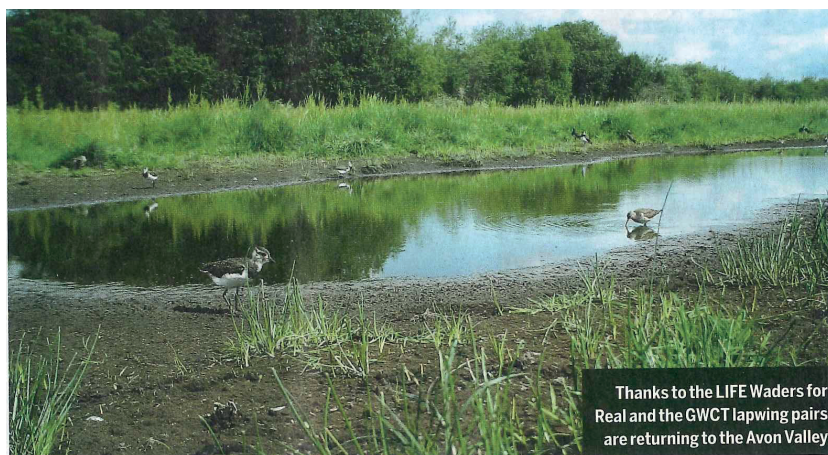
During the project, we aimed to raise the profile of issues concerning wader conservation and to disseminate project results to local, national and international audiences. These included:

- Farmers, landowners and gamekeepers within the Avon Valley, and on wet grassland sites throughout the UK.
- Local statutory agency officers working for Natural England, the Environment Agency and New Forest National Park.
- Local government bodies with responsibility for biodiversity and policy issues.
- The local community surrounding the Avon Valley, including the general public, schools, students in higher education and voluntary interest groups.
- National environmental policy makers – Defra, Natural England, JNCC, Environment Agency.
- Wetland conservation organisations at a national level (e.g. RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, WWT).
- The European research community (e.g. universities, NGOs, International Wader Study Group).

### Dissemination tools and products

#### Written and broadcast media

During the project, eight press releases to national, regional and local broadcast and print media were produced. These were picked up by a range of publications from newspapers to specialist-interest magazines. Four scientific papers have been prepared for submission to journals to ensure that project results reach researchers and policy makers.



## Keepers' expertise helps save lapwing

A GWCT initiative in the Avon Valley has helped our cherished waders thrive in restored wetland habitats

A project to turn around declines in wading birds in the Avon Valley is showing strong signs of success. The EU LIFE Waders for Real project run by the GWCT has increased numbers of waders in one of their former strongholds by careful habitat and essential predator management.

Wading birds have been in severe decline across the country, driven by changes in agricultural practices and increased levels of predation. Declines have been

a rich source of invertebrates and allow waders to probe ground with their beaks. The project has restored 7.3km of wet ditches and has created 33 wader scrapes, shallow wet depressions which benefit all kinds of wildlife.

Students from Sparsholt College have helped to clear 2km of derelict fencing and willow

to 33 and to stabilise the lapwing population at between 70 and 80 pairs. Snipe numbers have also improved in the valley after severe declines in the 1990s.

Gamekeepers have played a critical role in ensuring the success of the project. Lizzie Grayshon, LIFE Waders for Real



Lizzie Grayshon is LIFE Waders for Real project ecologist at the GWCT

Shooting Times, April 2019

### Online media

Our project website ([www.gwct.org.uk/wadersforreal](http://www.gwct.org.uk/wadersforreal)) has seen steady growth in the number of page views (3621 in 2019). 25 project blogs have been posted and many new contacts with practitioners and researchers have been made through the project Twitter feed during 2015-2019. From 2018, updates have been posted on a project Facebook page.

### Meetings and conferences

Throughout the project, project staff have delivered talks to local wildlife groups to raise the profile of the project. Talks and posters have been produced for the International Wader Study Group conference, ensuring awareness raising and dissemination of results to over 120 European practitioners and researchers from across Europe and further afield each year. We have benefitted from networking with staff on other LIFE projects through LIFE meetings and conferences organised by other projects. Our staff have been invited to speak at specialist meetings hosted by government organisations and policy makers to discuss future wader conservation. Our end-of-project conference was a great success, providing an opportunity for 60 people from 30 organisations to share their experiences and provide feedback and suggestions on our project.



### Local dissemination

At a local level, dissemination to stakeholders was via written project updates and annual feedback reports. Farmer meetings were held twice a year to present details of project progress and provide a forum for discussion. Visits were organised to sites in the Avon Valley to view habitat works on the ground and educational visits were made to local schools. Open farms days were attended each year and along with local events, such as the New Forest Show, these provided a great opportunity for engagement with local communities. The profile of the project and the EU LIFE programme was further raised locally with four notice boards close to Avon Valley footpaths and project logos on all equipment and vehicles.



## Project publications

Project results will be widely distributed to target audiences in 2020 and made available online in subsequent years. Key project publications, such as the Layman's Report, technical documents for practitioners and project leaflets will be available as pdfs for download via the LIFE Waders for Real webpage and will be promoted through the GWCT website, mailings to GWCT members and in popular articles.

### Layman's report

This details the project aims, methods and results in non-technical language suitable for a wide audience including journalists and the general public. Hard copies will be printed for distribution to journalists and at meetings and conferences. Copies will be sent to all attendees of the end-of-project conference. The report will be available online at the project website.

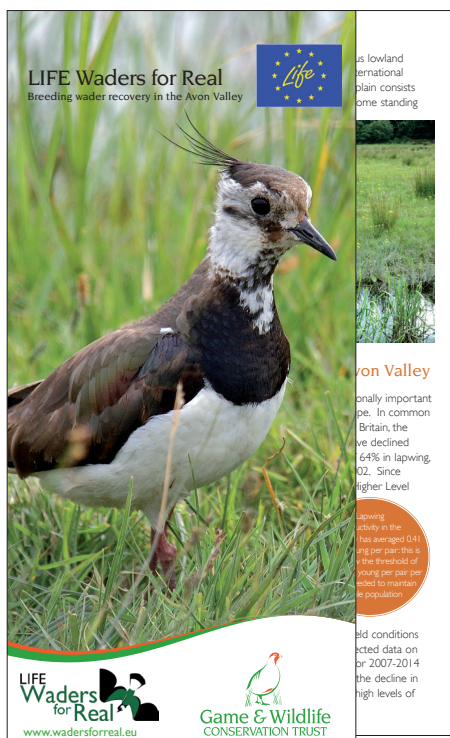
### Conference report

Discussion sessions at our end-of-project conference provided a valuable opportunity for participants to share experiences and resulted in a document summarising practical lessons for wader management and recommendations for future policy. The report will be distributed to all conference attendees, other practitioners suggested by attendees, Natural England staff at local and national level, and will be made available online.

### Saving Our Lapwing booklet

A booklet outlining the issues facing lapwings, the rationale behind the project and the actions implemented has been produced. It features interviews with stakeholders based in the Avon Valley, focusing on their engagement with the project and lessons learned. It is intended to inspire others to start lapwing conservation and suggest appropriate measures. A high-profile launch in London is planned, along with an article in a national newspaper.





## Education resources, leaflets and information packs

Two leaflets have been produced during the project. 600 copies of each have been printed and distributed. These have been particularly useful at local events such as the New Forest Show. Education events with local schools and community groups, used novel and interactive games and resources to improve the understanding of wetland conservation with these stakeholders. We used the Planning for Real approach to achieve wide reaching and measurable community engagement. The dissemination materials are available from our website ([www.wadersforreal.eu](http://www.wadersforreal.eu)) and our planning for real protocol and information pack.

## Scientific papers

Four papers based on project findings have been drafted for submission to scientific journals, and another two are planned. These will provide a lasting peer-reviewed record of project outcomes and enable researchers and practitioners to examine technical details when considering future wader restoration projects. They will also provide evidence for policy makers to justify future management approaches. We are considering open access publication for at least one of these papers to ensure that the main project results are widely accessible.

## After-LIFE strategy

### Vision and targets

We aim to restore Avon Valley wader numbers to 140 pairs of lapwing and 60 pairs of redshank by 2025. We plan to deliver this by facilitating the creation of at least 12 additional scrapes and c.1,000 m of ditches in the Avon Valley over the next five years and ensuring that electric fences are deployed in key locations to protect wader nests and chicks each spring.

We believe this is achievable as stakeholders now understand what is required for adequate wader productivity. The recent creation of an Avon Valley farmer cluster, with the LIFE Waders for Real Project Officer acting as facilitator for at least the next three years, means that the group should be able to capitalise on the project achievements to date.

### Continuation of project actions

Some project actions will need to be continued at hotspot sites to ensure habitat remains suitable for waders and necessary numbers of chicks are fledged each year. Emergent vegetation will gradually make scrape and ditch edges less suitable for broods and will need to be cleared every 4-5 years. Willow and reed growth will have to be removed at least every other year. Although not 100% fox-proof, temporary electric fences have increased lapwing nest survival, and brood survival where broods remained inside the fences. Continuing to protect nests and broods with electric fences will be essential to ensure high breeding success. Although not funded through the Waders for Real project, our analysis of long-term influences on wader productivity indicates that lethal predator control is beneficial and should be continued according to best practice where funded by the landowner.

The main challenge now is to aid small farms outside hotspots to work with neighbours across the landscape and help them access funding for wader management. Our aim is to expand project actions throughout the Avon Valley and we see the formation of the farmer cluster as a good starting point. Building on successful partnerships made during the project, such as that with Sparsholt College for help with habitat works, will also be important.







## Key objectives of the After-LIFE communication plan

- To continue to publicise the project outcomes and lessons learned, to local, national and international audiences.
- To continue to build stakeholder capacity for implementing appropriate management for waders within the Avon Valley, through continued advice and training.
- To expand project actions through engagement with more farmers in the Avon Valley and other similar situations.
- To advocate for appropriate options and adequate financial support for farmers within the new Environmental Land Management agri-environment scheme.
- To continue monitoring of waders, feedback to stakeholders and reporting of long-term results.



We intend management actions to be continued by farmers and land managers.

The project is run by

supported by

Want to learn more?

Email: [info@wadersforreal.org.uk](mailto:info@wadersforreal.org.uk)

Visit: [wadersforreal.org.uk](http://wadersforreal.org.uk)

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### BREEDING WADER RECOVERY IN THE AVON VALLEY

The fields in front of you are important for breeding waders, such as lapwing, redshank and snipe. They comprise part of a project seeking to reverse the decline of these birds in the Avon Valley. The project is a partnership between farmers, landowners and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, with input from Sparsholt College, Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency. This builds upon agri-environment scheme management to implement additional habitat measures and trial methods of reducing predation pressure on wader nests and chicks.

### WHY THE AVON VALLEY?

The Avon Valley has historically supported nationally important populations of breeding waders. However, in common with other lowland wet grassland sites throughout Britain, numbers of breeding waders in the valley have fallen dramatically since the early 1980s, with declines of 64% in lapwing, 75% in redshank and 97% in snipe. The valley is also designated for its wide range of habitats, an outstanding diversity of plants including several nationally rare species and many invertebrate species including dragonflies, grasshoppers and crickets.

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has monitored wader numbers in the Avon Valley for over 20 years and our data on lapwing breeding success since 2007 show that low nest and chick survival resulting from high levels of predation is an important factor in the decline of this bird.

### SPECIES TO BENEFIT

**LAPWING**  
The focus of the project, the lapwing is one of the most characteristic of the gamebirds of the Avon Valley.

**GADWALL**  
Waders nesting south of the river benefit from the creation of new and improved grazing and mowing regimes to reduce the risk of predation.

**SCAUP**  
Increased water levels through improved ditch lines and wet features.

**BROWN FLATSIDE**  
Increased water levels through improved ditch lines and wet features.

### WHAT DO WADERS NEED?

#### IMPROVED HABITAT

New and restored in-field wet features create optimum wader foraging habitat. These habitats provide a rich source of invertebrates on which wader chicks feed and soft soil to facilitate probing. These mini-wetlands also host dragonflies, damselflies, molluscs, important wetland plants, as well as overwintering waders and waterfowl. In addition, our farmers have modified grazing and cutting regimes to increase diversity and maintain shorter swards.

*In-field wet features have been restored to provide ideal wader chick foraging habitat (left before and right after)*

#### REDUCED PREDATOR PRESSURE

Waders select open landscapes, avoiding places where predators perch and hide. With help from our project partners, we have removed over 1km of old fences and willow scrub along with an additional 18 dead trees. We have deployed temporary electric fencing, protecting 125,880m<sup>2</sup> of wader breeding habitat. Fences are deployed in areas where nest predation has been identified and typically surround a wet feature where chicks are likely to feed. As well as understanding which predators are present, our intensive camera trap monitoring has improved the efficiency of legal predator control already conducted on parts of the study area by private landowners to assist wader recovery.

To mitigate against high fox predation, we must gain a much clearer understanding of fox ecology on river meadows. We have fitted GPS-collars to foxes and obtained tens of thousands of positions, and collected hundreds of fox scats. In the north of the valley, where foxes are unmanaged and waders no longer breed, our research has revealed that foxes living at surprisingly high densities are being sustained primarily by voles. Our focus in the south of the valley is to investigate how foxes behave around breeding waders and our temporary electric fencing. These novel insights into fox movements and activity patterns will underpin future advice on managing fox predation for wader conservation.

### PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

**61** LAPWING PAIRS IN THE STUDY AREA IN 2015

**105** LAPWING PAIRS IN THE STUDY AREA IN 2019

**84%** INCREASE IN BREEDING PAIRED BETWEEN 2015 AND 2019

**37** FENCES FITTED WITH GPS TRACKING COLLARS

**80** CAMERAS INSTALLED ON HOTSPOTS EACH YEAR

**1.3 KM** OF FENCING INSTALLED

**31** NEW SCARPS

**7.5 KM** OF DITCHES CREATED OR RESTORED



Information boards have been placed in several locations so that local communities, walkers and others can understand the work of the project.



## Delivery of the communication strategy

Effective communications after the end of the LIFE Waders for Real project will be essential to ensure that work continues in the Avon Valley, lessons are transferred to other similar situations, and key findings and messages get through to researchers and policy makers. The project website will be maintained for at least five years, and the Layman's Report will be available on the GWCT website indefinitely. The table outlines the other elements of our communication plan.

Action	Audience	Communication channel	Person responsible	Cost
Circulate Layman's Report	Conservation practitioners, Avon Valley farmers, general public	Hard copies to attendees of project conference and farmers, pdf available on project website (May 2020)	Lizzie Grayshon (Avon Valley facilitator)	£425
Distribute end-of-project conference report	Conservation practitioners, Avon Valley farmers	Online pdf, hard copies (May 2020)	Lizzie Grayshon	£125
Promote project locally	Local community	Two press releases for local newspapers and radio (May-June 2020)	Lizzie Grayshon	£185
Launch 'Saving Our Lapwing' booklet	Conservation practitioners, policy makers	Launch event in London, national newspaper article, hard copies and pdf version (May 2020)	Joe Dimbleby (GWCT press writer)	£1,430
Promote project nationally	Conservation practitioners, general public	Article for specialist farming/ countryside magazine, press release for national print and radio media (June-July 2020)	Joe Dimbleby, Lizzie Grayshon	£450
Maintain the project's online profile	Practitioners, researchers, public	LIFE Waders for Real website, Twitter account, Facebook page	Lizzie Grayshon	£1,145 per annum
Management advice	Landowners and farmers on hotspot sites	Telephone, email, on-site meetings, group meetings	Lizzie Grayshon	£1,970 per annum
Education, advice and training	Avon Valley landowners and farmers outside hotspots	Telephone, email, on-site meetings, group meetings	Lizzie Grayshon, Mike Short (GWCT predation ecologist)	£2,340 per annum
Transfer advice and training to other locations	Managers and farmers in other river valleys	Telephone, email, on-site meetings	Lizzie Grayshon, Mike Short, Andrew Hoodless (GWCT Head of Wetland Research)	c.£860 per annum
Investigate mechanisms for improving water transport in dry years	Farmers, Environment Agency, Natural England	Meetings, site visits	Andrew Hoodless, Lizzie Grayshon	£1,445

Action	Audience	Communication channel	Person responsible	Cost
Publish scientific papers explaining project results	Researchers, policy makers, conservation NGOs	Finish and submit four papers drafted during the project (by July 2020). Produce two further papers for submission (by April 2021).	Andrew Hoodless, Lizzie Grayshon, Tom Porteus (GWCT predation ecologist) Jonathan Reynolds (GWCT Head of Predation Studies)	£29,600
Advocate for appropriate agri-environment support	Policy makers	Meetings with Defra and Natural England, Parliamentary Group presentations, responses to consultations	Andrew Hoodless, Alastair Leake (GWCT Director of Policy), Teresa Dent (GWCT CEO)	£2,600 per annum
Engage with international projects	Practitioners and researchers	Contact with other NGOs, presentations at conferences	Lizzie Grayshon, Andrew Hoodless, Mike Short	c.£2,000 per annum
Initiate dialogue on predator management	Researchers, policy makers, conservation NGOs	Meetings, conference sessions	Andrew Hoodless, Mike Short	£1,040
Educate people about wetlands and ecosystem services	Farmers, general public	Open farm days, county shows	Lizzie Grayshon	£1,230 per annum
Educate school children	School children and teachers	School media pack, classroom/ field visits, trial a webcam, produce a video	Lizzie Grayshon	£1,720

To educate farmers and communities about the wider biodiversity benefits of wetland management and facilitate new farmer initiatives directed at other taxa.

The delivery of the communication strategy will be part-funded by GWCT as part of promoting our work and fulfilling our charitable objectives. The production of the scientific papers, for instance, is important for satisfying our research remit. Dissemination of the Layman's Report and project conference report, along with local and national press releases and articles have been budgeted within GWCT accounts for 2020. The launch of 'Saving our Lapwing' has been funded by the Dulverton Trust. This will now have to be delayed until autumn 2020 or conducted online owing to current Covid-19 restrictions. The changing situation around the Covid-19 pandemic, such as restrictions on public events, may lead to changes in the timings outlined here but objectives will be maintained.

The remaining actions will be implemented by Lizzie Grayshon. Lizzie was the LIFE Waders for Real Project Officer and she has been retained on staff with the new role of Avon Valley facilitator. This post will run for 2020-2022 and is partly funded by Natural England through the Farmer Cluster Facilitation Fund.



## Evaluation and reporting of long-term results

One of the main measures of success of the communication plan will be the size of the Avon Valley breeding wader population. GWCT intends to continue to host undergraduate and MSc students to assist with wader monitoring over the next five years. Because we are moving to a phase where landowners and farmers will no longer receive the high level of support from GWCT staff delivered during the LIFE Waders for Real project, achievement of the target lapwing and redshank pair numbers will be a strong indicator that stakeholders have been able to continue and expand necessary actions with less support.

Growth in participation in the Avon Valley farmer cluster and initiation of other biodiversity projects will provide measures of farmer engagement. We intend to continue with the Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach, initiated during the LIFE project, with questionnaires to track the experiences of farmers on hotspot sites in the longer term and to capture information from new farmer cluster participants. We aspire to engage better with a younger audience and progress towards more regular school events and use of webcams and videos represents an important longer-term milestone.

Wider communication success will be measured in terms of greater engagement with researchers, policy makers and other NGOs at national and European levels, through metrics such as numbers of meetings, invited consultations, conference presentations, speaker invitations and project proposals and collaboration. Key areas of engagement with researchers and NGOs will be on our fox tracking and development of effective fox management strategies, while important topics of engagement with policy makers will be better local solutions for floodplain water control by farmers and the delivery of a complete wader recovery package within the Environmental Land Management scheme, which will have to balance farmer eligibility and focused targeting with funding allocation.

We plan to fundraise specifically to enable GWCT staff to spend time in 2024 reporting on the outcome of the next five years of engagement in the Avon Valley. We envisage producing another Layman's Report which outlines progress and successes since the end of the LIFE project, and we hope to produce another scientific paper based on a longer period of wader management.