

Little Ringed Plover Factsheet



Little Ringed Plover and chick © Steve Phillips

Little Ringed Plovers are a fairly recent breeding bird to the UK. The early colonisers were always found on reservoir banks or shingle areas on working gravel pits. This is still the case over the majority of the UK although artificially created and managed areas now also exist on many nature reserves.

The Little Ringed Plover is still regarded as a rare breeding wader in the UK. The bird was first seen in the Tywi Valley in 1984 near the Dinefwr ponds. A recent survey by The British Trust for Ornithology found that 7% of the total UK population were found on the Tywi and its tributaries, the Cothi and the Bran.

Identification

A small plover, similar to the Ringed Plover, with a distinctive black and white head pattern. The Little Ringed Plover has pale legs and a black beak. When seen flying, its wings are plain brown without the white wing bar that Ringed Plovers have.

Ecology

What makes the birds on the Tywi unique amongst the UK population is that they're found on the shingle banks found prolifically in the Tywi, rather than on reservoirs and gravel pits. These shingle banks are now considered to be the more natural habitat of this species. The preference of working gravel pits suggests they need their shingle to be free of vegetation early in the nesting cycle. This occurs naturally on the Tywi where gravel is constantly moved throughout the year.

Little Ringed Plovers arrive in the UK in March to breed and leave again by the end of August. They deposit their eggs in a small hollow (called a 'scrape') that they create on the bare shingle where the birds and their eggs are well camouflaged. The birds will lay repeat clutches but the fledging success tends to be reduced on these occasions.

Although the Little Ringed Plover on the Tywi appear to be doing reasonably well there are considerable threats to them. The extraction of gravel from the river bed can be very harmful to the birds if carried out during their breeding season. Grazing cattle on the valley can cause damage when they move over the shingle banks to drink from the river. Walkers and fishermen on the river banks can also have a detrimental effect on the bird's success and can cause the failure of a nesting attempt. Another problem, beyond our control is the variable levels of the water in early Spring that can wash eggs away.

Management Advice to Farmers and Landowners

- If livestock are moving over shingle banks in order to drink from the River Tywi, then fencing off drinking areas during the Little Ringed Plover's breeding season i.e. March to August, could help the birds hatch more eggs.
- If livestock are not dependant upon the River for drinking water, fencing off shingle banks from stock using permanent or electric fencing will decrease disturbance to nesting Little Ringed Plovers and reduce the risk of eggs being trampled.
- Raising awareness of the existence of these birds to tenant farmers and anglers using farmland adjacent to the Tywi will ensure that the minimum of disturbance and damage takes place.

Advice to Anglers

- Please be aware that Little Ringed Plovers may be breeding on the shingle banks where fishing takes place. It would be advisable to walk along the water's edge instead of walking across the shingle where there is a risk of stepping on their eggs and disturbing the birds.

Further information can be obtained from Anna Hobbs, Landscape and Biodiversity Officer for the Tywi Afon yr Oesoedd project (01558 824271 or ahobbs@carmarthenshire.gov.uk) or by contacting Isabel Macho, Carmarthenshire Biodiversity Officer (01267 224653 or IMacho@carmarthenshire.gov.uk)



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