



# Wader Calendar Survey Instructions

Breeding waders are in steep decline and our society urgently needs more information about how many are left in different areas, and whether they are managing to rear young. Farmers are well-placed to gather valuable information on waders due to your familiarity with the wildlife of your farm, and the regularity with which you are out on the ground.

**The BTO is developing a method for farmers to record this information in a way that you can easily fit around the graft of the farming year.** The *Wader Calendar* can be pinned up on the back of a door or a wall, and updated on a weekly basis (taking a few minutes each week to complete).

If you would like to take part, simply print out the *Wader Calendar* and begin recording your weekly counts! Just **remember to return your completed forms** at the end of the summer by email or post using the contact details below. It is also helpful if you email us to let us know you're planning to take part, including your name, farm name and postcode. **If you have few or no waders on your farm, please still consider taking part; this information is just as valuable for wader conservation.**

## Contact

Paul Noyes, Wader Project Officer  
BTO Scotland  
Unit 15 Beta Centre, Stirling University Innovation Park  
Stirling, FK9 4NF

Email: [waders@bto.org](mailto:waders@bto.org)

Tel: 0751 619 4934

## Recording

The *Wader Calendar* form is a blank table to conveniently record information about the waders you see on your farm from late March to late July. **Each week, fill in one row of the table, entering information for the five target wader species as follows:**

### Core counts

- Enter the count of each species seen on your farm that week in the first (wide) columns
- If a species was absent that week, enter a "0" for the count
- If some were present, but you are unsure of the number, enter a tick "✓"

Try to minimize double-counting, limiting your count to the minimum number of birds that could have been present on your farm, based on your weekly observations (don't tally counts over different times in the week in the same area).

**Remember to enter "0" for the species you didn't observe.** Zero counts are just as important as counts or ticks "✓"!

### Extra information about counts (optional)

It is useful to indicate how many of the birds you counted are caring for young. Evidence of this comes from either seeing adults with chicks, or behaviours like repeated alarm-calling, agitation, or mobbing predators (or you!) (see **behaviour guide** below).

If you observe adult birds with young that are also alarm-calling, please record these only in the *With young* column (i.e. the first narrow column). Only use the second narrow column (*Alarm/agitation*) to record alarm-calling or agitated adults which no young were seen with.

Second (narrow) column: *With young* (regardless of behaviour)

- If possible, enter the number of birds from your count that were observed with young (regardless of behaviour)
- If any birds were observed with young but you cannot recall or are unsure of the number, simply enter a tick “✓” in this column

Third (narrow) column: *Alarm/agitation* (but no young observed)

- If possible, enter the number of birds from your count that were observed alarm-calling, agitated or mobbing (see **behaviour guide** below)
- If birds were observed alarm-calling, agitated or mobbing, but you cannot recall or are unsure of the number, enter a tick “✓” in this column

If your count did not include birds with young or any alarm-calling birds (e.g. just singing/ displaying or feeding), please enter a cross “X” in both columns.

Please enter counts of any young observed in the *Notes* column. Once chicks fledge, they can look very similar to adults; don’t get hung up on separating these! Counts later in the season will likely include a mix of adults and young.

### General guidance

If providing the extra information on behaviour or numbers of waders is too time-consuming or confusing, just recording presence of wader species each week (simply by ticking the main box each week) would still be very valuable!

If you’re away from the farm, have not been out much in the week, or have been too busy to observe waders, just cross out that week’s row. However, **if you were out and about on the farm, but did not see or hear any waders, remember to enter “0” in each core count.**

Anyone can fill in the *Wader Calendar*; it’s no problem if another member of your family, a farm hand or contractor is better placed to fill in a row (though please do not combine each other’s counts, unless they refer to distinct areas of the farm you have each covered separately).

**That’s it! Please try to fill in the table each week, whilst what you have observed is fresh in your mind.** There is no strict methodology, you can count waders at set times in the week or make observations as you go about your work on the farm.

### Farm details

Please make sure you fill in the details of your farm in the relevant section of the recording sheet. **It is especially important to enter the size of the area in which you are recording waders** (in most cases, the size of your farm), as this allows us to interpret your counts appropriately. If you wish, you can fill in multiple forms for distinct areas. In all cases, please make it clear (in the *Farm Details* section) which area each form relates to.

If you aren’t sure about the grid reference for your farm, you can use an online grid reference finder (e.g. <https://gridreferencefinder.com>). You can use the form to record waders for a whole farm, or for part of a farm. Please use the *Notes* box to give more details about any land management you undertake which is relevant to breeding waders, counts of other wader species breeding on your farm or any other information you feel is important!



### **Behaviour guide (recognising *Alarm/agitation*)**

Waders will often **repeatedly alarm call** and act very **agitated** when they are caring for young. Adults may fly off some distance for a short period of time but continue their distressed behaviour on their return. Example alarm calls (among many other vocalisations) can be found at <https://www.xeno-canto.org/> (e.g. [Curlew](#), [Lapwing](#), [Oystercatcher](#) and [Redshank](#)). If there are lots of waders in your survey square you may be faced with **communal mobbing** by many waders, sometimes of different species; please include these in any *Alarm/agitated* counts (unless you have observed young, in which case include them in *With young* counts). Note that Curlew in particular, may begin alarming at potential threats (including you!) from some distance away. There may also only be a single adult bird later in the season, as the females often leave before the chicks are fledged.

### **Try not to include displaying/singing waders in *Alarm/agitation* counts**

As much as is possible, try to limit birds entered in the *Alarm/agitation* count to those clearly showing the behaviours above. Waders can be very vocal throughout the year; some obvious calls and behaviours not to include in *Alarm/agitation* counts are singing/displaying birds. Songs and displays vary from species to species but all involve a “song” delivered from a perch or during a display flight around their home range. Some, especially lapwing, can look quite agitated in display flight, but please only classify birds as mobbing when you can see a predator (or they are mobbing you).

Displaying adults are most obvious when in flight and may include ‘song’ vocalisations (such as the ‘bubbling’ of Curlew) but may include ground-based displays and other behaviour associated with initiating breeding (e.g. copulation, courtship or digging a nest scrape). Such behaviours indicate territoriality but strongly suggest there are no young. Later in the season this may indicate a second breeding attempt after an initial, failed breeding attempt. You can find video clips showing examples of some of these behaviours on YouTube.com (for example, [Curlew display](#), [Oystercatcher display](#), [Lapwing display](#)).