

## **Ornithological Armageddon – The Impact of Calderdale Wind Farm on the Birds of Walshaw Moor**

Walshaw Dean and the extensive moorlands on the Walshaw Moor Estate are nationally and internationally significant for their ornithological richness and diversity. The moorlands surrounding the three reservoirs in Walshaw Dean, along with Widdop Moor, Wadsworth Moor, Shackleton Moor and Crimsworth Dean, provide vital habitats for rare and endangered ground-nesting birds, including significant colonies of curlews, lapwings, golden plovers, oystercatchers and skylarks, as well as snipe and redshanks, all of which return to this particular location specifically for around six months each year to mate, nest and rear their chicks. The experience of watching these extraordinary birds flying, foraging and rearing their chicks in their natural habitat and listening to their inimitable cries in this wild landscape is one of the great wonders of the natural world.

The vast scale of the proposed wind farm would result in the wholesale eradication of the entire ground-nesting bird population of the Walshaw Moor Estate through the destruction of their vital moorland habitat. It is this specific habitat in this specific location which draws the same birds back year after year and enables them to breed and, therefore, to survive. The massive physical disruption and noise caused by all the engineering work during the construction period would also deter or prevent birds from returning to their established breeding sites. It is simply incomprehensible to contemplate the deliberate and systematic extinction and silencing of these birds, who would be permanently driven away from their centuries-old breeding sites as a result of this development and whose last hope of survival would be eliminated.

The Walshaw Moor Estate is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for the conservation and protection of wild birds classified under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The number, range and rarity of the birds which inhabit Walshaw Moor are of national and international importance, including not only ground-nesting birds, but also birds of prey and a wide range of other resident and migrant bird species. Amongst the critically-endangered species with special protected status identified in the South Pennine Moors SSSI are golden plovers, merlins and twite. Apart from curlews, lapwings, golden plover, oystercatchers, skylarks, redshanks, and snipe, the diversity of bird species on the Walshaw Moor Estate is remarkable, including buzzards, barn owls, short-eared owls, little owls, kestrels, sparrowhawks, Northern wheatears, reed buntings, swallows, meadow pipits, dippers, goldfinches, redwings, fieldfares, pied wagtails, grey wagtails, pheasants, red grouse, sandpipers, greylag geese, cuckoos, ravens, starlings, great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker and grey herons.

The reason why these birds are attracted to Walshaw Moor is because of the range of habitats it provides and the specific feeding and/or breeding opportunities it offers. If these habitats are damaged or obliterated, the chances of these birds surviving in the future is minimal. In addition to the resident bird population and the ground-nesting birds that spend at least half of each year from February to July/August in this location, winter or summer migrants visit for shorter periods and many others birds also pass over Walshaw Moor and through the Walshaw Dean, Crimsworth Dean and Hardcastle Crag corridors throughout the year. By introducing a forest of dangerous whirling 200 metre high turbines right across their flight path, any birds which currently inhabit or visit Walshaw Moor are at risk of being injured or killed, whether permanent residents, seasonal visitors or birds passing through on migration.

The proposed wind farm would have disastrous consequences not only for the number of birds on Walshaw Moor, particularly ground-nesting birds, but on the diversity of bird species in the neighbouring National Trust estate of Hardcastle Crag and the adjoining valley of Crimsworth Dean, parts of which lie within the boundaries of the Walshaw Moor Estate. Walshaw Moor lies directly above these two ecologically rich valleys and their ecosystems are inextricably linked to each other and to the moorland above. It is because of their varied interconnected habitats that they attract such a diverse range of birds, the breadth and depth of which would be greatly reduced by the knock-on effects of the proposed wind farm. Protecting existing bird populations, especially endangered ground-nesting birds and birds of prey, and increasing biodiversity are top of the agenda in nature conservation. A highly disruptive and damaging development such as this wind farm, which would result in a drastic reduction of bird numbers and a significant decrease in ornithological biodiversity, should not be allowed.

The significance of Walshaw Moor as an ornithological sanctuary of national and international importance - vital to the future survival of ground-nesting birds in particular - cannot be over-estimated. The sheer scale of the proposed wind farm will not only destroy this rare ornithological habitat and wipe out entire species throughout the Walshaw Moor Estate but will result in carnage for any birds which attempt to fly over Walshaw Moor or through Walshaw Dean and Crimsworth Dean in future once the turbines are operational. Furthermore, wiping out one species directly affects others in the ecosystem and upsets the whole balance of nature. If this development goes ahead in any shape or form, it will result in ornithological Armageddon. For these reasons alone, under no circumstances should this development be permitted. It is diametrically opposed to the fundamental ethos of the criteria governing Special Protection Areas and directly contravenes the legal safeguards regulating Walshaw Moor's protected status as an SPA, a Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest.