

Sociable Lapwing

Vanellus gregarius



Similar in size to the Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), the Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) is much more brightly coloured, with sandy cream yellow tones. In its breeding plumage, the dark brown belly, dark cap and eye-stripe with a white supercilium are features distinctive from any other lapwing or plover. In flight, the conspicuous black and white wing pattern enables recognition of the species, even in non-breeding plumage. The species feeds largely on invertebrates such as beetles, spiders and caterpillars.



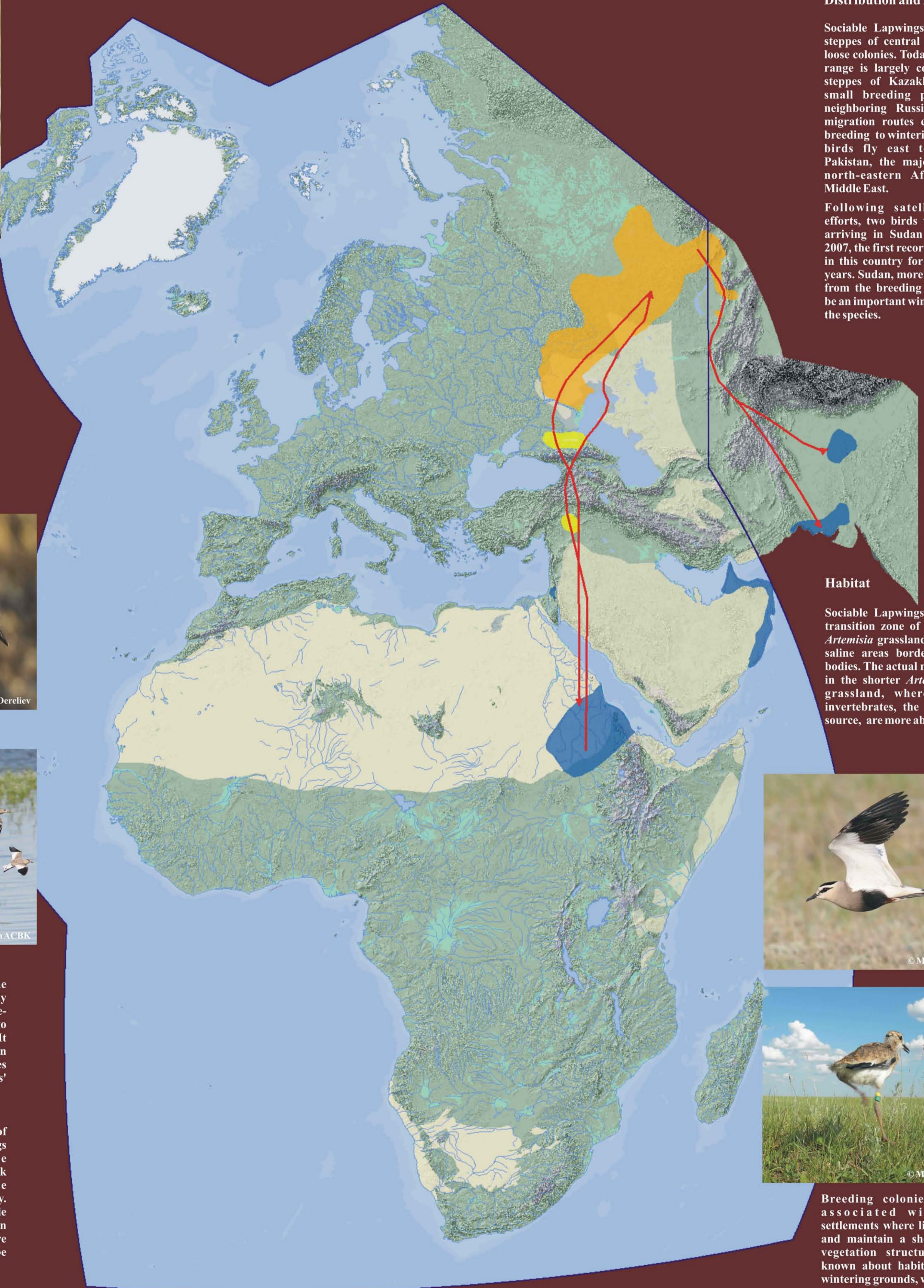
Conservation status

The species has declined steadily since the 1930s and numbers halved between 1960 and 1987. These declines continued and even accelerated in the 1990s. By 1994, the species was considered to be globally 'Vulnerable' according to the IUCN Red List, and in 2004 it was uplisted to Critically Endangered. In 2004, it was estimated that the world population could be as low as 400 pairs and that the species was on the brink of extinction.



The key factors that triggered a decline of this magnitude still remain largely unknown. It is believed that the large-scale conversion of steppe areas to arable land must have played a role. It has also been suggested that a reduction in grazing animals (both wild ungulates and domestic herds) altered the species' preferred habitat.

In 2006, a survey team found a flock of over 1,200 migrating Sociable Lapwings in Syria. Birds with satellite transmitters attached pointed to a flock of 3,200 birds at a site in the Ceylanpinar Province, eastern Turkey. The world population of the Sociable Lapwing is therefore larger than previously thought, and there are increased hopes that the species can be saved from extinction.



Distribution and migration

Sociable Lapwings breed in the steppes of central Asia, often in loose colonies. Today the breeding range is largely confined to the steppes of Kazakhstan, with a small breeding population in neighboring Russia. Two main migration routes exist from the breeding to wintering areas: some birds fly east to India and Pakistan, the majority move to north-eastern Africa via the Middle East.

Following satellite-tracking efforts, two birds were recorded arriving in Sudan in November 2007, the first record of the species in this country for more than 50 years. Sudan, more than 8,000 km from the breeding grounds, may be an important wintering area for the species.

Habitat

Sociable Lapwings breed in the transition zone of the *Stipa* and *Artemisia* grasslands, where bare saline areas border with water bodies. The actual nests are found in the shorter *Artemisia/Festuca* grassland, where dung and invertebrates, the primary food source, are more abundant.



Breeding colonies are often associated with human settlements where livestock graze and maintain a short and open vegetation structure. Little is known about habitat use at the wintering grounds, which includes gravel plains, semi-deserts, freshwater wetlands and cropped agricultural land.

Under the auspices of AEMA, an International Species Action Plan was drafted and published in 2004. Some of the main suggested activities comprised the survey of former breeding sites and research to obtain a better understanding of the breeding conditions, migratory routes, important stop-over sites and wintering grounds. The main actions proposed included legal protection in the key countries, like Kazakhstan and Russia, and in the longer-term, it was suggested that national action plans will need to be implemented.

