

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Current requests were listed in Bulletin 25, as were current marking schemes. Details of further marking schemes are given in this issue. Other new requests for information are given below.

Winter weights of Redshanks Tringa totanus

I am examining the pattern of winter weights of Redshanks throughout the country to determine how extensively Redshanks lose condition (see article in this issue). If anyone has weights of Redshanks during the winter, particularly during the period November to February, that have not already been submitted to the Wader Study Group, I would be grateful if I could use them (full acknowledgement will of course be given in any publication). Most useful data on each bird is age, wing length and weight, as well as location, date and condition of capture, but incomplete information is also welcome.

Nick Davidson, Department of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, England.

Weights of waders in cold weather in Britain

The moult of waders - an appeal for data

So far there has been little response to these two requests for information which appeared on pages 3 and 4 of Bulletin 25. If you have any information we should be pleased to hear from you.

International November count of Golden Plovers in western Europe: request for assistance

Like many other species of Palaearctic waders, Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* winter in western Europe, but unlike many others, it is not confined to a marine coastal habitat in this period. At this time the birds are scattered over a large area including Ireland, Great Britain, Morocco, Iberia, France and, in mild winters, the other countries bordering the North Sea. Very little is known of their total numbers but information on this subject would provide insight into proposed relationships between population size and total area of wintering grounds of waders, and the effects of weather on distribution.

Two country-wide surveys of Golden Plovers were carried out successfully in the Netherlands in November 1976 and April 1977. An article by Mennobart van Eerden and Peter Keij on these and other counts in Germany and Denmark will appear in the December issue of WSG Bulletin. An international count is being planned for 24-25 November 1979 when it is hoped to achieve as complete coverage as possible in Denmark, Western Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. Additional information from southern Norway and Sweden as well as France and further south would also be welcome. Would anyone able to organise counting in their area please contact the general organisers before 15 October. Please write to: Mr Cor Smit, Research Institute for Nature Management, Post Box 59, 1790 AB De Burg, Texel, The Netherlands.

CURRENT COLOUR MARKING SCHEMES

Details of colour marking schemes in the Old World received since the compiling of the list published in Bulletin 25 are given below. We ask ringers to notify the Editors of any other schemes and to advise us when these end. For colour-dyeing and temporary 'flag' schemes, the Editors would be grateful for advice well in advance for all seasons that the scheme will operate. Ringers should also consult their national ringing authority.

Reports of sightings, with as much detail as possible, should be sent to the appropriate person listed below; he will pass it on if necessary. In case of doubt, the record should be sent to one of the Editors. Please note that many schemes can make use of incomplete data if not all rings are clearly seen. Operators of schemes are requested to make sure that sightings are acknowledged and the observer informed of the history of the bird concerned.

COLOUR-RINGING

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Portugal (Rui Rufino, Centro de Estudos de Migrações e Protecção de Aves, Rua da Lapa 73, 1200 Lisboa, Portugal)

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Netherlands (Leo Zwarts, Achterwei 23, EE(FRL), Holland). This and some other studies of these species use a combination of one or more 'conventional' colour rings with a tall ring. These tall rings consist of one colour with engraved bands of a second colour. The bands may be wide or narrow and occur in one or more of three positions on the ring: high, middle and low.

We understand that another marking scheme for Oystercatchers may be operating in Gotland, Sweden but we do not have details.

Knot *Calidris canutus*
Sanderling *C. alba*
Dunlin *C. alpina*

NE Greenland 1979 (Jens Muff Hansen & Niels Odder Jensen, Skejbyvej 31, 8240 Risskov, Denmark). (We were very pleased to receive prior warning of this scheme. Certain colour codes were altered to avoid clash with another scheme - Eds).

COLOUR FLAGS

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Somerset & Avon (N.A.Clark, Department of Zoology, University of Edinburgh, West Mains Road, Edinburgh). The use of these more permanent leg flags is described elsewhere in this issue. Because widespread use of this method would reduce the great potential usefulness of the temporary flags described in the last issue, we strongly discourage the use of permanent flags, especially if conventional colour-rings or temporary leg-flags would be adequate for any intended study.

SPRING PASSAGE OF DUNLINS, SANDERLINGS, RINGED PLOVERS AND TURNSTONE THROUGH BRITAIN - PROGRESS REPORT.

by P.N. Ferns

Coverage for this Wader Study Group Project looks like being first class (Fig 1). Over 40 sites should be involved, some for catching, some for counting, and in many cases both. A complete list of participants has already been sent to contributors and will appear in a future edition of the Wader Study Group Bulletin. Not everyone on the list will necessarily be able to conduct large numbers of counts, but I hope something will be done at most sites. In addition, there are a few areas which were included in the survey too late to be shown in Fig. 1. Number 43 refers to counts which are being conducted at a number of coastal sites in the Republic of Ireland - organised by Patrick J. Smiddy through the Irish Wildbird Conservancy's Wetlands Enquiry.

The spring passage seems to have been a little later than normal this year, though numbers have been quite high. For example, a record count of 850 Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* was made at our site in the Severn Estuary (no. 24 in Fig.1.) on 13 May, which is a little later than usual. Sanderling *Calidris alba* numbers at this site were distinctly higher than in previous years, with 100 present during early May, even though this area does not provide ideal feeding conditions for this species. The passage of Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (not included in the WSG project) was also delayed, with a peak of 247 on 13 May, whereas the average peak date between 1973 and 1978 was 3 May (Ferns, Green & Round, in press).

Some observers have had difficulty in detecting migration departures, and while this may simply be that few birds were leaving in early May, it is also possible that departing flocks may be difficult to spot on north facing shores if they leave well before high tide and head straight out to sea. We had a particularly good day for departures on 12 May in the Severn (Table 1). This was the first fine day following a period of heavy rain and strong winds. It appears that birds had been awaiting fine weather before leaving since we recorded more departures than on any previous day of observations for a number of years. 12 May was also notable for the first mass arrival of Swifts *Apus apus* in South Wales. High tide occurred at 2040 and the wind was WSW force 4.

The first departures on 12 May took place three hours before high tide, but the majority took place between 20 minutes and two hours before high water. None at all occurred after high water (birds can usually be heard leaving after dark, though of course it is very difficult to estimate numbers). A total of 801 Dunlin *Calidris alpina* and 80 Ringed Plovers thus migrated, and most left directly from the tide edge, though a few roosted for a short while first. The average corrected compass bearing was 329° which would take them approximately over Belfast towards Iceland and Greenland. There was some alteration in the direction of flight during the first few minutes in the air, but after that they appeared to settle down and climb out of sight on a steady course. The average bearing of 3897 Dunlin leaving Langstone Harbour in April and May during the years 1953-1972 was 332° (Steventon 1977). This is very close to the figure from the Severn, though there was a lot more variation in direction at Langstone Harbour.

Catching has unfortunately not gone as well as had been hoped. We have had a total failure on the Severn, due to a combination of bad weather and unpredictable tides - so there will be very few colour-dyed birds about. The same weather has also affected other sites and has interfered with both cannon-netting and mist-netting. Another problem for many wader catchers who have not previously tried to catch so late in the season, is the enormous numbers of people (holiday-makers) who descend on the coast in May, making many beach sites impossible to use. However, the North Solway Ringing Group with the help of flying visits from the Wash Wader Ringing Group, have had some notable successes and have obtained good samples of Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*.

Another bright spot has been Morecambe Bay, where Chris Clapham reports catches of about 75 Sanderling, 100 Turnstone, 150 Ringed Plover and 1200 Dunlin. Ringed Plover and Sanderling passage appear to be a bit later than usual in the Bay, but good numbers of *Calidris alpina schinzii* passed through earlier than normal.

References

- Ferns, P.N., Green, G.H. & Round, P.D. 1979. Significance of the Somerset and Gwent Levels in Britain as feeding areas for migrant Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*). *Biol. Cons.* (in press).
- Steventon, D.J. 1977. Dunlin in Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester Harbours. *Ringing and Migration*. 1: 141 - 147

Dr. P.N. Ferns, Department of Zoology, University College, P.O.Box 78, Cardiff CF1 1XL, Wales.

Postscript (26 May 1979): As if to prove the idea of a late spring passage incorrect (and the idea of an early *schinzii* passage right), about 2000 Dunlins left our site on the Severn on 23 May, leaving us with only 200 Dunlins and 200 Ringed Plovers.