

DUNLIN ON THE SEVERN ESTUARY, ENGLAND

(Abstract of talk at WSG Autumn Meeting at Uttoxeter)

by N. A. Clark

Investigations of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* on the south side of the Severn Estuary have been carried out over two winters, 1978/79 and 1979/80. Three main sites, Clevedon, Sand Bay and Berrow have been studied. The substrates at these sites vary:

Clevedon - mud

Sand Bay - mud with large areas of sand at top of beach

Berrow - liquid mud with large areas of sand at top of beach

There is a difference in time available for feeding at different sites, due to the tide.

Most birds wintering on the Severn are of the race *alpina*. The males have a shorter bill length than the females. As bill length varies with feather margin total head length measurements have been taken.

The mean total head length of samples varies at different sites and times through the winter. However, this is masked as at sites where there are short-billed birds there is also a disproportionate number of very long-billed birds. Using a sample of internally sexed birds it has been possible to determine the sex of birds using discriminant analysis. From this data it was found that in December, January and February there were 70% females at Clevedon and Sand Bay and only 45% females at Berrow.

Total head lengths of birds caught at Clevedon in October and early November and subsequently retrapped at Clevedon in mid-winter were compared to birds caught at the same time which then moved south. The mean total head length of the birds staying at Clevedon was found to be significantly longer than that of those moving on. Of birds caught in late November and early December there was no significant difference in mean total head length between those staying and those moving on.

The weight pattern in 1978/79 followed the curve expected on the basis of previous studies, with a peak at the end of December. However in 1979/80 at Clevedon there was no mid-winter peak. Looking at male and female weights separately for the 1979/80 season it was found that females showed a mid-winter peak but males did not. At Berrow the weights of males and females were maintained at a higher level than at Clevedon.

INLAND WADER COUNTS

by OAG Münster

The note on Inland Wader Counts in WSG Bulletin 29 (Aug. 1980) was followed by a good response from different European countries. The number of investigated sites is now about 80! The greatest step forward was Tony Prater's organisation of the project in many interesting British sites. The other countries in which counting started last year were France and the Netherlands. In West Germany the counting scheme was continued with some new sites, 11 of them on the German Wattenmeer coast offering the opportunity of a direct comparison of the results between inland and coastal sites.

At the time of writing the counting forms of last year's season are arriving and the set is not complete yet. Therefore it is impossible at the moment to produce a comprehensive survey of the material which was gathered last year. We are quite hopeful that we will be able to make up for this in the next Bulletin and - as for a lot of sites 1980 was the first complete counting season (covering spring and autumn) - to present some preliminary results. The only fact perhaps worthwhile mentioning here is a quite distinct decrease in resting numbers of some species in Austria, Switzerland and inland Germany as yielded by the data of 15 sites covered both in 1979 and in 1980:

Species	Mean number of birds counted per visit (15 July to 31 Oct)		% change (1979 set as 100%)
	1979	1980	
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	2.6	1.2	-54
Curlew Sandpiper <i>C. ferruginea</i>	3.7	0.5	-86
Dunlin <i>C. alpina</i>	8.1	5.0	-38
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	8.5	6.8	-20
Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	78.3	37.6	-52
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	1.6	2.5	+56
Greenshank <i>T. nebularia</i>	5.3	4.7	-11
Green Sandpiper <i>T. ochropus</i>	7.5	8.9	+19
Wood Sandpiper <i>T. glareola</i>	8.5	6.6	-22

For some species the trend indicated in the table was general - occurring on each site - but for some others there were quite distinct differences between northern Germany and the area of southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

More about Inland Wader Counts in the next WSG Bulletin

OAG Münster, Biologische Station Rieselfelder, D-4400 Münster, West Germany