

Judging from past seasons, it is a little early to record large numbers of sightings away from the marking areas. However, we have already received a number of sightings showing movements of birds marked this season.

One Ringed Plover, marked in the Netherlands Delta on 17 or 28 August 1982 was seen in Vendée in France on 14 September 1982. Several birds marked in North Wales by SCAN Ringing Group have shown surprisingly varied movements already. One Ringed Plover marked on 7 August 1982 or 4 September 1982 was seen at the Hayle estuary, Cornwall, on 12 September 1982. One Dunlin marked on 7 August 1982 or 4 September 1982 was seen at Seahouses, Northumberland, on 9 September 1982. Another Dunlin from one of these two catches was seen by 2 observers at Havergate Island, Suffolk, around 7-10 September 1982. There have also been local sightings in North Wales of Dunlin, Oystercatcher and Redshank.

We have, to date, received no sightings away from the Wash of Wash-marked birds, although there have been many sightings within the Wash. Rowena Cooper is co-ordinating the "Wash" observers this year, and is herself spending time on the Wash actively looking for marked birds, in order to investigate movements between feeding areas within the Wash. However, more help at the Wash is always welcome. In previous years we have been unable to get much information on movements within the Wash, as it is such a large and difficult area to cover adequately when looking for marked birds.

On the ringing data collection side, the collection and checking of data proceeds all the time. We have recently been allocated extra computing 'file-space' which means that more data can now be run through the checking programs whilst new data is being transferred to the computer. Previously 'file-space' was more limited so that only one of these processes could take place at a time. This has meant that whilst we have put a lot more data onto computer file, relatively little of this new input has, as yet, been checked. We now plan to proceed with the checking of this data more rapidly, so ringers who have been eagerly awaiting print-outs to check should soon have their wish fulfilled!

Another important development taking some of our attention recently has been discussions with the organisers of various related projects, such as the renovated BTO/RSPB Birds of Estuaries Enquiry, and the new WSG project on The Effects of Severe Weather on Waders. Working together, these projects should produce very valuable information on the conservation needs of our coastal waders.

Finally, we would like to say 'thank you' to all the people who, by their voluntary help, make this project feasible; the ringers who catch and dye the birds, and send us their ringing data; the observers who go out and look for the marked birds, and send us the results; the people who receive sightings of marked birds and forward them to us; and everyone else helping in many ways.

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POSTSCRIPT: The visit to Baie du Mont St. Michel resulted in the marking of about 800 Dunlins, 70 Grey Plovers, 30 Knots and 8 Oystercatchers.

THE BIRDS OF ESTUARIES ENQUIRY

by Mike Moser

Following a break of several years, a full-time Birds of Estuaries Officer (Mike Moser) has been appointed by the BTO with financial aid from the RSPB and the NCC. The main objective of recreating the post is to develop and extend the scope of the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry and its use by conservation bodies.

A shortage of land, coupled with fast economic growth, in the mid 1960s brought a spate of proposals for massive barrage and land reclamation schemes for our estuaries. The habitat losses resulting from such schemes formed a serious threat to our wintering wildfowl and wader populations, and this was a major factor in firing the enthusiasm of ornithologists to study these habitats and their spectacular bird populations. The Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BoEE), initiated in 1969 with funding from the Nature Conservancy Council, was a pioneer project involving the co-operation of hundreds of estuary enthusiasts around the country. The basic information collected comprised the monthly count totals of waders and wildfowl present on each estuary in Britain and Ireland. The achievements of the initial BoEE programme (1969-1975) are summarised by the organiser, Tony Prater, in his book Estuary Birds of Britain and Ireland (1981, Poyser, Calton). Since 1975 the enquiry has been run by part-time organisers - Phil Hyde followed by John Marchant. During this period information was particularly requested for the midwinter months, and three reports were produced.

These results have put the Enquiry at the forefront of estuarine conservation, and have been used as evidence leading to the protection of several threatened sites, for example on the Ribble estuary, the Wash (Gedney Drove End) and Morecambe Bay. With all these results available, why is it so vital for us to continue to count estuarine birds? The reasons are straightforward: the threats to estuaries have not diminished, and conservation bodies must have sound, up-to-date, information at their disposal. The presence of a full-time Estuaries Officer at Tring will ensure a comprehensive and rapid feedback of such information to NCC, RSPB, County Trust and Local Authority Planning staffs, upon which they can build their cases for protecting threatened sites. In addition, it will allow a more detailed analysis of seasonal changes in the abundance and dispersion of our wintering shorebird populations. Long-term monitoring of population levels will also provide a warning of man- or naturally-induced changes in abundance.

In two major areas the BoEE will integrate very closely with projects organised by the Wader Study Group. One such project is the Movements of Wader Populations in Western Europe (see Pienkowski and Pienkowski, this Bulletin). At present, BoEE counts allow us to estimate only the peak number of birds using an estuary. This is a very important measure, but by combining these results with estimates of turnover from the WSG project, we should obtain a more accurate measure of the total number of birds using each estuary. The difference between the peak and total numbers is analogous to the number of visitors in a hotel in a whole year, and the number present on a bank holiday.

The second area concerns hard winters. None of these occurred during the initial BoEE programme, whereas two (1978/79 and 1981/82) have occurred since. Evidence is accumulating that hard weather can lead to severe mortality in some wader species. The responses of waders to these conditions are poorly known, and BoEE will work closely with a second WSG project: The Effects of Severe Weather on Waders (see Davidson and Clark, this Bulletin). This aims to find when, where, and how seriously wader populations are affected by severe weather, through the collection of corpses, population counts, and the weights of live birds. BoEE counters will be specifically requested to increase the frequency of their counts should a period of prolonged severe weather occur. In addition, the information collected through the BoEE will directly contribute to the BTO Winter Atlas.

The main objective this winter is to revitalise counting in regions where cover has declined since 1975, in order to obtain comprehensive counts for the mid-winter months (December, January and February). Counts may be extended in future years to cover the peak passage periods in spring and autumn. Much depends on the support and enthusiasm that can be given to the scheme, and anyone who would like to participate should contact me.

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WADER STUDY GROUP PROJECT ON THE EFFECTS OF SEVERE WEATHER ON WADERS

by N. C. Davidson and N. A. Clark

This project has now started, and will continue this winter until 31 March 1983. Figure 1 shows the distribution of observers who had registered for the project by October 1982. We urgently need need more observers, particularly in those areas for which we have no coverage so far. If you can help the project by making tideline searches, population counts and/or catching and weighing waders, whether on a regular or occasional basis, please fill in the registration form included with this bulletin and return it to us as soon as possible.

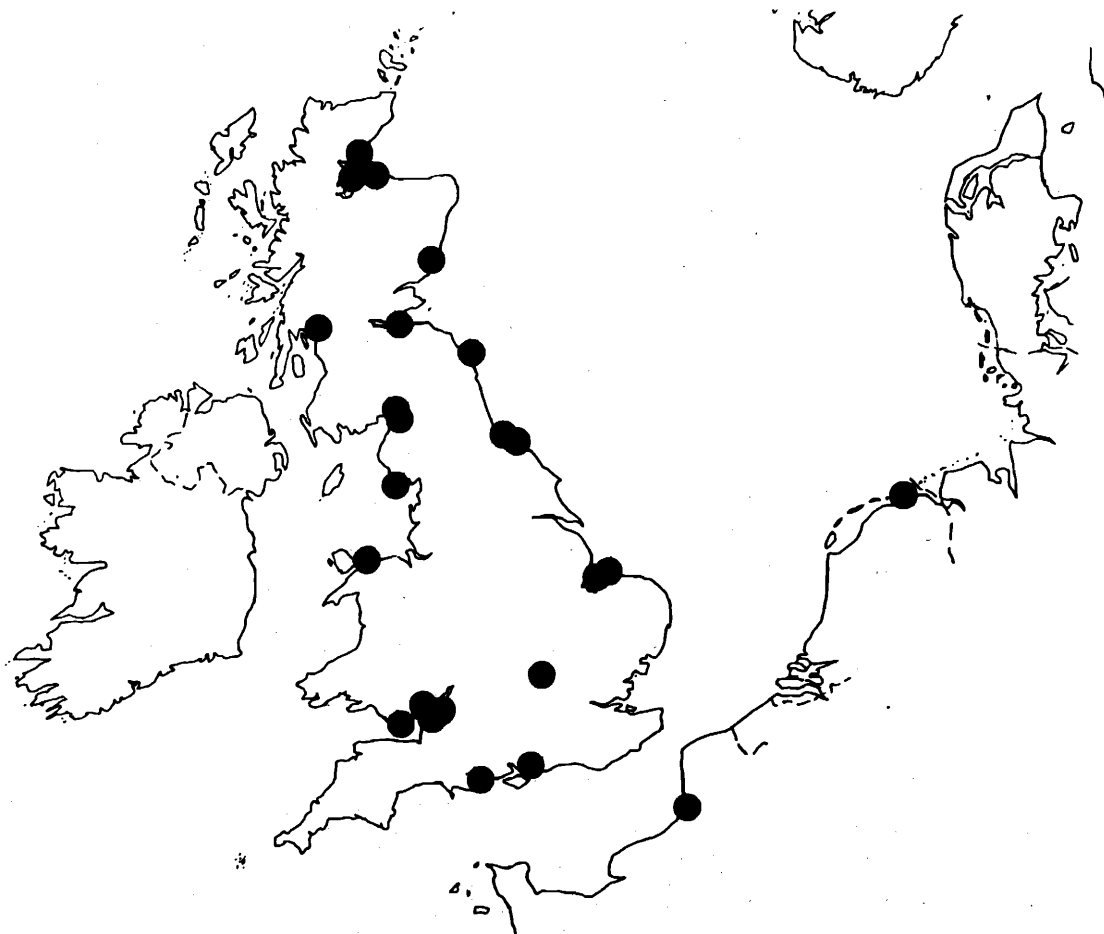


Figure 1. Distribution of observers as of October 1982

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