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THE WINTER SHOREBIRD COUNT: A PROGRESS REPORT

by Ron Summers and Mike Moser

During the winter of 1984-85 the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) in conjunction with the Wader Study Group organised a survey of the numbers and distribution of waders on the non-estuarine coasts of Britain. This aimed to provide first estimates of the importance of these habitats for wintering waders in comparison to estuaries. In addition to the bird count data, habitat information was also collected to examine the habitat preferences of waders. A more detailed description of the aims and methods of the project was given in *BTO News* 134 (September 1984).

Fieldwork took place between 15 December 1984 and 31 January 1985 and involved c. 2000 participants from the BTO and WSG. In remote areas such as north-west Scotland, the survey was carried out by visiting expeditions, while most other areas were covered by local ornithologists. The success of the survey can be gauged partly from the levels of coverage shown in Figure 1. A very high proportion of the non-estuarine coasts of the British Isles was surveyed.

The survey took place during a winter in which very severe weather occurred in southern Britain during mid-January. Thus, while counters in Shetland basked in the cool winter sun, those further south had to struggle through snow and ice to reach the shore. Fortunately, a large number of repeat counts were collected during the survey and we are currently processing these to assess whether large shifts in distribution occurred as a result of the severe weather.

The survey confirmed that many areas of open coasts hold rather few waders. This was generally true for the whole of the mainland west coast of Britain. In contrast, eastern Britain supported higher numbers, with the exception of Norfolk and Suffolk where the predominantly shingle beaches were almost barren. Many typically estuarine species such as Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Knot *Calidris canutus* and Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* were rare on the open coasts, while others such as Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* were found in relatively large numbers.

Analyses of the results are currently in progress and a full report of the survey will be given at the WSG meeting in October 1985.

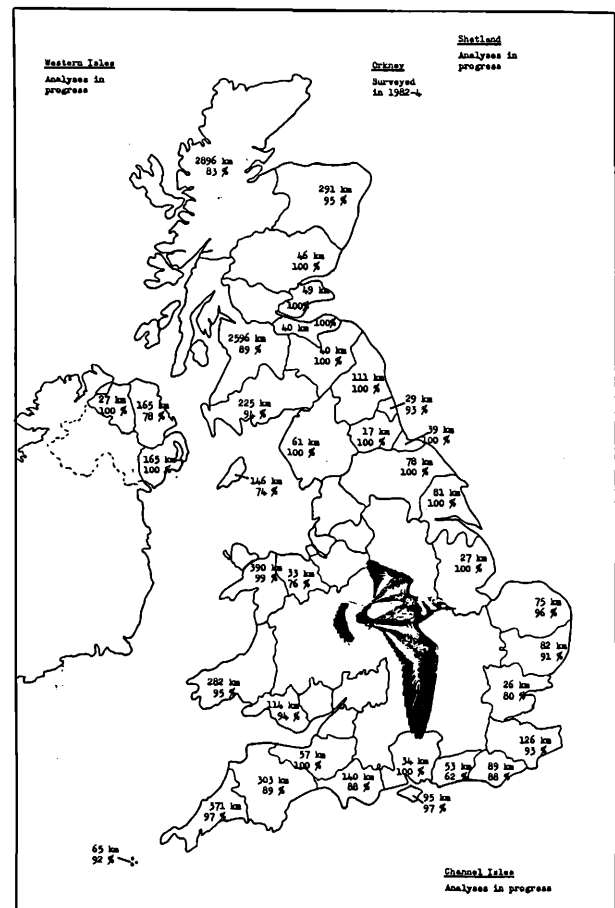


Figure 1. Map of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, showing county coverage achieved for the 1984-85 Winter Shorebird Count. The numbers for each county show the total length of non-estuarine shore (km) and the percentage of this (excluding cliffs) which was surveyed.

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