

BREEDING WADERS IN GALICIA, NORTH-WEST SPAIN

Jesus Dominguez, Felipe Barcena, J.A.Souza and Antonio Villarino

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The recent review of breeding waders in Europe (*WSG Bull.* 48, *Suppl.*) highlighted Spain as an area about which little is known of the size of breeding wader populations. This paper summarises existing information on the breeding status of 12 species of waders breeding in Galicia. Data are scarce for many species, and the figures for most species are provisional estimates.

J. Dominguez, Departamento de Biología Animal, Facultad de Biología, Universidad de Santiago, Galicia, España.

F. Barcena, Departamento de Parasitología, Facultad de Farmacia, Universidad de Santiago, Galicia, España.

J.A. Souza, c/ Eusebio da Guarda, 6-1º, 15007 A Coruña, Galicia, España.

A. Villarino, Avda. Buenos Aires 129-3º, 32004 Ourense, Galicia, España.

INTRODUCTION

A recent review of the situation of breeding waders in Europe (Piersma 1986) has revealed deficiencies in our knowledge of various regions of the continent, among them Spain. In this article we present information on this topic for Galicia, NW Spain. Our chief sources have been our own observations, many of them unpublished, the *Provisional Atlas of breeding birds in Galicia* (Beiras and Guitian 1983) and various notes and articles on Galician ornithology. For many of the species mentioned there is a striking lack of data concerning breeding population levels, and our estimates in these cases are very rough, and we hope provisional.

LIST OF SPECIES

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Since the early reports of breeding sites in the Islas Sisargas and the Coruña bay on the west coast of Galicia (Tait 1924), no further nests were observed in the region until F. Barcena discovered breeding pairs in 1982. In 1986 Barcena *et al.* (in prep.) located 7 breeding pairs and 3 pairs exhibiting territorial behaviour. There were a number of other pairs whose actual breeding could not be verified, at sites and seasons appropriate for reproduction. The total Galician population may be estimated as 7-20 pairs.

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

In Galicia this species inhabits inland shrubland and pastures, with isolated populations in suitable coastal localities. The lack of any systematic survey makes it difficult to estimate the total nesting population; a figure of the order of 100-1000 seems reasonable.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Inhabits the neighbourhood of inland rivers. Breeding pairs have also been observed on the coast (Souza 1978), though not in recent years. The total breeding population may provisionally be estimated as 5-50 pairs.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

The only breeding birds that we know of were the pair of adults observed with a juvenile by one of us (J.A. Souza) in 1979, on a beach on the north-west Galician coast. Sporadic nester.

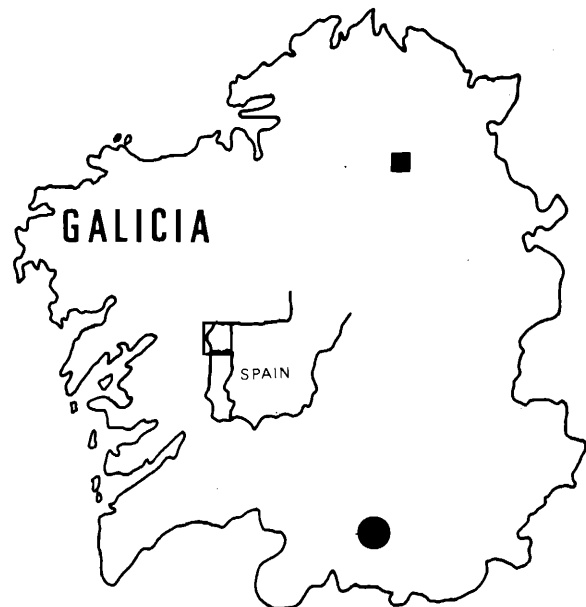


Figure 1. Study area showing Cospeito (■) and La Limia (●).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

A habitual nester on coastal beaches (Beiras and Guitian 1983). The number of breeding pairs is estimated as 50-100.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

The future of the only two breeding populations, located on dried inland lakes at Cospeito and La Limia (Figure 1), is threatened by the alteration of the environment and the growth of the human presence. The number of pairs is estimated as 40-70.

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

There are probably a number of breeding sites (Beiras and Guitian 1983), but breeding has been confirmed so far only in the area of La Limia (Villarino and Barcena, in prep.). The number of pairs varies from year to year between 10 and 50.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

The available data mention 3-5 pairs observed in mountainous woodland in eastern Galicia (Beiras and Guitian 1983). The breeding population may be estimated as 5-10 pairs.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

The only observation that we know of was a pair seen nesting by one of us (A.Villarino) near La Limia in the spring of 1981.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

In 1983 F.Barcelona and J.A.Souza located 5 breeding pairs in the La Limia area. The observation of Curlews in the breeding season on the north coast and at the Cospeito site (F.G. de la Torre, pers. comm.) suggests the presence of isolated pairs in these areas. Noval (1980) mentions breeding on the Asturian coast.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Breeding has been confirmed only on the dried lake at Antela (La Limia), where 1-5 pairs nest in favourable years.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Tait (1924) observed two breeding pairs on the banks of the river Mino at the Portuguese border. No further nests have been reported, though there are a number of probable but unconfirmed breeding sites (Beiras and Guitian 1983).

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THE HEAD PATTERN OF BLACK-WINGED STILTS

Antonio Xeira

Individual Black-winged Stilts vary considerably in the amount of black patterning on their heads and necks. The range of patterns that can be seen in birds of the nominate race is shown in Figure 1. The literature concerning the significance of this variation is complex and often not entirely in agreement (Cramp & Simmons 1983, Hayman *et al.* 1986, Prater *et al.* 1977). However, it is generally accepted that there is some link between the head pattern of individual stilts and their sex. At present, the only criterion which can be used with confidence to distinguish between the sexes is the colour of the mantle: black glossed with green in males, and brown in females.

During a study of Black-winged Stilts on the Tagus estuary (Portugal), I noted the head patterns of individual members of 13 known pairs. The pairs were recognized by their behaviour during territorial disputes or as an isolated pair. The members of each pair were sexed according to the colour of the mantle. For each individual I noted the colour of the mantle, crown, nape and hind-neck as either black, dusky or white. I then allocated each individual to one of the six patterns shown in Figure 1 on the basis of head colouration.

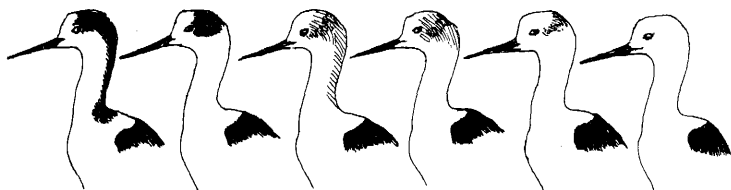


Figure 1. Most typical patterns on the heads and necks of Black-winged Stilts, and the number of individuals with each pattern observed during the study.

In each of the 13 study pairs the individuals differed in colour of the mantle. All variations in the head patterns drawn in Figure 1, with the exception of the all white head, were observed in the 26 study individuals. Although males were generally darker than females, in only eight of the pairs did the males have darker heads than their partner; in four pairs the females had the darker heads; and in the remaining pair the head patterns were of similar colouration. The overall amount of black on the head is therefore not a reliable indicator of sex in Black-winged Stilts. Males do however tend to have rather more extreme patterns (blackish or whitish), whereas females are intermediate (dusky).

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A.Xeira, Av. Gen. Norton de Matos, 69 2 esq., Miraflores, 1495 Lisboa, Portugal.