

Chapter 2. Waders on Wet Grasslands in Different European Countries

Status and Conservation of Meadow Birds in The Netherlands

Albert J. Beintema

Beintema, A.J. 1991. Status and Conservation of Meadow Birds in the Netherlands. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 61, Supplement:12-13.

Albert J. Beintema, Research Institute for Nature Management, P.O. Box 9201, 6800 HB Arnhem, The Netherlands.

The size of the breeding populations of a number of meadow birds in the Netherlands have been published by van Dijk *et al.* (1989) and are presented here in Table 1. Although censuses often show upward trends, a given population can in reality be on the decrease. This phenomenon can be explained by an increase in the efficiency and in the coverage of surveys. Due to this it is often difficult to convince policy makers that populations are on the decline. The decreases in the breeding populations of Dutch Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Ruff *Philoma-*

chus pugnax are very evident, with populations down to only a few percent of their size a few decades ago. Although it is not evident from the figures for reasons given above, the numbers of breeding Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* have decreased slightly, but in both species the decreases have not been as great as were expected ten or twenty years ago. The breeding population of the Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* is stable if not on the increase and those of the Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and the

Table 1. Population size of meadow birds (pairs or females) breeding in The Netherlands (from van Dijk *et al.* 1989)

| species | population in the Netherlands | population in Europe | % of the European population in The Netherlands |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Oystercatcher | 88,500 - 111,000 | 209,500 - 245,000 | 42% - 45% |
| Lapwing | 226,000 - 278,000 | 923,000 - 994,000 | 24% - 28% |
| Ruff | 870 - 1,050 | 247,000 | 0.4% |
| Snipe | 3,900 - 4,700 | 529,000 - 538,000 | 0.7%-0.9% |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 78,000 - 102,000 | 94,700 - 119,500 | 82%-85% |
| Curlew | 6,900 - 8,800 | 124,000 - 132,000 | 5%-6% |
| Redshank | 25,700 - 34,000 | 162,000 - 176,000 | 16%-19% |

Curlew *Numenius arquata* are certainly still increasing.

At present the grassland reserves, which cover about 14,000 ha, hold practically all breeding Ruff and Snipe in the Netherlands. Apart from that, the so-called "Relatienota" has come into effect some years ago, and the implementation is steadily moving on. There has been, and there still is, a lot of controversy and scepticism about this programme, which among other things aims to pay farmers for not doing things they would normally do in modern farming. Of course, this happens most in areas which are difficult to develop (that is why they were still good for birds), so many people see it as wasting conservation money to subsidize farmers. Yet after some 6 years of experience the outcome is not too bad. Especially in North Holland, where this programme has most coverage, we see a gradual recovery of meadow bird populations after a dramatic decrease in the 1970s.

To put it bluntly, Ruff and Snipe are beyond

concern. In the existing reserves they are safe and outside these so few breeding possibilities exist that they can be considered given up. As Oystercatcher, Lapwing and Redshank populations are fairly stable, attention should be focussed upon the Redshank and the Black-tailed Godwit, and especially the latter due to the international importance of the Dutch population (Table 1). The developments show that the present instruments are suited to stop further decrease, and even may enable recovery. Therefore, although we will no doubt have to accept some further decrease outside the large 'meadow bird centres', there is reason to be confident that the Netherlands will remain godwit country number one.

Reference

van Dijk, A.J., van Dijk, G., Piersma, T. & SOVON, 1989. Weidevogelpopulaties in Nederland. De jongste aantalsschattingen in internationaal perspectief. *Het Vogeljaar* 60: 49-68.

