

**Winter 1997/98 European
Non-estuarine Coastal
Waterfowl Survey (NEWS)
update**

(on behalf of the UK WeBS partners:
BTO, WWT, JNCC and RSPB)

Steve Holloway has become the Non-Estuarine Coastal Waterfowl Survey (NEWS) Project Officer at the British Trust for Ornithology. Future NEWS correspondence should be sent to Steve at the address below. In the UK, the WeBS regional organisers have been contacted and sent survey methods. Preparation of the UK coastline maps with the sections to be counted has started.

Progress with planning the Europe-wide coverage has been very encouraging. Although there are people who are prepared to assist with the counts, however we still do not have confirmed National Organisers for Greece or Iceland. If you are keen to take on that responsibility or know somebody who might be interested, then please let Steve know as soon as possible.

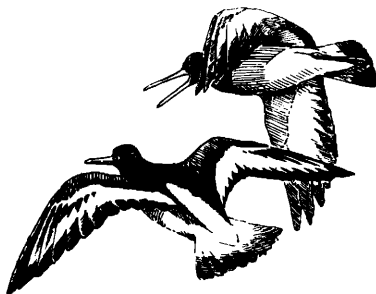
Although the project will concentrate on European coastal areas, the extended coverage of several important African countries is very gratifying. To date we are hoping to get some counts from at least Mauritania and South Africa.

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Reviews

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Cranswick, P.A., Waters, R.J.,
Evans, J. & Pollitt, M.S. 1995.
*The Wetland Bird Survey 1993-94:
wildfowl and wader counts.* BTO/
WWT /RSPB/JNCC, Slimbridge. ISBN
0 903793 42 3 (BTO), ISBN 0 900806 19 2
(WWT). [£15 including postage from WWT,
Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT, UK].

Congratulations to our UK colleagues!

This most recent annual report of monitoring activities for wildfowl and waders on coastal and inland sites, in estuaries or fresh water bodies, at high or low tide represents a major step to an comprehensive view of UK waterfowl populations. It highlights the importance of specific sites as staging or wintering grounds and provides data that can be used as an important tool in daily bird and nature conservation issues.

The report has several sections. Firstly, a short overview on recent developments in the UK counting system is given, followed by a summary of additional counting schemes which complement Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) core counts. The former refers to particular species' groups like geese or gulls, periods or particular sites. An outline of research projects and conservation efforts informs all counters - the major target audience - as to how WeBS data are used in terms of conservation and scientific progress.

A short chapter describes the weather conditions of the counting period, coverage and data presentation, accompanied by some critical remarks on how to use such data (a

very important issue in times when raw data may be used as the truth!).

In total, data from 1 885 sites are presented in the report. Monthly counts on these sites are called 'core counts' and are separated from additional counts made using different methodologies (such as low tide counts). A map of count density per 10 x 10 km grid square is added but this gives no real information on coverage per site.

After a review of total numbers and monthly fluctuations in Great Britain and Northern Ireland respectively, separate accounts summarise data for each species (including feral and introduced waterfowl).

These chapters present data against the criteria for numbers of international and national importance according to the 1% criterion of the Ramsar Convention (sites of national importance are those with at least 1% of the national total of the species), maximum numbers in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and information on population trends calculated using the Underhill Index. Tables present numbers of all important sites with maximum numbers in each of the last five years. For each species a comprehensive evaluation of national status and the most important sites for conservation is given.

The text discusses trends in numbers and distributional changes at main resorts. Also included are results of recent research programs or conservation related topics. So, the reader, especially all the counters (which are unfortunately not personally mentioned), can find a clear review of the UK status and populations of most waterfowl species.

Something genuinely new and very interesting is the implementation of low tide counts at selected estuaries. These data are presented as density values and offer new possibilities to interpret high tide counts, to evaluate the use of different habitat types by waterfowl species, and to assess the importance of particular parts of the estuaries with respect to adverse impacts. These counts are an

important development of modern counting schemes.

In my opinion, a very good report has been written. From the conservation point of view it was a necessary decision to combine all the different non-breeding waterfowl counting schemes in UK. This way it has been possible to produce a wide range of information on waterfowl which is of utmost importance for all local, regional, national and international wetland conservation bodies. It helps emphasis that there is no natural boundary between coastal and inland habitats, but a close link between the different waterfowl groups and their ecological demands.

A next step could be a closer look at important stopover sites. A year-round counting procedure in a somewhat tighter time schedule could recognise more important sites especially for migrating waders. As in the Wadden Sea, spring tide counts could be an appropriate method for further improvement. Besides this, counts of juvenile ratios are a valuable tool in interpreting counts, e.g. for geese. Special counts are necessary to recognise the main resorts of species like Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* for which Britain and Ireland has special international responsibility.

A very interesting addition to future editions of this fine report could be a comparison of species trends and status with other areas where intensive monitoring work has been done. The recently published results of the Wadden Sea (Meltofte *et al.* 1994; Rösner *et al.* 1994) form an especially suitable source to be included into a broader interpretation. Large-scale trends can be detected easier and earlier, and changes according to changing weather conditions or climate can be analysed. The same is true in detecting warning signals of particular species.

To summarise, bird count data of Britain and Ireland are published in a successful way which gives good feedback to counters, as well as making data available to bird conservation bodies for use in conservation at regional, national and flyway scales.

Meltofte, H., Blew, J., Frikke, J., Rösner, H-U. & Smit, C.J. 1994. Numbers and distribution of waterbirds in the Wadden Sea. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 74.

Rösner, H-U., van Roomen, M., Südbeck, P. & Rasmussen, L.M. 1994. Migratory waterbirds in the Wadden Sea 1992/93. *Wadden Sea Ecosystem* No. 2.

Peter Südbeck

del Hoyo, J., Elliot, A. & Sargatal, L. eds. 1996. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol. 3. Hoatzin to Auks. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. ISBN 84-87334-20-2. [£105.00 from specialist bookshops or from Lynx Edicions, Passeig de Gràcia 12, 08007 Barcelona, Spain. Tel. +34 3 301 07 77; Fax. + 34 3 302 14 75; e-mail lynx@hbw.com; Internet <http://www.hbw.com>].

This is a quite magnificent book! *The Handbook of the Birds of the World* is a lavish production, and for those not familiar with the series can give a very first impression of a 'coffee-table' book - meant to be acquired but not read. This is very misleading: there is a veritable mine of information to be quarried here.

This 821 page volume includes the Orders Opisthocomiformes (Hoatzin), Gruiformes (cranes, rails, bustards *etc.*) and Charadriiformes.

Each family of birds has a lengthy introductory chapter followed by a brief species account for each species. The chapters for each family are structured with extensive text sections covering systematics, morphology, habitat, general habits, food and feeding, breeding, movements, relationships with man, and status and conservation, together with a bibliography. The species accounts are similarly structured with paragraphs of various length under these headings but as they relate to the species, together with a world distribution map.

The publishers have assembled an all-star cast of authors for the wader chapters. Rostratulidae are covered by Guy Kirwan, Dromadidae by Mike

Rands, Haematopodidae by Phil Hockey, Ibidorhynchidae by Algirda Knystautas, and Recurvirostridae by Ray Pierce. Rob Hume describes the Burhinidae and Gordon Maclean the Glareolidae, whilst Theunis Piersma, Popko Wiersma and Jan van Gils have divided the task of presenting the Charadriidae and Scolopacidae. David Baker-Gabb describes the bizarre Pedionidae (Plains-wanderer) and Jon Fjeldså the equally poorly-known Thinocoridae (Seedsnipes).

Each species is illustrated in a colour plate, whilst the volume is lavishly illustrated with colour photographs throughout. The selection of photographs is especially notable and are more than just ornament. The photographic selection and editing is commendable. Obviously considerable lengths have been taken to locate photos that are not only quite stunning beautiful, but also illustrate specific points of behaviour, habitat, morphology or ecology that expand points made in the text. These really are pictures that are worth a thousand words. All are tied to the accompanying text section by means of detailed captions. I would purchase the volume for these photos alone!

The taxonomy of each family down to generic level (family, subfamily, tribe and genus) is presented at the beginning of each chapter as a clear illustration showing a typical species in each genus and its relationship to other groups within the family. As a consequence I think I now understand wader taxonomy for the first time ever! It would be excellent if these fine illustrations could be bought together. With a little additional text they would make a most useful primer in avian taxonomy.

A major piece of scholarship has been, for each species, to give reference to the original description of, and geographical location of the point of collection, of the type specimens.

The 81 page reference list is notable: by sampling I estimate that it contains about 10 500 references, which unlike those in the *Birds of the Western Palearctic* and other such major works, are full references giving unabbreviated paper titles. Of particular value to taxonomists is a

separate listing of the type descriptions for each species.

No review could be complete without noting Robert Bateman's Foreword. This most thoughtful essay on the history and philosophy of bird illustration and its relation to conservation might seem out of place in such a volume, yet it added greatly to my enjoyment of the book - perhaps indeed because its content was so unexpected.

Bateman concludes with a quotation from Baba Dioum:

"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught."

Food for thought indeed....

It is a long time since I have been so excited about a book! The quality of production is superb, the layout attractive and easy to read, and the illustrations magnificent. This is truly a book to curl up with on a winter's evening. Go and get a copy.

David A. Stroud

Delany, S. 1996. *Irish Wetland Bird Survey 1994-1995. Results from the first winter of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey*. IWC Birdwatch Ireland. 109 pp. ISBN 1 899204 06 7. [Ir£10.00 from IWC Birdwatch Ireland, Rutledge House, 8 Longford Place, Monkstown, Co. Dublin, Ireland].

The Republic of Ireland lies astride the East Atlantic system of migratory flyways, and with its mild Atlantic climate holds significant proportions of many migratory wildfowl and wader populations. Despite its key importance for waterfowl, to date there has been little annual waterfowl monitoring at a national scale.

A baseline survey - the Wetlands Enquiry - was undertaken over the period 1971/2 - 1974/5 (Hutchinson, 1979), whilst a follow-up - the Winter Wetlands Survey (Sheppard 1993) - was undertaken between 1984/5 - 1986/7. Additionally, there have been

a wide variety of single species surveys and notable aerial survey work for the International Waterfowl Census, but hitherto these have not occurred within the framework of a national monitoring scheme.

The establishment of I-WeBS, the Irish Wetland Bird Survey, in 1994 was therefore a major step forward. A co-ordinated national survey was undertaken in January 1994, shortly after the establishment of the scheme. This report presents the results from the first full winter's counts (1994/95).

It is an impressive production. The overall report format is loosely modelled on the UK WeBS annual report, although with significant improvements in several areas. In particular, maps showing site-related population data for key species provides an easily assimilated 'at a glance' summary of species distributions. The listing of the relationship between sub-sites (count units) and sites is valuable.

Inevitably, as a consequence of the very rapid production time, a few inaccuracies have slipped through. For example, there are some technical errors in the discussion of the Ramsar Convention and its legal basis on pages 3 and 4, and Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* and Smew *Mergus albellus* should be added to the list of those Irish waterfowl listed on Annex 1 of the EEC Birds Directive (both were added in January 1995 with the accession of Sweden, Finland and Austria to the European Union). Generally, however, such mistakes are very few.

A more general problem is the risk that the lists of sites and the data presented represent definitive lists of all important wetlands for the species concerned, rather than just those for which I-WeBS has been able to collect data in 1994/95. This is a problem inherent in data presentations for any waterfowl monitoring scheme where coverage is less than complete. Thus whilst the species account for Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* acknowledges collection of much other data by separately organised surveys for this population, a casual glance at the data table, might lead one to suppose that the

sites listed were indeed the top ten most important sites in Ireland and that the data were peak counts for 1994/5: in fact they represent just those data submitted to I-WeBS with much else collected by the international autumn and spring census organised by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

This problem will grow for I-WeBS (as it has also for the UK WeBS reports) as data collection becomes more comprehensive and therefore the omissions less obvious. It will be important that future reports indicate clearly the limitations of data throughout the report (e.g. in every table caption) rather than as caveats buried deep within the text. This will reduce - but never eliminate - the risk of inadvertent misinterpretation by users in a hurry.

This report is a quantum leap forward for waterfowl monitoring in Ireland and the I-WeBS partners (IWC Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) are to be congratulated for their vision, and encouraged to further develop the scheme.

Hutchinson, C.D. 1979. *Ireland's wetlands and their birds*. IWC, Dublin.

Sheppard, R. 1993. *Ireland's Wetland Wealth*. IWC, Dublin.

David A. Stroud

Piersma, T. & Ntiamoa-Baidu, Y. 1995. *Waterbird ecology and the management of coastal wetlands in Ghana*. Wildlife Dept., Ghana, Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ), The Netherlands. *NIOZ Report No. 6*. 112 pp. [Available on request from senior author, NIOZ, P.O. Box 59, 1790 AB Den Burg, Texel, The Netherlands].

This attractively produced report summarises the results of a seven week field study of Ghanaian coastal lagoon ecology made in October and November 1994. A Ghanaian/Wader Study Group (mainly Dutch) team studied the waterbirds and general ecology of two lagoon systems on

either side of the delta of the Volta river.

Comprehensive found counts were undertaken on 14 October, locating 38 073 waterbirds of 32 species at the Songor Lagoon, and 37 519 waterbirds of 46 species at the Keta Lagoon. An aerial survey of the lagoon complex located 76 000 waterbirds on the lagoons later in October.

The report integrates detailed summaries of data on counts, distribution, behaviour and foraging habits, diurnal rhythms, feeding ecology and food availability into a conceptual model that describes the daily and seasonal cycles of waterbird use of the lagoons. The changing annual cycle of bird numbers is thus explained in terms of the lagoon's seasonally changing hydrology and ecology. The report suggests ways in which the model could be tested through relating past waterbird counts to satellite images showing the extent of the lagoons on the count dates.

Short accounts of feeding ecology are given for Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*, White-fronted Plover *C. marginatus*, Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Curlew *N. arquata*, Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Bar-tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*, Knot *Calidris canutus*, Sanderling *C. alba*, Little Stint *C. minuta*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis*, Greenshank *T. nebularia*, Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* and Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*.

There are numerous attractive black and white photos throughout the report which illustrate the lagoon landscapes, their bird populations and traditional human activities such as fishing and salt production. These greatly enhance the volume.

The report concludes by relating the ecology of these seasonally changing lagoon systems to patterns of human

exploitation and use (mainly through shallow water fisheries), and thus to conservation of waterbirds. A series of recommendations are made which will no doubt assist the Ghanaian Wildlife Department in the establishment of appropriate conservation management regimes for these important lagoons.

This report will be a key reference for those with interest in African coastal waterbirds and their ecology, not only through its description of detailed studies at Songor and Keta Lagoons, but also through its attempt to establish a wider ecological framework for these observations which will aid the long-term conservation of these and similar sites.

David Stroud

Hälterlein, B., Fleet, D.M., Henneberg, H.R., Mennebäck, T., Rasmussen, L.M., Südbek, P., Thorup, O. & Vogel, R. 1995. *Anleitung zur Brutbestand-serfassung von Küstenvögeln im Wattenmeerbereich*. Wadden Sea Ecosystem No. 3. Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Group & Joint Monitoring Group for Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea, Wilhelmshaven. 55 pp., 5 fig., 4 tables. ISSN 0946-896X. (German, English summary; revised reprint from *Seevogel* 16 (1995): 1-24).

The report is freely available from the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Virchowstr. 1, 26382 Wilhelmshaven, Germany, fax: + 49 (0) 4421-44766. Please indicate if you prefer the German, Dutch or Danish version.

In order to achieve continuous evaluation of the ecological state of the Wadden Sea, the 'Trilateral Monitoring Expert Group' developed a general concept for an 'Integrated Monitoring Program for the Wadden Sea Ecosystem'. One of the parameters to be measured is population size and distribution of breeding bird populations. Therefore, within the Dutch-German-Danish co-operation on the protection of the Wadden Sea the 'Joint Monitoring Project for Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea' was established in 1989. Though some recently

published handbooks (e.g. Bibby *et al.* 1992) focus on bird census techniques in detail and present the theoretical background, a practical field manual for coastal areas was still lacking.

The main aim of the booklet is to make the breeding bird data collected in the Dutch-German-Danish Wadden Sea area more comparable through standardisation of methods. Any attempt to standardise monitoring methods must be welcomed. Only standardisation allows the assessment of total population size, population distribution and especially population trends. Census techniques for more than 25 coastal species are explained, including waders, gulls, terns, Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*.

The first part of the manual describes the general methodology of the most suitable techniques, the second part contains brief descriptions for different habitats and for individual species. Before going into detail the authors give basic safety guidelines and emphasise the paramount importance of conservation and that safety may require deviations from ideal census techniques. However, for environmental large-scale monitoring, standardisation of the methods and both long-term as well as large-scale comparability are most important. However, for basic ecological research, accuracy is of paramount importance, e.g. in analyses of population regulation in long-lived species.

For undertaking census of colonial breeding species, e.g. gulls, terns, Cormorant, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, four different methods are described:

- 1) within large colonies aerial counts or aerial photographs of, normally, 0.25 ha census plots, the plots ideally covering about 15% of the colony;
- 2) ground counts of pairs from a distance;
- 3) where the view of the colony is obstructed, counts of flying

individuals above the colony after natural or intentional disturbances. The number of individuals counted should be multiplied by a standard factor of 0.7 in order to calculate the number of pairs in the colony; and

- 4) gull colonies: one count of nests. Counts of nests should only be carried out if other breeding birds are not endangered by the count, and should not be carried out in mixed colonies with Avocets or terns.

Breeding populations of more or less single breeding waders, Shelducks, Eiders, etc. should be assessed by counting territorial pairs. Thus in the past the results of counts of territorial pairs have been greatly affected by the experience of the observer. The behavioural traits which should be recorded if a bird or birds are to be classified as a territorial pair are specified in detail. For the assessment of population trends in the census areas the total number of individuals should be recorded in addition to the number of territorial pairs. These values are less susceptible to individual counting errors and are probably more suitable for the assessment of population trends than the number of territorial pairs. Furthermore, flocks of non-breeding birds should also be assessed. Most of the methods are carefully described along with useful figures, time-tables, sample recording sheets etc.

The team of authors have summarised the most suitable survey techniques for coastal birds in a well-arranged field manual. Though the booklet is aimed more at wardens and amateurs than at highly specialised researchers and some of the methods described are specially adapted for surveys in Wadden Sea habitats, the manual will be useful to anybody counting birds in coastal areas. Only time can tell if it is a really practical manual.

The first complete breeding bird survey within in the 'Joint Monitoring Project for Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea' was carried out in 1991. The results are presented by Fleet et al. (1994).

Bibby, C.J., Hill, D.A. & Burgess, N.D. 1992. *Bird census techniques*. Academic Press, London.

Fleet, D.M., Frikke, J., Südbeck, P. & Vogel, R. 1994. *Breeding birds in the Wadden Sea 1991*. Wadden Sea Ecosystem No. 1. Common Wadden Sea Secretariat & Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Group, Wilhelmshaven. 108 pp.

Michael Exo

Johnson, O.W. & Connors, P.G. 1996. *American Golden Plover (Pluvialis dominica), Pacific Golden Plover (Pluvialis fulva)*. In: *The Birds of North America*, no. 201-202 (eds. A. Poole & F. Gill). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and the American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C. ISSN 1061 - 5466.

Previously regarded as different subspecies of the Lesser Golden Plover but now classified as two distinct species, the American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* are considered together in this issue of *The Birds of North America*. This dual treatment appears to be a sensible approach given the morphological and ecological similarities between these species and given that it is only within the last few years that they have been recognised as separate species. Thus, in a few previous studies it is not always possible to distinguish which of these two species the relevant information concerns. It is interesting to learn from this text that recent DNA analyses indicate that American Golden Plovers are in fact more closely related to Eurasian Golden Plovers *P. apricaria* than to Pacific Golden Plovers.

The text appears to be a comprehensive review of the current knowledge of both of these species and, in many respects, the format and style are similar to those used for the species accounts in *The Birds of the Western Palearctic* (which might be more familiar to readers in Europe). The main sections cover the following topics: distinguishing characteristics, distribution, systematics, migration, habitat, food habits, sounds, behaviour, breeding, demography and populations, conservation and management, appearance, measurements, other, and priorities for future research. Thus, with such a wide range of subjects covered and a reference list of over 250 publications this text provides an ideal first point of reference for anyone wishing to learn about these two species.

As is typical of such comprehensive species accounts, the type of information which is presented ranges from that which relates to fundamental aspects of the birds' biology and ecology (e.g. available data on breeding success and timing and routes of migration) to apparently trivial details, such as the number of pieces of lichen used to line nest scrapes.

Whilst a very considerable amount of information is presented and reviewed in the text, unfortunately much of this is done without a great deal of critical assessment. It is therefore difficult to assess the reliability of some of the material contained in the text, making further investigation of the original reference sources necessary. Once again though, this is often typical of this type of species account where the volume and range of material presented may be more important than attempting to assess the reliability of such information.



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