

# The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) Alerts

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report provides interpretation of the trends in over-wintering numbers of 42 common and widespread waterbird taxa (Grebes, Cormorant, Wildfowl, Waders) that occur in constituent countries of the United Kingdom.
- The report is based on an "Alerts System" which provides a standardised technique with which to monitor changes in the numbers of wintering waterbirds in the UK over a range of spatial scales and time periods using data collected as part of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS).
- The Alerts are intended to be advisory so that, subject to interpretation, they can be used as a consistent basis on which to direct hypothesis based research and subsequent conservation efforts if required.
- WeBS 'Core Counts' are used to record the numbers of waders and wildfowl at approximately 2000 wetland sites in the UK each year. The scheme has been running for over 50 years. This report will be updated annually as new data become available and additional sites are considered. The most recent data available for analysis comes from the winter of 2004/2005.
- The WeBS Alerts System uses General Additive Models (GAMs) to fit smoothed trends to annual indices. Changes in index values calculated using these smoothed trends are less susceptible to the effects of short-term fluctuations or to errors when sampling than are results produced using raw data plots.
- Proportional changes in the smoothed index value over short- (5-year), medium- (10-year) and long- (25-year) term and for SPAs, since-designation time-frames are categorised according to their magnitude and direction. Declines of between 25% and 50% trigger Medium Alerts and declines of greater than 50% trigger High Alerts. Although they will in general not promote discussion within the context of this report, increases of 33% and 100% (values chosen to be those necessary to return numbers to their former size following declines of 25% and 50% respectively) are also identified.
- There are four main sections to this report – National Accounts, an account for the suite of SPAs in Great Britain and Ireland, a section with maps showing the location of upward and downward trends and a section which details the accounts for each site.
- The National Account section deals with the counted numbers of all species included in the WeBS Alerts System for the UK, Great Britain, and the constituent countries. The SPA suite accounts compares counted numbers and trends on the SPAs in Great Britain and Northern Ireland with those for the relevant countries as a whole. The section with maps indicates, for every

species, all locations counted as part of WeBS, at which increases or decreases have occurred. Separate maps indicate SPAs and SSSI/ASSSIs where declines or decreases have occurred.

- The Site Account section deals with wetland sites of national importance for non-breeding waterbirds, these forming part of the SPA and SSSI/ASSI networks\*. Most SPAs are also designated as Ramsar sites.
- Each site account lists the species for which that site is important and gives details of High- and Medium-Alerts that have been triggered. Figures and tables are provided that allow site trends to be compared with regional and national trends. Trends of evaluated species for which Alerts have been triggered or which occur on the site in internationally important numbers are discussed.

*\* Following the Guidelines for the Selection of Biological 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSIs) / 'Areas of Special Scientific Interest' (ASSIs), an area may be selected for notification as a SSSI if it supports 1% or more of the British / All-Ireland population of a species in either the breeding season or outwith the breeding season (non-breeding). The Selection Guidelines for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) also allow for the selection of areas that support 1% or more of the national population of rare or vulnerable species (listed in Annex I to the EC Birds Directive) in any season. The SPA guidelines additionally allow for the selection of areas that support assemblages of more than 20,000 individual waterbirds or seabirds in any season. All Annex I and migratory species, within these defined assemblages, that regularly occur on the site are qualifying species, but to identify the main component species those occurring at levels of 1% or more of their national population are highlighted, along with those with occurring at levels of 1% or more of their international population and species whose numbers on the site exceed 2,000 individuals.*