WeBS

GSMP

Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25

The annual report of the Wetland Bird Survey and the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

BTO Birds Science People

RSPB

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WATERBIRDS IN THE UK 2024/25

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the principal scheme for monitoring the UK's wintering waterbird populations, providing an important indicator of their status and the health of wetlands. The Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) monitors the abundance and breeding success of the UK's native geese and migratory swans during the non-breeding season. *Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25* is the 43rd annual report and comprises this summary report and data at: www.bto.org/webs-reporting

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THE WeBS PARTNERSHIP

WeBS is a partnership jointly funded by BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers and previous support from WWT.

The permanent members of the WeBS Steering Committee in 2024/25 were Teresa Frost (BTO), Dawn Balmer (BTO), Kirsi Peck (JNCC) and Simon Wotton (RSPB).

THE GSMP PARTNERSHIP

GSMP is a partnership, run by and jointly funded by BTO, JNCC and NatureScot with fieldwork conducted by both volunteer and professional surveyors.

The permanent members of the GSMP Steering Committee in 2024/25 were Teresa Frost (BTO), Neil Calbrade (BTO), Kirsi Peck (JNCC) and Jess Shaw (NatureScot).

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We are indebted to the time and skills of the thousands of WeBS and GSMP Counters who collected the data used in this report and to the invaluable efforts of the WeBS Local Organisers who are listed on the back cover.

The WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) (members listed on page 43) provided advice on behalf of Counters and Local Organisers. The BTO Information Systems team delivered essential technical assistance and continues to develop and provide assistance for WeBS Online and WeBS Report Online.

We are also grateful to the following for providing supplementary information, data inputting, proof-reading and particularly invaluable help in 2024/25: Deborah Newman, Niall Burton, Dawn Balmer, Simon Wotton, Kirsi Peck and Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS). Grateful thanks to all and apologies to anyone who has been inadvertently missed.

Report content, analysis and production was by Teresa Frost, Neil Calbrade, Gillian Birtles, Bridget Hiza, Emma Caulfield, Mark Hammond, Steve Pritchard, Steven Harrop, Alastair Feather and Ian Woodward.

The painting of a gull roost used on the cover of this report is by Alan Harris. For more of Alan's work, see www.alanharrisbirdartist.co.uk. All other artists and photographers are acknowledged on the pages of this report.

This report was printed by Page Bros, Norwich.

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LESSER BLACKBACKED GULL BY EDMUND FELLOWES/BTO

Online Resources

More information, including site tables and trends for all regular WeBS species, is available online at: **www.bto.org/webs-reporting**

This summary report can be downloaded from the WeBS website at: **www.bto.org/webs-publications**

The online and summary outputs in conjunction constitute the report *Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25*

CITATION

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Waterbird headlines – WinGS, Arctic Indicators and more

Inside the 2024/25 annual report...

4,153 registered WeBS volunteers

By **Teresa Frost** BTO

Welcome to the 43rd Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) report, *Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25*, which includes results for the Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) and, this year, also the 2023/24–2024/25 Winter Gull Survey (WinGS). Thousands of dedicated volunteers have put in an immense amount of effort across all these surveys – and as a result in this summary report, plus the WinGS research report, scientific papers and WeBS Report Online, more up-to-date information on our non-breeding waterbirds is accessible than ever before.

The diversity of gulls as a key component of our waterbird fauna is celebrated in this report, even as we report declines in many of them. We focus on the regularly occurring wintering species in detail, which have a variety of habitat and seasonal requirements from the UK wetland network, depending on their ecology. Herring Gull is the most dependable resident, with a large UK breeding population and present in fairly stable numbers year-round. Great Black-backed Gull is also mostly resident. Mediterranean Gull is the most summer-focused species, with noticeable passage occurring as well as an increasing British breeding population and its lowest numbers, although still increasing, being present in mid-winter. Passage birds are also a notable feature of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the UK, which make extensive use of the East Atlantic Flyway during winter as far south as West Africa. For both species, the WinGS analysis of autumn counts showed statistically greater number of birds present in September than January, highlighting the value of these autumn roosts for the flyway populations. Common Gull and Black-headed Gull are familiar all year round, with the former having a more northerly distribution in the breeding season, but we also host many passage birds and wintering birds that breed elsewhere. Tracked birds suggest Black-headed Gull are very mobile outside the non-breeding season throughout northwest Europe. It's a complex picture, but find out how our glorious gulls are faring on pages 16–27.

As well as the usual round-up of WeBS and GSMP survey results conducted annually, in the 2024/25 year an extra spring count was carried out. This gathers data on important sites for Pink-footed Goose used for staging their migration back towards their Iceland and Greenland breeding grounds; results are on pages 36–37. Waterbird population estimates have been updated using WeBS and GSMP data and you can see the resultant changes to the 1% national thresholds on pages 28–29. We highlight the international status of Bewick's Swan following the 2020 Census on page 32; it will be important to see if the January 2026 census shows that the decline has continued. Another important international paper, which was funded by WeBS and BTO and analyses WeBS and GSMP data together with equivalent data from the Netherlands, was published in December 2025 and reported on page 28–29. It looks at the potential for 'Arctic Indicators' using wintering waterbird data to infer the status of arctic breeding populations. This means that all of you taking part in monitoring here are acting as 'remote sensors' for conditions in remote areas where direct breeding monitoring is not possible – just one more way that the data you collect can be used for vital conservation research.

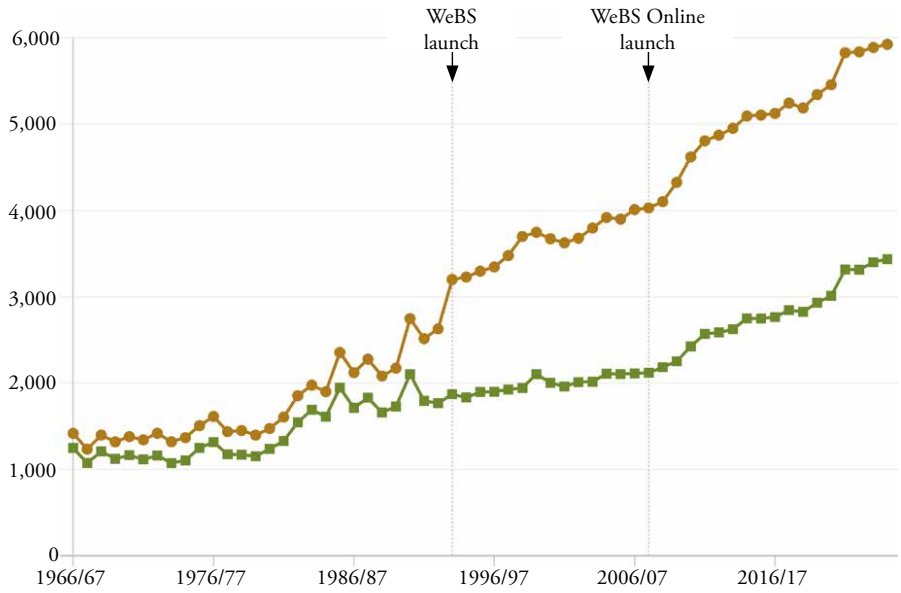
BLACK-HEADED GULL AND BEWICK'S SWAN BY NEIL CALBRADE;

WeBS Core Counts 2024/25 – in numbers

Core Counts were carried out on 5,923 WeBS sectors (count units) at 3,435 sites from July 2024 to June 2025.

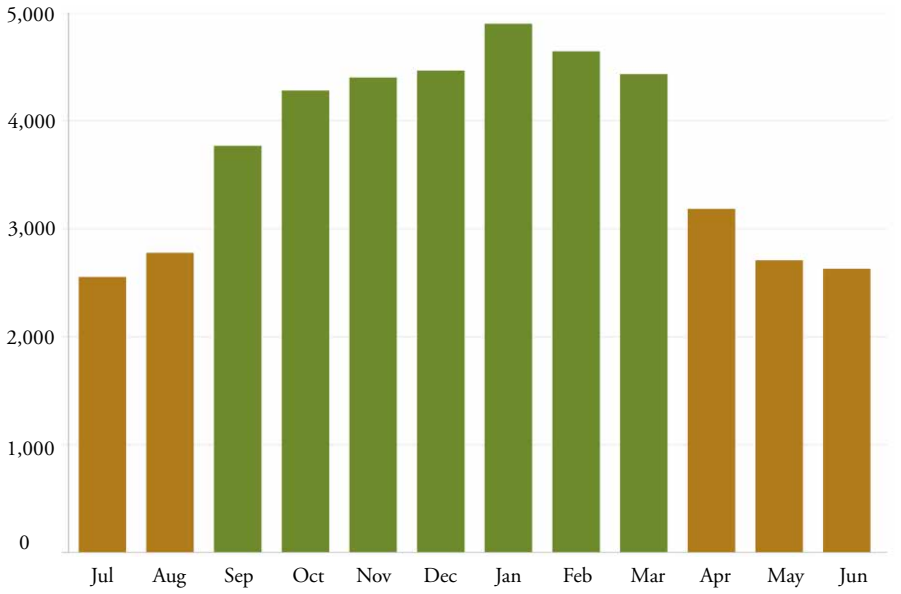
Not all Core Counts are linked to individual Counters in the WeBS Online database, but most are; 2,746 Counters named as the lead counter were associated with WeBS Core Count visits made in 2024/25. Including additional team members, the number of registered WeBS volunteers was 4,153

There were 44,670 count visits, 69% in the core September–March period (green bars on lower graph).



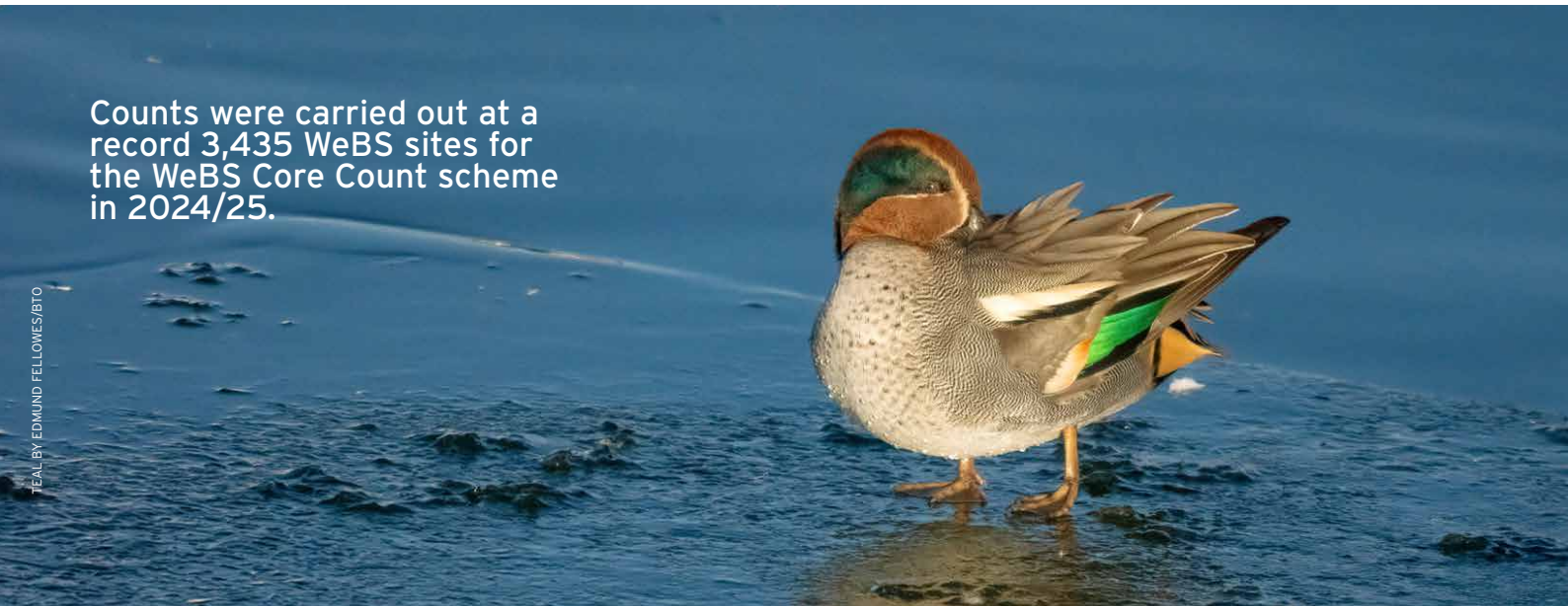
▲ **Number of WeBS count sectors (green squares) and sites (gold circles) covered at least once annually 1966/67–2024/25.**

▼ **Number of WeBS Core Count visits in 2024/25 by month during the core winter period (green bars) and the rest of the year (gold bars).**



Core Count dates in 2024/25

2024	2025
21 July	12 January
18 August	16 February
22 September	16 March
20 October	13 April
17 November	25 May
15 December	15 June



Counts were carried out at a record 3,435 WeBS sites for the WeBS Core Count scheme in 2024/25.

TEAL, BY EDMUND FELLOWES/BTO

WeBS coverage in 2024/25

Counts were carried out at **3,435 wetlands in 2024/25** in the UK, Isle of Man and Channel Islands.

Areas shown in black were counted at least once by WeBS Core Counts – providing a picture of the excellent geographical coverage achieved.

For sites covered by **I-WeBS in Ireland** please see the I-WeBS pages at: **birdwatchireland.ie**

UK Low Tide Counts 2024/25

Seventeen UK estuaries were counted at low tide, generating important data about feeding areas.

The WeBS Low Tide Count scheme facilitates the collection of information about use of the UK's estuaries by waterbirds at low tide. The scheme has flourished since its inception in the winter of 1992/93, with all the major estuaries in the UK having been counted at least once since then. The scheme aims to monitor, assess and regularly update information on the relative importance of intertidal feeding areas of UK estuaries for wintering waterbirds, and in doing so complements information gathered on populations through the WeBS Core Counts.

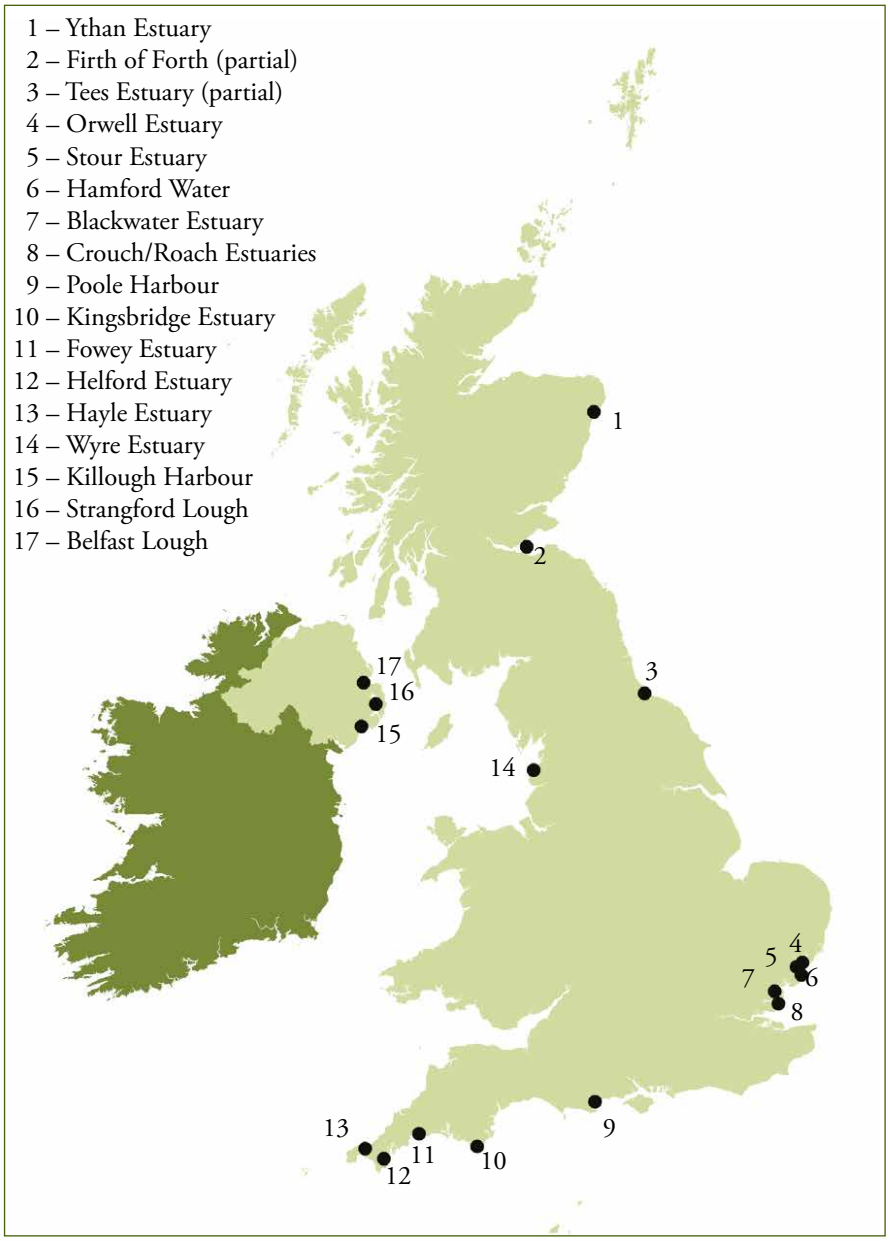
Information collected at low tide represents an important contribution to the conservation of waterbirds, by providing supporting information for the management of UK Ramsar Sites and SPAs, other site designations, and whole estuary conservation plans. Numbers of waterbirds present in predefined sectors are counted. Most individual estuaries are counted at low tide once every six years, although on some sites more frequent counts are undertaken.

Further information about WeBS Low Tide Counts is available online via **www.bto.org/websreporting-lowtide** including data summaries and dot density distribution maps for different estuaries and species. Dot density maps are now available for all species and years, including the facility to show any combination of site, species and year side by side for comparison. Presentation of WeBS low tide information typically takes two forms: (i) tabulated statistics of peak numbers and mean densities, and (ii) dot density maps to give a visual representation of species' foraging densities across a site. Dots do not represent the precise positions of birds; they are assigned to habitat components proportionally and placed randomly within those areas. No information about distribution of birds at a finer scale than the count sector level should be inferred. For all maps on the online reporting interface, one dot is equivalent to one bird.

During 2024/25, complete WeBS Low Tide Counts were carried out at 15 estuaries, and on selected sectors on a further two estuaries.

On several sites – Poole Harbour, Kingsbridge Estuary and Helford Estuary – Core Counts are carried out annually at low tide and data feed into both schemes, allowing assessment of distributional changes.

Results from the counts on Belfast Lough are presented on pages 38–39 of this report.



Estuaries counted as part of the WeBS Low Tide Count scheme in 2024/25.

2024/25: A warm December and icy January

Weather, phenology, productivity and migration context for 2024/25.

By **Bridget Hiza** BTO

The weather around WeBS count dates can influence results due to changing distribution of birds and volunteer coverage.

Autumn 2024 saw average temperatures overall, with rainfall slightly below average. Notably, Storm Ashley arrived on the October count date, bringing heavy rain and strong winds to Northern Ireland, Scotland and northern areas of England and Wales. Despite this, coverage was only down 2% in October 2024 compared with October 2023.

The winter of 2024/25 was milder than average, with December being the fifth warmest December recorded in the UK. However January was colder than average, with Altnaharra (Sutherland) recording its lowest January temperature since 2010, with -18.9°C on the 11th. Consequently, the January Core Count date recorded an average of 26% ice cover, the highest recorded January ice cover in WeBS since 2009/10.

Spring 2025 was dry and settled, being recorded as the warmest and sunniest spring in the UK since records began in 1884. Although a dry spring overall, the May WeBS count date experienced heavy rains, hail and thunder in northern parts of the UK.

CONTINENTAL CONDITIONS

Europe experienced warmer than average conditions from July 2024–May 2025. The winter in the Baltic Sea region was mild, with a lower number of ice days than usual.

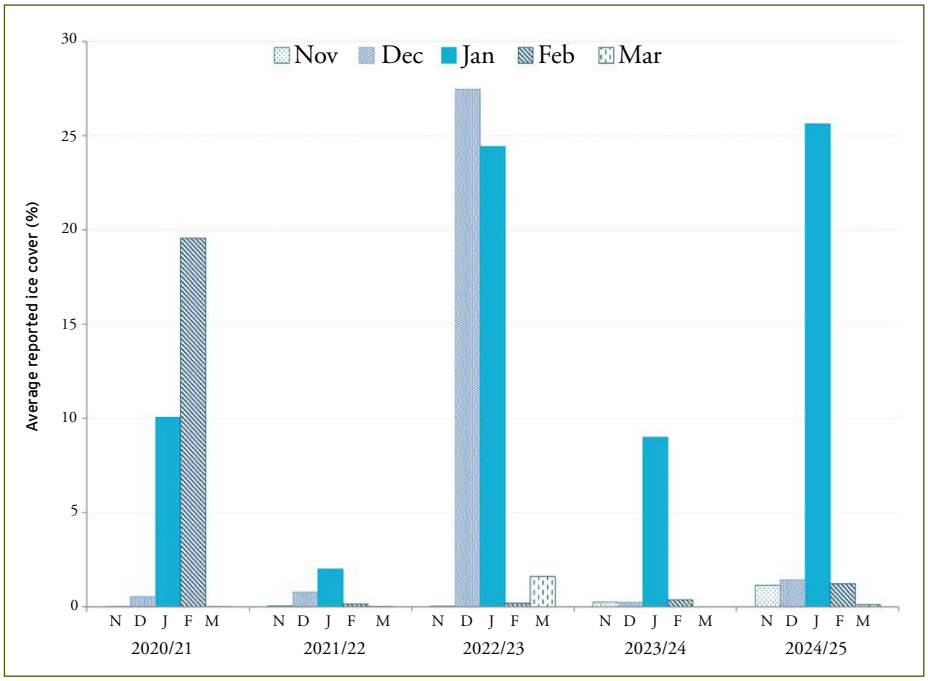
BREEDING CONDITIONS

Breeding productivity in the summer of 2024 can affect numbers of passage and wintering juvenile wildfowl and waders in the UK.

Spring 2024 arrived late in the Arctic, with many field stations experiencing snow cover until mid-June. Break-up of ice on rivers at Bolshezemelskaya tundra, Russia was the latest break-up observed in the last 20 years. Temperatures and breeding success were reported to be average overall. A research station in Kolva and Kharyakha river basin in Russia recorded low breeding success due to the late spring, slowing the migration and nesting of all bird species. However, Ringed Plover passage in autumn 2024 was higher than usual which can indicate a good breeding season.

WeBS AGE AND SEX RESULTS

An increasing number of records were received of age or sex counts which is starting to form a useful dataset, including sex ratios for Goosander, which is consistent with male moult migration behaviour.



Percentage of ice cover reported on WeBS Core Count dates from November to March 2020/21–2024/25.

SOURCES

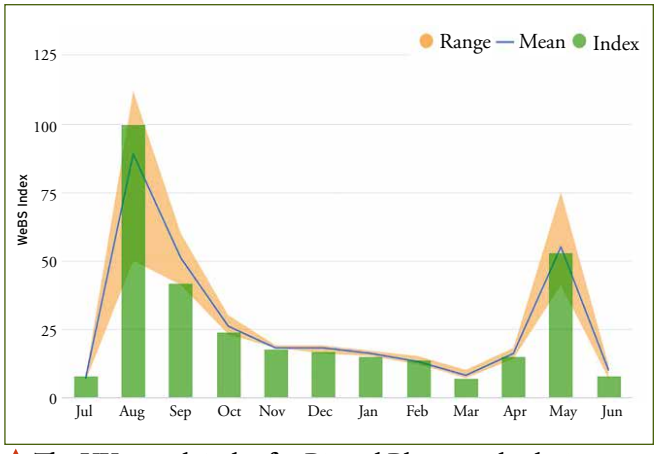
Climate summaries from: **metoffice.gov.uk, en.ilmatieteenlaitos.fi** and **climate.copernicus.eu/surface-air-temperature-maps**

Hydrological summaries from: **nrfa.ceh.ac.uk**

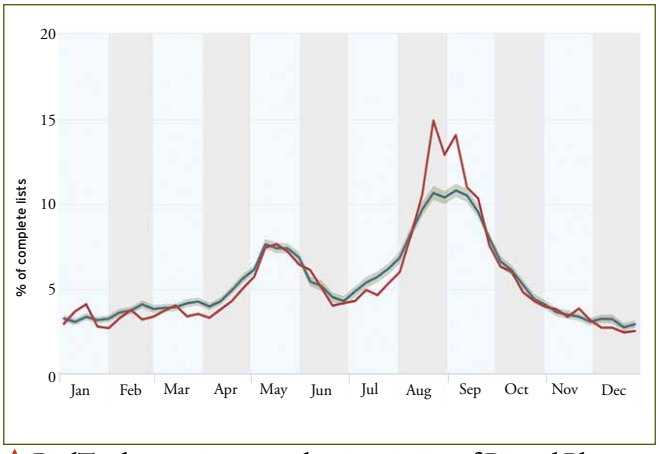
Arctic breeding information from: **www.arcticbirds.net**

9,135 records of age/sex ratios were submitted in WeBS Online, an increase of 18% on the records submitted in 2023/24.

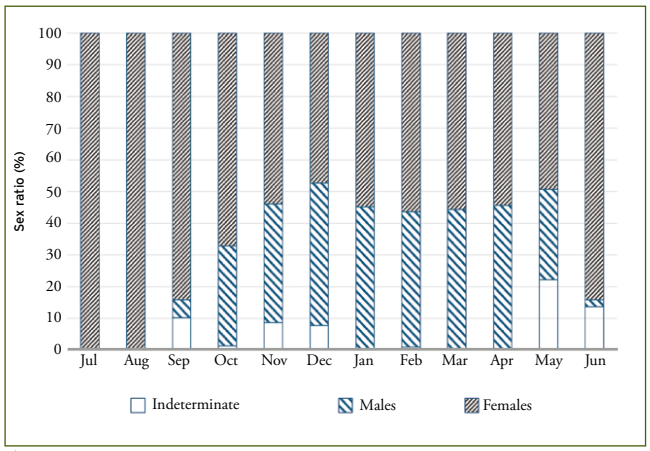
494 Goosander sex ratios submitted in 2024/25 are gathering key monitoring data on their moulting ecology.

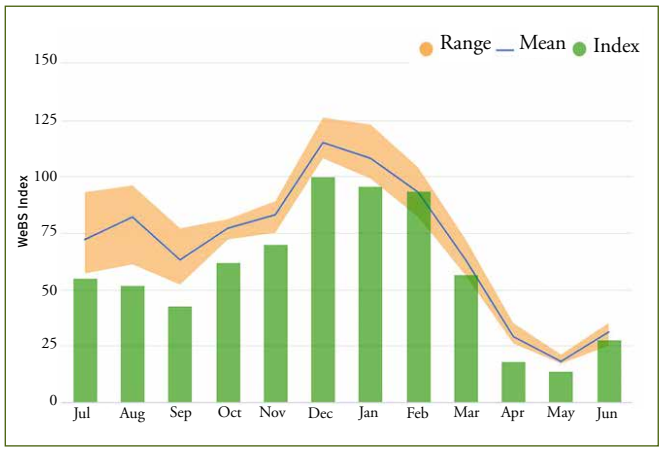


▲ The UK month index for Ringed Plover peaks during passage. It was above average in August 2024 following the summer 2024 breeding season. Green bars = 2024/25; blue line/orange hatched area = previous five-year mean/range.



▲ BirdTrack reporting rates showing timing of Ringed Plover passage in autumn 2024 which also suggests more birds passed through Britain and Ireland in the second half of August. Red (2024) and blue (historical average) lines = weekly percentage of complete lists where the species was recorded.





▲ The number of Female and Male Goosander recorded in WeBS each month in 2024/25 (left) and monthly Goosander index (right). The dip in September in the monthly index is likely to relate to male Goosander undertaking a moult migration to Norway. In the sex ratio data few males are recorded until October, although eclipse plumage can make sexing challenging during the moult period.

GOOSANDER BY EDMUND FELLOWES/BTO

National trends

A concise summary of how the UK's most familiar waterbirds fared in 2024/25.

Indices and smoothed indices are plotted in the WeBS Report Online for all waterbird species with sufficient data for the UK, Great Britain, Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. Annual species indices, smoothed indices, and 25- and 10- year trends are available under an Open Government Licence from **www.bto.org/webs-annual-report** as a spreadsheet download. Population trends are also published as Official Statistics on the JNCC website and have been produced to the high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Table 1 contains 25- and 10-year trends for the most abundant waterbird species for the UK and Table 2 contains the equivalent trends for Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales.

GEESE & SWANS

A record low index value in 2024/25 for Bewick's Swan since monitoring began in 1966/67 was recorded (25-year trend -96%). Whooper Swan recorded its second highest index value (10-year trend +25%). The Mute Swan 25- and 10- year trends are now both negative at -6%.

The most recent Canada Goose indices for England, Scotland and Wales were all slightly below the high point of the past five years, and the UK 10-year trend of +27% correspondingly shows some signs of slowing down in the rate of increase. Similar patterns can be seen in British/Irish Greylag Goose (10-year trend +19%) and naturalised Barnacle Goose (10-year trend +9%). But there is no such sign of possible slowdown for the non-native Egyptian Goose, which had a record high index in 2024/25 (10-year trend +120%).

Icelandic Greylag Goose, which has an earlier start date for its index than most species, had its lowest index since 1965/66 (25-year trend -30%). Taiga Bean Goose had a record low index since their index began in 1981/82. For more on migratory goose census results, see pages 34–37.

DUCKS

Shelduck recorded its highest index for 15 years and has a 10-year trend of +9%. Shoveler continue to strongly increase, with a record high index in 2024/25; the 25-year trend of +82% is largely driven by English increases, where numbers have close to doubled over that time period. The Gadwall index is continuing to stabilise but is still increasing (10-year trend 9%) and Teal are also stable, with a 10-year trend of -2%. Pintail, which had dropped to a recent low in 2013/14, is showing signs in the latest three years of stabilising at a slightly higher level (10-year trend +39%, 25-year trend -6%). The Mallard index is also showing some tentative signs of stabilising, but the 10-year trend is still negative at -16%.

Eider (10-year trend -20%) recorded a record low index since monitoring began in 1996/97. Tufted Duck continue their recent downward trajectory (10-year trend -22%) and Scaup has recorded its lowest index since monitoring began in 1966/67 (25-year trend -73%). The Red-breasted Merganser index shows signs of stabilising in the latest few years, but the 10-year trend is -21%.

WADERS

Species that have positive 25-year trends include Black-tailed Godwit which continue their increase, with another record high index in 2024/25 and a 10-year trend for 2013/14–2023/24 of +22%. The latest Avocet index was slightly lower than 2023/24 but they still have a strong 10-year trend of +35%. Sanderling is also doing well (10-year trend +25%).

Several wader species are looking more stable, with 10-year trends between -1% and +7% for Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Knot and Redshank. All of these except Knot have a negative trend for the 25-year time period, however. Purple Sandpiper and Dunlin also have negative 25-year trends, but the former has a 10-year trend of +22% and had its highest index for 24 years in 2024/25. Dunlin has a 10-year trend of +16% but the 2024/25 index fell compared to the previous two years.

Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit continue to decline (10-year trend -24% and -22% respectively).

OTHER WATERBIRDS

Cattle Egret and Great White Egret both saw record high indices and whilst Little Egret was slightly under the previous year they still show a strong increase with a 10-year trend of +44%.

Gulls continue their declines, with record low indices since monitoring started in 1993/94 for Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Little Gull and Kittiwake. Mediterranean Gull recorded a record high index. For more on gull trends, see pages 16–27.

For all trend graphs see the online report:

www.bto.org/webs-reporting

Table 1 Population trends of non-breeding waterbirds in the UK.

Species/population	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)	Species/population	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)
▲ Dark-bellied Brent Goose	-2	-12	▲ Scaup	-73	-57
▲ Svalbard Light-b Brent Goose	52	13	n/a Eider	-32	-20
▼ Nearctic Light-b Brent Goose	36	-2	▼ Goldeneye	-56	-20
n/a Canada Goose	60	27	▬ Goosander	-23	-7
n/a Naturalised Barnacle Goose	178	9	▬ Red-breasted Merganser	-46	-21
▬ Greenland Barnacle Goose	31	-22	▬ Little Grebe	24	11
▬ Svalbard Barnacle Goose	68	8	▬ Great Crested Grebe	-26	-9
n/a British/Irish Greylag Goose	120	19	▲ Little Egret	573	44
▼ Icelandic Greylag Goose	-30	-44	▼ Cormorant	46	23
▲ Pink-footed Goose	96	19	▬ Moorhen	-25	-14
▼ Greenland White-fronted Goose	-57	-10	▬ Coot	-30	-18
▬ European White-fronted Goose	-67	-13	▬ Oystercatcher	-19	-1
n/a Mute Swan	-6	-6	▲ Avocet	174	35
▼ Bewick's Swan	-96	-88	▼ Lapwing	-41	-12
▲ Whooper Swan	171	25	▼ Golden Plover	-26	-17
n/a Egyptian Goose	577	120	▼ Grey Plover	-30	-1
▬ Shelduck	-20	9	▬ Ringed Plover	-41	7
n/a Mandarin Duck	129	30	▼ Curlew	-41	-24
▲ Shoveler	82	44	▲ Bar-tailed Godwit	-28	-22
▲ Gadwall	51	9	▲ Black-tailed Godwit	145	22
▬ Wigeon	-6	-6	▬ Turnstone	-17	3
▼ Mallard	-32	-16	▬ Knot	15	3
▬ Pintail	-6	39	▲ Sanderling	54	25
▲ Teal	14	-2	▬ Dunlin	-22	16
▼ Pochard	-72	-33	▼ Purple Sandpiper	-14	22
▼ Tufted Duck	-21	-22	▬ Redshank	-24	0

Trends are % changes of smoothed population index values for 52 of the most abundant waterbirds in the UK for which robust trends can be produced.

The longer term smoothed trend refers to the 25-year period 1998/99 to 2023/24. The shorter term smoothed trend refers to the 10-year period 2013/14 to 2023/24. Note, it is customary to truncate the final year when reporting smoothed trends, so whilst data from 2024/25 have been used in creating the smoothed index values, the trend period assessed and reported is until 2023/24.

Preceding each species is an indication of flyway population trend, based on: Nagy, S. & Langendoen, T. 2022. *Report on the Conservation Status of Migratory Waterbirds in the Agreement Area, Eighth Edition*. Wetlands Int., NL. ▲ increasing, ▼ decreasing, ▬ stable, n/a not applicable as population is non-native (Canada Goose, Egyptian Goose, Mandarin) or non-migratory (Mute Swan, British/Irish Greylag Goose, Naturalised Barnacle Goose and Eider).

Trends use WeBS data except for Pink-footed Goose, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Icelandic Greylag Goose, Greenland Barnacle Goose and Svalbard Barnacle Goose, for which dedicated censuses are undertaken (see pages 34–35). The Icelandic-breeding Goose census include Pink-footed Geese and Icelandic Greylag Geese residing in other countries at the time of the census.

Pochard down 72% since 1998/99 and down 33% since 2013/14

POCHARD BY NEIL CALBRADE

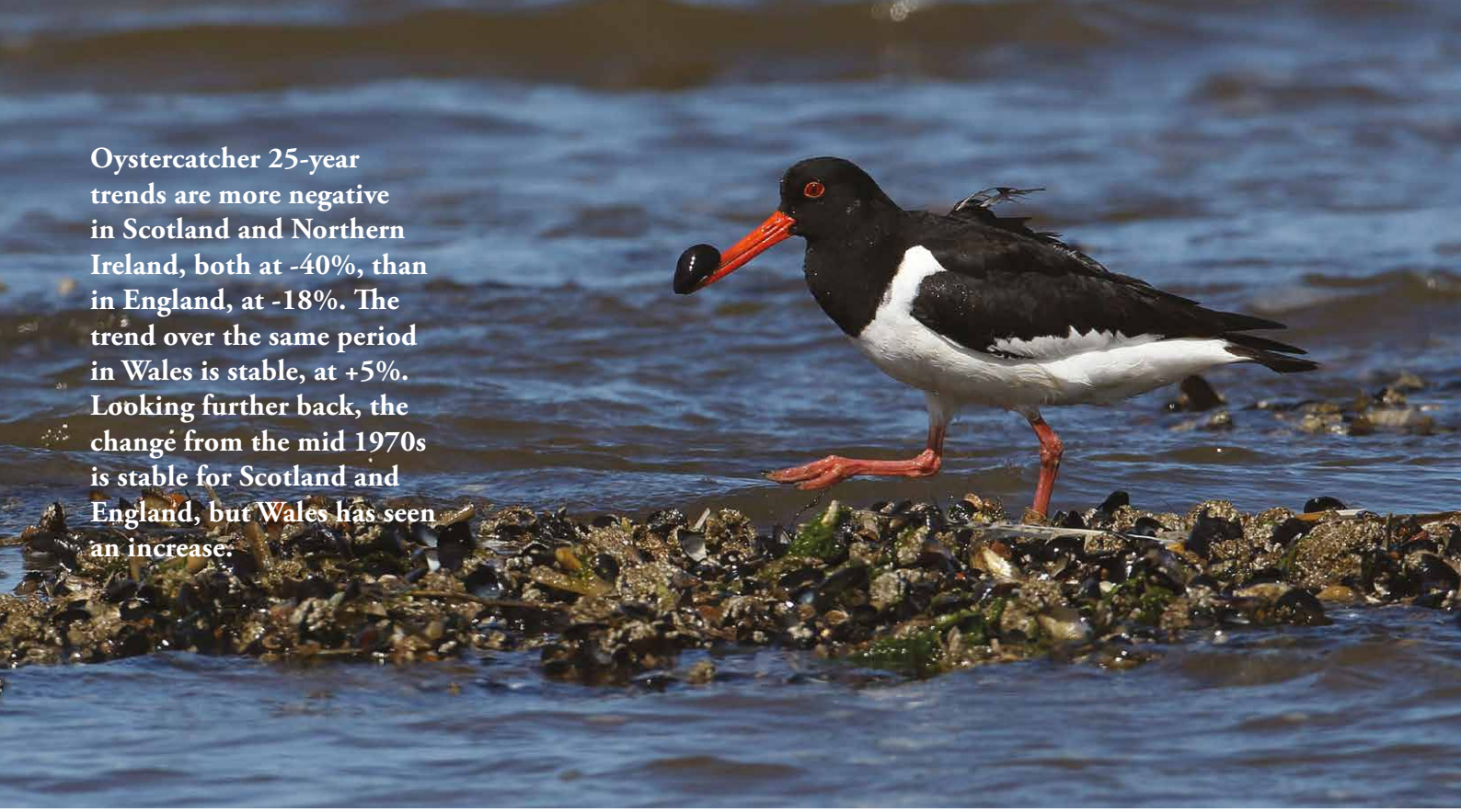
Table 2 Population trends of non-breeding waterbirds in the constituent countries.

Species/population	Scotland		Northern Ireland		England		Wales	
	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)	25-year trend (1998/99-2023/24)	10-year trend (2013/14-2023/24)
Dark-bellied Brent Goose					-2	-12	-54	-42
Svalbard Light-bellied Brent Goose	522	15			50	13		
Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Goose	1,388	164	20	-8	4,400	84	2,200	80
Canada Goose	375	30	-44	-45	49	28	140	35
Naturalised Barnacle Goose			121	19	181	6	3,900	26
Greenland Barnacle Goose	31	-22						
Svalbard Barnacle Goose	54	-1			68	8		
British/Irish Greylag Goose	229	62		-12	110	17	12	28
Icelandic Greylag Goose	-30	-44						
Pink-footed Goose	90	0			98	21		
Greenland White-fronted Goose	-57	-10						-23
European White-fronted Goose					-74	-10		
Mute Swan	-10	-10	-42	15	0	-5	21	-16
Bewick's Swan			-100	-100	-95	-86	-100	-100
Whooper Swan	25	-21	65	2	225	28	157	-31
Egyptian Goose					577	120		
Shelduck	-22	-11	-27	-13	-17	17	-19	4
Mandarin					102	27		
Shoveler	-43	-4	-30	-4	98	49	-22	-22
Gadwall	166	103	68	51	46	7	130	0
Wigeon	-13	0	-55	-17	-2	-5	2	4
Mallard	-38	-6	-32	-20	-30	-18	-24	-1
Pintail	22	35	61	2	-13	38	-18	8
Teal	-4	3	26	-3	18	-5	-5	5
Pochard	-79	-42	-90	-67	-62	-22	-90	-55
Tufted Duck	-25	-28	-79	-46	2	-16	15	-16
Scaup	-60	-50	-85	-73	-92	-86	-74	-22
Eider	-38	-24	100	-4	-44	-14	-20	51
Goldeneye	-34	-12	-90	-58	-43	-19	-61	-39
Goosander	-18	-18			-28	-2	98	46
Red-breasted Merganser	-34	-5	-21	19	-57	-40	-64	-33
Little Grebe	84	30	19	54	17	3	25	-4
Great Crested Grebe	-46	-16	-54	73	-17	-13	-3	-14
Little Egret		833		322	500	32	827	79
Cormorant	-21	9	-12	16	64	24	27	-5
Moorhen	3	28	-35	9	-29	-19	-13	18
Coot	-49	-24	-47	11	-27	-19	-36	-14
Oystercatcher	-40	-18	-40	-22	-18	5	5	0
Avocet					194	41		
Lapwing	-70	-18	-66	-26	-38	-11	-10	-34
Golden Plover	-36	-3	-66	-28	-18	-15	111	-11
Grey Plover	-72	-39	-61	44	-28	0	-47	-27
Ringed Plover	-37	-4	-19	18	-46	0	-21	11
Curlew	-45	-25	-52	-30	-39	-25	-38	-18
Bar-tailed Godwit	-49	-31	-58	-49	-22	-18	-39	-34
Black-tailed Godwit	367	172	556	22	131	21	220	33
Turnstone	-27	-4	-26	-13	-13	6	40	38
Knot	-53	-28	-36	74	22	4	3	-40
Sanderling	102	13	1,800	111	52	25	14	-9
Dunlin	-28	40	-37	48	-18	16	-45	-12
Purple Sandpiper	17	22	-59	41	-26	14		
Redshank	-32	3	-41	1	-18	-2	19	-1

Trends are % changes of smoothed population index values for 52 of the most abundant waterbirds in the UK for which robust trends can be produced; note these may only be present in small numbers in some countries.

The longer term smoothed trend refers to the 25-year period 1998/99 to 2023/24. The shorter term smoothed trend refers to the 10-year period 2013/14 to 2023/24. Note, it is customary to truncate the final year when reporting smoothed trends, so whilst data from 2024/25 have been used in creating the smoothed index values, the trend period assessed and reported is until 2023/24.

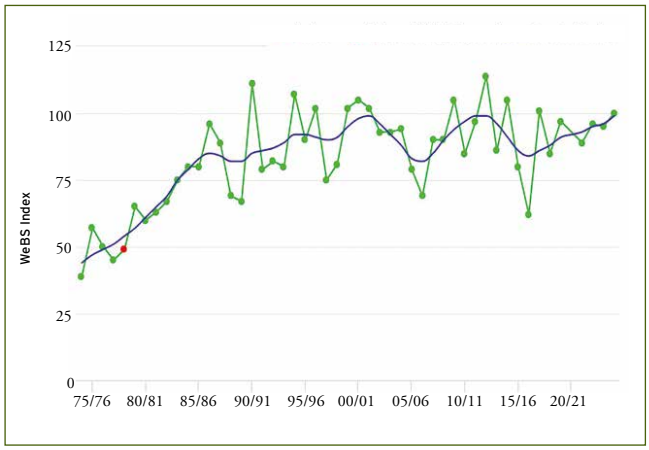
Trends use WeBS data except for Pink-footed Goose, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Icelandic Greylag Goose, Greenland Barnacle Goose and Svalbard Barnacle Goose, for which dedicated censuses are undertaken (see pages 34–35). The Icelandic-breeding Goose census include Pink-footed Geese and Icelandic Greylag Geese residing in other countries at the time of the census



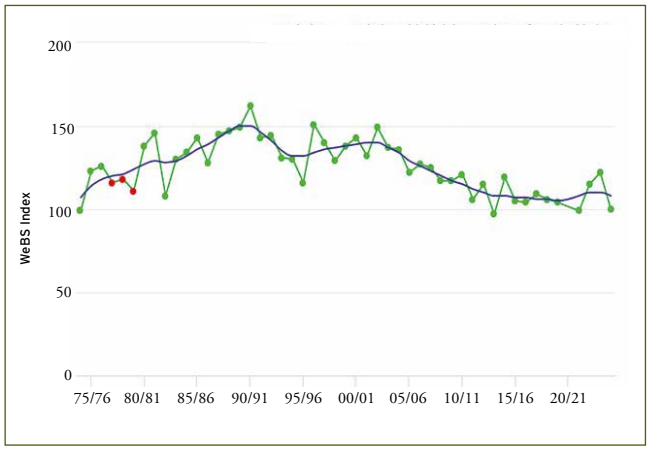
Oystercatcher 25-year trends are more negative in Scotland and Northern Ireland, both at -40%, than in England, at -18%. The trend over the same period in Wales is stable, at +5%. Looking further back, the change from the mid 1970s is stable for Scotland and England, but Wales has seen an increase.

▲ **WeBS trend for Oystercatcher in Northern Ireland.**
Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.

▲ **WeBS trend for Oystercatcher in Scotland.**
Green dots = annual index; red dots = sparse data; blue line = smoothed trend.



▲ **WeBS trend for Oystercatcher in Wales.**
Green dots = annual index; red dots = sparse data; blue line = smoothed trend.



▲ **WeBS trend for Oystercatcher in England.**
Green dots = annual index; red dots = sparse data; blue line = smoothed trend.

OYSTERCATCHER BY LIZ CUTTING/BTO

Largest waterbird aggregations

The UK's wetlands support millions of waterbirds each winter.

WeBS site totals indicate which sites support the largest aggregations of waterbirds each year. Understanding precisely how many individual birds use a site is clearly very difficult to ascertain from counts alone, as many sites are used by migrants on passage and consequently there can be high turnover rates.

Table 3 lists the Principal Sites for non-breeding waterbirds. The totals are the summed counted maxima for each species during the course of the WeBS year (missing counts are not imputed; supplementary counts are included). Sites with a five-year average of 20,000+ waterbirds are listed. Non-native species (e.g. Canada Goose and Mandarin Duck have been excluded from the totals. Although an important component of a site's waterbird fauna, gulls and terns are also excluded, since the recording of them during WeBS Counts is optional.

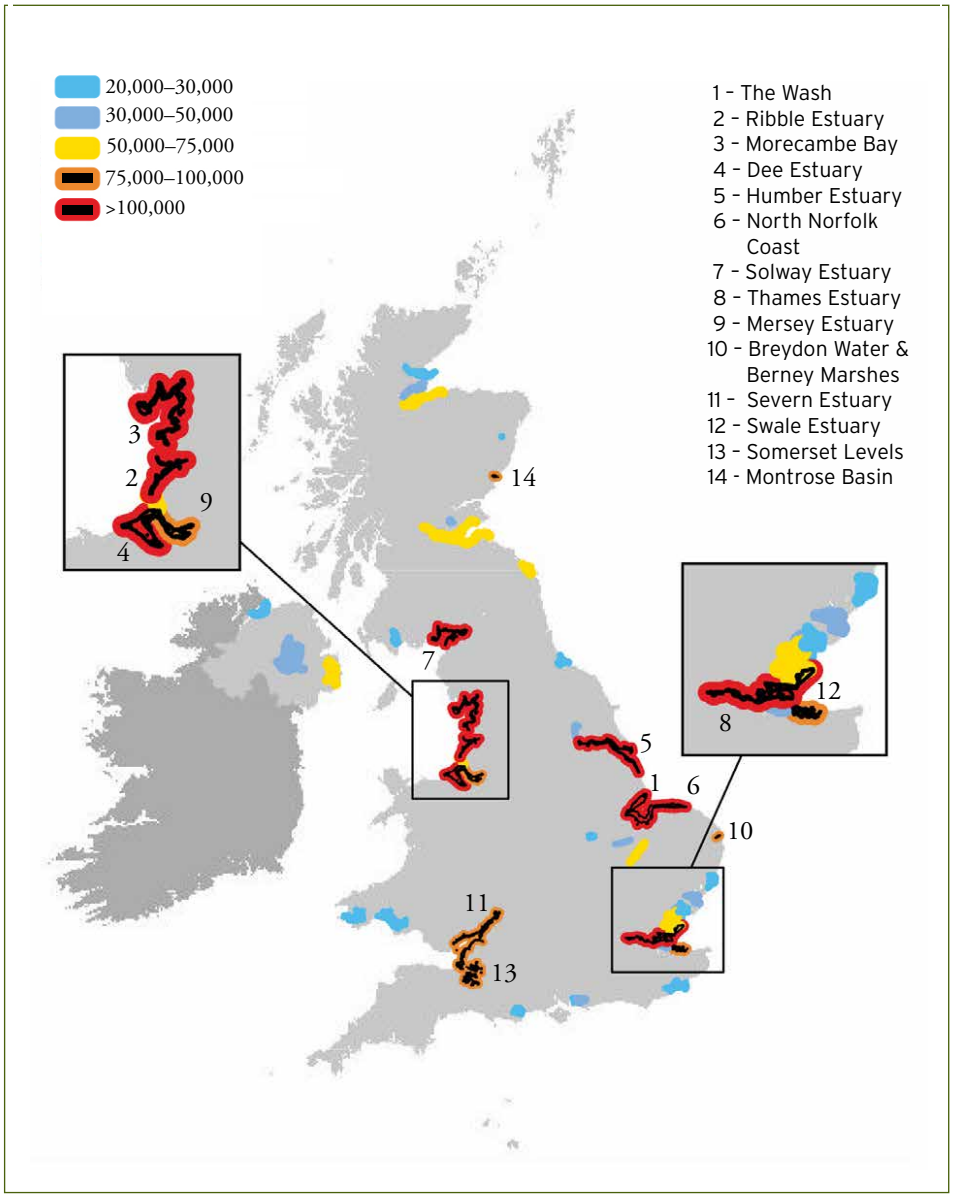
In addition to Table 3, it is possible to view the totals for all WeBS sites via the WeBS Online Report 'Totals' tab. In the interactive table of sites, non-native species, gulls and terns and supplementary counts can be included or omitted as desired by the user. By default only the major sites with over 1,000 birds are listed, but the filter can be changed to all sites in a county or country. Selecting a site will show the species for which that site holds more than the national or international importance thresholds.

IMPORTANT NOTE

Some monthly surveys in 2020 and 2021 were affected by COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, this may have depressed site-species peaks, and in turn, the site waterbirds aggregation total for the 2020/21 years, and hence the five-year mean for certain sites in Table 3. The site-species peak for each site is available on the WeBS Report Online. If the species peak for a given site has typically been from a month affected by COVID-19 restrictions during 2019/20 or 2020/21, the month of the peak is bracketed online. Furthermore, the peak count value itself has been bracketed to indicate that it would be expected to have been higher had complete counts been available from the months affected by the COVID-19 restrictions and may in turn have affected (generally depressing) the five-year mean.

SITE FOCUS

The number of sites with a five-year average in excess of 100,000 birds fell by one site to eight, with Breydon Water and Berney Marshes dropping due to several lower-than-average years. In 2024/25, 47 sites had a five-year average in excess of 20,000 birds, the same as 2023/24. Following a couple of below average years, the Duddon Estuary dropped off the list being replaced by Carmarthen Bay.



▲ **Sites with a five-year average of 20,000+ waterbirds. Sites above 75,000 birds are listed.**

Table 3 Principal Sites for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK.

Site	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	5-year mean
The Wash	431,763	406,134	460,991	417,853	381,230	419,594
Ribble Estuary	247,255	228,915	173,730	167,637	173,291	198,165
Morecambe Bay	144,186	168,169	187,972	199,710	156,993	171,406
Dee Estuary (England and Wales)	169,894	166,457	158,140	171,715	183,397	169,920
Humber Estuary	133,158	171,403	128,678	146,192	102,037	136,293
North Norfolk Coast	153,657	124,203	133,752	165,044	104,466	136,224
Solway Estuary	128,377	132,628	118,290	145,759	124,306	129,872
Thames Estuary	126,551	120,106	125,252	148,053	115,880	127,168
Mersey Estuary	77,098	82,741	128,898	100,697	87,081	95,303
Breydon Water and Berney Marshes	125,988	123,104	31,272	89,716	74,332	88,882
Severn Estuary	66,589	84,206	82,056	92,818	71,041	79,342
Swale Estuary	65,279	89,865	69,225	81,832	89,007	79,041
Somerset Levels	90,413	72,417	81,572	80,359	69,129	78,778
Montrose Basin	96,899	93,048	70,816	73,999	57,003	78,353
Blackwater Estuary	60,131	71,731	63,781	104,424	68,753	73,764
Forth Estuary	84,147	65,083	67,009	62,734	86,524	73,099
Lindisfarne	69,773	46,374	46,242	60,390	65,497	57,655
Strangford Lough	52,168	62,881	60,594	53,417	53,269	56,465
Crouch-Roach Estuary	53,413	42,748	52,550	70,868	61,494	56,214
Inner Moray and Beauly Firths	65,413	44,699	57,608	47,617	56,170	54,301
Alt Estuary	67,794	41,370	42,687	43,873	73,492	53,843
Ouse Washes	49,829	64,266	50,572	46,912	56,769	53,669
Medway Estuary	45,285	42,485	53,612	57,094	48,365	49,368
Nene Washes	47,929	37,596	34,993	43,802	34,453	39,754
Chichester Harbour	33,134	36,941	38,432	42,503	43,014	38,804
Stour Estuary	34,512	42,877	40,237	39,741	34,408	38,355
Loch Leven	29,162	33,270	41,741	49,283	35,888	37,868
Cromarty Firth	41,077	35,815	38,611	37,084	35,469	37,611
Lower Derwent Ings	35,914	31,165	36,514	35,226	39,195	35,602
Abberton Reservoir	46,987	38,264	36,796	24,261	31,604	35,582
Hamford Water	32,412	32,318	23,342	34,819	52,691	35,116
Loughs Neagh and Beg	34,883	32,390	33,424	36,363	30,813	33,574
Alde Estuary	16,876	29,176	28,185	35,446	31,011	28,138
Dengie Flats	16,521	18,206	39,177	29,090	28,140	26,226
Lough Foyle	26,665	27,565	32,569	27,688	15,199	25,937
Wigtown Bay	31,170	21,338	25,087	26,337	25,228	25,832
Loch of Skene	17,159	20,413	44,553	20,031	26,807	25,792
Langstone Harbour	22,906	26,428	30,404	31,317	17,182	25,647
Poole Harbour	22,185	25,106	23,827	25,397	26,031	24,509
Dornoch Firth	27,385	23,834	24,805	21,111	23,406	24,108
Burry Inlet	31,347	29,061	22,345	17,830	17,267	23,570
Dungeness and Rye Bay	16,367	27,125	22,406	23,799	19,594	21,858
Rutland Water	23,042	26,142	24,071	19,395	15,908	21,711
Tees Estuary	19,523	20,246	22,895	25,030	20,441	21,627
Colne Estuary	20,301	23,493	20,263	20,821	21,350	21,245
Cleddau Estuary	26,236	22,979	21,679	13,457	20,305	20,931
Carmarthen Bay	11,957	22,744	26,436	24,249	14,826	20,042

- Totals are the sum of species maxima during the WeBS year at each site, using data from all months. **This summary does not account for missed visits or reduced coverage, from COVID-19 restrictions or otherwise.**
- Some totals may differ slightly from those published in previous annual WeBS reports due to late or amended data.
- Non-native species (such as Canada Goose and Mandarin), are excluded, as are gulls and terns due to incomplete coverage.
- A more comprehensive table showing all sites is available online via: **www.bto.org/webs-totals**

Gulls galore!

Being optional in WeBS, gulls require a periodic specific survey to produce more robust population estimates.

By **Ian Woodward** and **Emma Caulfield** BTO

The long-term nature of WeBS and GSMP data enable UK wintering waterbird trends to be produced for over a hundred species, with trends for many species also being produced at country level (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales) and for Great Britain. These trends help prioritise conservation actions by feeding into periodic assessments such as the Birds of Conservation Concern (Stanbury *et al.* 2021), i.e. the 'Red List and Amber List' which helps identify species most in need of conservation action. WeBS data also contribute to other periodic assessments including population estimates (see pages 28–29), and to wider research which helps to inform conservation management. For example, by comparing WeBS data with environmental factors across different sectors within a site, or across different sites, ecologists can pinpoint which factors are correlated positively or negatively with species' local trends and undertake further targeted research to confirm direct associations and to suggest management solutions which might reverse declines.

The outputs mentioned above and many others enable WeBS to have an impact on the conservation of wintering waterbirds. By monitoring and improving our understanding of the ongoing trends of wintering waterbirds and contributing to wider research, WeBS is a vital component supporting and influencing government policies and management actions by landowners which affect wetlands and wetland birds. However, there are some species or groups of waterbirds for which WeBS is less well-suited as a monitoring tool, as they are more difficult to observe and count accurately at WeBS sites (e.g. Water Rail) or are found widely in habitats that are less well-covered by WeBS (e.g. wintering goose species which often forage in arable fields).

Whilst trends for wintering gulls are published in the WeBS Report Online, these are considered potentially less robust than the trends for many other species and are not among the 52 species for which WeBS results are published as official statistics. There are two main reasons for this. First, recording gulls is optional in WeBS and therefore not all counters count gulls. Second, wintering gulls range widely across the wider countryside and forage in many habitats not counted by WeBS including agricultural fields, playing fields and rubbish tips. Even when WeBS counters do count gulls they will only be counting birds using estuarine habitats or other wetland sites during daylight hours.

However, like several goose species which forage in the wider countryside during daylight, wintering gulls conglomerate within often large roosts at night, with gulls utilising larger water bodies and coastal waters. This offers an opportunity to count a much larger proportion of the wintering birds and hence monitor population trends over time. Whilst goose populations are monitored annually through roost counts carried out under GSMP (see pages 34–36), wintering gull populations have been monitored periodically through a series of roost surveys dating back to 1953. An update to this sequence was completed in the winters of 2023/24 and 2024/25 and the survey results have just been published (Caulfield *et al.* 2026).

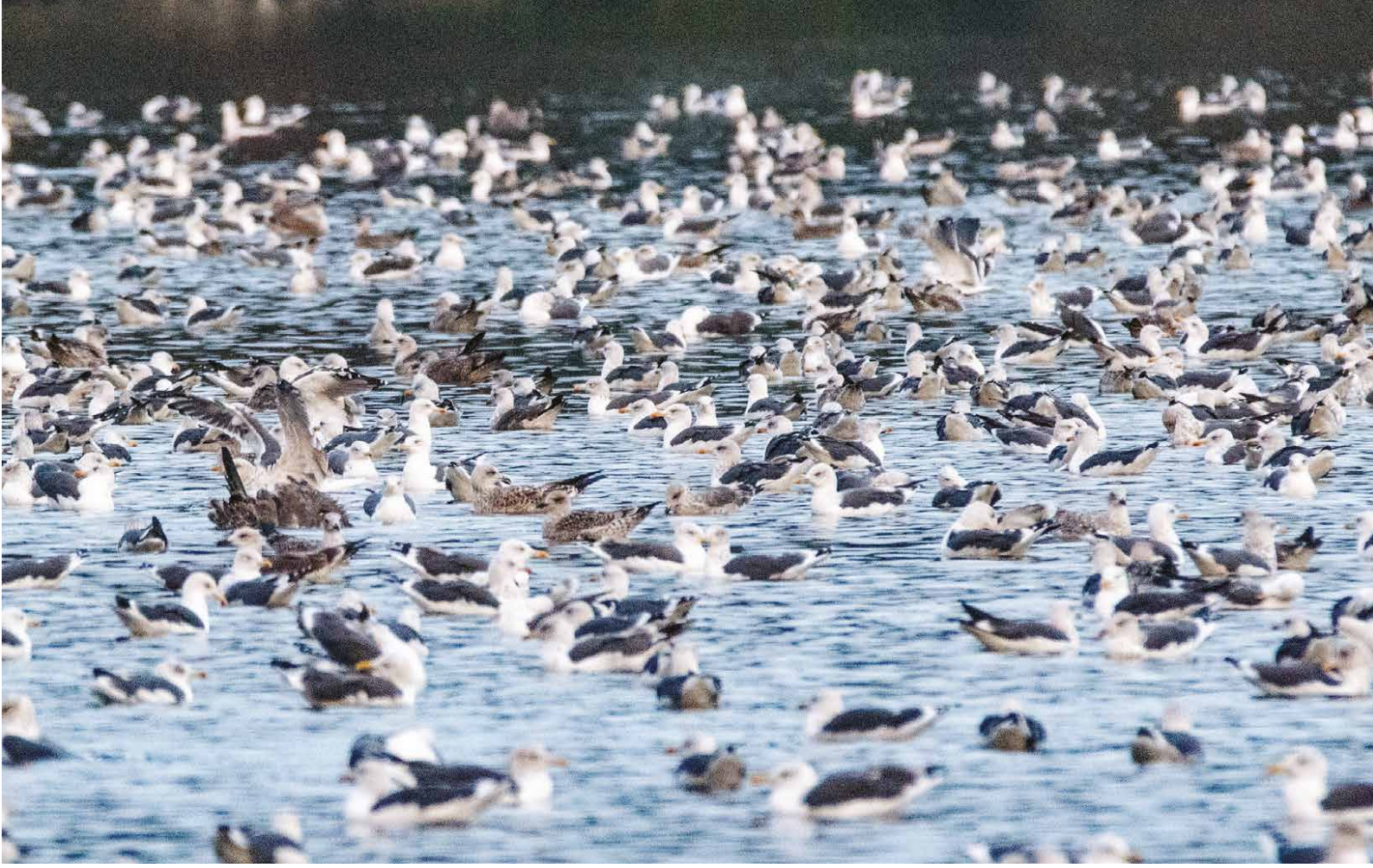
The early Winter Gull Surveys, carried out every 10 years between 1953 and 1993, covered only known major roost sites, with coverage expanding over time to cover a wider geographical area and to include coastal roosts as well as inland roosts. Hence, whilst they likely counted the vast majority of wintering gulls, they provided a minimum figure rather than a complete population estimate. The most recent survey prior to the current one, and the first to be known by the acronym 'WinGS', attempted to address this by including additional 'Sample Sites' to complement the counts at the major roosts ('Key Sites'). This enabled robust population estimates to be made, taking into account gulls that spend their nights at small roosts away from Key Sites.

Whilst this methodological change facilitated the publication of improved population estimates, it requires substantially greater volunteer effort to achieve sufficient survey coverage, and the previous survey took place over three winters from 2003/04 to 2005/06. As a result, it is difficult and costly to organise repeat surveys: whilst earlier winter gull surveys took place every 10 years, there had been a gap of twenty years since the previous survey and consequently a new WinGS was long overdue when it took place in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

FIND OUT MORE

Caulfield, E.B., Clarke, J.A., Burton, N.H.K., Boersch-Supan, P.H., Frost, T.M., Balmer, D.E. & Woodward, I.D. 2026. *Winter gulls in the United Kingdom: Results from the 2023/24–2024/25 Winter Gull (Roost) Survey*. BTO Research Report 807, BTO, Thetford, UK.

Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D., & Win, I. 2021. The status of our bird populations: the fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. *British Birds* **114**: 723–747.



GULL ROOST BY IAN SHEPPARD

The results from WinGS highlight substantial declines in wintering gulls in the UK, with the combined population estimate for all species in 2023/24 and 2024/25 equating to nearly 2.5 million gulls. This compares to a population from a population estimate of 3.9 million gulls when the survey was last run in 2003/04 to 2005/06. Black-headed Gulls alone from the last survey (2.2 million) almost matched the total estimate for all gull species this time around!

At a species level, substantial declines over the last 20 years were recorded for four of the six gull species for which population estimates were produced (Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull). Substantial increases have occurred for Mediterranean Gull, which has slowly spread in the UK since first breeding here in 1968. Results for Herring Gull were less clear with the data from WinGS suggesting that wintering numbers for this species are relatively stable or have increased slightly since the last survey. The species focus articles on pages 20–27 give some more detail for each species.

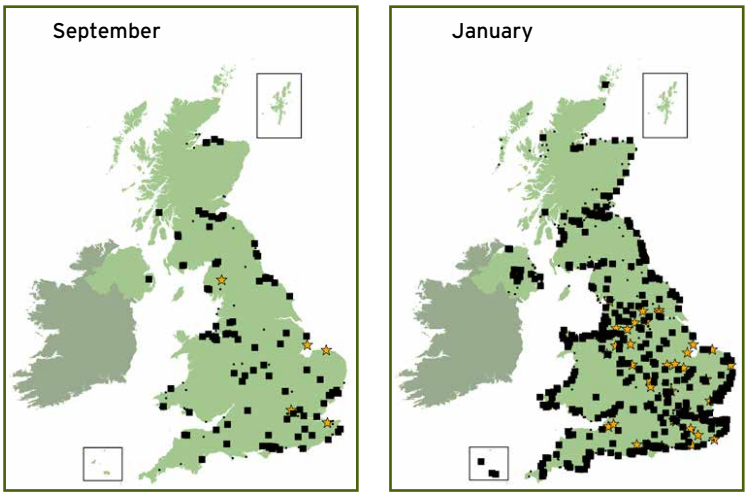
The results are broadly in line with WeBS trends since the early 2000s, and suggest that despite the concerns about their robustness for gulls, the WeBS trends may potentially offer a reasonable proxy for monitoring wintering gulls in the years between Winter Gull Surveys. There are some differences, however, most notably the decline for Black-headed Gull noted by WinGS is much greater than the decline suggested by WeBS data covering the same period. Hence, whilst WeBS data may help us to monitor ongoing trends, future WinGS surveys which count the whole population more thoroughly are still likely to be important for assessing population change. Furthermore, dedicated periodic WinGS counts will also help the Country Nature Conservation Bodies identify and monitor sites which support important numbers of roosting gulls.

THANK YOU!

Many WeBS volunteers carried out WinGS counts and we thank you all for your support, as well as the WinGS Local Organisers (many of whom are WeBS Local Organisers). If you cover a WeBS site and don't already count any gulls present during your regular monthly visit please consider whether you are able to count them. If you are able to carry out an extra roost count at your WeBS site during the winter (ideally in January) this can be entered into WeBS as a supplementary count. (Note, however, that you should never adjust the timing of your regular WeBS count to coincide with the evening roost as this could bias the counts of other species which may be behaving differently in the evening, e.g. some species may be more difficult to detect if they have gone to roost themselves.)

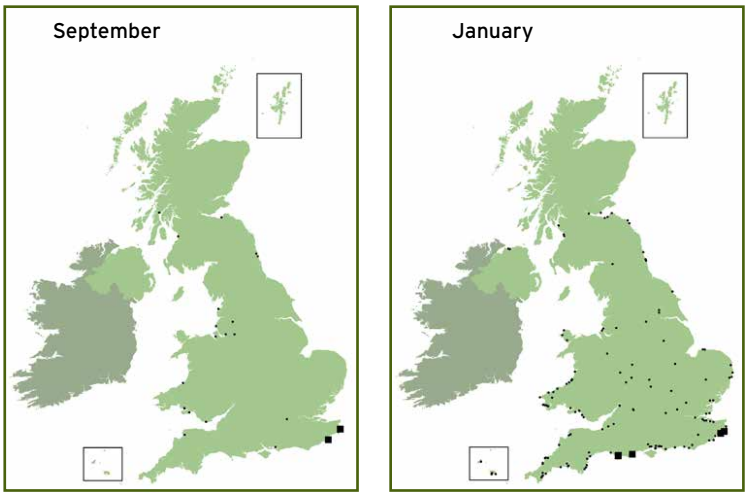
Black-headed Gull

Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	1,100,000	940,000–1,300,000
England	960,000	800,000–1,200,000
Scotland	92,000	71,000–110,000
Wales	49,000	28,000–99,000
Northern Ireland	12,000	8,400–17,000
Channel Islands	530	78–1,200
Isle of Man	6	0–15



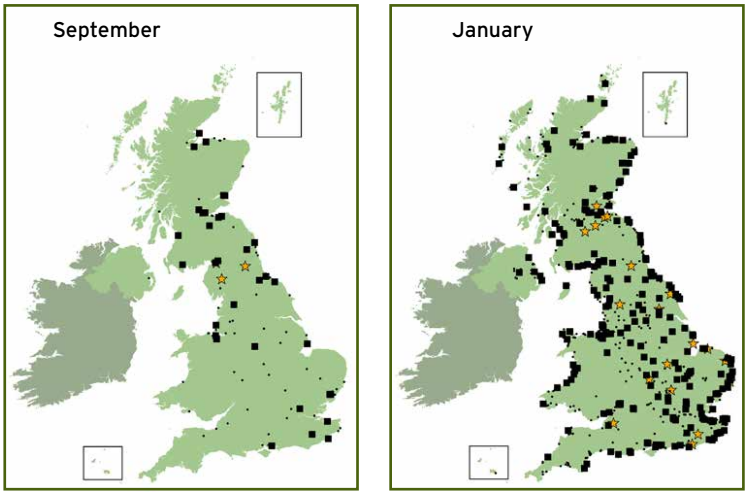
Mediterranean Gull

Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	4,300	2,100–12,000
England	3,800	1,800–10,000
Scotland	63	43–99
Wales	300	120–2,200
Northern Ireland	8	3–15
Channel Islands	9	0–21
Isle of Man	0	0–0



Common Gull

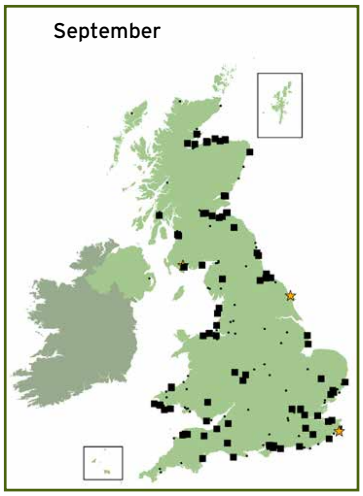
Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	520,000	440,000–600,000
England	300,000	240,000–380,000
Scotland	200,000	150,000–240,000
Wales	12,000	5,400–47,000
Northern Ireland	2,100	560–4,700
Channel Islands	5	0–15
Isle of Man	2,100	1,200–3,300

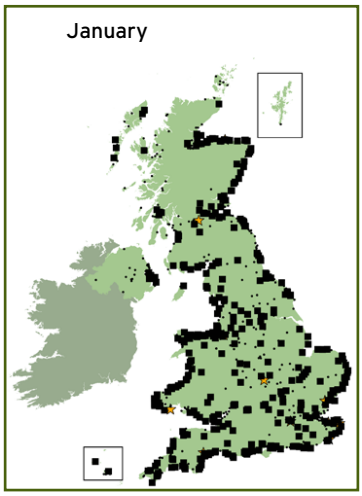


▲ Species maps show maximum counts at roosts submitted to WinGS for identified gulls during September (left) and January (right). Coverage was more complete in January. All maps use the same scale: black dot 1–100 birds; large black square 101–4,500 birds; orange star over 4,500 birds.

Herring Gull

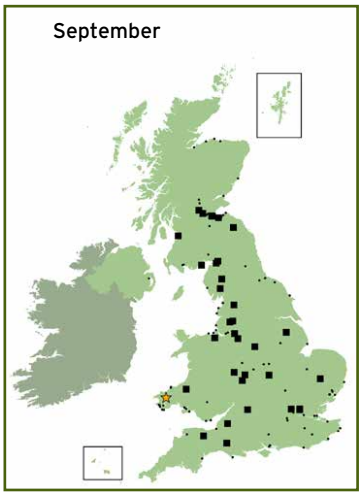
Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	720,000	640,000–810,000
England	410,000	340,000–480,000
Scotland	230,000	190,000–270,000
Wales	82,000	54,000–140,000
Northern Ireland	8,100	5,500–9,700
Channel Islands	1,200	180–2,400
Isle of Man	2,000	230–4,900

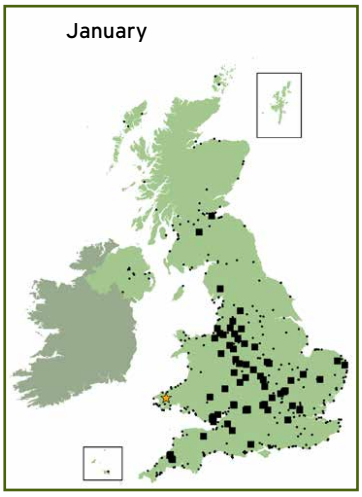




Lesser Black-backed Gull

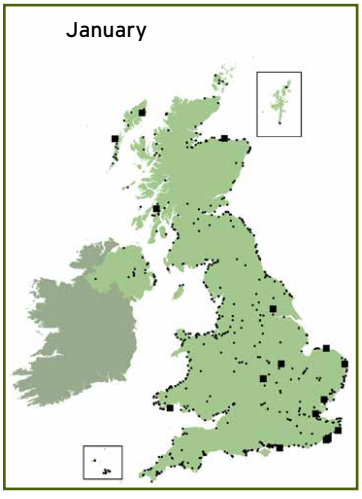
Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	66,000	46,000–92,000
England	53,000	38,000–73,000
Scotland	680	380–1,400
Wales	11,000	2,500–28,000
Northern Ireland	190	140–380
Channel Islands	6	0–12
Isle of Man	1	0–3





Great Black-backed Gull

Population Estimates:		
Country	Estimate	Range
GB	26,000	20,000–37,000
England	16,000	11,000–25,000
Scotland	7,800	6,100–10,000
Wales	1,200	750–5,200
Northern Ireland	430	110–3,000
Channel Islands	62	17–110
Isle of Man	120	44–250



Focus on … Herring Gull

By **Gill Birtles** BTO

The archetypal 'seagull', Herring Gulls are found throughout Europe and are the second largest gull found in the UK, with the largest being Great Black-backed Gull (pg. 24). They are a familiar species to the general public, as they often congregate loudly in urban areas, opportunistically eating food we throw away and breeding on rooftops, particularly near the coast but also sometimes in towns and cities many miles inland.

Herring Gull populations declined strongly across the UK in the late twentieth century and as a result they are included in the Red list in the UK under the *Birds of Conservation Concern 5a addendum* (Stanbury *et al.* 2024), giving them the highest level of conservation concern. The reason for this historic decline may have included disease (botulism), increased predation of young at nest sites and changes to the marine environment such as the ban on fisheries discards (Burnell *et al.* 2023).

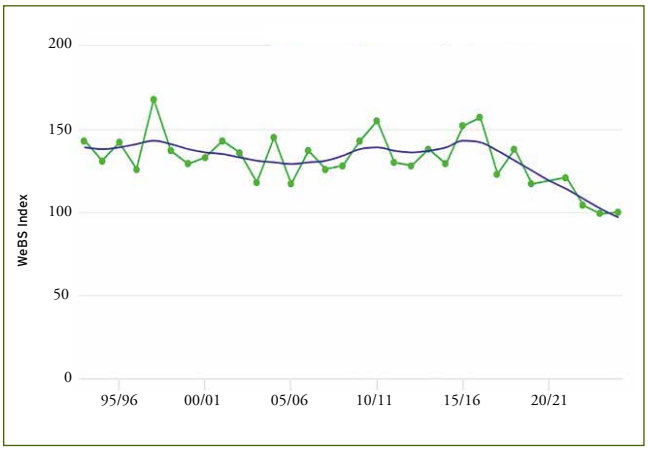
The most recent Winter Gull Survey offers better news for Herring Gulls and suggests that wintering numbers in Great Britain have been relatively stable for the last 20 years and may even have increased slightly. The winter population estimate for this species in Great Britain from the latest WinGS is 720,000 individuals (Caulfield *et al.* 2026).

It is believed that urban breeding populations are increasing (Burnell *et al.* 2023) but, as urban nests are very difficult to monitor, it is as yet unclear whether the increases in towns and cities compensate for ongoing declines at traditional coastal nesting sites.

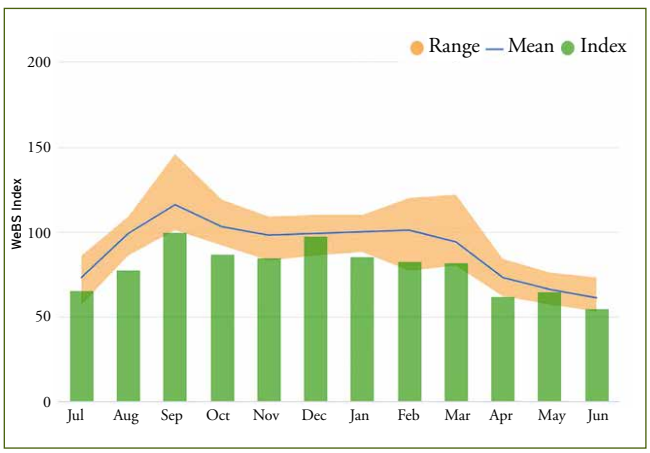
Because of the colonisation of urban areas, they have come into conflict with humans. The high defensiveness of their nests and young is notable and every summer you will see articles about Herring Gulls stealing chips, or even small dogs, adding to their perceived reputation as a nuisance.

Herring Gulls willingness to adapt, where other species are less able to is something to be admired. They are opportunistic and will eat a wide variety of food and can be found feeding in large congregations at landfill sites, taking advantage of the food we throw away.

This is supported by the 2024/25 WeBS data, where the largest WeBS Core Count for Herring Gull was Cotesbach Landfill Tip and A5 Lagoons in Leicestershire which had a peak of 8,000 birds in January 2025 and a five-year average of 10,480 birds. The only higher count in 2024/25, of 13,314 Herring Gulls came from a WinGS autumn roost count on the Forth Estuary in September 2024.



▲ **WeBS trend for Herring Gull in the UK.**
Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.



▲ **Monthly indices for Herring Gull in the UK.**
Green bars = 2024/25; blue line/orange hatched area = previous five-year mean/range.

HERRING GULL BY NEIL CALBRADE

Focus on … Mediterranean Gull

By Dawn Balmer BTO

There were 3,482 pairs of Mediterranean Gulls breeding in the UK in 2023; a new record maximum reported to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. There has been a substantial increase in the breeding population since the first breeding in 1968 in Hampshire. Most of the breeding population is concentrated in southern England (with 2,183 nests at one site alone, Langstone Harbour in Hampshire), though there has also been some range expansion. 2023 saw the first confirmed breeding in Scotland, with two pairs nesting and hatching chicks in North-east Scotland, although none survived to fledging (Short 2024). There were five pairs in Wales and 12 pairs in Northern Ireland. The large colonies in southern England are vulnerable to disturbance and flooding on spring tides. The BTO/JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) does not adequately monitor Mediterranean Gull and we encourage regular monitoring at breeding sites and an improved flow of data from well-counted sites to SMP.

The Winter Gull Survey included Mediterranean Gull as a core species for the first time. The Great Britain January estimate is 4,300 individuals (2,100–12,000). The highest counts came from Weymouth Bay in Dorset (650), RSPB Lodmoor (500), Dover Harbour (268) and Poole (223). The previously published estimate for wintering Mediterranean Gull was 4,000 individuals which was derived from a compilation of county/regional/other sources data from throughout the winter months (Frost *et al.* 2019), and repeated again in Caulfield *et al.* (2025).

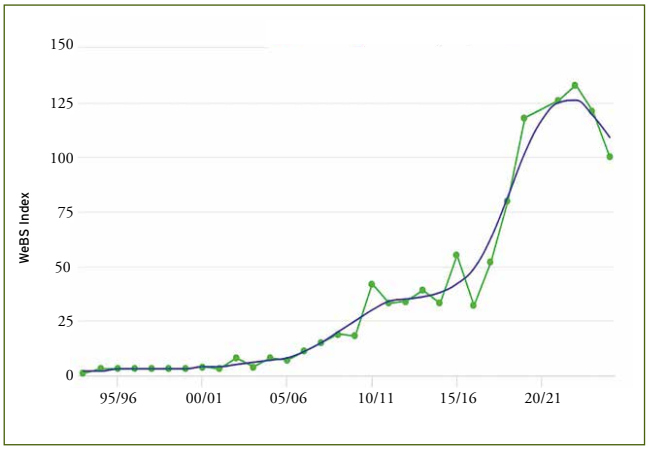
Counting gulls is optional in WeBS but there are consistent counts at many of the important sites, with a five-year average of 2,041 at Fleet and Way being the highest. Typically the highest counts at sites are outside the winter months, such as 1,220 on the Thames Estuary in April 2025 and 1,018 at Chichester Harbour in March 2025. Based on counts from the 2024/25 winter, the Great Britain maximum from WeBS is 3,366.

Looking at the BirdTrack reporting rates (the % of complete lists recording a Mediterranean Gull) we see that spring passage occurs through February and March, often reaching a pre-breeding season peak by early April at major colony sites. The reporting rate peaks in mid-July and this is the time of year when Mediterranean Gull is dispersing from breeding areas and we see a post-breeding influx. There is a further peak in late September and October before the reporting rate drops to a low over the winter.

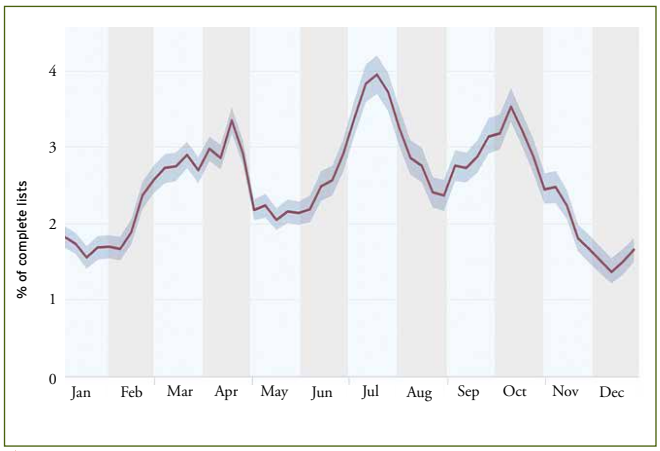
FIND OUT MORE

Frost, T., Austin, G., Hearn, R., McAvoy, S., Robinson, A., Stroud, D., Woodward, I. & Wotton, S. 2019. Population estimates of wintering waterbirds in Great Britain. *British Birds* **112**: 130-145.

Short, D. 2024. Breeding Mediterranean Gulls at Forvie NNR, Newburgh, North-East Scotland in 2023. *Scottish Birds* **44**: 85-87.



WeBS trend for Mediterranean Gull in the UK.
Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.



BirdTrack historical reporting rates showing the typical summer peak of Mediterranean Gull records in the UK.

MEDITERRANEAN GULL BY NEIL CALBRADE

Black-headed Gull

Probably the most familiar gull in the UK, though numbers have steadily been falling.

By **Gill Birtles** BTO

An understandable misconception about Black-headed Gulls held by members of the general public is that they are indeed 'black-headed' gulls, when in fact adults have a chocolate brown hood during the breeding season and for much of the rest of the time are white-headed (with the addition of brown smudges). In the winter historically they were probably confused with Common Gulls, and even today we had to provide an "unidentified small gull" option for WinGS roost counts and account for this in modelling, as identification can be challenging in poor light.

Non-birders who do notice them might think that they only gather in small groups and are quarrelsome. But what may appear as anti-social behaviour is usually just birds noisily communicating with each other. In the 2024/25 WeBS year, the peak count came from a WinGS roost count on the Mersey Estuary and was 64,650 birds. In the breeding season they nest in colonies. In such large groups, it's no wonder they are raucously loud and even their scientific name suggests their noisy, social natures, as '*ridibundus*' means 'laughing'.

Black-headed Gulls can be found in a wide range of coastal and inland waterbodies, and during winter will happily explore urban sites for food, as well as agricultural sources such as freshly plouged fields and outdoor pig farms. BTO's Garden BirdWatch results show that they are regular visitors to UK gardens in the winter months, peaking in November to February (BTO Garden BirdWatch 2026).

Black-headed Gulls are a highly migratory bird across much of their range. Their migration routes usually lead them to coastal areas, estuaries, and inland waters in western and southern Europe, the Mediterranean region,

▲ **WeBS trend for Black-headed Gull in the UK.**
Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.

BLACK-HEADED GULL BY NEIL CALBRADE

and parts of the Middle East and South Asia. Some birds travel several thousand kilometres, often moving in loose flocks. Not all Black-headed Gulls migrate long distances. In milder parts of western Europe, including the UK, many remain throughout the winter. However, tagging and colour marking studies are beginning to show that some individuals move regularly throughout the non-breeding season within and between countries. Their adaptability allows them to use urban environments, farmland, and coastal habitats while migrating or overwintering.

Given that this species is so widespread and can be seen almost everywhere, it may be surprising to learn that this species is Amber listed in the UK under the *Birds of Conservation Concern 5a addendum* (Stanbury *et al.* 2024), based on declines in both the breeding and wintering populations. Both WeBS data and WinGS data show that populations are generally decreasing in the UK with the four constituent countries of the UK recording a very similar trend. Although the winter population estimate from the latest WinGS survey was 1.1 million individuals, making it the most abundant wintering gull species (Caulfield *et al.* 2026), this represents a substantial decline of approximately 50% in the 20 years since the previous WinGS.

There have been observations of significant mortality at breeding colonies in Britain and elsewhere in recent years caused by High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI), and this will have contributed to the decline in WinGS and may well be the reason for the sharp decrease shown in last two years of the WeBS trend. However, WeBS data indicate that there has been a steady decline over the last 20 years and therefore the WinGS decline will also have been driven

Table 5 Top sites for Black-headed Gull.

Site	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Month	5-year mean
Mersey Estuary†	6,697	(12,162)	(10,326)	**6,288**	**64,650**	Jan	25,878
Bewl Water†	389	52,470	26,600	15,040	22,690	Jan	23,438
Lower Derwent Ings†	2,000	8,000	18,000	46,000	**14,700**	Jan	17,740
The Wash†	(19,713)	(10,759)	(16,536)	**17,830**	**14,100**	Sep	17,045
Humber Estuary	(7,386)	(11,551)	(14,866)	(7,595)	(5,632)	Dec	14,866
Delph and Belmont Reservoirs	19,115	24,100	14,040	7,300	7,500	Mar	14,411
Rutland Water†	252	40,000	1,705	**10,205**	15,627	Jan	13,558
Eccup Reservoir	18,000	21,000	11,000	1,500			12,875
Severn Estuary	11,128	(16,722)	(13,036)	(9,347)	8,765	Jul	12,413
Abberton Reservoir†	2,955	3,036	947	**22,784**	**31,922**	Jan	12,329
Nene Washes†	(0)	(0)	(0)	**11,000**	(0)		11,000
Dee Estuary (England and Wales)	10,186	13,050	14,792	6,224	9,431	Aug	10,737
Chasewater†	9,000	12,500	11,000	**7,000**	9,000	Dec	9,700
Draycote Water†	20	57	17,500	**26,500**	0		8,815
Ranworth and Cockshoot Broads†	17,000	20,000	3,600	**186**	**905**	Oct	8,338
Thames Estuary†	(6,813)	(12,878)	(4,806)	7,200	5,770	Jul	8,165
Morecambe Bay	(6,445)	10,398	5,683	(6,468)	(5,542)	Aug	8,041
Poole Harbour	(8,130)	(5,358)	11,222	4,081	5,368	Jan	7,200
Dungeness and Rye Bay†	(1,307)	(250)	(608)	**10,000**	**3,000**	Sep	6,500
Chichester Harbour†	(2,886)	(2,428)	5,265	**10,000**	4,064	Mar	6,443
Forth Estuary†	(3,356)	(2,696)	(3,749)	**5,785**	**6,534**	Sep	6,160
Audenshaw Reservoirs†				**6,500**	**5,120**	Jan	5,810
Dearne Valley	6,828	10,657	7,888	2,489	688	Sep	5,710
Tittesworth Reservoir†					**5,520**	Jan	5,520
Solway Estuary†	(7,120)	(3,479)	(3,788)	**5,806**	**3,128**	Sep	5,351
Ellesmere Lakes†	(580)			**5,025**	**5,580**	Jan	5,303
North Norfolk Coast†	(4,396)	(4,510)	(5,520)	**5,030**	**5,000**	Sep	5,183
Ouse Washes†	(400)	(655)	571	**6,453**	**8,419**	Jan	5,148
Livermere and Ampton Water†	2,300	6,001	(3,003)	**6,000**	6,250	Jan	5,138
Southampton Water†	1,951	(1,765)	2,009	**3,750**	**12,442**	Jan	5,038

• Annual peaks and month in 2024/25 when recorded are shown. Brackets indicate incomplete coverage. Five-year mean is for period 2020/21 to 2024/25.
† = Counts include supplementary roost count data, WinGS roost counts shown in **bold**.

by other factors. These are uncertain but may have included human disturbance, increased predation and declines in invertebrate prey species (Burnell *et al.* 2023).

Table 5 lists the sites with a five-year average of 5,000+ birds, and of the top 10 sites in 2024/25, six were inland sites (Bewl Water, Lower Derwent Ings, Delph and Belmont Reservoirs, Rutland Water, Eccup Reservoir and Abberton Reservoir). Aside from Derwent Ings, these are man-made reservoirs constructed between 1826 and 1976, again demonstrating the ability of this species to take advantage of a changing environment. The map of WinGS roost counts on page 18 shows that as well as the large inland and estuarine roosts, the species is also widely distributed along the coast.

The WinGS counts have highlighted in this species in particular the value of roost counts for assessing how birds use sites. At many sites in Table 5, the counts highlighted in bold made during the WinGS counts are much higher than those recorded on WeBS Core Counts. The peak counts at Abberton Reservoir were 22,784 in 2023/24 and 31,922 in 2024/25 compared with peak counts of 4,744 and 657 from the respective years' daytime Core Count peak counts. We would strongly encourage supplementary roost counts for gulls where it is known that birds may gather in larger numbers at times away from when the monthly Core Counts are carried out.

The similarity between the WinGS and WeBS results suggests that WeBS data could help us monitor winter populations for this species during the years between WinGS. Therefore, we ask that WeBS counters who feel confident to count Black-headed Gulls during their Core Count visits, to please do so, so that we can continue to monitor how this species is faring at WeBS sites across the UK.

FIND OUT MORE

BTO Garden BirdWatch. 2026. **www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/gbw/results/long-term-patterns**

Focus on … Great Black-backed Gull

By **Gill Birtles** BTO

Here in the UK, we are very lucky to play host to the world's largest gull species, the Great Black-backed Gull. These birds are very large and thick set, with a powerful beak which often looks to have a piece of red pepper stuck to it.

Because of their size, Great Black-backed Gulls are not known to have any predators and therefore may be considered an apex predator within an ecosystem and have a fierce reputation for stealing food from other birds and animals within their habitat and predating the young of other seabirds.

Great Black-backed Gulls are generally solitary birds, however, they do flock together in larger numbers around a food source or during migration. While Great Black-backed Gulls are present in the UK year-round, with breeding populations in the north and west, many Great Black-backed Gulls migrate from Scandinavian countries to overwinter in the UK.

The global population of Great Black-backed Gulls is estimated to have declined by 43%–48% between 1985 and 2021 (Langlois Lopez *et al.* 2022) and this decline has been reflected across Britain and Ireland.

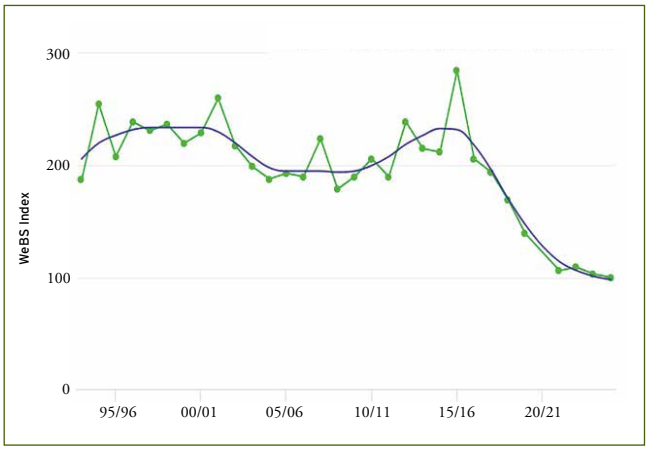
The overall population estimate for Great Britain from the latest WinGS is 26,000, a substantial decrease from the estimate of 76,000 during the previous WinGS survey. WeBS data support the findings from WinGS, showing a 25-year decline of 57%.

Unlike many of our other gull species, Great Black-backed Gulls have shunned urban life, and are very much coastal birds, preferring island and marshy habitats. In the 2024/25 WeBS year, three of the top five sites for Great Black-backed Gulls were Castle Island, Northumberland, Cuckmere Estuary, Sussex and Coquet Island, Northumberland, which all had peak counts of over 500 birds, and all of which are island or marsh habitats.

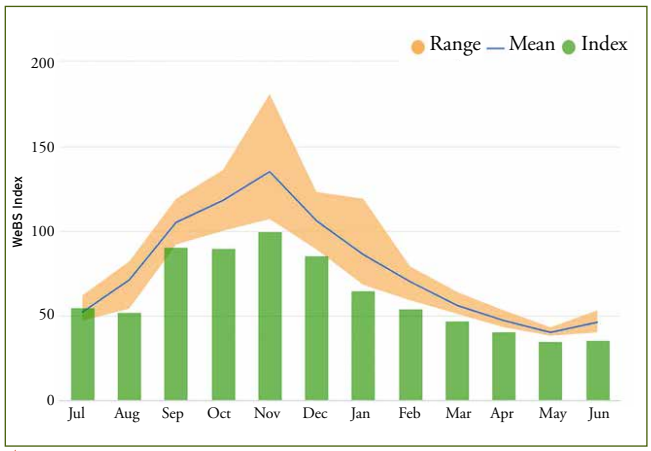
Perhaps because of their inability to adapt quickly to an ever-increasing human oriented world, and in common with many other seabirds they are Red-listed species in the UK under the *Birds of Conservation Concern 5a addendum* (Stanbury *et al.* 2024).

FIND OUT MORE

Langlois Lopez, S.L., Bond, A.L., O'Hanlon, N.J., Wilson, J., Vitz, A., Mostello, C., Hamilton, F., Rail, J.F., Welch, L., Boettcher, R., Wilhelm, S., Anker-Nilssen, T., Daunt, F. & Masden, E. 2022. Global population and conservation status of the Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*. *Bird Conservation International*. **33**: 1–11.



WeBS trend for Great Black-backed Gull in the UK. Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.



Monthly indices for Great Black-backed Gull in the UK. Green bars = 2024/25; blue line/orange hatched area = previous five-year mean/range.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL BY EDMUND FELLOWES/BTO

Focus on … Lesser Black-backed Gull

By **Bridget Hiza** BTO

Lesser Black-backed Gulls inhabit the UK all year round, breeding on coastal islands and increasingly on flat roofs in city centres. There has been a significant increase of Lesser Black-backed Gulls breeding in urban areas in recent years (Burnell *et al.* 2023).

Despite the increase in abundance in urban areas, the wintering population has decreased since 1998. WeBS data show a decrease of 29% over the last 10 years, and a 50% decline over the last 25-year period. Similarly, results from the latest WinGS exemplifies this decline, with a decrease of 47% since the last WinGS in 2003/04–2005/06.

Although found in the UK all year round, part of the UK breeding population migrates south to southern Spain, Portugal and North and West Africa during autumn and winter (Klaassen *et al.* 2012). As it was known that this species is not present in its largest non-breeding numbers in mid-winter, for the first time an additional autumn roost count was carried out as part of the recent WinGS survey.

Llys-y-fran Reservoir was the top WeBS site in 2024/25, with a five-year average of 5,491 birds, exceeding the International Importance threshold. A further 24 sites held nationally important numbers, many as a result of WinGS roost counts.

Although coverage in autumn was less complete than in mid-winter, the additional visits have been informative for both estimates and range. As can be seen on the maps on page 19, there is a shift between September and January from northern sites to the south-west of Britain, with the majority of the January large roosts being south-west of a line between Morecambe Bay and the Thames, a pattern not present in any of the other species.

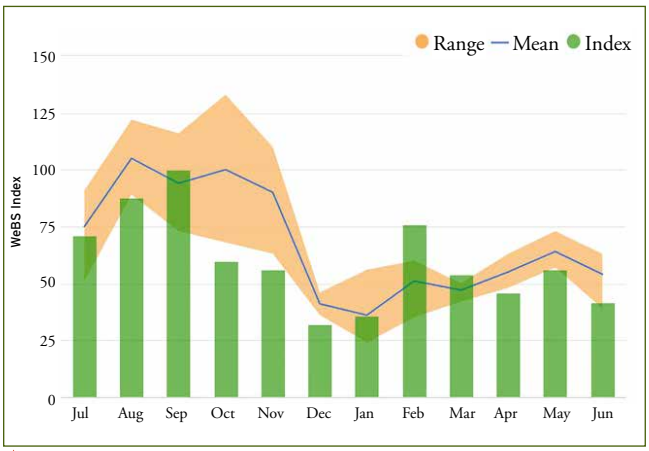
The cause of the species' decline include disease such as HPAI and botulism, predation from mammals, loss of nesting habitat due to sea level rise, and reduction in discards from fisheries due to legal changes (Harris *et al.* 2026).

Over a third of the global population of Lesser Black-backed Gull breed in Britain and Ireland, including an estimated 87% of the *graellsii* race. The *intermedius* race also occurs here, particularly in autumn and spring. Amber-listed in the Birds of Conservation Concern, with the UK supporting internationally important numbers, it is vital for their conservation to continue monitoring in both the breeding and non-breeding seasons and conduct further research into the causes of the observed halving of wintering numbers here over the past 20–25 years.

FIND OUT MORE

Klaassen, R.H., Ens, B.J., Shamoun-Baranes, J., Exo, K.M. & Bairlein, F. 2012. Migration strategy of a flight generalist, the Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. *Behavioral Ecology* **23**:58–68.

▲ **WeBS trend for Lesser Black-backed Gull in the UK.** Green dots = annual index; blue line = smoothed trend.



▲ **Monthly indices for Lesser Black-backed Gull in the UK.** Green bars = 2024/25; blue line/orange hatched area = previous five-year mean/range.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL BY GARY CLEWLEY/BTO

Common Gull

Becoming less common in winter and Red-listed, with an estimated drop of 180,000 birds over 20 years, but migrants still swell numbers in the UK.

By **Teresa Frost** BTO

Whilst not exactly misleadingly named, for the non-breeding season at least, in the latest WinGS survey Common Gull was less numerous than Black-headed Gull and Herring Gull, and it has been recorded at slightly fewer WeBS sites. But they are a familiar, if unobtrusive, presence at many a WeBS site during winter, roosting in their thousands along with other gulls at larger roosts, and making use of a variety of foraging habitats during the day.

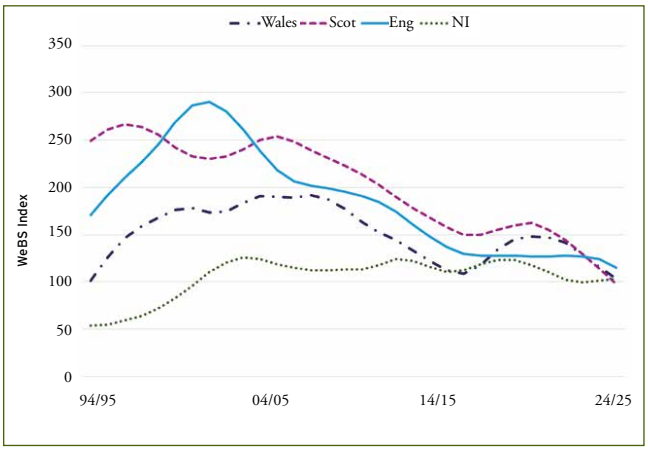
A breeder of coasts, inland marshes and moorland close to lakes and riversides in northern climes, migration studies show a high degree of connectivity from Ireland and Britain towards Norway and the Baltic; there are not many breeding birds in Iceland, where it is a relative newcomer. Most birds wintering in the UK are thus the *canus* subspecies, with the *heieni* Russian subspecies mainly wintering further east; although ringing data shows it is also regular in western Europe. As a result of declines in coastal breeders seen during the *Seabirds Count* Britain and Ireland breeding census, the *Birds of Conservation Concern Seabird addendum* added Common Gull to the Red list (Stanbury *et al.* 2024).

The WeBS indices in Northern Ireland and Wales, being based on a small number of sites and birds, are fairly stable/slightly increasing. The England and Scotland indices, which represent the largest numbers, have been mostly on a downward trajectory since WeBS monitoring began in 1993/94. Overall, the UK 10-year trend is -17% and the 25-year trend is -50%.

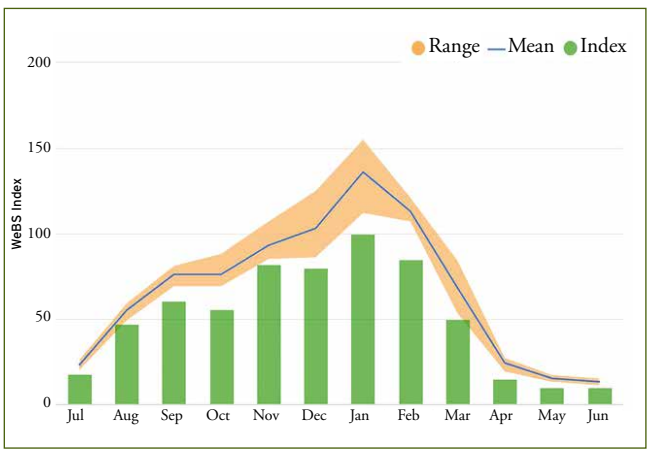
The 2023/24–2024/25 WinGS estimate for Common Gull is a little over half a million individuals, with an estimate of 520,000 birds in Great Britain. England was estimated to support the majority (59%) of these, Scotland held 38%, and Wales 2%. The Northern Ireland estimate was 2,100 (560 – 4,700). The survey also confirmed that higher numbers are present in midwinter compared to autumn.

The updated WinGS estimate for Great Britain is a substantial decrease of 180,000 individuals since the 2003/04–2005/06 Winter Gull Roost Survey. The pairwise analysis of change indicates a decline since the previous survey of 19%. These substantial declines in the number of Common Gull during the mid-winter period at roosts, echoing the daytime trends observed in WeBS, tell of a gull that is still common in the non-breeding season, but not in the numbers of the past.

The cause of the observed decline in the UK in winter may reflect flyway population declines. As many individuals are coming from the northwest, there is the possibility that, like other species, migration 'short-stopping' could be influencing wintering trends in the UK. However, the latest East Atlantic Flyway 10-year trend is 'moderate decrease', suggesting that UK results are not simply due to range change and declines are occurring more widely. In Britain, breeding colonies are almost wholly in Scotland, where annual monitoring of coastal colonies showed a 23-year trend of -38% according to Seabird Monitoring Programme data (Harris *et al.* 2026). The latest *Seabirds Count* census found numbers of Apparently Occupied Nests had declined by over half in Britain, and an increase in Ireland did not offset this. Threats to the species are thought to include habitat loss, human disturbance, predation (including from non-native and introduced mammals) and pollutants. However, this is a poorly studied species and, given these declines in wintering and breeding populations, more research into the factors driving this could assist their conservation.



▲ **WeBS trends for Common Gull in Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland.**



▲ **Monthly indices for Common Gull in the UK.** Green bars = 2024/25; blue line/orange hatched area = previous five-year mean/range.

COMMON GULL BY NEIL CALBRADE

Table 4 Important sites for Common Gull.

Site	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Month	5-year mean
Bewl Water†	204	28,840	29,420	**16,540**	48,350	Feb	24,671
Solway Estuary†	(5,044)	(1,719)	(1,267)	**3,510**	**22,035**	Sep	12,773
Forth Estuary†	(1,093)	(406)	2,779	**8,541**	**14,325**	Jan	8,548
North Norfolk Coast†	(794)	(1,258)	(904)	**8,514**	(607)	Jan	8,514
Lower Derwent Ings†	800	2,000	7,000	21,000	**8,100**	Jan	7,780
Ranworth and Cockshoot Broads†	300	20,000	1	**18,438**	**58**	Oct	7,759
Rutland Water†	20	12,050	901	**8,543**	8,962	Jan	6,095
Severn Estuary†	(519)	(343)	(917)	**6,041**	**5,367**	Jan	5,704
Loch Leven†	0	0	0	**5,514**	**21,500**	Jan	5,403

• Annual peaks and month in 2024/25 when recorded are shown. Brackets indicate incomplete coverage. Five-year mean is for period 2020/21 to 2024/25.
† = Counts include supplementary roost count data, WinGS roost counts shown in **bold**.

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT GULLS

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Updates to waterbird population estimates and species threshold levels

Population thresholds help identify potential sites of national importance for waterbird species and populations.

By **Ian Woodward** BTO

Criteria for assessing the international importance of wetlands have been agreed by the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention Bureau 1988). A wetland in Britain is considered nationally important if it regularly holds 1% or more of the estimated British numbers of one species or subspecies of waterbird, and in Northern Ireland if it holds 1% or more of the all-Ireland estimate. However, it should be noted that, where 1% of the national population is less than 50 birds, 50 is usually used as a minimum qualifying threshold for the designation of sites of national or international importance.

The national population estimates (and hence the thresholds) are updated approximately every six years and WeBS counts are an essential part of this process contributing to the wintering estimates for most waterbird species alongside GSMP and NEWS (Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey). For waterbird species which are commonly found inland or away from water, other sources of data are used including species surveys or statistical techniques which account for birds using habitats which are less well-covered by WeBS.

Increasing estimates and thus thresholds may mean that some sites no longer pass the revised threshold, and conversely for declining species a lower threshold can result in a site being flagged as nationally important in WeBS Report Online which would not have been previously flagged. Recently colonising species such as Cattle Egret, Great White Egret and Spoonbill continue to expand and their estimates have increased, but the thresholds have not yet exceeded the 50 birds minimum. The British estimate for Curlew, an example of a species in decline, has decreased by 10,000 birds which has reduced the threshold by 100 birds; Lindisfarne and Alt Estuary are thus flagged in this year's data on the WeBS Report Online as having nationally important numbers where they wouldn't have been otherwise.

In some cases the estimate change is a result of methodological changes and does not necessarily match the WeBS trend for the species. For example, Mute Swan estimates have increased despite trend data suggesting a shallow decline; Loch Bee (South Uist) WeBS site is no longer flagged as important as it now falls just under the threshold of 540. (Note that for Mute Swan, as the breeding population is resident, the British and Irish national and international (flyway) populations are the same.) For more information on which estimate and threshold changes are thought to be due to population change and which are likely to be caused by changes in estimation methods, see Caulfield *et al.* (2025), and for more information on thresholds, and how they are reported in WeBS see the guide to WeBS methods (BTO 2026).

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Table 6 Changes to the 1% national thresholds.

Species	GB Threshold	All-Ireland threshold	Species	GB Threshold	All-Ireland threshold
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	960 (-20)		Grey Plover	360 (+30)	20 (-10)
Svalbard Light-bellied Brent Goose	38 (+4)		Ringed Plover	500 (+80)	130 (+10)
Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Goose	22 (+6)	270 (-80)	Whimbrel	1* (-)	
Greenland Barnacle Goose	480 (-80)	140 (-20)	Curlew	1,100 (-100)	380 (+30)
Svalbard Barnacle Goose	340 (-90)		Bar-tailed Godwit	450 (-50)	140 (-30)
British/Irish Greylag Goose	1,800 (+400)		Black-tailed Godwit	540 (+150)	250 (+50)
Icelandic Greylag Goose	590 (-320)	30 (-5)	Turnstone	380 (-20)	90 (-5)
Taiga Bean Goose	2 (-)		Knot	3,000 (+400)	200 (+40)
Tundra Bean Goose	3 (-)		Ruff	11 (+2)	
Pink-footed Goose	4,400 (-700)		Sanderling	250 (+50)	85 (-)
Greenland White-fronted Goose	100 (-20)	80 (-20)	Dunlin	3,700 (+300)	620 (+160)
European White-fronted Goose	15 (-6)		Purple Sandpiper	95 (-2)	20 (-)
Mute Swan	540 (+40)	110 (+20)	Little Stint	1* (-)	
Bewick's Swan	13 (-31)	20 (-)	Woodcock	14,000 (-)	
Whooper Swan	210 (+50)	190 (+40)	Jack Snipe	1,000 (-)	
Shelduck	550 (+80)	100 (-)	Snipe	10,000 (-)	
Shoveler	250 (+60)	35 (+15)	Common Sandpiper	1* (-)	
Gadwall	340 (+30)	20 (-)	Green Sandpiper	2* (-1)	
Wigeon	4,600 (+100)	670 (+110)	Redshank	1,100 (+160)	240 (-)
Mallard	7,000 (+300)	250 (-30)	Spotted Redshank	1* (-)	
Pintail	220 (+20)	20 (-)	Greenshank	11 (+3)	20 (-)
Teal	3,300 (-1,000)	440 (+80)	Black-headed Gull	11,000 (-11,000)	
Pochard	180 (-50)	70 (-40)	Mediterranean Gull	43 (+3)	
Tufted Duck	1,200 (-100)	160 (-110)	Common Gull	5,200 (-1,800)	
Scaup	39 (-)	20 (-)	Great Black-backed Gull	260 (-500)	
Eider	770 (+40)	85 (+55)	Glaucous Gull	2 (-)	
Velvet Scoter	34 (-)		Iceland Gull	3 (-)	
Common Scoter	1300 (-)		Herring Gull	7,200 (-100)	
Long-tailed Duck	130 (-)		Caspian Gull	1* (-)	
Goldeneye	180 (-10)	20 (-20)	Yellow-legged Gull	8 (-)	
Smew	1* (-)		Lesser Black-backed Gull	660 (-540)	
Goosander	150 (-)	20 (+20)	Sandwich Tern	1* (-)	
Red-breasted Merganser	97 (-3)	25 (-)	Red-throated Diver	210 (-)	
Moorhen	3,200 (+200)		Black-throated Diver	6 (-)	
Coot	1,700 (-300)	220 (+30)	Great Northern Diver	43 (-)	
Crane	3 (+1)		White-billed Diver	1* (new)	
Little Grebe	190 (+40)	30 (+10)	Cormorant	640 (+20)	120 (+10)
Red-necked Grebe	1* (-)		Shag	1,100 (-)	
Great Crested Grebe	170 (-)	30 (-)	Glossy Ibis	1* (-)	
Slavonian Grebe	9 (-)		Spoonbill	2* (+1)	
Black-necked Grebe	1* (-)		Bittern	9 (+1)	
Oystercatcher	2,900 (-)	570 (-40)	Cattle Egret	8 (+7)	
Avocet	130 (+43)		Grey Heron	390 (-60)	25 (-)
Lapwing	6,200 (-)	820 (-30)	Great White Egret	6 (+5)	
Golden Plover	4,000 (-)	910 (-10)	Little Egret	100 (-10)	20 (-)

Numbers in brackets () are the change from the Threshold used in ***Waterbirds in the UK 2023/24***.
* denotes not flagged in WeBS Report Online.

Arctic Indicators

The use of monitoring data from North-west Europe as indicators for the health of Arctic-breeding waterbird populations.

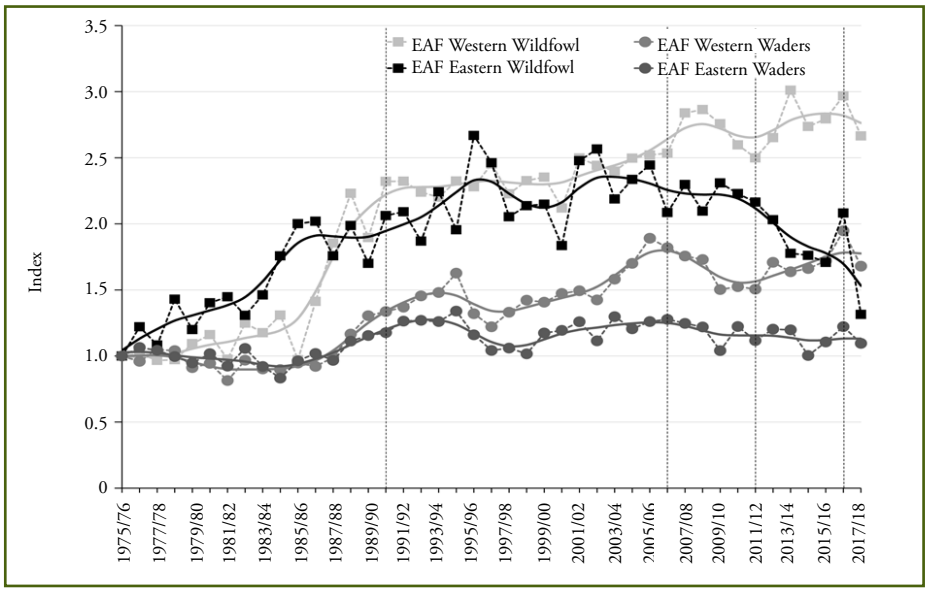
By **Bridget Hiza** BTO

Arctic environments are at the highest risk of effects from climate change, with significant ecological impacts already being observed. However, due to remote locations and logistical constraints in monitoring within the Arctic region, it is difficult to monitor these effects on waterbird species breeding in the Arctic. Consequently, a study by Thaxter *et al.* (2025) used data from the UK and the Netherlands to assess the status of Arctic waterbirds. Since a considerable number of Arctic-breeding waterbirds spend the non-breeding season in other areas, long-term data sets of abundance and reproductive measures were analysed to assess the status of their breeding populations.

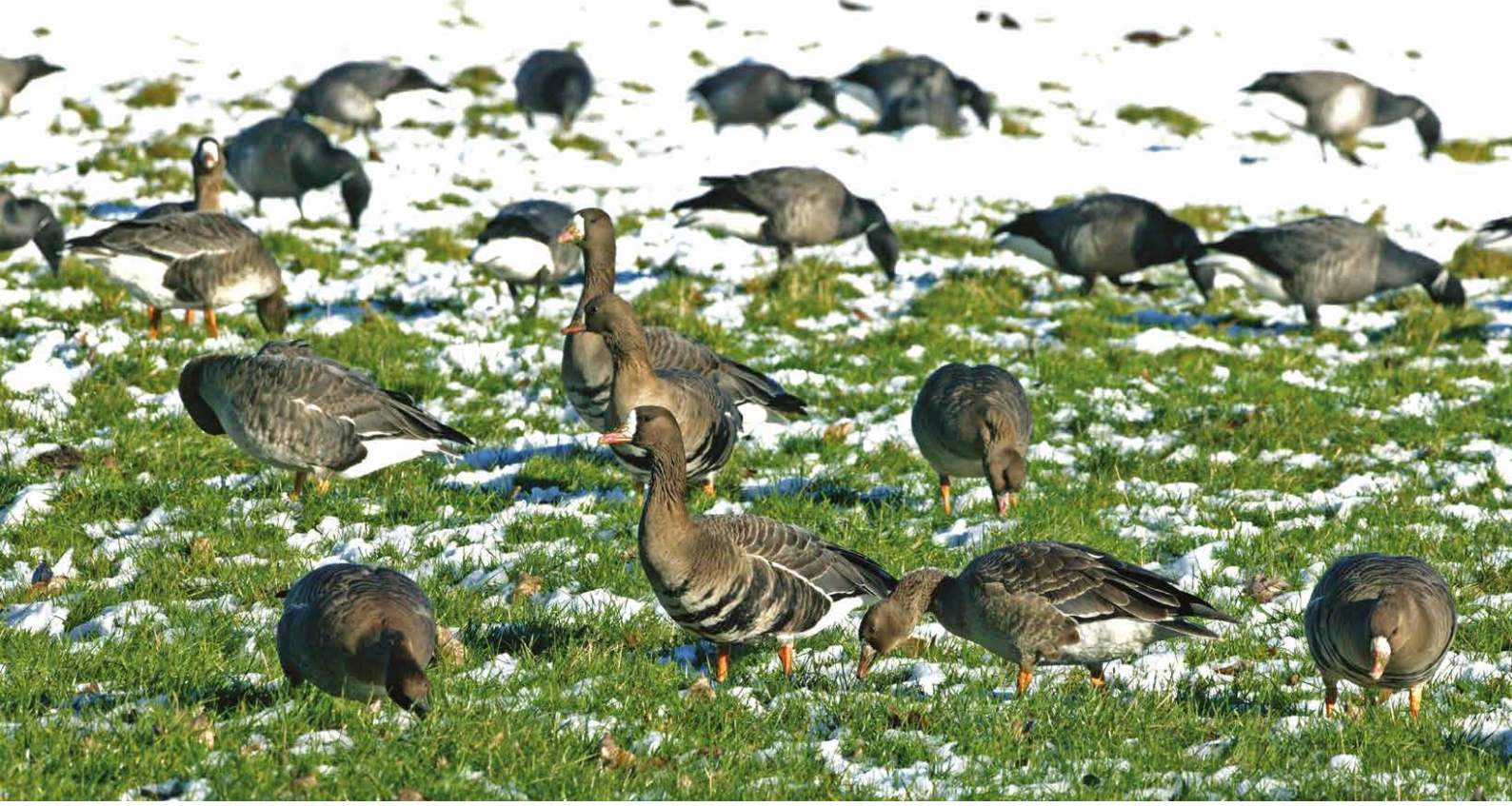
Data from WeBS, GSMP and the Dutch waterbird monitoring scheme for migratory Arctic-breeding species wintering in the UK and the Netherlands were used to assess abundance and productivity in the Arctic.
This study found that the once long-term increase in population size has been slowing down, particularly with species from the east, with some showing declines over the last decade. Over the 41-year time period, waders have fared worse than wildfowl, however in the last five years of the study, wildfowl showed steeper declines in abundance.

Changes of abundance over 5-, 10-, 25-and 41-year periods were compared between taxonomic groups and the longitude (UK and the Netherlands). Trends for birds from the Western Arctic were more positive than those for birds from the Eastern Arctic over the last five years up to the study's end in 2017-18. Over the longer timeframes, trends were also more positive for Sub-Arctic than High-Arctic breeders. This suggests that waterbirds from the far north may be under greater pressure.

Since families of geese and swans tend to stay together in winter, age ratios are an effective measure of productivity for the Eastern and Western pathways. Both fluctuated over time, but the Western productivity indicator showed a significant long-term decline from 1985. Interestingly, on shorter timescales, cyclical patterns were shown, supportive of the predator-prey population



▲ **Grouping together trends in abundance of waterbird species as 'indicators' can reveal common patterns within the East Atlantic Flyway (EAF). Here species are grouped according to those that use Western or Eastern migratory pathways. Solid lines show the underlying trends between the winters of 1975–76 to 2017–18 and vertical lines show time periods over which change in abundance was assessed. Figure from Thaxter *et al.* (2025).**

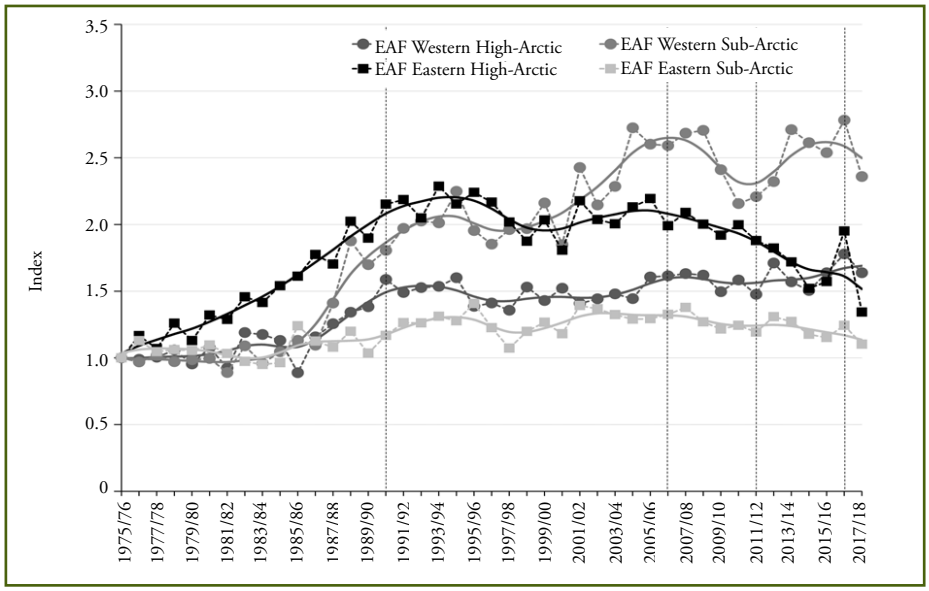


WHITE-FRONTED GEESE BY CHRIS KNIGHTS/BTO

dynamics theory. This suggests that lemming cycles in the Arctic may still be a key contributor in wildfowl productivity due to low lemming numbers resulting in higher egg and chick predation, despite rapid environmental change.

Waterbird populations are affected by conditions across their entire annual cycle. Some species are affected most by conditions at their breeding grounds, with others being influenced by their wintering or migration stop-over sites. Since this study was only using data from the UK and the Netherlands, expanding this approach to include data from other countries along the East Atlantic Flyway would make the indicators more representative of the Arctic-breeding populations by including more of the population, as well as minimising any impacts of climate driven shifts in winter distributions.

Although there are Arctic field stations that monitor breeding success, these only cover a small fraction of the vast region. Total failure or success in one area may not be typical elsewhere, depending on highly local weather and food conditions. This new approach of using data from wintering grounds is therefore an invaluable way of measuring the health of the Arctic, and should be expanded in the future to include more wintering regions within the East Atlantic flyway.



▲ Species are grouped according to those that use Western or Eastern migratory pathways and breed in the High-Arctic or Sub-Arctic. Solid lines show the underlying trends between the winters of 1975–76 to 2017–18 and vertical lines show time periods over which change in abundance was assessed. Figure from Thaxter *et al.* (2025).

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Bewick's Swans in freefall

The continued decline of Bewick's Swans in the UK is due in part to short-stopping but is also due to a larger population-level decline.

By **Bridget Hiza** BTO

The Northeast/Northwest European population of Bewick's Swans breeds in the European Russian Arctic, migrating to Northwest Europe in the winter.

The International Bewick's Swan Census (IBSC) is conducted every five years (now every six). This has been going on since 1984, involving a coordinated count of Bewick's Swans in mid-January in Northwest Europe. The census is often timed with the International Waterbird Census to ensure high coverage. This is often conducted as part of the International Swan Census (ISC) which also counts Whooper Swans.

ISC data has shown that Bewick's Swan populations have been declining significantly, with a decline of 39.4% between 1995 and 2010. Since then, there was a slight increase of 11%, with 20,149 recorded in the January 2015 ISC. This recovery wasn't sustained and the population decreased by 29.7% between 2015 and 2020.

As well as an ongoing decrease in population numbers, it has also been found that distribution changes are prevalent, with a significant increase in Bewick's Swans being found in north-eastern parts of the wintering range, instead of the south and west. As a result, birds were found in internationally important numbers (i.e. with ≥1% of the total population) at more sites in Germany during the 2020 ISC compared to previous censuses. Furthermore, it seems that Bewick's Swans were more dispersed in 2020, rather than favouring key sites.

Annual productivity of Bewick's Swans has been decreasing from 2010 to 2024/25. A population model predicts the population size will continue to decrease, with an estimate of 11,068 predicted for the 2026 ISC which, if accurate, would represent a further 14.4% decrease, though this will be dependent on how good the 2025 summer breeding season was.

POPULATION SIZE AND TRENDS

A paper by Koffijberg *et al.* (2025) showed a 56.7% decline in numbers in the NE/NW European Bewick's Swan population from 1995 to 2020, with an annual average decrease of 3.3% per year from 1995–2020.

DISTRIBUTION CHANGES

The study conducted by Koffijberg *et al.* (2025) reported that the distribution of Bewick's has changed in recent years, with the proportion of Bewick's Swans in the Northeast increasing (including Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Baltic countries and Switzerland), compared to previously mainly being found wintering in Britain, Ireland and France. This is believed to be due to climate change, with birds choosing to winter closer to their breeding grounds due to milder winters, a process known as short-stopping.

CHANGES IN HABITAT USE

Since the late 20th century, Bewick's Swans were recorded to mainly feed on pasture. However, arable has been the primary foraging habitat recorded for Bewick's Swan in both the 2015 and 2020 IBSC. This study shows that winter cereals continue to be an important food source for Bewick's Swans in mid-winter. Maize fields were also commonly used by Bewick's Swans in 2020, possibly due to increased availability of this habitat within their wintering ranges, or due to this being a high carbohydrate food source. Changes in habitat use could be due to a range of reasons, including the change in distribution, therefore offering different habitat types in these wintering ranges, as well as changes in crops being grown due to warmer winters and increased sowing of autumn cereal crops.

The ongoing decline of the NE/NW European Bewick's Swan population is of concern. It is therefore vital to continue monitoring these population changes through the ISC. Furthermore, it is important to continue improving conditions for swans at both staging and wintering sites, by maintaining suitable habitats, reducing lead poisoning, and reducing collision with infrastructure and illegal shooting. Since Germany now supports 45.7% of the total population during winter, it has replaced the UK and the Netherlands as the most important wintering area for this species.

FIND OUT MORE

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GSMP Surveys 2024/25

Censuses and age assessments of migratory goose and swan species are carried out in the UK and Ireland.

By **Neil Calbrade** & **Alastair Feather** BTO

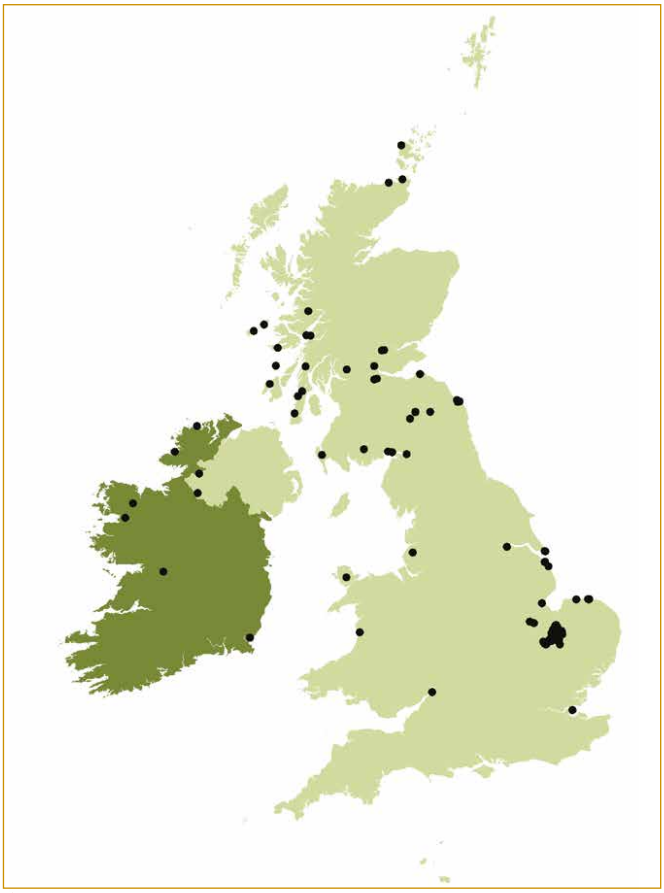
GOOSE AND SWAN AGE ASSESSMENTS

Age assessments comprise two measures of annual breeding success (or productivity): the proportion of young (first-winter birds in non-breeding flocks), and the mean brood size (number of young produced by successful breeding pairs).

Table 7 shows the number of birds aged and the breeding success of goose and swan populations wintering in the UK, recorded during various surveys in 2024/25. Note that the number of birds aged may include the same individuals more than once if they have been aged on multiple dates.

Age assessment data from all survey years and time series plots are available on the 'Ratios' tab of the WeBS Report Online, at **https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/ratios.jsp**

WHOOPER SWANS BY NEIL CALBRADE



▲ **Locations from where age assessments of geese and swans were received in 2024/25.**

Table 7 Age assessments of geese and swans.

Population	Number of samples	Number aged	Percentage young (%)	Mean brood size (young per succesful pair)
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	15	5,283	0.27	1.19
Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Goose	149	14,153	1.75	2.16
Svalbard Light-bellied Brent Goose	6	511	17.4	N/A
Svalbard Barnacle Goose	14	12,797	10.06	2.07
Greenland Barnacle Goose	N/A	5,220	8.75	1.78
Taiga Bean Goose	N/A	197	9.14 (Slamannan)	N/A
Pink-footed Goose	1	181	-	2.03
Greenland White-fronted Goose	21	4,825 (GB) 3,402 (Ireland)	5.26 (GB) 5.29 (Ireland)	2.17 (GB) 2.22 (Ireland)
Bewick's Swan	18	277	2.88	2.33
Whooper Swan	99	18,797	12.1	1.91

Age Assessments use data submitted into GSMP Online except for Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Goose, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Taiga Bean Goose, Greenland Barnacle Goose and Svalbard Barnacle Goose, for which dedicated asessments are undertaken (see page 34–35).

ICELANDIC-BREEDING GOOSE CENSUS 2024/25

The Icelandic-breeding Goose Census (IGC) annually monitors two migratory goose populations: the Greenland/Iceland Pink-footed Goose and the Icelandic Greylag Goose, the results from which can be found in Table 8.

For Pink-footed Geese, estimates were made for 19 core sites from where no counts were received in October, bringing the total to 445,830 which has been selected as the population estimate for 2024. This represents a 4% decrease on the previous year (466,400 birds).

Counts on the IGC weekends in October and November 2024 came from 157 sites, with counts exceeding the international threshold for Pink-footed Geese (5,400) being received from 38 sites in 2024/25. The highest count of the winter was 37,487 at Montrose Basin in November 2024 with 33,720 there in October 2024. New roost sites in Cambridgeshire and the Yare Valley, Norfolk indicate an expansion in the distribution of this species.

A total of 68,384 Greylag Geese were counted during the November census. This figure was adjusted to account for the estimated number of British/Irish Greylag Geese likely to have been counted at sites during the census, resulting in an amended population estimate of 46,773 Icelandic Greylag Geese. This represents a 15% decline in the population compared with the previous year (54,992 birds).

Given the increase in the British/Irish population into areas traditionally used by Icelandic birds in winter, accurate assessment of the population of Icelandic Greylag Geese is becoming increasingly difficult. Work is currently ongoing with Icelandic colleagues to improve our understanding of the situation.

TAIGA BEAN GOOSE

The only regular Taiga Bean Geese flock that winters in the UK on the Slammanan Plateau, Falkirk was monitored by the Bean Goose Advisory Group (BGAG) during the winter of 2024/25. No birds now regularly winter in the Yare Valley, Norfolk.

Table 8 IGC counts of Pink-footed and Icelandic Greylag Geese.

Region/area	Pink-footed Goose						Greylag Goose		
	October 2024			November 2024			November 2024		
	Count	Sites	Estimates	Count	Sites	Estimates	Count	Sites	Adjustments
Iceland	1,040	1					26,169	1	
Shetland				6	1		2,084	3	-609
Orkney				279	5		34,793	29	-17,190
Caithness				623	1		1,273	1	-37
Highland and Moray	37,446	4	37,504	44,305	8	12,636	963	5	
Aberdeenshire	44,521	5		32,430	3	5,000	54	5	-219
Angus	46,050	2		41,872	2		126	2	-110
Perth and Central	37,555	9	9,723	32,467	8		645	5	-469
Fife	2,807	3	16,098	8,537	2		45	1	-1,062
Lothian	11,731	6		11,745	6	2,311	1,142	8	-1,487
Argyll and Bute									
Clyde									
Dumfries and Galloway	8,268	3		5,481	3		40	3	-322
Scottish Borders	20,580	5		20,221	6	5,182	1,050	5	-106
Cumbria	5,815	6		2,712	3	3,650			
Northumberland	9,500	3	8,227	2,876	2				
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,650	1	39,487			26,871			
Lancashire and Merseyside	34,062	5	21,212	37,514	5	12,618			
Cheshire	10,535	1	12,525	13,970	1	4,300			
Wales	4,410	1		14,845	1				
Cambridgeshire				50	1				
Norfolk and the Wash	23,084	9		63,285	13				
Raw total	**301,054**			**333,218**			**68,384**		
Estimated	144,776			72,568			0		
Adjustments	0			0			-21,611		
Total	**445,830**			**405,786**			**46,773**		

The peak count on the Slammanan Plateau was 169, but this may not reflect the actual total, as due to conditions this figure could have included a few Pink-footed Geese. A count of 167 was made using thermal imagery footage taken from a drone to derive a count of birds arriving at a roost site. A total of 197 birds (likely including some duplication) were aged during the winter. The percentage of juveniles identified was considered to be 9.14%, slightly lower than that recorded in winter 2023/2024 (10.7%) (Minshull *et al.* 2025).

The Yare Valley population has dwindled considerably over the last two decades, from 485 in 1990/91 to no confirmed records in 2024/25.

GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

The 2024/2025 survey represents the 43rd annual census of Greenland White-fronted Geese coordinated in Great Britain by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study and in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland co-ordinated by the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Table 9 shows the most recent five seasons of total census data available based on the full survey of all known regular winter haunts for this population, broken down by totals for Wexford and the rest of Ireland, and from Islay and the rest of Britain.

The global population of Greenland White-fronted Geese in spring 2025 comprised 13,303 individuals, 5,086 in Ireland and 8,217 in Britain, the lowest count on record, a decline of 11.6% from the 15,043 counted the previous spring.

The percentage of young among wintering Wexford and Islay geese were each among the lowest on record again (4.7% and 3.9%) and generally low elsewhere, due to poor spring conditions on the west Greenland breeding areas. The conservation status of these geese is now increasingly perilous. (Fox *et al.* 2025).

SVALBARD BARNACLE GOOSE

Counts of Svalbard Barnacle Geese on the Solway and on Budle Bay, Northumberland began in early October and continued through to late May. The peak count recorded across the two sites was 42,673 on 16 April 2025 (with 39,073 being on the Solway). Due to the possibility of double counting, an adopted population count for 2024/25 was 41,800 birds.

The highest count on the Solway came from 16 April of 40,756 birds. Counts from Budle Bay were again high with a peak count of 5,470 birds in mid-October.

Age assessments in 2024/25 were carried out on the Solway during the winter, with 12,797 birds assessed. The results revealed that young birds comprised 10.06% of the flocks, and mean brood size of 2.07 goslings per successful pair.

GREENLAND BARNACLE GOOSE

The Greenland Barnacle Geese on Islay had a better breeding season than in the previous two years with 8.5% of the birds aged being first-winter birds and a mean brood size of 1.78 per successful pair. The sample aged represents about 18% of the mean winter total. Wintering numbers on Islay were similar to 2023/24 (Ogilvie 2025).

NEARCTIC LIGHT-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE

The 2024/25 census in Ireland and Iceland produced a total of 29,449 birds in October 2024. A total of 14,153 birds were aged, with 1.75% being juveniles, and of 55 broods, the average brood size was 2.16.

Table 9 Greenland White-fronted Geese counts.

	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
Wexford	6,262	5,361	5,531	4,283	2,858
Rest of Ireland	2,148	2,928	2,261	1,325	2,228
Islay	6,878	5,297	5,168	4,926	4,274
Rest of Britain	4,898	4,441	5,067	4,509	3,943
Population Total	**20,186**	**18,027**	**18,027**	**15,043**	**13,303**

FIND OUT MORE

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March IGC count

Counts are carried out in spring every three years to identify key sites being used by Pink-footed Geese.

By **Neil Calbrade** BTO

Every three years, in addition to the October and November IGC Counts, a spring count of Pink-footed Geese, which takes place in March, is carried out. This spring count is undertaken in order to determine the distribution of the geese at a time when they are feeding to build up nutrient reserves for a successful migration back to their breeding grounds. These counts do not provide a way of censusing the whole population, but do help identify and monitor the key sites being used by the geese at that important time of year, prior to their migration back to breeding grounds (Stroud, 2016). This is especially needed for monitoring of sites protected particularly for them, such as the Solway Firth and Ribble and Alt Estuary SPAs.

In March 2025, a total of 173,356 Pink-feet were counted, far fewer than during the autumn IGC counts when 301,054 were counted in October and 333,218 in November. The peak March count of 20,200 came from Findhorn Bay, on the Moray Firth. The Dee Estuary and Caerlaverock NNR both recorded March counts in excess of 10,000 birds and a further nine sites recorded over 5,000 birds. At seven of these sites, the March count was higher than either of the autumn counts (see Table 10).

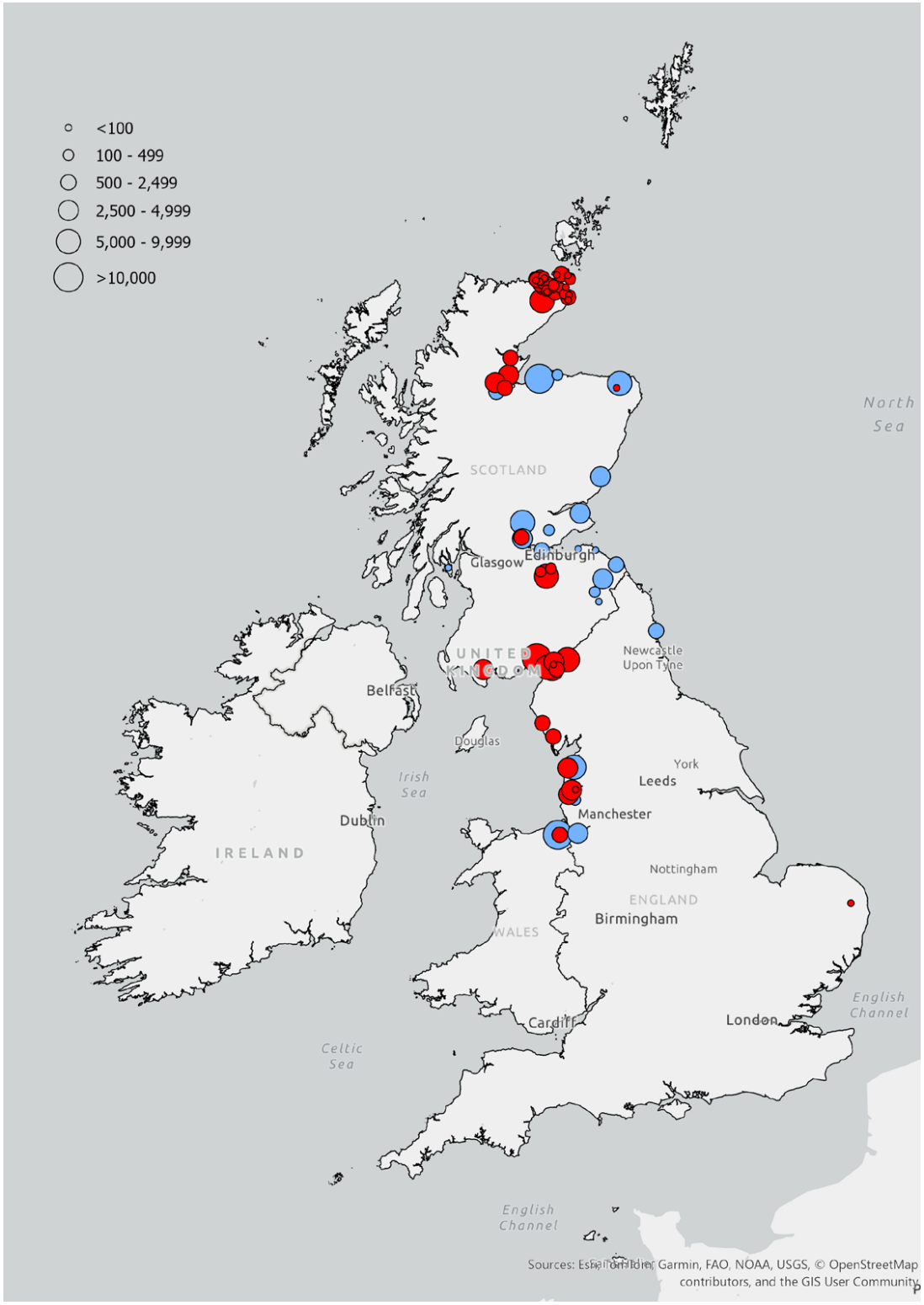
In 2025, March counts were made at 119 sites (compared with 70 in March 2022), and with birds being more dispersed, despite overall numbers being lower, Pink-footed Geese were recorded at more sites in March (79) than during the October and November IGC Counts (66 and 71 sites respectively).

With birds on the move, it was noted that the numbers of Pink-feet had notably declined during the build to the count date on the Dee Estuary. Earlier in the month there were 20,000 present, but only half this number when the count was made.

As expected at this time of year as birds head northwards towards their Iceland and Greenland breeding sites, many birds were found in Caithness, an area that records relatively few Pink-footed Geese during the autumn IGC counts. By March there were very few birds remaining in Norfolk and around the Humber, both areas that hold large populations in winter as birds have already begun their northward migration.

Table 10. Key sites during the March IGC Counts.

SITE	March 2025	October 2024	November 2024
Findhorn Bay	20,200	25,140	21,330
Caerlaverock Nnr: Blackshaw Bank	10,137	5,649	3,213
Dee Estuary	10,030	4,410	14,845
West Water Reservoir	8,200	6,010	6,300
Middlemuir (New Pitsligo Moss)	7,600	20,750	20,900
Carsebreck and Rhynd Lochs	7,150	7,950	6,550
Pilling to Cockerham	6,695	2,953	15,123
Moricambe (Newton Arlosh)	5,930	-	-
Solway Firth: Border Marsh	5,900	1,800	-
Loch More	5,500	-	330
Skinburness Marsh	5,270	5	522
Rockcliffe	5,200	2,000	2,050



▲ **Concentrations of Pink-footed Geese during the March 2025 IGC count. Red dots = sites where the March count was higher than either of the autumn counts**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to the many IGC Local Organisers and counters, without whom the annual monitoring of Pink-footed and Icelandic Greylag Goose populations would not be possible.

The Greenland White-fronted Goose counts were provided by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study Group. The Taiga Bean Goose counts were supplied by the Bean Goose Advisory Group. The Svalbard Barnacle Goose counts were carried out under contract. The Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Goose counts were provided by Kerry Mackie.

Belfast Lough at low tide

By **Neil Calbrade** BTO

Belfast Lough is a large sea lough in the northeast of Ireland, with the city of Belfast at its head. The area surveyed comprised the coast from Carrickfergus on the north shore around to the eastern end of Bangor on the south shore. Much of the site is afforded SPA and Ramsar status, with a further SPA over open water. The outer parts of the Lough's shore are generally rocky with some sandy bays, although more extensive areas of intertidal mud are found toward Belfast. Industrial land claim has reduced the area of the mudflats over the last 150 years, and Belfast has become the main port in Northern Ireland for heavy cargo, though all of the area, including the important Belfast Harbour Pools, has been given a degree of protection. Extensive areas of the lough support commercial shellfisheries. There are problems of refuse disposal, pollution and general disturbance, notably bait diggers who can pose potentially high levels of disturbance on the north shore.

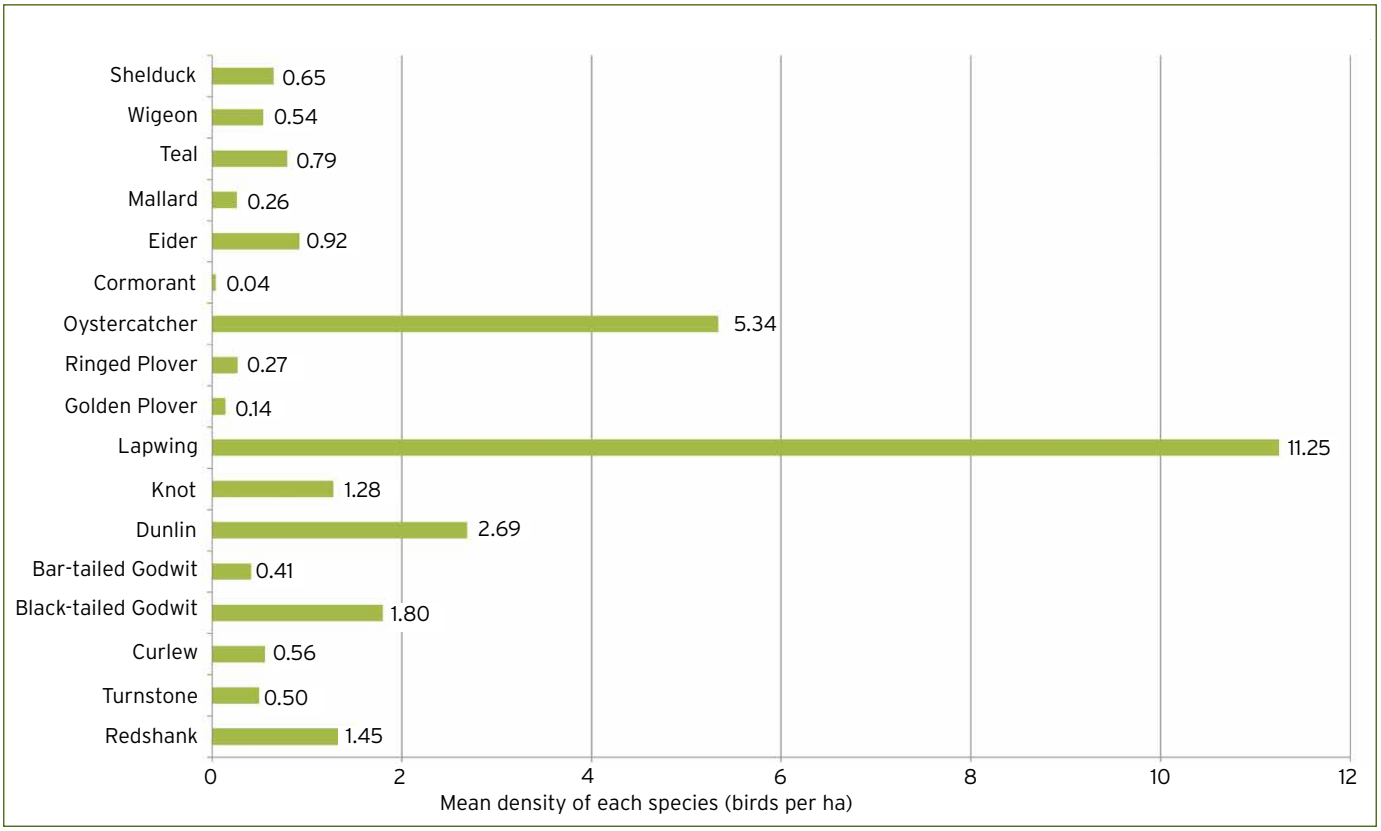
The distribution of two species are mapped on the opposite page: Eider and Oystercatcher, based on WeBS Low Tide Counts undertaken in 2024/25, are displayed alongside distributions from previous Low Tide Counts from 2004/05 for comparison.

Eider occur in nationally important numbers on Belfast Lough, and WeBS Alerts showed an increase of 276% since 1997/98 (Caulfield *et al.* 2025a), and this is reflected in the Low Tide Counts with a mean count of 1,283 (0.92 birds per ha) in 2024/25 compared with 995 (0.67 birds per ha) in 2004/05. The largest concentration of Eider in 2024/25 was between Macedon Point and Whiteabbey, and also large numbers at Holywood, whereas in 2004/05, the vast majority of birds were found on the north shore between Whitehouse Lake and Greenisland.

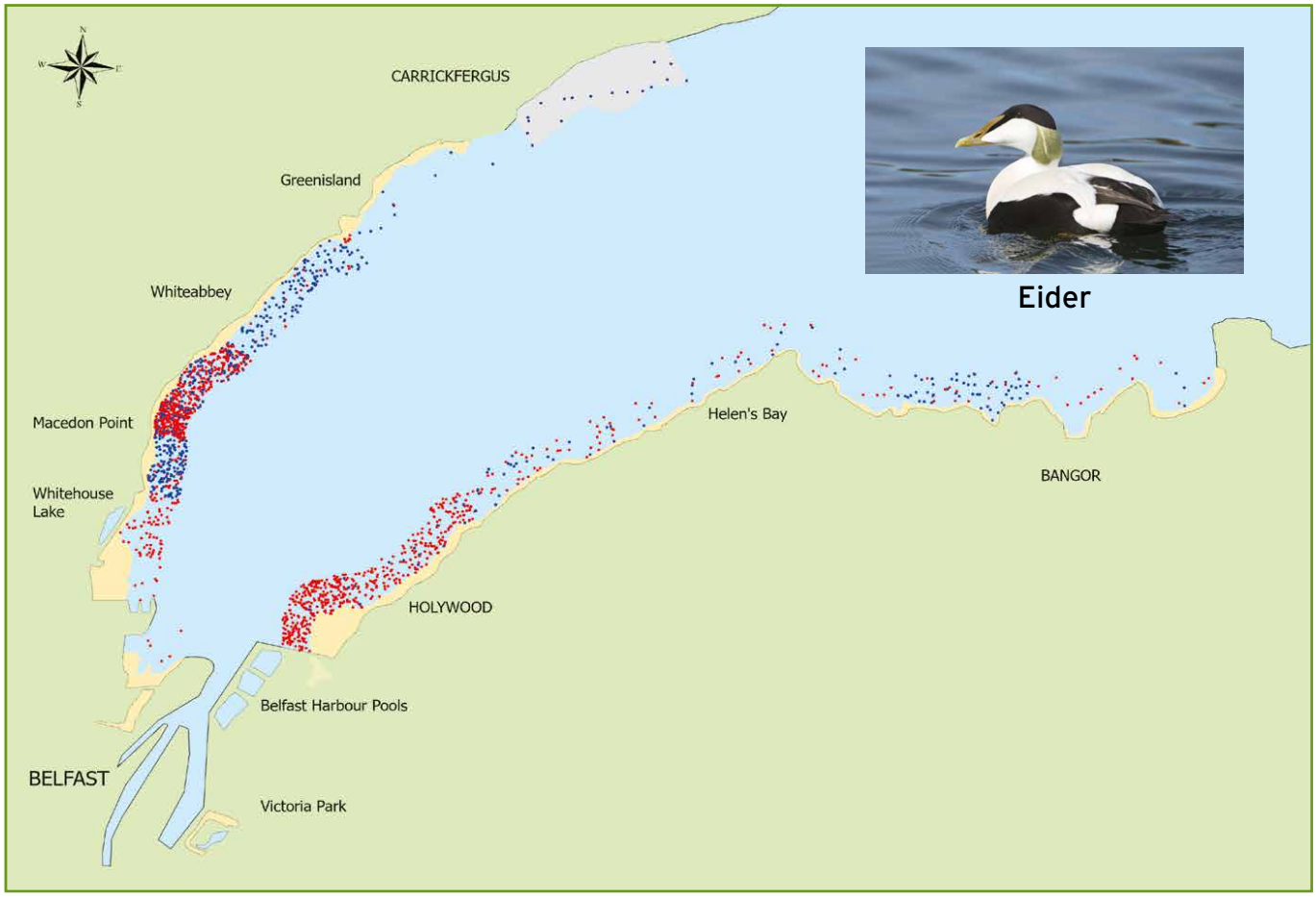
Although declining at this site, Oystercatchers still occur in nationally important numbers on Belfast Lough, though in 2024/25 the mean winter count at low tide was 1,934 (5.34 birds per ha) compared with 3,565 (7.98 birds per ha) in 2004/05. Oystercatchers were widely distributed in both winters with main concentrations south of Whitehouse Lake and at Holywood.

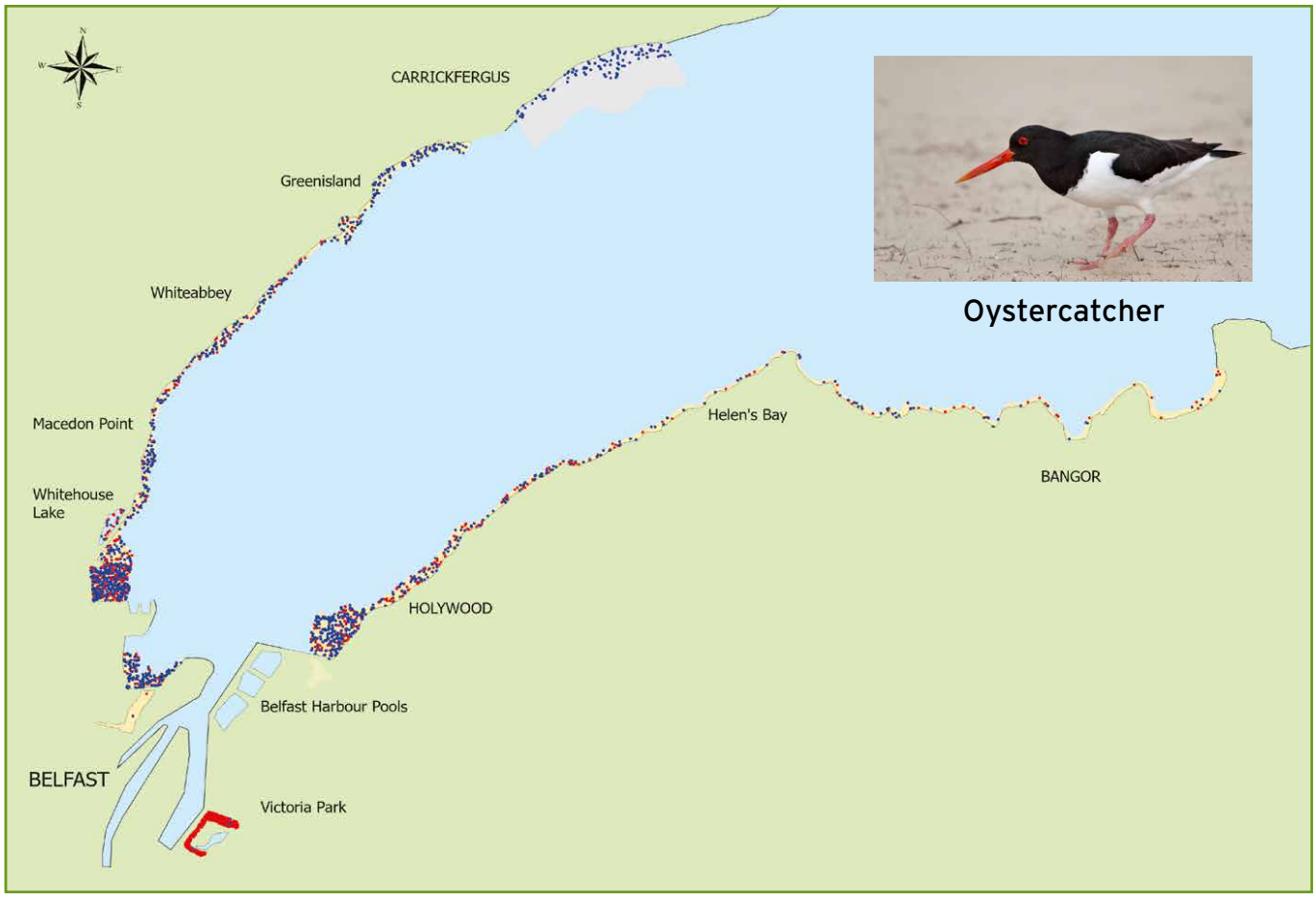
GENERAL STATISTICS FOR BELFAST LOUGH 2024/25

Area covered: 1,780 ha
Mean total birds: 9,189
Mean bird density: 5.16 birds per ha



▲ **Mean densities of waterbirds at low tide on Belfast Lough in 2024/25.**

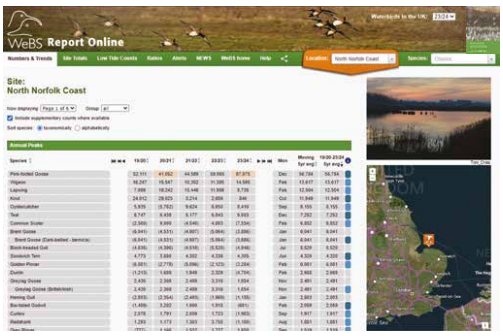




▲ **Low tide distribution of Eider (1 dot = 2 birds) and Oystercatcher (1 dot = 3 birds) on Belfast Lough, for the winters of 2024/25 (red) and 2004/05 (blue). Grey area not counted in most recent year.**

EIDER AND OYSTERCATCHER BY EDMUND FELLOWES/BTO

WeBS Report Online



Explore species trends, peak counts and more at:
www.bto.org/webs-reporting

The annual report, *Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25*, combines an extensive online data resource, WeBS Report Online, with this summarised written report.

The WeBS Report Online interface provides access to the latest tables of WeBS Core Count data at site and species level via the 'Numbers & Trends' and 'Totals' tabs, together with low tide summaries and distribution density maps for estuaries via the 'Low Tide Counts' tab. GSMP age assessments results are in the 'Ratios' tab. Results from the Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) are in the 'NEWS' tab and WeBS Alerts in the 'Alerts' tab.

In the 'Numbers & Trends' section, searching for a site of interest from the menu allows users to explore which species have ever been recorded at the site. Users can view and download the peak numbers of each species recorded at the site throughout the year, the five-year mean peak count and the month in which the peak count was recorded. The table can be sorted alphabetically or taxonomically by species or by the peak counts. By scrolling back through the years, contemporary counts and associated five-year averages can be compared with historical counts at the site.

For those looking for information on a particular species of waterbird (in some cases divided into biogeographic populations) every species ever recorded by WeBS is featured, with an individual page listing all sites where it has been recorded by the scheme. As well as offering the functionality to sort sites in tables either alphabetically, by annual peak, or by five-year average, the interface also allows the user to filter sites by country, county and/or habitat. Annual and monthly trend plots for the UK and constituent countries are shown (where applicable) and the data and plots can be downloaded. Supplementary counts can be included or excluded in the tables, or GSMP-only data displayed. For reference purposes, data from reports for previous years can be accessed by choosing the appropriate WeBS year from the 'Waterbirds in the UK' drop-down menu.

The 'Totals' tab summarises waterbird aggregations at WeBS sites and by country. The default view shows a table of sites with 1,000 or more birds and includes supplementary counts but excludes gulls and terns and non-native species, as is standard in the Principal Sites table (see page 14–15). The country totals can be filtered to species group.

The 'Ratios' tab gives percentage young and mean brood sizes from GSMP Goose and Swan Age Assessments for the current year. Past years can be viewed by changing the WeBS year or via the plots on the right-hand side.

The 'Roosts' tab shows the location of wildfowl and wader roosts from WeBS sectors on estuarine sites and selecting a roost will display the species and habitat data, along with the tidal state and month that the roost is used.

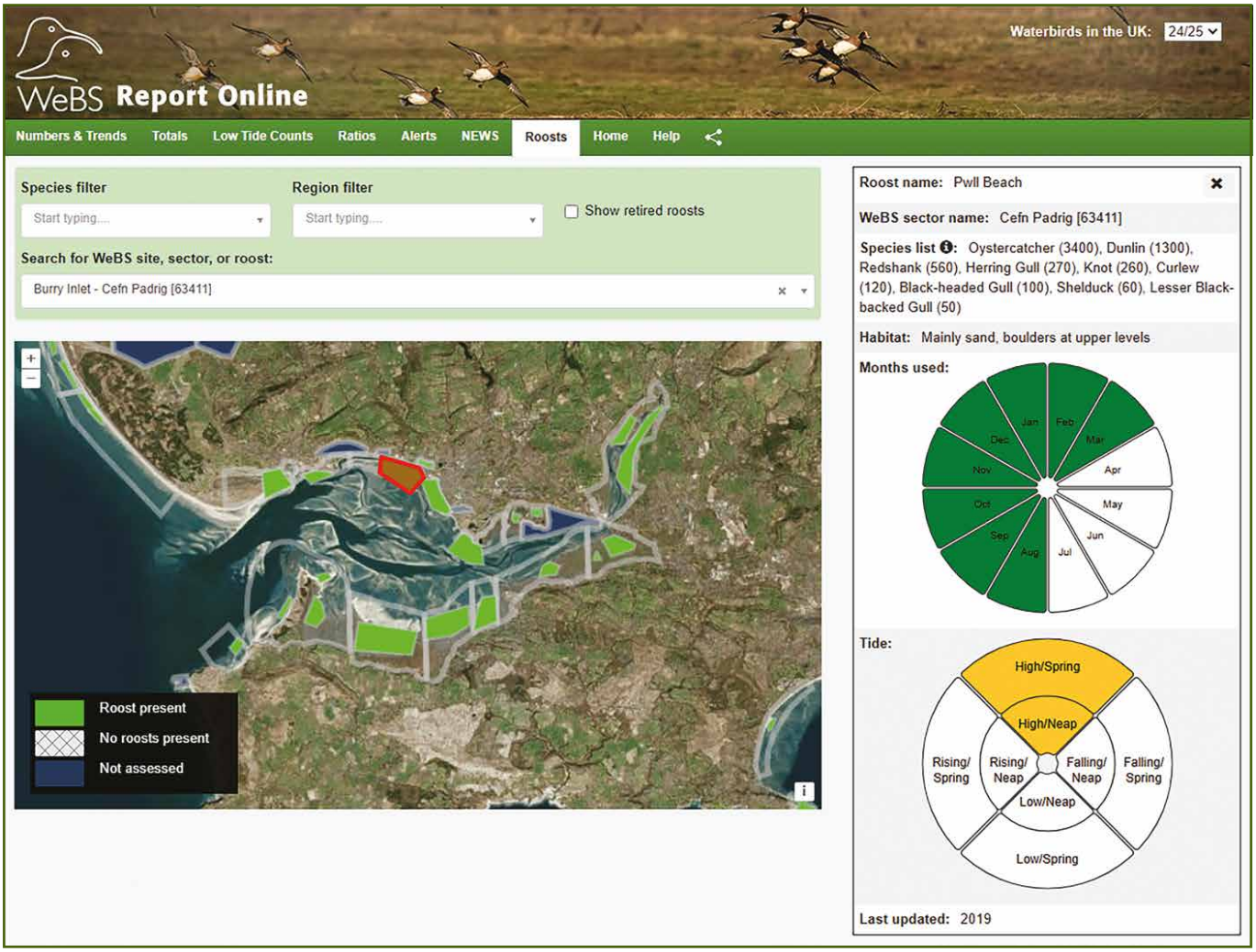
In the 'Low Tide' section, up to four interactive distribution density maps can be viewed simultaneously and maps can be viewed for all waterbird species recorded during the survey. Estuaries can be chosen from the Location menu and the survey year from the Low Tide Count year menu. Selecting a species will display a map with count sectors separated into intertidal, subtidal and non-tidal habitats and random dots indicating the count of birds in the sector.

A special adaptation was added, for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 years only, to allow for COVID-19 restrictions, so that if this could have impacted the peak, the count has been bracketed (see *Waterbirds in the UK 2021/22*). The usual rules with the calculation of the five-year average and completeness are then followed (full details available in the WeBS Survey Methods, Analysis and Presentation documentation).

FIND OUT MUCH MORE

Access WeBS Report Online at: **www.bto.org/webs-reporting**

The 'Numbers & Trends' section features species trends (for the UK and constituent countries) and site tables for all species (with facility to filter by country, county and habitat), alongside sections on NEWS, Low Tide Counts, Site Totals and WeBS Alerts. There is also a 'Help' section containing tutorials, to help you make the most of the resource.



▲ **A new section has been added to the WeBS Report Online with the release of this report. The 'Roosts' tab allows you to view the location of wader and wildfowl roosts on estuarine sites. Clicking on a roost will give species and habitat data, along with the tidal state and month that the roost is used.**

WeBS objectives, aims and methods

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monitors non-breeding waterbirds in the UK in order to provide the principal data on which the conservation of their populations is based. To this end, WeBS has three main objectives:

- to assess the size of non-breeding waterbird populations in the UK;
- to assess trends in their numbers and distribution;
- to assess the importance of individual sites for waterbirds.

These results also form the basis for informed decision-making by conservation bodies, planners and developers, and contribute to the sustainable use and management of wetlands and their dependent waterbirds. The data and this annual WeBS report also fulfil some of the objectives of relevant international Conventions and Directives to which the UK is a signatory. WeBS also provides data to Wetlands International to assist their function of coordinating and reporting upon waterbird status at an international flyway scale. Full details of the survey's history, field and analytical methodologies are available via the WeBS website: **www.bto.org/webs**

Waterbirds in the UK 2024/25 (comprising this summary report together with numbers and trends available from WeBS Report Online at **www.bto.org/webs-reporting**) presents the results of WeBS in 2024/25. Data from other national and local waterbird monitoring schemes, notably the BTO/JNCC/NatureScot Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme, are included where WeBS data alone are insufficient to fulfil specified aims. The annual *Waterbirds in the UK* report therefore provides a single, comprehensive source of information on waterbird status and distribution in the UK.

Uses of WeBS data 2024/25

226 WeBS Data Requests in 2024/25

With the UK host to internationally important numbers of wintering waterbirds, one of the principal aims of WeBS is to provide data to facilitate their conservation. Indeed, there have been many high-profile examples over the years in which WeBS data have proved to be fundamental in securing the protection of important wetland sites.

A summary of site-based WeBS information is presented on the WeBS Report Online and available for use with an Open Government Licence. Data at a finer level (both spatial and temporal) than the online portals are available in a user-friendly format through a bespoke WeBS Data Request. We recommend that WeBS-based information that is to be incorporated into site evaluation work, such as Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), should be sourced through a WeBS Data Request.

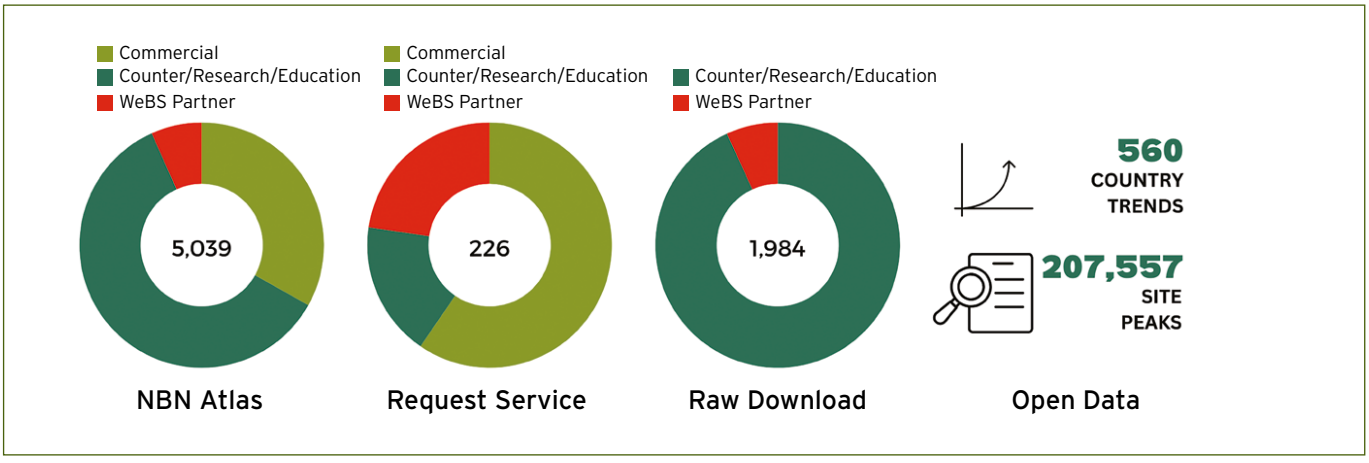
The graphic below shows the number of Data Requests to the WeBS office and downloads from online portals for the financial year April 2024–March 2025. Data users are from a range of stakeholder groups, including country conservation agencies, environmental consultancies, academic researchers and bird clubs.

The WeBS office serviced 134 Commercial, 52 Partner and 40 research/other bespoke Data Requests. In addition, there were 1,848 downloads of unprocessed count data from WeBS Online by Counters, organisers and county bird recorders and 135 downloads by WeBS partners in 2024/25.

Summarised WeBS species presence data is uploaded to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas in an Open Government Licenced dataset with other BTO/JNCC/RSPB partnership schemes. Records from this dataset were downloaded 1,670 times in the year for commercial projects, 338 times for statutory projects and 3,031 times for education, research and other reasons. Data downloads of Open Government Licenced data of 560 country species trends and 207,557 site species annual peak data from the WeBS Report Online are also available for anyone to use for any purpose with WeBS acknowledged as the source, but usage of this portal is not tracked.

January WeBS data are supplied to Wetlands International for inclusion in the International Waterbird Census, and summaries are used in outputs such as waterbird population estimates and AEWA Conservation Status reports.

The WeBS Partnership is keen to encourage WeBS data use within environmental research. A number of scientific papers and reports that have used WeBS data in recent years are referenced within the pages of this annual report, and there is of course an extensive suite of other research questions relating to waterbird ecology and wider wetland management issues to which WeBS data would lend themselves, at both national and international scales.



▲ **WeBS data uses in 2024/25.**

WeBS DATA REQUESTS

More information about the WeBS Data Request Service is available from **www.bto.org/webs-data** where you can see coverage by WeBS of different sites, check data request charges, and view examples of the data that can be provided.

WeBS Local Organisers in 2024/25

Continued from back page

WALES

Anglesey	Ian Sims
Breconshire	Andrew King
Burry Inlet	Alan Seago
Caernarfonshire	Rhion Pritchard
Caernarfonshire (Foryd Bay)	Simon Hugheston-Roberts
Carmarthenshire	Alan Seago
Ceredigion (incl Dyfi Estuary)	Russell Jones
Clwyd (coastal)	VACANT (now Dave Dickenson)
Clwyd (inland)	VACANT
East Glamorgan	Daniel Jenkins-Jones
Gwent (excl Severn Estuary)	Richard M Clarke
Merioneth (estuaries)	Jim Dustow
Merioneth (other sites)	Jim Dustow
Montgomeryshire	Tony Coatsworth
Pembrokeshire	Annie Haycock
Radnorshire	Peter Jennings
Severn Estuary (Wales)	Kevin Dupé
West Glamorgan	VACANT (now Alan Seago)

NORTHERN IRELAND

Antrim (Larne Lough)	Doreen Hilditch
Antrim (other sites)	Adam McClure
Armagh (excl Loughs Neagh and Beg)	Stephen Hewitt
Belfast Lough	Ian Enlander
Down (Carlingford Lough)	Aiobheann Morrison
Down (Dundrum Bay)	VACANT (now NIEA)
Down (other sites)	Kez Armstrong
Down (Outer Ards)	NIEA
Down (South Down Coast)	Kez Armstrong
Down (Strangford Lough)	Kerry Mackie
Fermanagh	Michael Stinson
Londonderry (Bann Estuary)	Dean Jones
Londonderry (Lough Foyle)	NIEA
Londonderry (other sites)	Claire Hassan (now VACANT)
Loughs Neagh and Beg	NIEA
Tyrone (excl Loughs Neagh and Beg)	Ciara Laverty
Upper Lough Erne	NIEA

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Alderney	Alderney Wildlife Trust Ecologist
Guernsey Coast	Mary Simmons
Jersey (inland)	VACANT
Jersey Coast	Roger Noel (now VACANT)

ISLE OF MAN

Isle of Man	David Kennett

We would be grateful for help organising WeBS in areas currently without a Local Organiser (marked **VACANT**). If you live in one of these areas and would be interested in taking on the role, please let us know. Email: **webs@bto.org**

In 2024/25, the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (WeBS LOAC) comprised Alan Burnham, Chris Gunn, Dan Jenkins-Jones, Kerry Mackie, Brian Moore, Andy Riches and Eve Tigwell. Many thanks to them for representing the wider LO network. Further information about the WeBS LOAC can be found at: **www.bto.org/webs/loac**

The IGC Local Organisers in 2024/25 were Malcolm Ross (Borders), Sinclair Manson (Caithness), Gillian Ogg (Fife), Stephen Welch (Lothian), Jim Scott (North Norfolk and The Wash), Paul Massey (Northumberland), Tim Dodman (Orkney), Mike Bell (Perthshire and Central), Rory Tallack (Shetland), Frank Mawby (Solway Firth South), Richard Averiss (Montrose Basin), Andy Riches (Solway Firth North), Ruth-Ann Leak (Lancashire, North Merseyside and Morecambe Bay) and Mike Pilsworth (East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire). We are grateful for their help in organising the census.

Selected further reading

Recent and key studies that have used WeBS & GSMP data

Calbrade, N.A., Birtles, G.A., Woodward, I.D., Feather, A., Hiza, B.M., Caulfield, E.B., Balmer, D.E. Peck, K., Wotton, S.R., Shaw, J.M. & Frost, T.M. 2025. *Waterbirds in the UK 2023/24: The Wetland Bird Survey and Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme*. BTO/ RSPB/JNCC. Thetford.

Atkinson, P.W., Frost, T.M. *et al*. (15 co-authors). 2025. Evaluating the use of carcass and testing data to assess the high-pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) related mortality in wild birds in the United Kingdom and Crown Dependencies between 2021–2023. *Bird Study*.

Brides, K. Bruce, L., Marshall, L., Taylor, J., Lopez Colom, R., Balmer, D.E., Vickers, S.H., Scott, D., Rees, E.C. & Wood, K.A. 2026. The Ouse Washes and its increasing importance for Whooper Swans. *British Birds* **119**: 74–85

Burke, B., Kennedy, J., Gadd, R., Fitzgerald, N., Lynch, A., Caffrey, B., Walsh, A., Murray, T. & Kelly, S.B.A. 2025. The status and distribution of wintering waterbirds in Ireland in 2023: results from the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS). *Irish Wildlife Manuals*, No. 162. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland.

Caulfield, E.B., Feather, A., Smith, J.A., Frost, T.M. & Woodward, I.D. 2025a. *Wetland Bird Survey Alerts 2021/2022: Changes in numbers of wintering waterbirds in the Constituent Countries of the United Kingdom, Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Areas of Special Scientific interest (ASSIs)*. BTO Research Report 786. BTO, Thetford.

Caulfield, E.B., Woodward, I.D., Peck, K., Wotton, S. & Frost, T.M. 2025b. Overwinter population estimates of waterbirds in Great Britain. *British Birds* **118**: 642–657.

Caulfield, E.B., Clarke, J.A., Burton, N.H.K., Boersch-Supan, P.H., Frost, T.M., Balmer, D.E. & Woodward, I.D. 2026. *Winter gulls in the United Kingdom: Results from the 2023/24–2024/25 Winter Gull (Roost) Survey*. BTO Research Report 807, BTO, Thetford, UK.

Frost, T.M. & Calbrade, N.A. (eds.). 2022. *Wetland Bird Survey News 2020/21 Special Edition*. BTO, RSPB and JNCC. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford.

Godeau, U., Gaget. E., Dami, L., Baddour, K., Daf, D.O.S.O., Dakki, M., Frost, T., Hornman, M., Kolberg, H., Lorentsen, S.H., Molina, B., Moniz, F.E.F.F. & Defos du Rau, P. 2026. Recommendations for Improving the Modeling of Wintering Waterbird Population Sizes and Trends. *Ecology and Evolution*; **16**:e72902. **https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.72902**

Koffijberg, K., Calbrade, N.A. *et al*. (19 co-authors). 2025. Decline of the Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* population wintering in Northeast/Northwest Europe. *Wildfowl* **75**: 63–93

Stanbury, A., Eaton, M., Aebischer, N., Balmer, D., Brown, A., Douse, A., Lindley, P., McCulloch, N., Noble, D. & Win, I. 2021. The fifth Birds of Conservation Concern in the United Kingdom, Channel Islands and Isle of Man and second IUCN Red List assessment of extinction risk for Great Britain. *British Birds* **114**: 723–747.

van Roomen M., Reneerkens J., Citegetse G., Crowe O., Gueye K., Langendoen T., Dodman T., Meise K. & Schekkerman H. 2025 (eds). *East Atlantic Flyway Assessment 2023. The status of coastal waterbird populations and their sites*. Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative p/a CWSS, Wilhelmshaven, Germany, Wetlands International, Wageningen, The Netherlands, BirdLife International, Cambridge, United Kingdom. **https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15355685**

Thaxter, C.B. *et al*. (14 co-authors). 2025. The use of monitoring data from north-west Europe as indicators for the health of Arctic-breeding waterbird populations. *Bird Conservation International* **35**: 1–16

GSMP

Birds Science People

BTO

RSPB

JNCC

NatureScot

British Trust for Ornithology
The Nunnery
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SPECIAL THANKS

We wish to thank all surveyors and Local Organisers for making WeBS the success it is today. Unfortunately space does not permit all observers to be acknowledged individually, but we would especially like to credit the Local Organisers for their efforts.

WeBS Local Organisers in 2024/25

ENGLAND

Avon (excl Severn Estuary)	Rupert Higgins
Bedfordshire	Richard Bashford
Berkshire	Sean Murphy (now Alice Trchalik)
Buckinghamshire (North)	Martin Routledge
Buckinghamshire (South)	VACANT
Cambridgeshire (incl Huntingdonshire)	Bruce Martin
Cambridgeshire (Nene Washes)	Charlie Kitchin (now Peter Beckenham)
Cambridgeshire (Ouse Washes)	Paul Harrington
Cheshire (North)	VACANT
Cheshire (South)	Paul Miller
Cleveland (excl Tees Estuary)	Chris Sharp (now Michael Leakey)
Cleveland (Tees Estuary)	Adam Jones
Cornwall (excl Tamar Complex)	Derek Julian
Cornwall (Tamar Complex)	Charles Nodder
Cotswold Water Park	Claire Carpenter
Cumbria (Duddon Estuary)	Colin Gay (now Dave Shackleton)
Cumbria (excl estuaries)	Dave Shackleton
Cumbria (Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary)	Dave Shackleton
Dee Estuary	Colin Wells
Derbyshire	Kelvin Lawrence & Layla Alexandra
Devon (other sites)	Peter Reay
Devon (Exe Estuary)	Martin Overy
Devon (Taw/Torridge Estuary)	Chris Dee
Dorset (excl estuaries)	Nicola Hoar
Dorset (Poole Harbour)	Paul Morton
Dorset (Radipole and Lodmoor)	Carol Philipps
Dorset (The Fleet and Portland Harbour)	Steve Groves
Durham	Anne Donnelly
Essex (Crouch/Roach Estuaries and South Dengie)	Sean Murphy
Essex (Hamford Water)	Leon Woodrow
Essex (North Blackwater)	John Fell
Essex (other sites)	Anthony Harbott
Essex (South Blackwater & North Dengie)	Anthony Harbott
Gloucestershire	Michael Smart
Greater London (excl Thames Estuary)	Ben Hillier
Greater Manchester	Tim Wilcox
Hampshire (Avon Valley)	John Clark
Hampshire (estuaries/coastal)	Geoff Butler
Hampshire (excl Avon Valley)	Keith Wills
Herefordshire	Chris Robinson
Hertfordshire	Martin Ketcher
Humber Estuary (inner South)	Keith Parker
Humber Estuary (mid South)	Mike Pilsworth
Humber Estuary (North)	Nick Cutts
Humber Estuary (outer South)	Owen Beaumont
Isle of Wight	Jim Baldwin (now Teresa Tearle & Robin Attrill)
Kent (Dungeness area)	David Walker
Kent (East)	Murray Orchard
Kent (Medway Estuary))	Bob Knight
Kent (Pegwell Bay)	Steffan Walton
Kent (Swale Estuary)	Brian Watmough
Kent (Thames Estuary – Hoo)	Murray Orchard
Kent (West)	VACANT
Lancashire (East Lancs and Fylde)	David Jeffries
Lancashire (North inland)	Peter Marsh
Lancashire (Ribble Estuary)	Ken Abram
Lancashire (River Lune)	Jean Roberts
Lancashire (West inland)	Mark & Heather Walsh
Lee Valley	Cath Patrick
Leicestershire and Rutland (excl Rutland Water)	Brian Moore
Leicestershire and Rutland (Rutland Water)	Tim Sexton
Lincolnshire (North inland)	Chris Gunn
Lincolnshire (South inland)	Joanne Cawtheray
Merseyside (Alt Estuary)	Steve White
Merseyside (inland)	David Broome
Merseyside (Mersey Estuary)	Dermot Smith
Morecambe Bay (North)	Mike Douglas
Morecambe Bay (South)	Jean Roberts
Norfolk (Breydon Water)	Anthony Bentley
Norfolk (excl estuaries)	Mark Clay
Norfolk (North Nofolk Coast)	Neil Lawton
Northamptonshire (excl Nene Valley)	VACANT
Northamptonshire (Nene Valley)	Steve Brayshaw
Northumberland (coastal)	Kathy Evans
Northumberland (inland)	Tim Daley
Northumberland (Lindisfarne)	Andrew Craggs
Nottinghamshire	Michael Hill
Oxfordshire (North)	Sandra Bletchly
Oxfordshire (South)	Ben Carpenter
Severn Estuary (England)	Harvey Rose
Shropshire	Martin George
Solway Estuary (inner South)	David Blackledge
Solway Estuary (outer South)	Dave Shackleton
Somerset (other sites)	Eve Tigwell
Somerset (Somerset Levels)	Eve Tigwell
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Suffolk (Alde Complex)	Ian Castle
Suffolk (Alton Water)	John Glazebrook
Suffolk (Blyth Estuary)	Will Russell
Suffolk (Deben Estuary)	Nick Mason
Suffolk (Orwell Estuary)	Mick Wright
Suffolk (other sites)	Alan Miller
Suffolk (Stour Estuary)	Rick Vonk
Surrey	Penny Williams
Sussex (Chichester Harbour)	Peter Hughes
Sussex (other sites)	Helen Crabtree
Sussex (other sites - coastal)	Dave Boddington
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The Wash	Jim Scott
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Wiltshire	Jenny Stunnell
Worcestershire	Chris North (now Gert Corfield)
Yorkshire (East and Scarborough)	Alan Burnham
Yorkshire (Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales)	VACANT
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Dumfries and Galloway (Loch Ryan)	Paul Collin
Dumfries and Galloway (other sites)	Andy Riches
Dumfries and Galloway (Rough Firth)	Andy Riches
Dumfries and Galloway (Wigtown Bay)	Paul Collin
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Moray Basin Coast	Bob Swann
Mull	Nigel Scriven (now Evan Miles)
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Sutherland (excl Moray Basin)	VACANT
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