

# International Swan Census (ISC) Guide for WeBS counters

## Getting started

As a WeBS counter, if you would like to count for the International Swan Census at your WeBS site(s), please contact [gsmp@bto.org](mailto:gsmp@bto.org) or your ISC Local Organiser to get allocated to your site(s). Once you are allocated, you will be able to submit your ISC data in WeBS Online after your usual January WeBS Core Count submission.

If you would like to count more ISC sites which aren't your usual WeBS sites, please create a GSMP account and request a site through the vacant sites map: <https://app.bto.org/gsmp/public/vacant-isc.jsp?%40=1>

## ISC Background

Whooper and Bewick's Swan numbers in the UK and Republic of Ireland are monitored annually through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) and the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) respectively. Although these schemes provide good coverage of a high proportion of wintering sites used by Whooper Swans, a number of non-wetland or temporally flooded areas

are not surveyed, hence a more comprehensive census that focuses specifically on these species, is required to fully assess the size of the population; such a survey is undertaken every five years (now every six years).

## Aim and Methods

The main aim of the ISC is to estimate the size and distribution of each population, as well as identify important wintering sites. Age assessments are also made during this survey, providing a coordinated estimation of breeding success. In addition, counters are asked to record the type of habitat used by the swans during the census, recording the number of each swan species using each habitat type.

The ISC can be carried out during your WeBS Core Count on the weekend of 17th-18th January 2026. As well as counting all Whooper and Bewick's Swans seen at your site, we also ask you to record age assessments (adults and juveniles assessed, as well as number of broods) as well as habitat type used by the swans.



# Entering your ISC counts into WeBS Online

If you are a WeBS counter, you can enter your counts without having to create a GSMP Online account. Simply enter your January Core Count as usual in WeBS Online, and if you enter a Bewick's or Whooper Swan, once submitting your form, click on the 'Pass data to International Swan Census' button in orange.

## Enter count - WeBS Core Count

✓ Count Submitted

Thank you for entering your count data. A summary of the species submitted is shown below.

By clicking on the button below, relevant visit data and records of swan species will be copied across to a data entry form for the International Swan Census. You may be prompted for additional details. Registration is not necessary, though would be welcomed if you wish to participate formally.

[Pass data to International Swan Census](#)

GSMP

Some of your data submitted through WeBS will auto-fill on the GSMP form, including site, date, start and end time, ice cover, count accuracy and count of Bewick's and Whooper Swans.

## Enter Count - International Swan Census

✓ 1. Visit details

Count:

Site:  [Add Map](#)

Date:

Start time:

End time:

Method: ☐ Dawn roost count ☐ Dusk roost count ☐ Daytime/feeding count

Site use: ☐ Roost site ☐ Feeding site ☐ Roost and feeding site

Ice cover:  %

Tide state: Select all that apply... ☐ Rising ☐ High ☐ Falling ☐ Low

Was there local flooding? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Don't know

Count accuracy: ☒ OK ☐ Low

Ringed birds seen? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Dead or sick birds seen? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Comments:

1000 characters remaining

## 1. Visit details

Please fill in the blank fields, including whether the count was carried out as a Dawn Roost Count, Dusk Roost Count or Daytime/feeding Count, site use, tide state for coastal sites, and whether there was local flooding. Please also indicate if ringed birds were seen and if any dead/sick birds were seen using the key provided. Please note that BTO doesn't deal with the colour ringing of Whooper and Bewick's Swans, however if you do see colour ringed swans, please select 'yes' and input your details into [www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac). There is also a facility to record extra details in the comments box (e.g. additional counters, disturbance, etc). Once you have completed this page, please scroll down to '2. Counts'.

## 2. Counts

The two key species to record for the ISC is Whooper and Bewick's Swans. Your counts will be auto-filled from your WeBS count. Please make sure these counts are correct. If you are unsure whether it is Bewick's or Whooper, you can mark it as 'Unidentified yellow-

billed swan', however we urge you to try to specify the species if you can. If you feel your count was a significant underestimate of the numbers you would have been able to count under ideal conditions then please use [square brackets] to show this.

✓ 2. Counts

Enter a 0 if no birds of the key species were present. Use square brackets to enclose gross underestimates, e.g. [105]

Species	Required core count		Age assessments			
	Present	Count	Adult	Young	Indeterminate	Assessed
Bewick's Swan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Whooper Swan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	20	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Unidentified yellow-billed swan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

## Age Assessments

When carrying out your ISC counts, we encourage you to record age assessments if possible, recording broods as well as number of adults and juveniles assessed. This can be input in section 2 in the right-hand side of the table labelled 'Age assessments.' Here, input the number of adults you assessed along with the number of young you assessed (note: this doesn't have to add up to your total count, you can age assess however many you choose as long as this number doesn't exceed your count). Once you enter in these two boxes, the right hand column labelled 'Assessed' will automatically calculate how many swans you assessed for ages. You can then fill in the remaining that you didn't age assess in the indeterminate box.

Brood sizes for Whooper Swan

Broods of 1:  Broods of 2:  Broods of 3:  Broods of 4:  Custom brood size:  [Add](#)

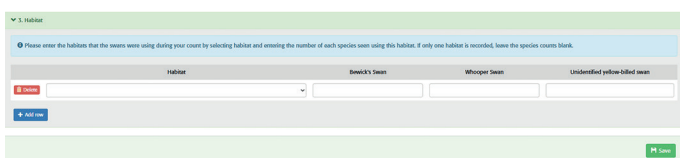
Young accounted for: 4/4

[Cancel](#) [OK](#)

After filling in adults and young, you can also add broods by clicking the 'broods' icon on the right. This will come up with a pop-up window where you can enter the number of broods of each size, and if there are any broods larger than 4, these can be added in the custom brood sizes box. Then click 'Ok'. If you didn't do age assessments, you can leave the age assessments columns blank.

### 3. Habitat

Finally, there is a tab at the bottom of the form to input habitat that recorded swans were using. Specify the number of each species you are recording for habitat use, as well as the habitat type they were found on. Simply click on the drop down and select the habitat type you recorded. You can then enter a count of each species using this habitat. If you want to record separate flocks on the same habitat, you can do this by adding another row of the same habitat and inputting different counts of species to indicate flocks. If only one habitat is recorded, leave the species counts blank.



Habitat options:

Natural Permanent Lake	Open Coast	Rough/unimp. pasture (flooded)
Artificial lake/reservoir	Improved pasture (dry)	Reseeded pasture (flooded)
Gravel pit	Rough/unimproved pasture (dry)	Turlough - improved pasture
Non-tidal river	Reseeded pasture (dry)	Turlough - rough/unimproved
Canal	Arable: stubble	Callow - improved pasture
Freshmarsh	Arable: winter cereal	Callow - rough/unimproved
Tidal river-estuary (on water)	Arable: oil seed rape	Raised bog
Saltmarsh/merse	Arable: potatoes	Blanket bog/moorland
Mudflats	Arable: carrots	Other (please specify)
Brackish Lake	Arable: sugar beet	
Sea Loch	Improved pasture (flooded)	

Once you have entered all your data, click 'Save' at the bottom right of the page. If any mandatory information has been omitted, these will be highlighted as an error in red at the top of the page. These must be addressed before the count can be submitted otherwise your count will not be saved.

If you are satisfied you have recorded everything correctly, then the count has been submitted on the online database and you can close the page, or alternatively return to the WeBS Online page if you have more data to input for a different site.

#### Viewing & editing past records

Unfortunately, you will not be able to view or edit your ISC records through the pop-up. It is therefore important to double check your data input before you submit. If you feel you made a mistake after submission, please email [gsmpp@bto.org](mailto:gsmpp@bto.org) or contact your ISC Local Organiser.

#### When to submit your counts

We recommend that you submit your counts as soon as possible after your count so that any queries can be dealt with whilst the count is still fresh in your memory. As the WeBS recording year runs from July to June, your ISC counts should be submitted promptly before the end of September of each year. However, since this count takes place in January, we would assume most will submit data well before September. We cannot guarantee that any data submitted after the end of September will be included in the WeBS/GSMP annual report.

#### FAQs

- As a WeBS counter, do I need to create a GSMP account to count for ISC?

No, simply let us at [gsmpp@bto.org](mailto:gsmpp@bto.org) or your ISC Local Organiser know you would like to count your WeBS site for ISC. Once allocated, you can submit your ISC data in WeBS Online through the pop-up.

- I didn't complete my ISC count on the Census Date, should I still enter the data as an ISC Count? Please enter your data as an ISC Count. All complete counts should be submitted regardless of whether they were on the Census Count Date or not.

- I've input data incorrectly - can this be rectified? Unfortunately not through the pop-up. Please contact your ISC Local Organiser or email [gsmpp@bto.org](mailto:gsmpp@bto.org) and we can amend this for you.