

WeBSnews

The newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey



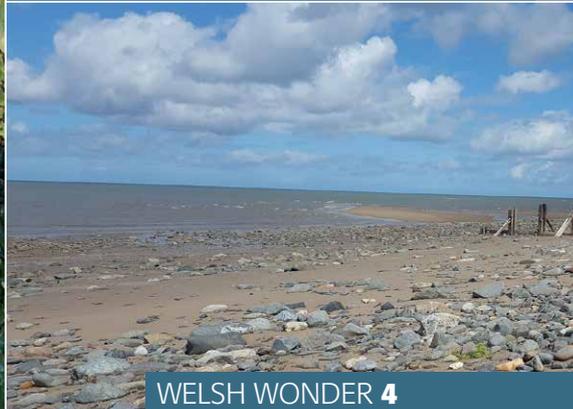
WHEN IS A
LAKE NOT A
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See page 6



EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM 12



LOW TIDE UPDATE 8



WELSH WONDER 4

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ALSO INSIDE

- 01 UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE
- 02 FROM THE EDITOR
- 04 WeBS SITE IN THE SPOTLIGHT
- 06 THE TOPONYMY OF WeBS
- 08 LOW TIDE UPDATE
- 09 LONG-STANDING COUNTERS
- 10 CITIZEN SCIENCE THAT CAN CHANGE POLICY
- 12 THE EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM
- 14 RSPB CASEWORK
- 16 WeBS ONLINE UPDATE
- 18 DAVID SALMON
- 18 EFFECT OF WEATHER
- 19 LOCAL ORGANISER NEWS
- 19 LOAC UPDATE
- 20 BACKCHAT

PLUS WeBS WHO'S WHO, CORE COUNT DATES & NEWS



University Challenge!

Amy Sherwin, ex-president of the Cardiff University Ornithological Society (CUOS), describes how their group has taken on local WeBS counts which could work as a blueprint for other universities...

The society was started in 2014 by a few wildlife enthusiasts, who put on talks and walks mainly aimed at students within the school of biosciences. CUOS has now been running for over four years and has developed into a group of students from a range of schools across the university with mixed abilities who are actively contributing to the conservation of our local wildlife through BTO surveys.

In 2016, we were approached by Dan Jenkins-Jones (WeBS Local

Organiser for East Glamorgan) on Twitter to see if we, as a society, wanted to trial taking on a WeBS site that could be passed on through generations of members. The "Roath Park Lake" site is only a short walk from the university and has roughly a 2 km perimeter. The site has a good mix of species offering a fantastic learning opportunity to students unfamiliar with wetland species. Several members of the society have also been actively involved with other BTO surveys such as Breeding Bird ▶

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome...

...to the latest issue of WeBS News.

In a year dominated by extreme weather from the “Beast from the East” followed by the joint hottest summer on record in the UK, we will soon be welcoming the return of hundreds of thousands of wintering waterbirds to our shores.

As a former student of Bishop Burton College in East Yorkshire, during my time there, the Bishop Burton Ornithological Society would run day birding trips and do monthly bird surveys of the campus which were always well attended. In a similar fashion, the Cardiff University Ornithological Society carry out WeBS Counts which is an excellent way for students to gain valuable skills for their CV as well as enjoying the company of like-minded individuals (pg 1).

One site that holds nationally important numbers of several species of waterbird is Traeth Lafan, which Rhion Pritchard puts in the WeBS site location spotlight (pg 4).



Neil Calbrade Editor & WeBS Officer



CONTINUED FROM COVER

Survey (BBS), nest recording and bird ringing through connections made within the society.

Perfect for Students

This opportunity has been a massive draw to new students wanting to gain wildlife recording experience and to those studying degrees outside of the biological sciences who want to make an active contribution to conservation. We have found that WeBS counts are the perfect survey type for busy students; a small commitment of one morning per month is easy to fit into even the busiest student's schedule. Many students enjoyed and looked forward to an escape from studying, particularly during exam periods. It is an ideal way to focus the mind on something other than revision, while still doing something productive

with our time.

As a society we encourage students with little or no bird watching experience to join us for the counts, some of whom are now taking lead of the counts. Within only a few counts, members gain confidence and are soon able to take more responsibility with counting. The skills that members gain are excellent to add to their CV's for future opportunities, including attention to detail, team work and survey techniques.

How we maintain consistency

At the start of each year we offer a range of training including an indoor and outdoor identification session depending on learning preferences by members. The society has a member in charge of the count and who is aware of members' skills and knowledge. At each count, bird species are divided

WeBS NEWS

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The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, which aims to provide the principal data for the conservation of their populations and wetland habitats. The data collected are used to assess the size of waterbird populations, assess trends in numbers and distribution and identify and monitor important sites for waterbirds. A programme of research underpins these objectives. Continuing a tradition begun in 1947, around 3,000 volunteer counters participate in synchronised monthly counts at wetlands of all habitat types, mainly during the winter period. The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is a partnership jointly funded by BTO, RSPB and JNCC, in association with WWT with fieldwork conducted by volunteers.



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When you have finished with this magazine, pass it to a friend or recycle it.

ALL PHOTOS BY LUCY HADDOCK



Intrepid WeBS counters Jess, Ellie, Catherine, Jess, Talek, Amy



Lucy, Ellie, Jack, Zoe, Eve, Amy and Catherine braving the snowy weather

up between members who walk the perimeter of the lake together. The lead counter also counts additional species if members aren't confident or want to check for consistency going forward. This method has worked really well with members getting experience of counting the easier through to the more difficult species and eventually being confident enough to count well over 100 Tufted Ducks and sex them.

Roath Park

In rain, snow or shine a team always turned up and were dedicated to the count. We had great comradery even when we had a particularly bad bout of snow. Thankfully, Roath Park has a café on the lake so we all had a well-deserved hot chocolate afterwards!

During our counts we have also recorded a range of other birds including a Stonechat which was a first for the site during the heavy snow this winter. We are often noticed by local bird watchers while doing the survey and it's a great opportunity to showcase what a group of young people can achieve. On occasion the counts have been so well attended that each member has only had a single species to count.

Legacy

The counts seem to have improved the society's social media presence,

particularly on Twitter where we have had a lot of interaction. These interactions have led to some exciting opportunities for the society such as involvement with other organisations and charities, with whom we hope to have further relationships in the future.

Participation in WeBS counts has hugely improved all of our members identification skills, encouraged members to seek out sites outside of Cardiff after leaving university, and also introduced BTO surveys to a wider range of people. After two successful years of conducting the WeBS counts, the society would definitely recommend other university

groups to consider taking on a local WeBS site. It is a perfect way of improving skills and getting as many people as possible out into nature.

I hope CUOS can continue counting Roath Park Lake for many years and that generations of members benefit from the training and experience that it provides.

Amy Sherwin (ex-president) writing on behalf of Cardiff University Ornithological Society

 @CUBirds



WeBS LOCATION SPOTLIGHT



Traeth Lafan

This large estuary on the northwest coast of Wales holds nationally important numbers of eight species of waterbird and is a vital refuge for many more.

Rhion Pritchard WeBS Local Organiser

Traeth Lafan (Lavan Sands) is a site at the eastern end of the Menai Strait, separating Anglesey from the mountains of Snowdonia. The WeBS site extends eastward from the Britannia Bridge as far as Llanfairfechan, and covers about 2,500 hectares of intertidal sand and mud flats crossed by several freshwater streams. There is a commercial fishery, particularly seabed lay cultivation of mussels around Bangor. The area is opened for cockling in some years, when stocks are thought to be sufficient, and when the site is opened there can be 80 – 100 cocklers out on the flats at low tide. On average, Traeth Lafan holds around 17,000 birds in winter, with Oystercatcher the most numerous species. The site's designation as a Special Protection Area (SPA) is primarily for Oystercatcher, both because of the regular population and as a cold-weather refuge for birds from further east, mainly the Dee Estuary. Oystercatcher numbers usually average around 5,000 in winter, ranging between 3,000 and 8,000 or more, and WeBS counts of this species are regarded as important indicators for the overall management

of the site. Studies have shown that individual Oystercatchers specialise in feeding on either mussels or cockles, and that changes in the population can be linked to either mussel or cockle availability.

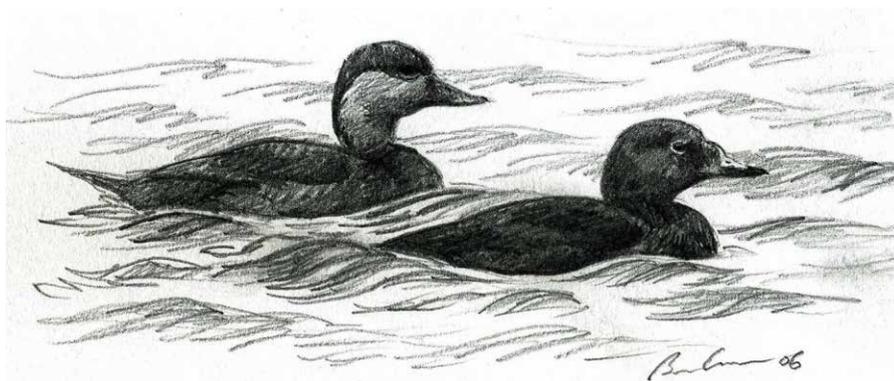
Wildfowl counts on part of the site began in the 1950s, and there have been regular WeBS counts here since the 1965/66 winter. The nature of the site means that it has to be divided into sectors, using six counters for core counts. There have also been several low-tide counts, which in the central section can involve a walk of up to 3km over the mud flats, since the birds often congregate in gullies near the main channel. Traeth Lafan is of national importance for a number of bird species, including Oystercatcher.

A number of other waders are also of national importance, notably Redshank (1,500) and Curlew (2,000). Curlew numbers show no pronounced long-term trend, but Redshank numbers have increased since the 1990s, and the site was briefly of international importance until the thresholds were raised. Dunlin numbers have declined since the 1970s, when up to 10,000 birds were counted; the average is now around

2,000. Numbers of other waders, such as Knot, show no clear trend, with large numbers in some years and very few in others.

While numbers of some species have not varied very much in the last 50 years, others have changed a great deal. The award for the most dramatic increase must go to Little Egret. The sighting of one Little Egret here as late as the early 1990s caused considerable excitement, but from 2002 numbers began to increase, and in August 2013 the count reached 173. Some other species have not done so well, notably the Red-breasted Merganser. A regular post-breeding concentration here between July and September reached over 500 in some years in the 1990s, but has been down below a hundred in recent years and continues to decline. This has been partly balanced by a post-breeding build-up of Goosander. Until 2011, 12 counts were of 10 or fewer birds, but since then a flock of red-heads has built up to reach nationally important numbers between July and September, with over 200 in some years.

Numbers of several other wildfowl species also build up in late summer, including 100 – 150 Mute Swans. Greylag Geese usually appear in numbers, sometimes up to 1,000, in early September, but only stay for a few days. The Greylags visit from the Anglesey lakes, while colour ringing has shown that many of the Mute Swans come from Cheshire and Shropshire. We do not know the origins of the Goosanders, as there are too many for all of them to be birds breeding locally. In winter, a small population of Nearctic Light-bellied Brent Geese is increasing slowly, and





Traeth Lafan holds nationally important numbers of both Oystercatcher and Red-breasted Mergansers.



can reach about 70 birds, but Mallard numbers have declined from around 800 birds to under 400.

There is usually a large post-breeding concentration of Great Crested Grebe here, which can reach 500 birds in some years, and there can also be good numbers in early spring before the birds disperse to their breeding sites. Small numbers of Slavonian Grebe can often be found among them. The grebes are usually a long way offshore, and an accurate count requires a clear day and a calm sea. The same applies to the Red-throated Divers and Common Scoters off Llanfairfechan, both of which peak in spring. Over 200 Red-throated Divers have been counted here in good conditions. Gull roosts build up from early July onwards, with around

3,000 Black-headed Gulls, and these roosts sometimes include 600 or more Sandwich Terns.

Rarities turn up in the area from time to time, but most do not stay long enough to be included in a WeBS count. However, the counts have sometimes been given some extra spice by the presence of something unusual, including American visitors such as Forster's Tern and the Black Scoter which accompanied the Common Scoter flock off Llanfairfechan for several winters.

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 If you would like to see your WeBS site in the location spotlight in future issues of WeBS News, please contact the editor.

WeBS Snippets



BTO ID videos

If you have trouble separating your Bar-tailed from Black-tailed Godwits, Whooper Swans from Bewick's, differentiating between female ducks or just get frustrated by similar-looking small waders, check out the BTO Identification videos at www.bto.org/about-birds/bird-id. These excellent tutorials explain how to identify these tricky pairings or groups of species in a series of easy to follow annotated videos.

Opting out of paper reports

The WeBS Partner Organisations strive to reduce the use of paper where possible. While we will still produce paper WeBS Reports and Newsletters, we are always looking at ways to reduce the number of copies printed. If you are a WeBS Counter and you would like to opt out of receiving either or both of them, please contact webs@bto.org to let us know. Remember, both the report and newsletter are available to download from the website at www.bto.org/webs-publications

The toponymy of WeBS

An interesting look at mapping the different geographic names for different wetland habitats.

Teresa Frost WeBS National Organiser

Of all the major surveys run by the BTO, WeBS is the most site focused. A large part of WeBS data management is dealing with the complexity of sites that vary by size and how they have been divided and counted over the years. Wetlands come and go as tides turn and man extracts gravel and minerals, claims agricultural land or creates lakes for fishing. Much effort has been expended by the central office, local organisers and counters in mapping boundaries of where people are counting on the ground and changing this over time.

But it wasn't until I saw maps on social media of wetland names from Ordnance Survey open data that I wondered whether we might have been overlooking an interesting dataset collected by WeBS – local names for WeBS sectors and sites. A toponymic study (study of place names) of WeBS location data was in order.

Before moving to BTO, I lived north of Carlisle for a few years and had to not only get used to saying burn or beck depending on which side of Hadrian's Wall I was, but also lochan or tarn, so that seemed a good place to start. It was fascinating to see on the map of WeBS names how restricted **tarn** is to Cumbria, with just a bit of creep into the south Pennines. It's an example of one of the many place words brought by Norse settlers to that area 1,000 years ago. Some other names for smaller WeBS sites are also geographically clustered, including, surprisingly to me, words that are commonly used such as **pond** (possible bias to urban areas) and **pool** (mostly central England) and Wales.

- ◆ lough
- loch
- llyn
- mere
- broad
- lake



How the names for large waterbodies differ

Another term I noticed when I moved north was the **loughs** of the Tyne gap. Mapping WeBS location names containing **lough** shows it crops up in various places in northern England. A possible explanation is historic Irish connections to some areas, as lough is an English word borrowed from the Old Irish **loch**,

the spelling still used today in Scottish Gaelic and for many Scottish waterbodies. Most WeBS sites in Northern Ireland are **loughs**. The Welsh word **llyn** has similar roots, whereas in most of England the word for a large waterbody is **lake** which comes from quite a different source (proto-Germanic via Old English).



Different names for small waterbodies (above left), bogs (above right) and man-made waterbodies (below left).

East Yorkshire; East Anglia; and Surrey and Sussex. This is perhaps due to geography as much as dialect.

Another combination of geography and dialect can be seen by mapping words for bogs and marshes used in WeBS site names. **Moss** is again Old English/proto-Germanic but is chiefly used in west England from Shropshire to Cumbria and in lowland Scotland. From the same language family, a groundwater-fed **fen** is more alkaline than an acidic moss, but I wonder whether the scientific separation of terms happened before or after the use of fen being centred on the Cambridgeshire-Norfolk-Lincolnshire fenlands? The word **bog** comes from Irish and Scottish Gaelic but relatively few WeBS sites have bog in their name or the Welsh term **cors** (which stems from the latin *carex*, sedge). **Moor** seems to be used most often for lowland wetlands.

Mapping the names of artificial waterbodies reveals close links to the underlying geology. **Reservoirs** are most frequent in the north and west of Britain, particularly where there are no major groundwater aquifers to serve major urban areas such as Glasgow, Cardiff and Manchester. Conversely, sand and gravel **pits** are typically found in the south and east.

The East Anglian **broad** meanwhile is a dialect word from the 1650s, presumably to differentiate the shallow lakes that were created by peat extraction from the narrower ditches and rivers (“broad” is of course also used in other wetland names, resulting in a scatter outside East Anglia when mapped). Another English word for a shallow lake is **mere** and it is interesting to see four distinct areas where this word is commonly used in WeBS names: the meres of Shropshire, Cheshire and Cumbria;

Many of the names of WeBS sites can be found on other maps such as Ordnance Survey and Google maps, but not all can. Sometimes we are given two names for a place, one on the map and one that is used locally. If your site is also known by another name, let us know and we can incorporate it.

Low Tide Update

Each winter, dedicated WeBS Counters brave the elements to carry out Low Tide Counts on estuarine sites around the UK.

Neil Calbrade WeBS Low Tide Organiser

The winter of 2017/18 saw Low Tide Counts carried out on 17 estuaries around the UK, including the Mersey, Traeth Lafan (Lavan Sands), Conwy Estuary, Taw-Torridge Estuary, Chichester Harbour and the Blackwater Estuary.

The counts for the 2018/19 winter will soon be underway on Southampton Water, Alde/Ore Estuaries, Tees Estuary and Lindisfarne among other sites being counted under the six-yearly program.

We would welcome counts from any estuary, even those that have not yet been counted under the scheme, so please contact the WeBS office (email: lowtide@bto.org) if you are able to organise a team or be able to count a whole site yourself once a month between November and February and would like to take part.

As part of the online WeBS Reporting interface via www.bto.org/websreporting-lowtide, dot density maps for all sites and species are now available. This allows the user to compare the distributions of birds using any combination of site, species and years side by side for ease of comparison. Monthly peak counts and average densities can also now be seen for all species recorded on each site in a particular winter.

You can now compare ► the distributions of birds between years on a site



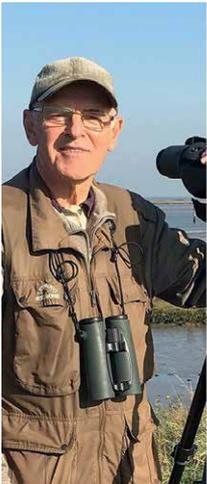
Dunlin are one of the most abundant wader species recorded on Low Tide Counts

NICK CLAYTON

Species	Mth peak	Mth avg	Avg density
Male Swan	49	38	0.25
Greylag Goose	1	1	<0.01
Canada Goose	409	353	0.20
Barnacle Goose	1	<1	<0.01
Brent Goose (Dark-bellied)	1215	1212	0.69
Shelduck	179	104	0.06
Wigeon	2109	1011	1.63
Gadwall	3	2	<0.01
Teal	754	524	0.30
Mallard	367	318	0.18
Fintail	69	66	0.03
Shoveler	73	51	0.03
Pochard	8	7	0.02
Tufted Duck	12	9	0.02
Goldeneye	1	<1	<0.01
Red-breasted Merganser	83	74	0.17
Little Grebe	6	4	<0.01
Great Crested Grebe	2	1	<0.01
Savonian Grebe	2	1	<0.01
Common Loon	61	57	0.03
Shag	5	3	<0.01
Little Egret	55	40	0.03
Grey Heron	31	21	0.02
Water Rail	1	<1	<0.01
Moonhen	20	10	<0.01
Coot	56	46	0.10
Oystercatcher	1602	1429	1.39
Avocet	302	289	0.28
Ringed Plover	75	39	0.04
Golden Plover	125	116	0.09
Grey Plover	180	172	0.17
Lapwing	831	495	0.38
Knot	38	22	0.02
Dunlin	3091	2610	2.54
Skip	4	3	<0.01
Black-tailed Godwit	813	799	0.81
Bar-tailed Godwit	114	66	0.06
Curlew	702	674	0.51
Greenbank	12	9	<0.01

Celebrating long-standing WeBS counters

As WeBS continues to celebrate 70 years of waterbird monitoring in the UK, we want to shed some light on some of our longest standing WeBS counters....



PETER ALLARD

Peter has volunteered for WeBS for **56 years** and worked as a site organiser. He says:

"With some 50 years of National Wildfowl Counts, Birds of Estuaries Enquiry and Wetland Bird Surveys under my belt, I still continue counting at Breydon Water on a monthly basis. Counting waterbirds has become totally addictive, I still enjoy every minute of it."



www.bto.org
Volunteers' Week 2018 #Volunteersweek

Registered Charity
No. 260829 (England & Wales)
104140 (Scotland)



DAVID SMALLSHIRE

David has volunteered for WeBS for **48 years**. He says:

"Counting birds on a regular basis yields bounties for the observer in the form of a good appreciation of phenology and – given a long enough period – population trends at the chosen site. These days, it's also a great excuse to get away from the keyboard once a month!"



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ROBIN HARRIS

Robin has volunteered on a particularly challenging WeBS site for **33 years**. He says:

"Carrying out the WeBS counts over the years has given me some of the most rewarding times I have ever had whilst birdwatching and has allowed me to make a very small contribution to BTO's efforts to learn more about birds in Britain. Thank you, BTO."



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WeBS OBITUARY

Keith Fox

1943–2017

Keith Fox, WeBS Counter, WeBS Local Organiser for Somerset (other inland sites) and long-time BTO supporter passed away in November 2017. Keith's interest in birds, like many people, started at a young age when he and his life-long friend, Geoffrey Blackman, would compare records of the birds they had seen in their respective gardens. Over the years Keith and Geoffrey went on many birding adventures including a trip to Fetlar in the Shetland Isles. Soon after this he started to become involved with the "Duck Counts". He met his wife, Veronica, at the end of 1967 when he was already leading a small but significant group of young pioneer birders which comprised of Andy Davis, Dick Senior and Keith Vinicombe. Keith and Veronica's main site was Blackwell Pond and they completed counts at this site until finally having to retire from counting in 2012.

Keith took on the role of WeBS Local Organiser in the late 1970s when he also started his studies with the Open University and gained his BA in 1982 – a very proud moment for him and his family. During this time Keith was not only studying and working hard as the WeBS Local Organiser, he and Veronica were also taking part in many other BTO surveys, including Heronry Counts, Breeding Bird Survey, and the Garden BirdWatch survey. In 2017 Keith would have celebrated 50 years of supporting "duck counting" as it was known back when he first started. Keith was only just 74 when he passed away and it is a tragic loss of his skills and the enjoyment of birding that he and his wife shared for all those years. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

Heidi Mellan

Citizen Science that can change policy

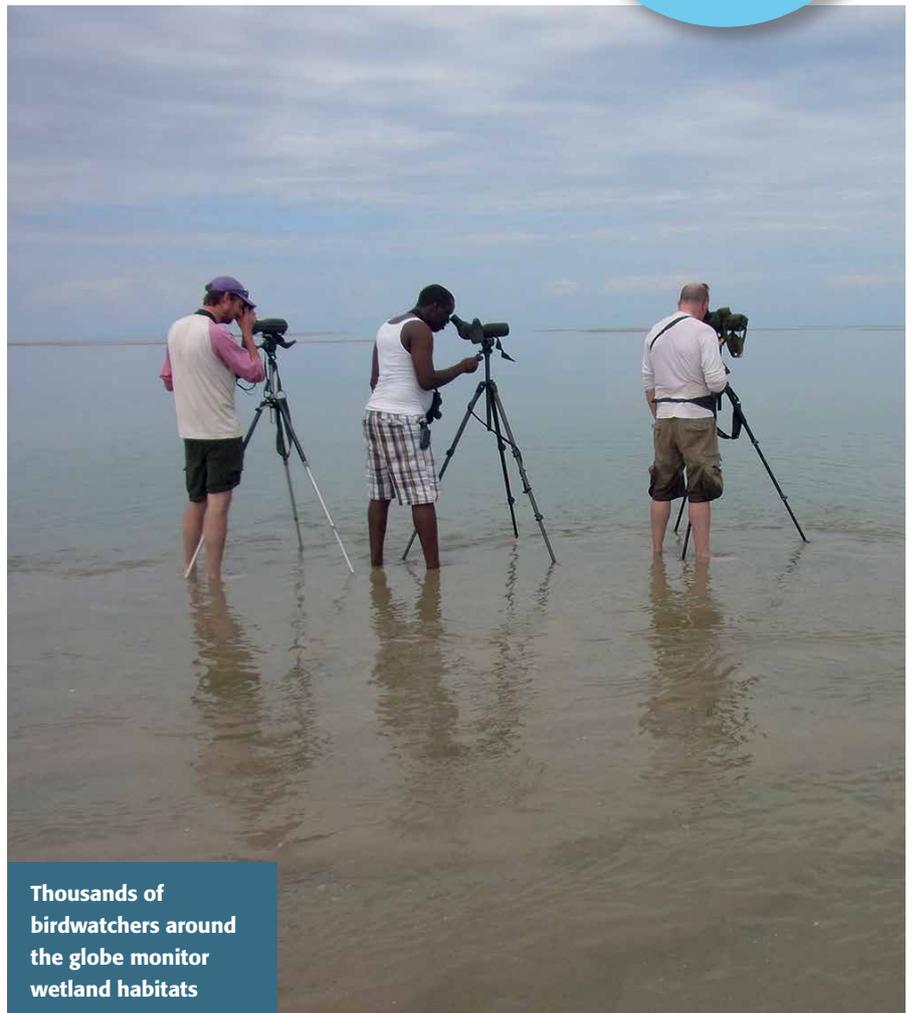
Your January WeBS Counts contribute to the International Waterbird Census. Here is one way they are making a difference.

Connor Walsh Media Officer, Wetlands International

WeBS STAT...
3,156
The number of WeBS
counters in 2016/17.

Facilitating knowledge transfer is part of what we do at Wetlands International, and 2017 included one particularly large transfer: having overseen more than 15,000 bird counters for 23 years, we took 2.4 million waterbird records, transformed them into analysable data, and moved it on to academics at Cambridge and other universities. We helped them process and analyse the data with our computing power, in silicon chips and grey matter alike. The result is an article in the journal *Nature* which may reshape priorities in conservation practice and funding. The scale of the effort on the (often muddy) ground might well be matched by the scale of impact on policy.

The Cambridge researchers, Tatsuya Amano and William Sutherland, overlaid factors caused by humans, and revealed some truths about conservation since 1990. Human population growth, climate change, agricultural expansion, and surface water change—all are worth considering, but none has the level of impact of one factor: governance. In this case, governance means how effectively a country enforces the rules, according to World Bank indicators. It sounds obvious enough but brings up the kicker of the second most significant, and intertwined, factor: whether or not the survey site is formally protected as some sort of nature reserve, combined with how strong the governance is. A protected area in the European Union normally works better than one in South America or sub-Saharan Africa. So



**Thousands of
birdwatchers around
the globe monitor
wetland habitats**

there are geopolitical implications to this study, grounded as it is in the simple, fine pleasure of volunteer birders enjoying a bracing January day out counting waterbirds.

‘Conservation today, certainly as practised by Wetlands International, strives to benefit humans and nature alike’

The analysis starts on the premise that waterbird counts can indicate how productive a wetland is; and wetlands are great for biodiversity. So changes in the number of species and of populations can point to changes on the ground. The maps show losses in some areas, growth in others.

Conservation today, certainly as practised by Wetlands International, strives to benefit humans and nature

alike. All being part of an ecosystem, it makes sense to seek that balance. We also work cooperatively, providing knowledge and expertise from, for example, ecology and community facilitation, to governments and business. This research collaboration with academia reinforces not just the validity of this approach but also how it must be expanded.

Start with bird counters, organised at the national level; move that data up to the global level; publish in a high-profile journal; and then influence the priorities of decision-makers. The process is much easier said than done, but the potential rewards are there for everyone along the chain.

How do you find 15,000 people to count birds for two decades? For us, that might look like the 'easy' part: bird watchers are everywhere and passionate about what they do. In reality though, identifying and counting waterbirds takes a lot of knowledge and experience which is more plentiful in Europe than parts of Africa and Asia. For a global enterprise such as this, finding the people and collating all their records is no small feat. Much of the fieldwork was part of the International Waterbird Census, which has been in operation since 1967 and is coordinated by Wetlands International. While that census does not cover the USA, it dovetails nicely with the comparable Christmas Bird Count run by the National Audubon Society, and the researchers were able to use both together. Our in-house technical officers took charge of these growing datasets, and passed them onto researchers Tatsuya Amano and William Sutherland who prepared the article for Nature along with Tamás Székely and Brody Sande of the universities of Debrecen and Santa Clara. Our staff on this project were Szabolcs Nagy, Taej Mundkur, Tom Langendoen, and Daniel Blanco, who worked with Candan U. Soykan of the Audubon Society.

The data, in the form of the Nature article, will continue its journey: it will inform the continued International Waterbird Census; meanwhile our advocacy and programme staff will

'bird watchers are everywhere and passionate about what they do.'

take the new knowledge generated by this research and engage, as ever, with governments, business, and civil society to safeguard and restore wetlands for the benefit of people and nature.

Supporters

The International Waterbird Census would not be possible without diverse support, not least from the thousands of volunteers who go out counting waterbirds and sharing their records. Institutional support includes: Ministry of the Environment of Japan, Environment Canada, AEW Secretariat, EU LIFE+ NGO Operational Grant, MAVA Foundation, Swiss Federal Office for Environment and Nature, French Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, UK Department of Food and Rural Affairs, Norwegian Nature Directorate, the Netherlands Ministry of Economics, Agriculture and Innovation, and Wetlands International members.

The 2018 International Waterbird Census took place:

- Asia-Pacific: 6 – 21 January
- Africa-Eurasia: 13 – 14 January
- Caribbean: 14 January – 3 February
- Central America: 15 January – 15 February
- The Neotropics: 3 – 18 February and 7 – 22 July

About Wetlands International

Wetlands International is an independent, not-for-profit network organisation active in five continents. Its mission is to safeguard and restore wetlands for people and nature. Wetlands International brings together knowledge, policy and practice. It connects the local with the global and enables society to act.

<https://www.wetlands.org>

Your WeBS Core Count priority dates for the 2018–2019 season...

2018...

14 October

11 November

9 December

2019...

20 January

17 February

24 March

21 April

19 May

16 June

7 July

4 August

15 September

13 October

17 November

15 December

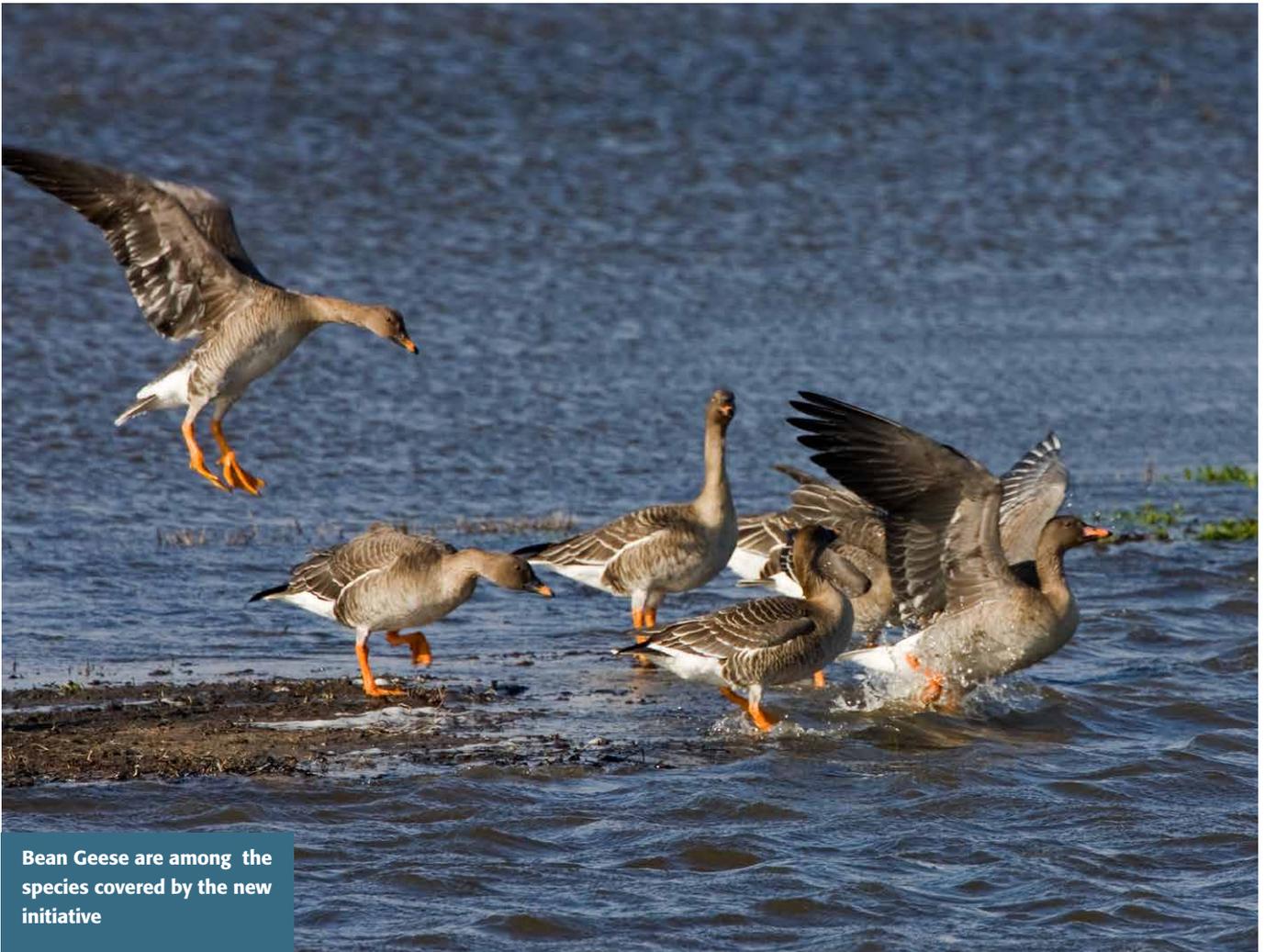
Where tidal conditions at coastal sites are unfavourable on these dates, Local Organisers are encouraged to agree alternative dates. Ideally, these should be separated by at least three weeks from counts in the preceding and following months. Counts on different count units within complex sites should be coordinated to avoid the possibility of double counting.

Keep up-to-date with count dates and add them to your electronic calendar at www.bto.org/webs/coredates

Breaking new ground in managing shared waterbird populations

The European Goose Management Platform (EGMP) is a recently established initiative under the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) to coordinate multiple strands of European goose conservation and management.

David Stroud JNCC and **Rae McKenzie** SNH



Bean Geese are among the species covered by the new initiative

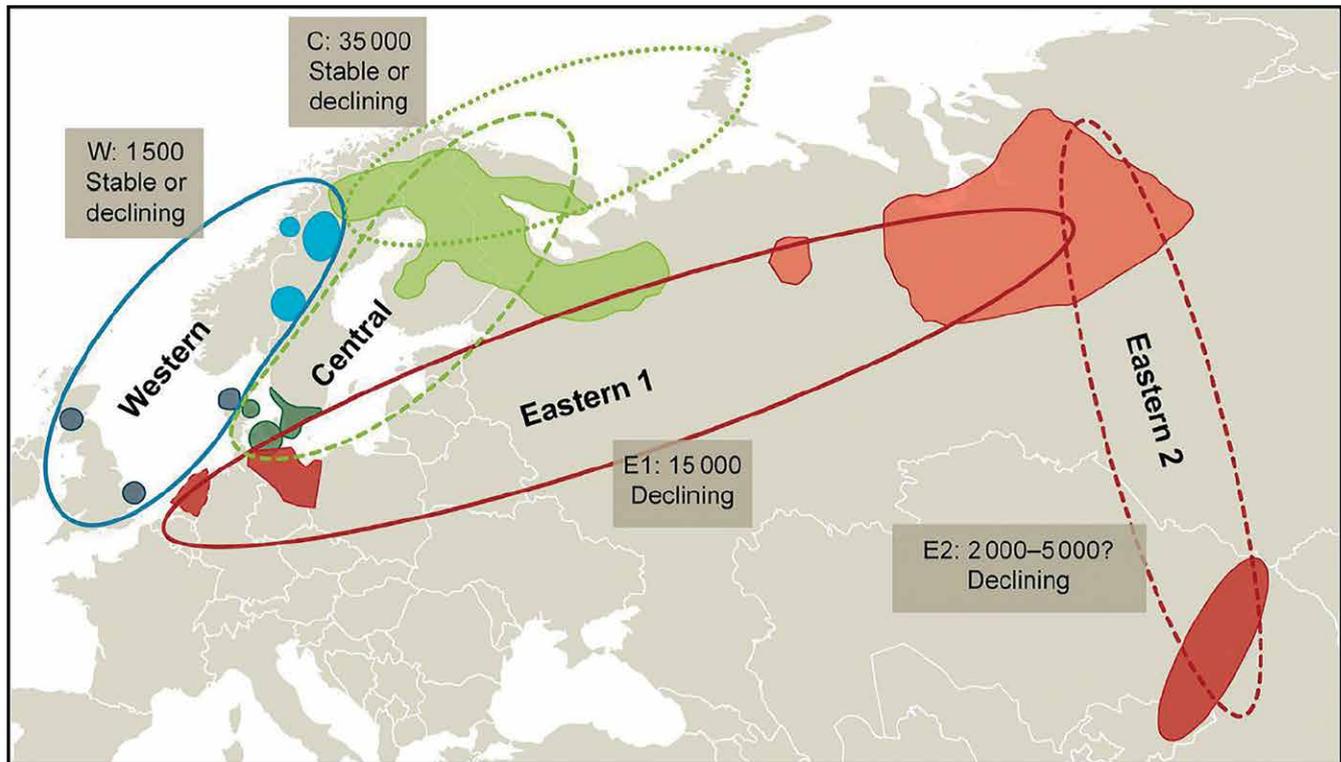
CHRIS KNIGHTS

At present, the EGMP oversees implementation of international plans for Svalbard Pink-footed and Taiga Bean Geese. Further draft Management Plans for the three populations of Barnacle Geese and the continental population of Greylag Geese will go to AEWA's seventh Meeting of Parties this December and, if adopted, co-ordination of their

implement will also fall to EGMP. UK participates within EGMP and our engagement will become greater with the anticipated adoption of the Barnacle Goose plan.

Current implementation of the Pink-foot and Bean Goose plans is breaking new ground in their adaptive processes to conservation and management.

For Pinkfeet, which cause significant agricultural damage on spring staging areas in Norway, the 2012 plan adopted a target population size of about 70,000 birds. Annual hunting regulations are now linked to population size assessments on the wintering grounds. At levels above 80,000, hunting regulations in Denmark and Norway are liberalised to



▲ Figure 1. Taiga Bean Goose Management Units (from AEWA conservation plan).

increase harvest and thus restrict population growth, whilst if the population were to fall below 60,000 more restrictive hunting regulation would allow recovery. The most recent assessments presented to the June 2018 EGMP meeting indicates that this adaptive approach to hunting regulation is indeed stabilising the population – which previously had shown unconstrained growth.

Taiga Bean Geese present a quite different set of challenges. The various population units (Figure 1.) have shown declines triggering the need for conservation attention by AEWA. An adaptive response has thus been developed which allows – on the basis of population demographic modelling – a small (and annually variable) harvest to be taken that allows population recovery whilst still maintaining a limited hunting opportunity. For the Central Management Unit – which migrates through the Baltic – the quota is allocated between the relevant Range States where hunting is permissible (currently Russia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany).

A programme of work also addresses other conservation issues, and the UK is involved with respect to our two flocks within the Western Management Unit (Figure 1.) – at Slamannan in Central Scotland, and in the Norfolk Broads. As WeBS counts have shown, the latter flock is in dire straits, having declined from a peak of almost 500 in 1990/91 to just 18 birds in 2018, and Natural England are seeking to investigate the causes of decline. Indeed, EGMP assessments show that, in 2017/18, the whole Western Management Unit (shared also with Denmark, Norway and Sweden) now comprises just 878 individuals. As pressures on the different Management Units may be similar, there is benefit from international sharing of research findings and thinking and EGMP facilitates this.

EGMP is innovating in implementing management processes for geese that are not only international in scope and collaborative between countries, but also adaptive in their nature. Further, the issues being addressed are becoming progressively more

complex – from the ‘simple’ flyway of Svalbard Pinkfeet involving just four countries, to – potentially – seeking common management approaches in the nine principal Range States across continental Europe that host Greylags.

EGMP has itself adopted an adaptive approach to its operations – ‘learning by doing’ – and is thus developing experience of relevance to other current international migratory bird conservation and management needs.

.....
Further information:

Papers for the 2018 EGMP meeting:

<https://tinyurl.com/yccnrn99>

AEWA adaptive management plan for

Svalbard Pink-footed Goose: [https://](https://tinyurl.com/y9759t7h)

tinyurl.com/y9759t7h

AEWA conservation plan for Taiga Bean

Goose: <https://tinyurl.com/yal5gbaa>

On the case

The RSPB are currently engaged in a number of cases where important wetland habitats are under threat.

Simon Wotton RSPB

Whooper Swans are among the birds under threat from a proposed road scheme near Lough Beg.



JOHN PROUDLOCK

Along with other organisations, RSPB have fought for many years to ensure habitats that support rare and vulnerable wildlife are protected from the worst impacts of human development. RSPB are currently involved in a number of cases around the UK, with information available on the RSPB website: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/our-positions-and-casework/casework/>.

Current cases include:

Lough Beg SPA in Northern Ireland supports almost 46,000 waterbirds in the winter, including internationally important numbers of Whooper Swans. In 2003, Toome became the centre of proposals to build a dual carriageway which would replace part of the A6 linking Belfast and Londonderry. The route proposed by the Roads Service would bypass a local

village and cut through fields used by wintering Whooper Swans - splitting the main swan area and running close to the nearby Lough Beg SPA, used by the swans for roosting. RSPB alerted the Roads Service to the presence of swans and the need to implement the Conservation Regulations. Following agreement with the Roads Service on mitigation measures, RSPB were eventually satisfied the proposal



ROSE WILLIAMS (RSPB IMAGES)

▲ Consultations are ongoing which may affect Shorne Marshes.

would not result in harm to the swan population, or the habitat, and withdrew our objection, conditional on the mitigation measures.

Highways England are currently consulting on a new crossing on the Lower Thames as an additional route to the existing Dartford crossings. The preferred route for a new Lower Thames Crossing was announced by the Government in 2017 and comprises a bored tunnel between Shorne in Kent and Tilbury in Essex, with associated new road links. The route entails tunnelling under the RSPB reserve at Shorne Marshes. The mudflats, saltmarsh and grazing land here are part of the Thames Estuary and Marshes SPA and Ramsar site. RSPB are keen to ensure that any crossing that is constructed here avoids causing damage to these important places and will be rigorously examining the proposals to that end.

Nature conservation designations across the Firth of Forth reflect the importance of this area, the complex of estuarine habitats and the species which it supports, including: the Firth of Forth SPA, designated for supporting internationally important numbers of waterfowl including Bar-tailed Godwit, Shelduck and Redshank. RSPB are supporting SNH's objection to a new development, of a new container freight terminal on brownfield land at the Port of Rosyth, in Fife, which could cause significant harm to the Firth of Forth SPA. Although the new development would be on existing dockland, there would be a need for significant new dredging to allow access for container ships. This may impact on the neighbouring intertidal mudflats, important for a range of bird species and part of Firth of Forth SPA.

Merlin Bird ID app

If you carry a smartphone on your WeBS count and encounter an unknown species, this new app may be able to help.

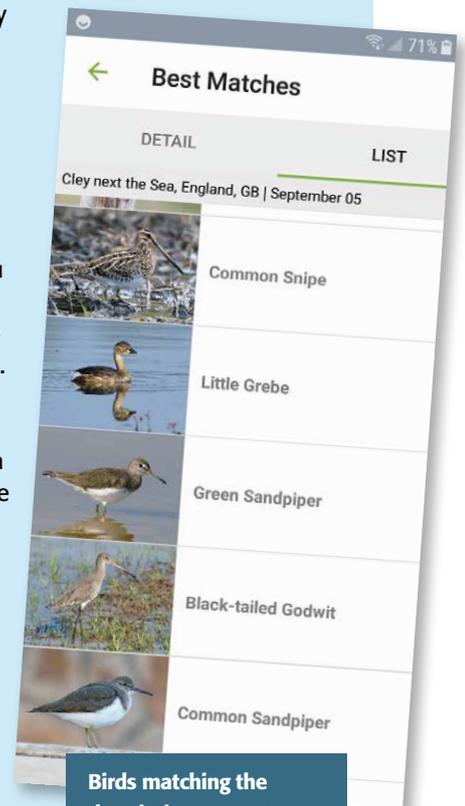


Ever struggled to identify a bird you've seen on your WeBS Count? The free Merlin Bird ID app, developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and partnered by BTO, for iPhone and Android smartphones can help you solve the mystery in five questions, or with a photo you have taken of the bird.

Created for birders and birdwatchers of every level, Merlin starts by asking you a few simple questions, before revealing a list of birds that most closely fit your description. Having selected the species that fits best, you can explore photos, sounds and identification tips to help confirm what you have seen.

Powered by Visipedia, Merlin's Photo ID tool uses computer vision and deep learning technology to identify birds in images. Simply take a photo by holding your smartphone to the eyepiece of your binoculars or telescope, or choose an existing photo on your camera and photograph the camera screen with your phone. Merlin's powerful AI will suggest an identification almost instantly.

When you are on holiday in a new location, pull up the Likely List for the area and Merlin will display a custom list of species you might encounter, and can



Birds matching the description you enter can be viewed side by side.

even help you prepare for a big birding trip so you know what to expect.

Merlin is fun and easy to use - whether you are curious about a bird you have seen once or you are hoping to identify birds seen on your WeBS count, the answers are waiting for you with this free bird identification app.

You can download Merlin via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

WeBS Online gets a new look

Thirteen years after it was first released, WeBS Online is set to get a refresh to make it easier to navigate and to introduce some long-awaited improvements...



Heidi Mellan WeBS Counter Network Organiser

The overall look of WeBS online is being refreshed to make it cleaner and, hopefully, simpler to find your way around. As before, all of the WeBS options on the home page are listed down the right-hand side with your count entry and editing options at the top. The count entry pages are also changing:

- GONE are the separate pages for the count details and species counts.
- GONE are those annoying drop-downs when entering your counts!
- IN is a more streamlined look with the count entry pages now all on one page so you can go back and change the count details, or add comments without losing your species counts.
- IN is the ability to add today's date by typing "T" into the date field or "Y" for yesterday's date.
- IN is an easier way to tell us whether or not you looked for gulls and terns during your visit.
- IN is a much more smartphone and tablet friendly interface. Each row in the additional species section is now searchable allowing you to add new species to your list without the double-click.
- IN is a single submit button so you know your counts have been uploaded to the database as soon as you've hit "submit count".

The 'View/edit submissions' pages have also changed. Instead of having to scroll down through all your sites to

Data Home / Count Entry

Enter count

▼ I. Visit details

Survey Type: Core Count Low Tide Count

Counter:

Site:

Date:

Start Time: :

End Time: :

Extra details:

Ice Cover: %

Count Accuracy: OK Low

Specify that no count was carried out Specify that a paper record was received

▲ If you have Core and Low Tide sites, first choose which type of count you wish to enter then find your site from the drop-down list.

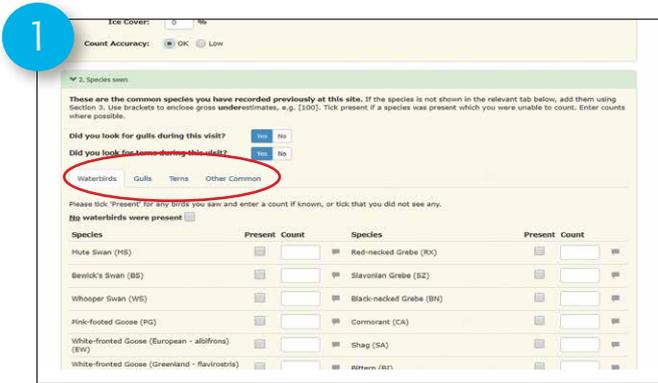
find the one you want, you can now choose whether you want to find a Core; Low Tide; or Casual/Roost count. You can then select by location (eg CWP – Lake 202b) or choose to select a Parent Location (e.g. Cotswold Water Park). Once you've got your list of counts you can now filter all of the columns to help you find the count you are looking for.

Editing is also much easier as those confusing green "edit" buttons are all gone! Now, when you select the "Edit Count" button you will be taken to the Count entry pages where you can amend any part of the count before resubmitting it.

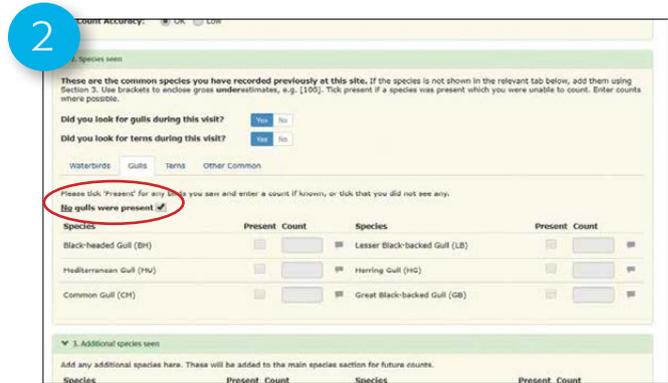
Did you know you can view the site boundary map (if available); the annual peaks; and monthly counts for

your sites using the "Site Summaries > Local Site Summaries" option? This section has also had a little bit of a make-over. When selecting this option you will have a list of your sites. Clicking on the site name will show you the site boundary map. There is a date range next to your site name, clicking on the date range will allow you to compare the annual peak counts for that site. If you then click on the blue years at the head of each column you will be shown a table of the monthly counts for that year.

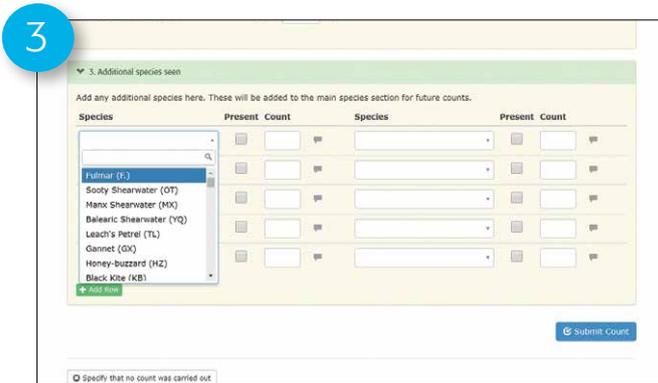
We are still in the development stages but some of your Local Organisers will soon be testing the new WeBS Online. We are hoping to release the new look WeBS Online before the end of year but the actual release date is TBC.



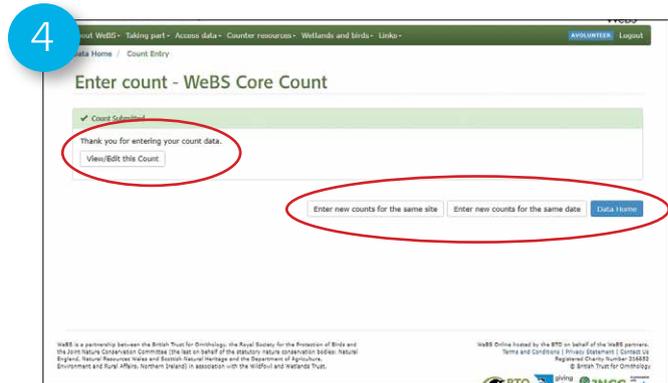
▲ Select the appropriate tab to enter data for Waterbirds, Gulls, Terns and other species commonly seen at your site.



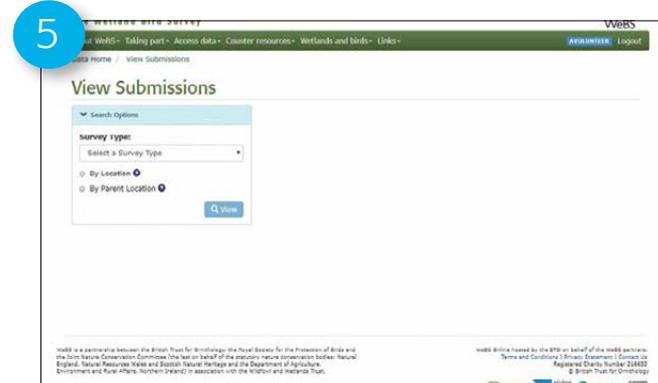
▲ If you looked for Gulls or Terns, tell us if none were present.



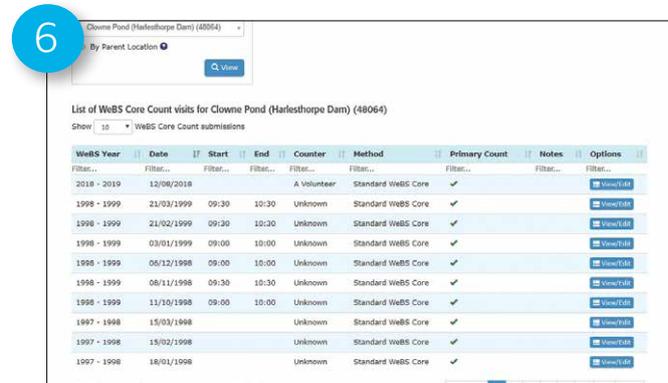
▲ Find the species you wish to add and enter a count.



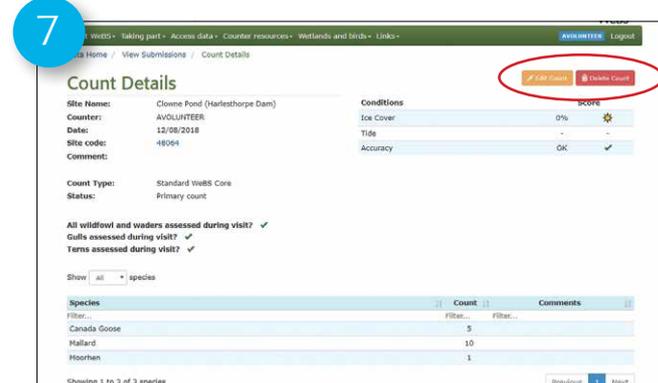
▲ You can now go straight to the edit pages if required; enter another count; or go back to the home page.



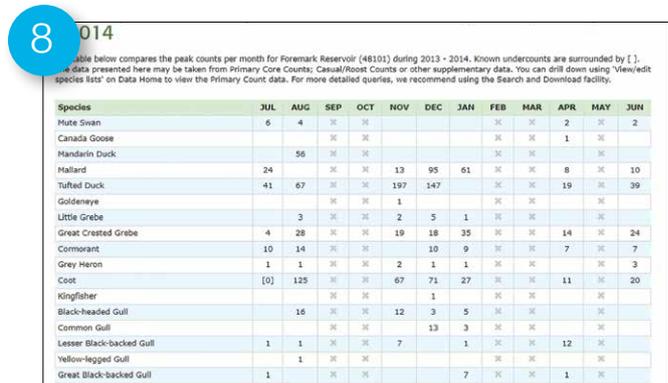
▲ Select the type of count and select the location.



▲ You can now filter the columns to help you find the count you wish to edit.



▲ Clicking on the "Edit Count" button will take you back to the Count Entry pages allowing you to amend any part of the count on one page.



▲ Use the Local Site Summaries option to compare annual peaks and monthly counts for your sites.

David Salmon

A celebration of the career of one of the pioneers of the National Wildfowl Counts, a precursor to WeBS, on his retirement.

Richard Hearn & Eileen Rees WWT

David Salmon is a name that will be familiar to many of the longer-serving WeBS counters. He first began processing waterbird count data back in 1971, whilst still a teenager, as assistant to George Atkinson-Willes, who pioneered the National Wildfowl Counts and also the International Waterbird Census.

Initially based at Monks Wood with the Nature Conservancy, in 1973 he moved to the then Wildfowl Trust headquarters at Slimbridge where he continued working on the NWC, a precursor to WeBS, until 1989, when he was poached by WWT's fund-raising department!

He remained a highly successful and much-loved member of staff (working in the legacies team) until his retirement in May, following an incredible 47 years of service.



Wildfowl Counters and at the front "Wildfowl in Great Britain" authors at Slimbridge, 2nd February. Front row from right to left, Dr. Malcolm Ogilvie, David Salmon, William Atkinson (Chairman, Nature Conservancy Council), George Atkinson-Willes, Professor Geoffrey Matthews (Deputy Director Research WWT), Dr. Myrlyn Owen.

▲ David at the first counters' conference and the launch of the 2nd edition of "Wildfowl in Great Britain" at Slimbridge WWT Reserve in 1986.

In the early years, count data were processed using a trusty mechanical calculator (only one step on from an abacus). The calculator was effectively a giant electronic typewriter with a clutch, from which, reputedly, smoke would emerge if calculations got stuck in an infinity loop! When George retired from WWT in 1983, David

single-handedly steered the NWC during a critical phase of development as the first computers became available for the storage and processing of data. He also played an instrumental part in strengthening the network of counters, organising the first counters' conferences in the mid-1980s.

During this time he also found time to co-author the authoritative 2nd edition of Wildfowl in Great Britain with two other greats of wildfowl research, Myrlyn Owen and George Atkinson-Willes, as well as many other publications. His overall contribution to the knowledge we have today about our internationally important waterbird populations has been simply immense.

Everyone at WWT and the WeBS team at the BTO wishes David a long, happy and healthy retirement. Thanks David!

INTERNATIONAL

Weather impact on breeding

From the "Beast from the East" to the joint hottest summer on record, this year has been dominated by the weather...

Beginning on the 24th February 2018, the "Beast from the East" as the media dubbed it, brought unusually low temperatures and heavy snowfall to much of the UK. It was not just the UK that felt the force of these conditions, with extreme weather on the Arctic breeding grounds of many of our wintering waterbirds. With much

more snowfall than usual in northeast Greenland, which subsequently was slow to melt this year, resulted in a non-breeding year for many wader species such as Sanderling and Knot. As a result, WeBS Counters are encouraged to record the proportion of juvenile Sanderlings in flocks to see if the poor breeding season was more widespread than Greenland. The full article

can be seen at <https://bit.ly/2MHt8cF>.

Conversely, in the Russian Arctic, early indications from WWT researchers is that Bewick's Swans have had a successful breeding season. Following a poor breeding season for this long-term declining species in 2017 when a late spring didn't leave much of a breeding window for returning swans, it is hoped that 2018 has seen a change of fortunes. The full article can be seen at <https://bit.ly/2Qn5HY6>.

As with recording Sanderling, WeBS counters are encouraged to submit proportions of juvenile Bewick's Swans from any herds they see on their counts in the comments field of WeBS Online.

The extreme conditions experienced this year will surely be felt for some time, and will be highlighted in the next WeBS Report which will analyse the 2017/18 WeBS year.

COUNTER NETWORK

Local Organiser News

Heidi Mellan WeBS Counter Network Organiser

We would like to thank Trish Harper (Somerset Levels); Bill Quantrill (Wiltshire); Toby Branston (Radipole and Lodmoor); Jamie Dunning (South Yorkshire); John Dye (Lochaber); Julian Novorol (Hamford Water) Tom Clare (Lancashire west (inland)); Ian Hodgson (Pegwell Bay); Shane Wolsey (Carlingford Lough) and Bob McMillan (Skye and Lochalsh) for all their hard work as Local Organisers and who have retired from the scheme since the last newsletter was published.

We were greatly saddened to hear that Keith Fox passed away in November 2017 (see obituary on pg 9). He was the Local Organiser for Somerset (other inland sites) for well over 30 years after taking up the role in the late 1970s. John Jones also passed away in May 2018, he was the Dorset Local Organiser for over 20 years before retiring from the role in 2014. Our condolences go out to their families, they will both be greatly missed.

We would also like to thank the following new Local Organisers: Claire Jones who has taken over as the Wiltshire Local Organiser; Eve Tigwell for taking on the Somerset Levels; Steve Hale who is the new Radipole and Lodmoor Local Organiser; Grant Bigg for taking on South Yorkshire; Henry Cook who is the new Local Organiser for Clwyd (coastal); Leon Woodrow who has taken over as the Hamford Water

Local Organiser; Anthony Harbott who is the new Essex Local Organiser; Stefan Walton who has taken over as the Pegwell Bay Local Organiser; Jenny Lynch for taking on Carlingford Lough; Peter Hearn for taking on Morecambe Bay North and Jonathan Jones who is the new Local Organiser for Skye and Lochalsh.

Our special thanks go out to Steve Madge, his Local Organiser (Gladys Grant) had this to say about him: "He is a totally amazing individual and one of the best bird watchers in the world - my two sons when they first started birding absolutely adored him as he always had time for them and wasn't at all condescending or superior with them. In the 80s he was leading tours all over the world to places that no one else went to and his books are amazing". Special thanks also to Veronica Fox, who supported her late husband, Keith, with his Local Organiser duties as well as being a WeBS counter in her own right. Thank you both for your support!

Desperately seeking organisers...

We are urgently seeking new Local Organisers for Angus; Buckinghamshire (South); Cheshire (south); Derbyshire; Durham; Halifax/Huddersfield area; Kent (east and west); Lochaber; Sutherland (excl. Moray Basin); Co. Down; Co. Londonderry and Co. Tyrone. If you would like to know more about becoming a WeBS Local Organiser please contact us at the WeBS Office webs@bto.org.

WeBS LOAC

LOAC Update

The Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) provides an opportunity for the counter network to improve communication with WeBS staff providing ideas, feedback and advice.

We are looking to hear from any Local Organisers who may be interested in serving on the LOAC. If you would like

to know more about what is involved please contact Heidi (webs@bto.org).

If you have any comments about any aspect of WeBS which you would like to bring to the attention of the LOAC, please get in touch with your Local Organiser or LOAC representative listed below.

WeBS LOAC Representatives

Southwest England

Eve Tigwell
eve.tigwell@zen.co.uk

Eastern England

Chris Gunn
donandchris@hotmail.co.uk

Midlands

Brian Moore
b_moore@ntlworld.com

Northern England

Colin Wells
colin.wells@rspb.org.uk

Wales

Andrew King
andrew.king53@virgin.net

South and East Scotland

Allan Brown
swans@allanwbrown.co.uk

North and West Scotland

Bob Swann
robert.swann@homecall.co.uk

Northern Ireland

Kerry Mackie
kerrymackie9@gmail.com

or

Shane Wolsey
shane.wolsey@btinternet.com

BACKCHAT

Word of mouth...

Vacant sites..

Do you have a friend who would make a good WeBS counter, or perhaps you have time to take on an additional site yourself? We are always looking for more help! Vacant sites and priority sites can be explored via the 'Find a vacant site' button on the webs homepage at www.bto.org/webs.



It is also possible to set up new sites, particularly where these would help fill gaps in coverage of certain habitat types and regions – contact the relevant Local Organiser or Heidi Mellan at the WeBS office to discuss.

Site photographs request

Following on from last year's appeal, we are still looking for photographs of every site for use in the WeBS Online Report. If we currently don't have a photograph of your site (please note that for complex sites with several sectors, we can only use one image) on the site pages of the report, but you have a photograph you would be happy for us to use, please send labelled images to webs@bto.org.

Training and Mentoring

Could you help someone learn the ins and outs of WeBS counts? If you are willing to run or help with local training days, or mentor less experienced counters by letting them accompany you on your counts, please let your Local Organiser know.

Snap shot



Coming from America!

WeBS counter, **Roger Riddington** tweeted this superb photograph of a vagrant White-rumped Sandpiper, seen on his WeBS count at Virkie, Shetland. Thanks Roger, and happy recording!

Calling all photographers and artists

We are always in need of good quality photographs and artwork of WeBS species for use in the WeBS annual report and WeBS newsletter. If you have artwork or images that you would be happy for us to use, with full credit given of course, please get in touch.

The WeBS team & contacts

Although the first port of call for counters should be their Local Organiser, many counters and Local Organisers are in regular contact with the WeBS team. For those that are not sure who to contact for various matters, the following 'Who's who' should help...

Graham Austin

WeBS Alerts, WeBS database management, Statistical analyses
graham.austin@bto.org

Matthew Baxter

Web Software Developer
matthew.baxter@bto.org

Neil Calbrade

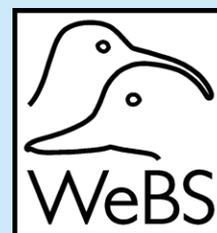
WeBS Low Tide Count Organiser, Data Requests, WeBS News Editor
neil.calbrade@bto.org

Teresa Frost

Management of WeBS, WeBS Core Counts, Annual Report
teresa.frost@bto.org

Heidi Mellan

WeBS Counter Network Organiser Counter and Local Organiser database management, WeBS Online
heidi.mellan@bto.org



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