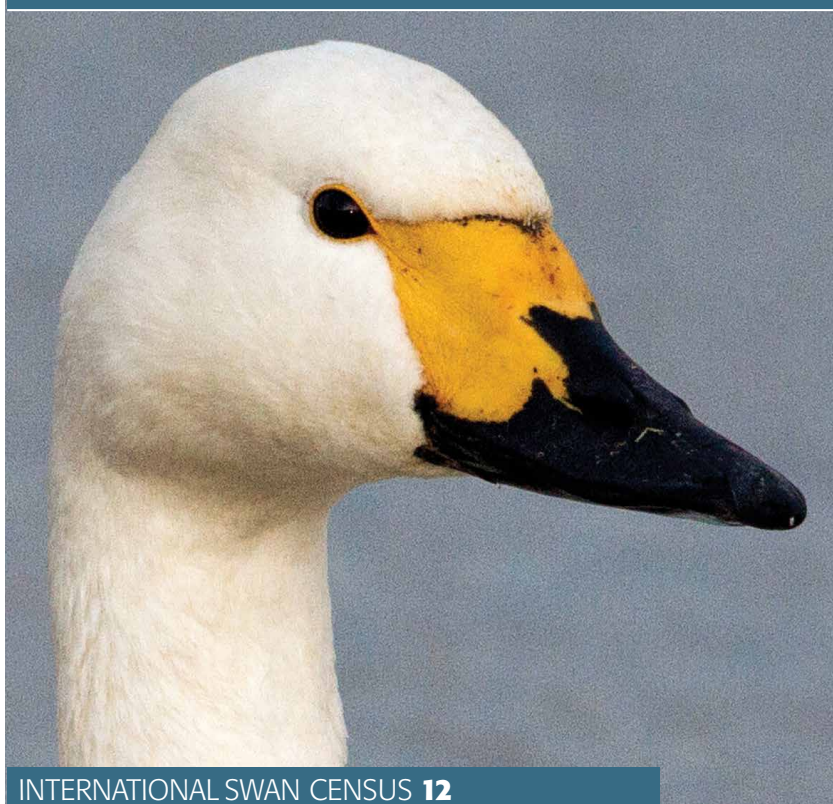


WeBSnews

The newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey



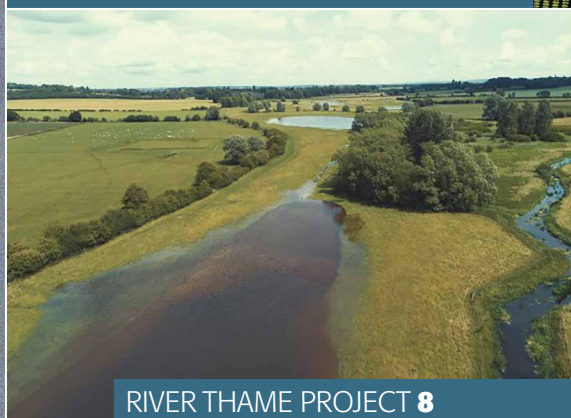
WeBS AT
UNIVERSITY
See page 16



INTERNATIONAL SWAN CENSUS 12



BARNACLE GOOSE RINGING 6



RIVER THAME PROJECT 8

ISSUE 37 • AUTUMN 2021

ALSO INSIDE

- 01 WeBS DURING THE PANDEMIC
- 02 FROM THE EDITOR
- 04 WeBS SITE IN THE SPOTLIGHT
- 06 BARNACLE GOOSE RINGING
- 08 RIVER THAME CONSERVATION TRUST PROJECT
- 10 WeBS SITE PRIORITISATION
- 12 INTERNATIONAL SWAN CENSUS
- 14 ESSEX PLAYING FIELDS AND FLOOD ALLEVIATION SITES
- 16 UNIVERSITY SOCIETY WeBS
- 17 LOW TIDE COUNT UPDATE
- 18 WeBS ONLINE IMPROVEMENTS
- 19 LOCAL ORGANISER NEWS
- 19 WeBS OBITUARIES
- 20 BACKCHAT

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

WeBS during the pandemic

The news in 2020 was dominated by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Although at the time of writing the majority of the restrictions have now been lifted, this was certainly not the case over the 2020/21 winter, which as expected, affected counters' ability to get out and do their WeBS counts.

On 23 March last year, the UK Government announced the first national lockdown. Although going out for daily exercise was allowed under the rules, carrying out surveys at this time was not and so surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, Nest Record Scheme, Waterways Breeding Bird Survey and Constant Effort Site ringing in

particular were hit by volunteers not being able to take part. Thankfully, these initial restrictions did not impact on WeBS as much, as the core recording period is September to March, and so the indices for the majority of species were unaffected. As a result we were able to produce the annual *Waterbirds in the UK 2019/20* report as usual.



in association with

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome...

...to the latest issue of *WeBS News*. In what has been another very difficult year for all of us, WeBS counts were hit by further lockdowns and restrictions during the peak winter period. We are currently looking at the data for last winter to see how much our reporting will be affected as a result.

In this issue, we hear from several WeBS counters who carry out their counts under differing circumstances including as part of their work (pg.14), as a university group (pg. 16) and as part of a recently formed Conservation Trust (pg. 8). However the counts are done, we are grateful for your efforts.

If your WeBS site ever hosts naturalised Barnacle Geese, be on the look out for birds that have been colour-ringed as part of a new study into their movements (pg. 6).



Neil Calbrade Editor & WeBS National Organiser



CONTINUED FROM COVER

As the year went on, two further lockdowns came into force in November 2020 and January 2021, with more stringent restrictions preventing many from carrying out their monthly WeBS count. These lockdowns came during the peak mid-winter period and impacted the January WeBS counts which feed into the International Waterbird Counts. Restrictions differed across the UK affecting distances that could be travelled, and group sizes. In Scotland, volunteers were clarified as being exempt from general public restrictions on the 19 June 2020, instead coming under 'FISA' guidance for environmental workers. BTO strongly recommended that volunteers followed guidance on social distancing if continuing to survey. Exemptions from general public restrictions were later applied in England

and Northern Ireland, and these helped some counters achieve coverage where the counter felt comfortable to and it was safe to do so.

THE IMPACT ON WeBS REPORTING

We are reviewing the full impact on WeBS and to what extent we will be able to produce the standard annual outputs, including the species indices, site totals and our usual *Waterbirds in the UK* report.

Early indications are that the most significant impact of lockdown restrictions and BTO guidance during the 2020/21 WeBS year was on the January and February counts, with March counts in Northern Ireland also not carried out. Due to differing rules and guidance across the UK, the impact varied between countries. Like-for-like comparisons suggest that for January 2021

WeBS NEWS

WeBS NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

Gill Birtles WeBS Counter Network Organiser, BTO gillian.birtles@bto.org
Kane Brides Research Officer, WWT kane.brides@wwt.org.uk
Neil Calbrade WeBS Officer, BTO neil.calbrade@bto.org
Lauren Evans WeBS Counter
Teresa Frost WeBS Manager, BTO teresa.frost@bto.org
Richard Hearn Bird Ringer
Nick Marriner WeBS Counter
Scott Petrek Bird Ringer
Danny Sedgwick WeBS Counter
Tom Simon WeBS Counter
Stephen Vickers Bird Ringer

Photography

Cover: Kane Brides, John Harding and River Thames Conservation Trust.
 Inside: Andy Bloomfield, Kane Brides, Neil Calbrade, Hannah Coburn, Mark Collier, Liz Cutting, Teresa Frost, Luke Marriner and Tom Simon.

NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

Design Neil Calbrade
Printing Swallowtail Print, Norwich

Thanks to Dawn Balmer, Gill Birtles, Teresa Frost, Geoff Hilton, Kersi Peck, Anna Robinson and Viola Ross-Smith for proofreading this newsletter.

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.



BTO
 The Nunnery, Thetford,
 Norfolk IP24 2PU
 Tel: 01842 750050
www.bto.org



RSPB
 The Lodge, Sandy,
 Bedfordshire SG19 2DL
 Tel: 01767 680551
www.rspb.org.uk



JNCC
 Monks House, City Road
 Peterborough PE1 1JY
 Tel: 01733 562626
www.jncc.gov.uk



WWT
 Slimbridge, Gloucestershire
 GL2 7BT
 Tel: 01453 891900
www.wwt.org.uk

Information in this Newsletter is compiled from a variety of sources and does not necessarily reflect the views of WeBS partner organisations. © BTO 2021 Published by BTO/RSPB/JNCC.



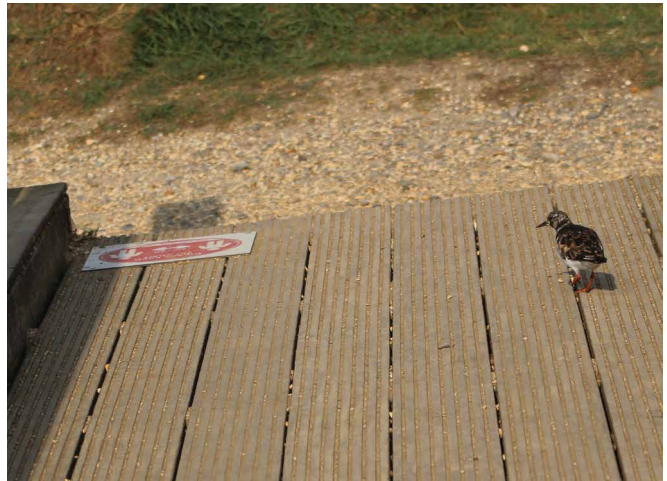
When you have finished with this magazine, pass it to a friend or recycle it.

compared to January 2020, visit submissions were at 68% for Scotland, 50% for England, 37% for Wales and 1% for Northern Ireland.

For many other months, the number of submissions was comparable or better than a year earlier, but the gaps, at what is the peak time for many species, are expected to cause difficulties in calculating species indices. Missing data for those core winter months will also affect the species site peaks in the WeBS Report Online and site totals (principal sites). Low-tide averages will also be affected, as most sites only carried out Low Tide Counts for November to December instead of November to February.

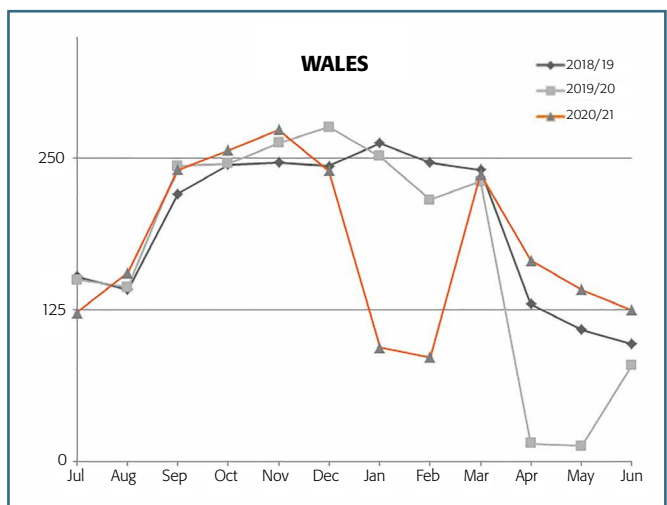
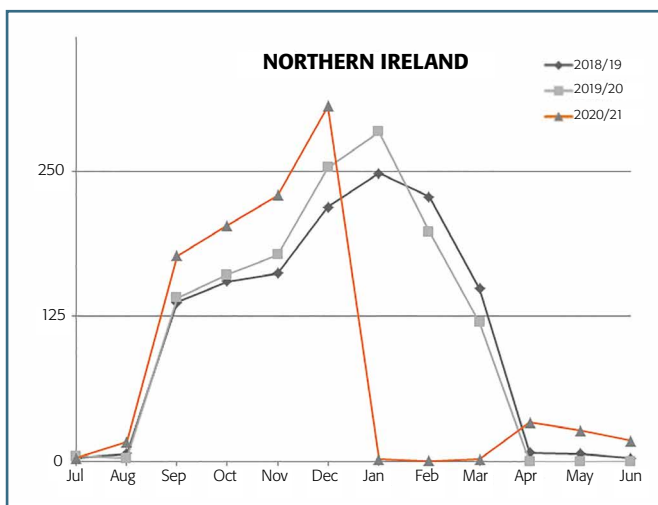
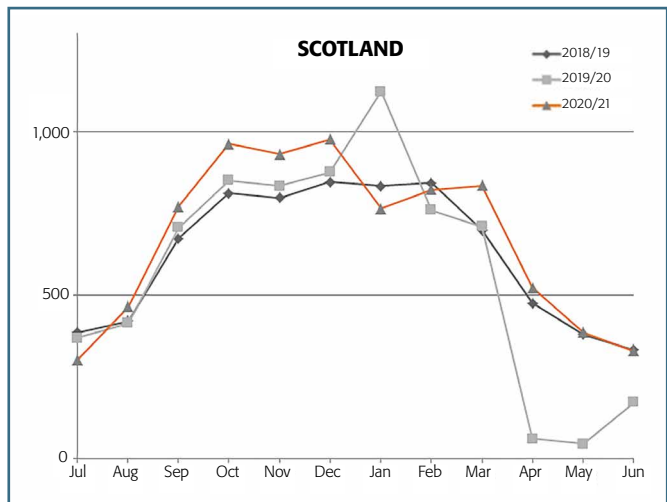
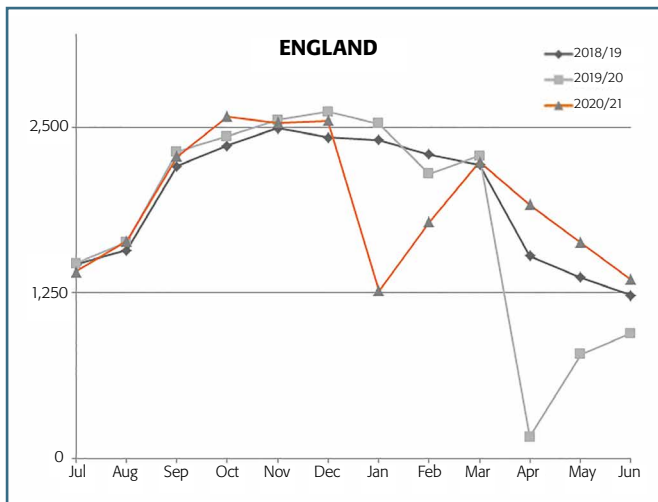
Analysis carried out so far suggests almost all species are affected, with perhaps a more pronounced impact on highly aggregated species. The graphs below show how the number of visits was affected, in total and in the four countries.

Work will continue on investigating the reporting impacts, so please keep an eye out for further announcements.



TURNSTONE BY TERESA FROST

▲ A Turnstone adhering to the social distancing notices.



▲ Count comparison of the last three years for the different countries showing the significant drop in 2020/21.

WeBS LOCATION SPOTLIGHT



Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve

A gravel pit situated on the outskirts of Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire may not sound that exciting, but for one young WeBS counter, this provides a wonderful site on his doorstep.

Danny Sedgwick WeBS Counter

The Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve is a fairly unassuming former gravel pit in the Ouse Valley, Milton Keynes. Most people, even some of the locals, use it as an extension of the river footpath, only stopping to see the resident Konik ponies, without really understanding their purpose. Never stopping to appreciate all the wonderful bird life which calls it home.

The site changes dramatically throughout the seasons. During the spring numerous islands pepper the site: some shingle, some vegetated. This creates a wonderful mosaic of habitats interspersed with pools of varying depths. At this time of year Little Ringed Plover and Oystercatcher, some of the star species, can be seen pairing

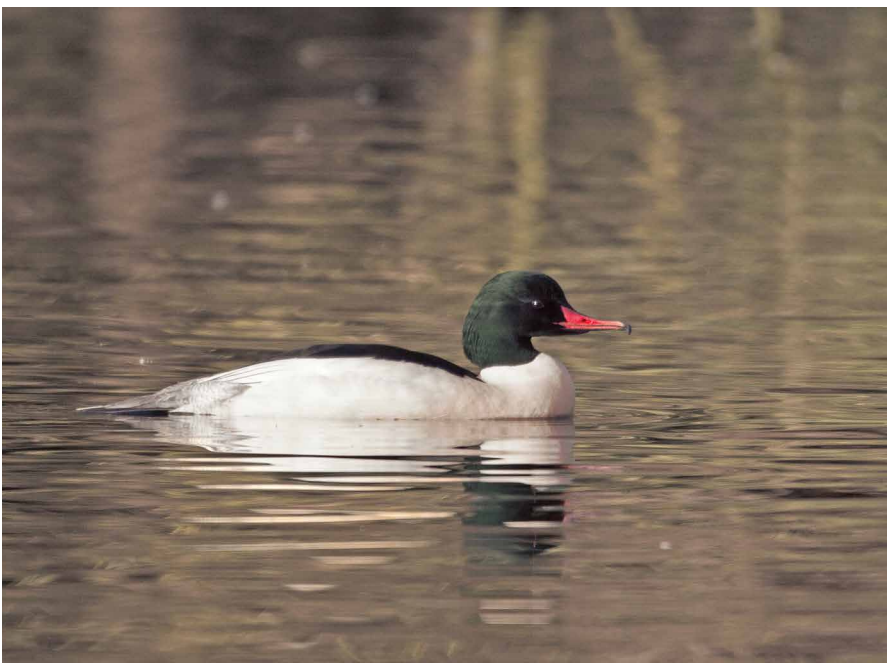
up ready for the breeding season ahead. In winter it lives up to its name – flooding regularly, often making the pathways impassable. Waterfowl love this new flooded landscape. Sizeable flocks of Wigeon, up to 50 birds, and large groups of Goosander take up residence almost immediately.

In early August the site is in a state of migratory flux. As birds begin to leave their breeding grounds, every visit, be it a WeBS Core Count day or not, becomes exciting – you never know what you are going to find. Could this be the day a Wood Sandpiper drops in? Or maybe something even more exciting? There is only one way to find out, and whilst the light is still on my side getting up at 4:00am doesn't feel like a chore.

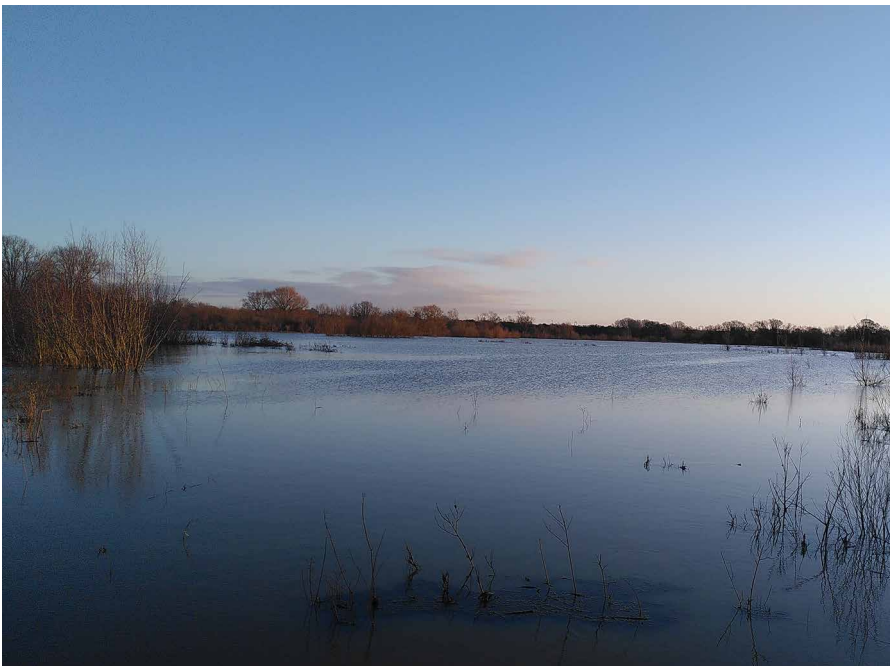
The site doesn't blow you away with rarities or nationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl, but what it does give you is a chance to appreciate the commoner and often overlooked species. A morning spent counting a raft of Tufted Duck or watching a Little Egret fish can grant you as much pleasure, if not more, than you finding a rarity.

Being a relatively new addition to the WeBS sites in Milton Keynes it has been an incredibly interesting experience documenting, and attempting to build a picture of, the bird life which uses the site throughout the year. Although I have only been doing the count for one year, I have witnessed a substantial change in the site: it has now matured and developed a uniqueness which isn't replicated elsewhere in Milton Keynes. This is owed, in part, to the Konik ponies which help control the vegetation on site further creating a diverse habitat. It will be an incredibly insightful experience monitoring the site's further development over the coming years, and seeing what effect this has on the distribution of both breeding and wintering birds.

I have had countless memorable encounters while doing the WeBS count for the site, but some of the highlights have to include: finding a male Pintail amongst a raft of Teal and Gadwall on a freezing cold February morning, (a bird new to me at the time and one of three on the site that winter); getting the best views I have ever had of a Common Snipe, feeding out in the open, in



GOOSANDER BY JOHN HARDING



▲ The Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve changes dramatically in summer (top) and winter (bottom).

front of a hide; watching the Great Crested Grebe chicks learning to fish, ably assisted by their parents; and finally finding a Black-tailed Godwit, a local rarity, amongst a group of Lapwings and Black-headed Gulls.

I hope I have demonstrated through my experience of the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve that the ordinary can be extraordinary, when time is given

to appreciate it, and that it is well worth monitoring any local site because you never know what could turn up! Any local site, no matter the size or number of rare birds, is important and should be treasured.

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

WeBS snippets



An extinct goose found in ancient art

A previously undescribed species of goose may have been discovered in a 4,600 year old Egyptian painting. The bird, which looks superficially similar to a Red-breasted Goose, was noticed by a University of Queensland researcher in a painting 'Meidum Geese' which has been described as Egypt's Mona Lisa. Whether or not this finding is just a case of artistic license is unknown but it does give a fascinating insight into what may have been an ancient, now extinct, species.

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 paper copies of either or both of these publications, please contact **webs@bto.org** to let us know. Both the report and newsletter are available to download from the website at: **www.bto.org/webs-publications**

DANNY SEDGWICK

Barnacle Geese in a changing world – the British naturalised population

Increasing numbers of Naturalised Barnacle Geese are now well established in England and Wales and colour-ringing may give insights into their movements and survival.

Kane Brides, Scott Petrek, Stephen Vickers & Richard Hearn

WeBS STAT...
348%
 The increase in the
 Naturalised Barnacle
 Goose population
 since 1993/94.

Britain hosts three populations of Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, two of which are entirely migratory, spending the winter on our shores from Greenland and Svalbard. Those migrating from Greenland tend to winter on the west coast of Scotland and Ireland, with the bulk of the population wintering on the Isle of Islay, whilst those migrating from Svalbard winter chiefly on the Solway Firth, with smaller groups occasionally wintering on the coast of northeast Britain. The smallest of the three populations is the naturalised population, which occurs all year round and also breeds in Britain. Most of this population is found in England and Wales, with smaller numbers occurring in Scotland. Presumably originating from a mixture of once captive stock, immigrants from the Dutch/Russian population or injured birds that no longer migrate, the naturalised population is estimated by WeBS to number around 4,000 birds (Frost *et al.* 2021).

BARNACLE GEESSE IN A CHANGING WORLD

The conservation status of the three migratory Barnacle Goose populations in Europe (Greenland, Svalbard and Russian) has over the last half century dramatically changed, and because of this there are concerns regarding its potential impact on other flora and fauna, especially on Arctic ecosystems (Jensen *et al.* 2018). In some Range States, the species is causing increasing damage to agriculture and is also posing increasing risk to air safety. The development of an International Single Species Management Plan (ISSMP) was identified as a priority



BARNACLE GEESSE BY ANDY BLOOMFIELD

▲ **Keep a look out for colour-ringed Barnacle Geese on your WeBS site.**

and undertaken by the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

Given future management of the wild migratory populations, it would be advantageous to better understand any connectivity that occurs between the migratory and naturalised populations, as is being studied in other European countries. As reported by Mitchell *et al.* (2021), confirmation already exists that Scottish-hatched Barnacle Geese are mixing with migratory flocks. Over the water in the Netherlands, intensive ringing has shown birds from the Russian population having stopped migrating altogether and expanding their breeding range, with once migratory birds now breeding in the Netherlands (which is still the wintering area for most birds) and resident all year round. Is this a future glimpse into how other

goose species may react to increasing populations and food availability? Furthermore, colour-marked birds from the Dutch resident naturalised population have already been sighted in Britain.

Despite flocks being found at sites across Britain, much still remains unknown about the movements and demography of this naturalised population. The absence of such fundamental information, such as data on movements, survival and mortality has hindered efforts to understand the demographic causes of the observed increased in population size.

RINGING OF BARNACLE GEESSE

Not surprisingly the capture and ringing of Barnacle Geese in Britain and Ireland has mainly been concentrated on the two migratory populations, with

both populations having been intensively studied over the years, the Svalbard population since 1973! Cannon netting has been used to colour ring migratory birds on their UK wintering grounds, whilst on their breeding grounds (mainly on Svalbard) large numbers can be rounded up and colour ringed when flightless during their annual moult, which have bolstered the number colour-marked.

To date, the naturalised population has received little attention by way of colour-marking on a large scale. Individual projects in Scotland (ran by Carl Mitchell), Wales (by SCAN Ringing Group / Steve Dodd) and Bedfordshire (by the Ivel Ringing Group), have, over the years provided fascinating glimpses into the movements of our so-called resident population. Colour-marking has shown birds marked at Ynys-Hir in Wales to be linked with the breeding population in the Lake District, with birds moving c.230 km each spring to Cumbria (Dodd *et al.* 2017). Those marked in Bedfordshire have been known to cross the English Channel, with sightings received from France (M. Reed pers. comm.), whilst goslings hatched and raised in Scotland have been sighted in Norway and Iceland, seemingly having joined their wild migratory counterparts (Mitchell *et al.* 2021).

NEW COLOUR-MARKING PROJECT

To deliver up to date information on this population, volunteers from the Waterbird Colour-marking Group have embarked on a new colour-marking project, with the aims of i) better understanding movements between naturalised sub-populations in Britain, ii) assessing whether connectivity between our naturalised population and other populations in Europe occurs and to what degree this happens and iii) producing the first survival estimate of this population.

As wildfowl species undergo a complete moult which renders them flightless for several weeks each year, it's during this time that large numbers of geese can be rounded up, caught and ringed to allow further study. July 2021 saw the first of the round-ups, which we hope will span several years



KANE BRIDGES

▲ A colour-ringed Barnacle Goose ready for release.

at sites across England and Wales. All birds have been colour-marked with an engraved blue ring with an alphanumeric code in white lettering (*e.g.*, A96). On the opposite leg the birds are ringed with a metal ring, along with a plain colour-ring, either above or below the metal ring to denote the ringing site.

The catches were a great success with the team starting at Ullswater in the Lake District, Cumbria where 158 birds were rounded up, including catching a bird that had previously been ringed at Ynys-Hir, Wales. Calling upon local ringers and groups to help with ringing effort and to cut down on travel due to COVID-19 precautions, a further 35 birds were caught in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire, 431 at Holkham and 106 at Pensthorpe in Norfolk, followed by 46 birds colour-marked with the Llangorse Ringing Group in Powys. These catches, twinned with attempts

at catching breeding birds earlier in the year, have seen over 800 Barnacle Geese caught and colour-marked during 2021 alone.

FUTURE CATCHING & SIGHTINGS

As we intend to catch and colour-mark birds for a number of years, we are looking to expand catching effort, to incorporate other sites in areas where Naturalised Barnacle Geese occur. We are asking WeBS counters where Barnacle Geese occur at their sites or when they are out birding, to check any birds for colour rings. Of course, sightings of colour-marked birds are most welcome and to help with the expected volume of re-sightings as the project grows, we have created an online re-sightings/histories feedback portal: www.waterbirdcolourmarking.org/barnacle-geese with sightings also being sent to the BTO to be included in the national dataset.

FIND OUT MORE

Dodd, S.G. 2017. Colour-ring resightings and flock counts link the increasing Welsh wintering Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* flock to a naturalised breeding population in the Lake District. *Ringing & Migration* **32**: 54–57

Jensen, G.H., Madsen, J., Nagy, S. & Lewis, M. (Compilers) 2018. *AEWA International Single Species Management Plan for the Barnacle Goose (Branta leucopsis) - Russia/Germany & Netherlands population, East Greenland/Scotland & Ireland population, Svalbard/South-west Scotland population.* AEWA Technical Series No. 70. Bonn, Germany.

Mitchell, C., Macdonald, D., Bates, B. & Pink, R. 2021. Movements of naturalised Barnacle Geese ringed in Strathspey. *Scottish Birds* **41**: 3–9.

River Thame – the value of an inland river WeBS project

Five years since its inception, an exciting project along the River Thame has already yielded rewards.

Nick Marriner Volunteer Trustee and WeBS coordinator



It may not be on too many people's list of birding hotspots but an exciting new partnership between BTO and the River Thame Conservation Trust (RTCT) has put the River Thame firmly on the local birding map.

For those of you wondering where the River Thame is, its headwaters rise east of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire where it flows south west into Oxfordshire past Thame before heading south to complete its c.40 mile journey towards the confluence with the Thames at Dorchester.

RTCT was established in 2012 with a mission to better understand and improve the biodiversity of the river but had little understanding of presence, distribution and/or the abundance of birds using the river and its floodplain.

With the fantastic support of BTO, a formal WeBS project was set up in 2015 with RTCT acting as local organiser overseeing 16 individual survey sectors, recruiting/training volunteers and managing the day to day running of the project.

Our first Core Count took place on Sunday 13 December 2015. Since then, the project has gone from strength to strength; 25 volunteers have been involved in surveying (10 of whom have not missed a month) and have recorded 53 wetland bird species across 897 visits and generated 5,807 records.

The records are now giving a clear picture of the wetland bird life of the river and its floodplain.



As the graph opposite shows, the records have highlighted two key areas with greater abundance of wetland birds centred around the Aylesbury Sewage Treatment Works/Eythrope area and the Shabbington/Ickford/Waterperry area.

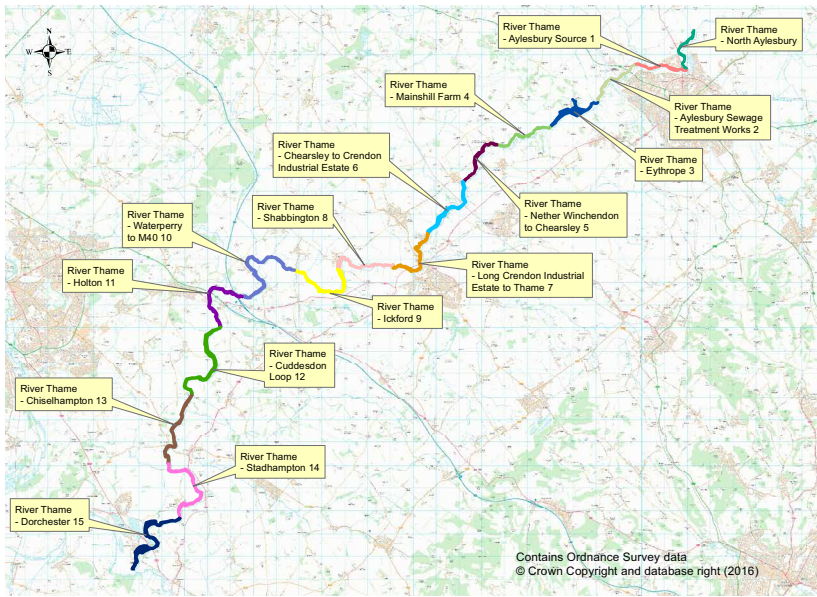
The wet winter of 2020/21 established the Waterperry – M40 sector as one of the most exciting sites in Oxfordshire with counts of 1,400 Teal, 1,050 Wigeon, 105 Pintail, 83 Shoveler, 31 Gadwall, 189 Snipe and three Jack Snipe. Likewise, the Aylesbury STW sector established its profile in Buckinghamshire with records of Garganey, Wood Sandpiper and Jack Snipe.

The WeBS data has made a huge impact on the profile of the river and the work of RTCT with:

HABITAT CREATION PROJECTS

RTCT has used WeBS data as a basis for two new major wetland habitat creation projects in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust.

At Eythrope, a major new wetland complex has been created in partnership with the Waddesdon Estate comprising of a complex of offline wetland, river backwaters and new scrapes. Completed in 2020 the site is proving a real draw for passage waders with Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper,



▲ The 16 sectors that make up the River Thames project site.

Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Jack Snipe and Grey Plover as well as an overwintering Great White Egret.

At Waterstock, a rotary ditcher has been used to create a complex of new wetland scrapes on the new Local Wildlife Site floodplain. Green Sandpiper was recorded on the first survey after completion!

FORMAL DESIGNATION OF SITES

Surveys in the Ickford to Waterperry sectors have uncovered a real gem of an area of c.4 km of undisturbed river and rough grazing floodplain. Volunteers worked hard to engage landowners and secured their permission to apply for formal Local (County) Wildlife Site designation on two specific sites. Both were approved in 2019.

SPECIES PROTECTION

The River Thames holds two populations of breeding Curlew and WeBS surveys have helped to keep track on their fortunes. Building on this the project has formed the basis of local coverage for this year’s BTO Breeding Waders of Wetland Meadows (BWWM) survey with existing volunteers providing data for BWWM sites along with their WeBS visits.

RTCT also now sits as catchment lead for the River Thames on the newly formed Upper Thames Wader Group working with other key catchments to set up practical projects in support of our breeding Curlew.

NEW RECORDS

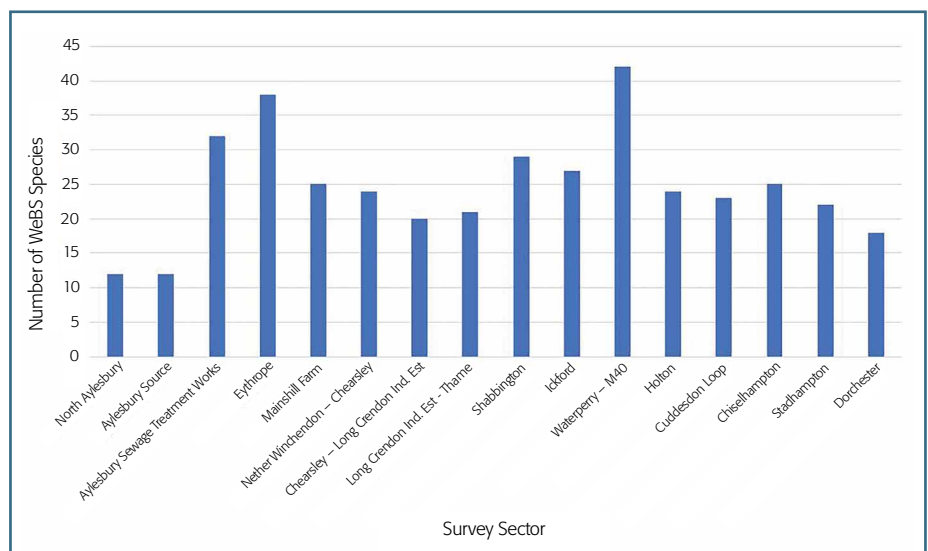
WeBS has also helped uncover exciting new records in what is a relatively unrecorded area. In addition to the wintering wildfowl, local rarities such as Gannet, Kittiwake, Osprey, Great Skua and Marsh Harrier have been recorded.

More excitingly, WeBS surveys have recorded the growing success of Goosander on the river, which are a rare wintering, and previously non-breeding, species locally. Growing numbers have overwintered with up to 13 birds recorded in 2020/21. A first breeding pair was found on the river in 2020 and a second pair with five fledged young was discovered in 2021 (a first ever record of breeding Goosander in Oxfordshire!).

The first five years of the project have helped establish a baseline from which we hope to build a growing dataset to track trends not only on the river but also of specific site based projects.

Previously the River Thames was known as a birding desert locally with very few, if any, sites watched on a regular basis. Since then, WeBS has firmly put the river on the birding map showing what can be done with a structured and focused surveying effort.

RTCT is rightly proud of, and grateful for, the work of its dedicated team of volunteers who have contributed thousands of hours of their time to support the project. Equally we are grateful to the BTO for its support in setting up and supporting the project – a real example of a volunteer-led partnership that is starting to make a big difference on the ground.



▲ The number of WeBS species recorded by survey sector.

Prioritising WeBS site coverage

Have you ever wondered why certain sites are identified as being a key site or higher priority in the WeBS Vacant Sites online maps? Several factors need to be considered in order to prioritise coverage of these sites.

Teresa Frost WeBS Manager

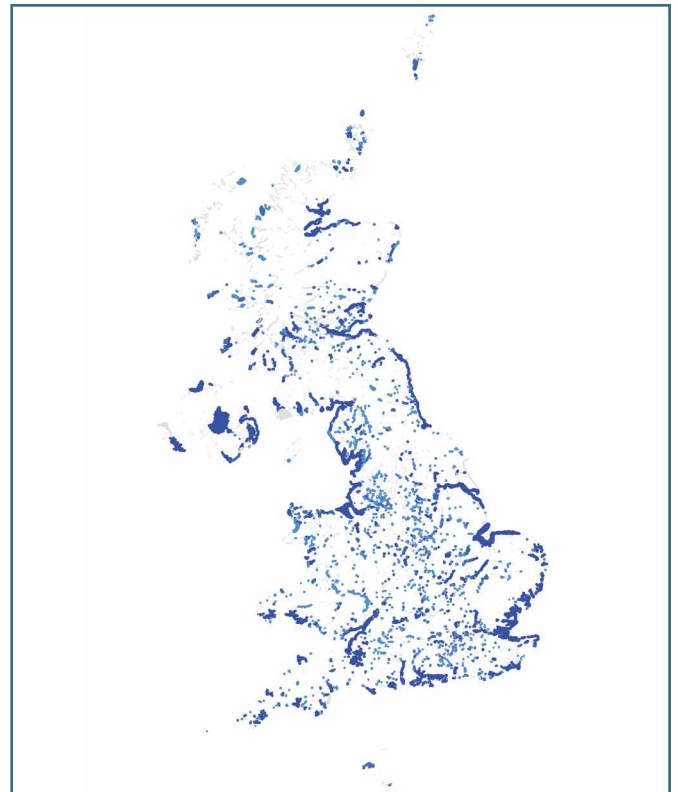
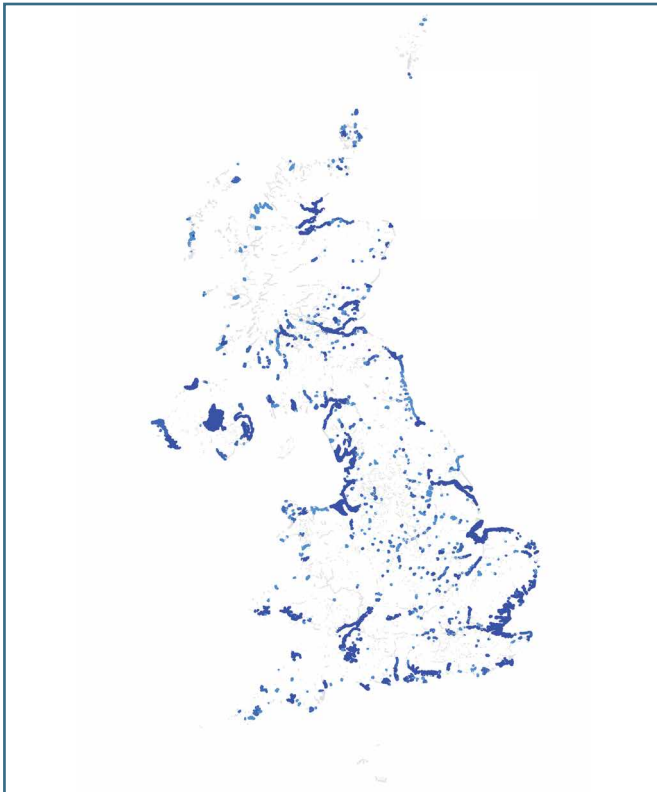
First things first: all WeBS counts are important and useful! Your counts are valuable in so many ways, and I'll be returning to why later. We are grateful to each and every one of you for collecting such important data.

There are over 4,000 WeBS count sectors that are currently not being regularly counted. We have two main ways of recruiting people to fill the gaps. The first is our marvellous team, 140 strong, of volunteer Local Organisers, who can approach people directly and through local bird clubs and groups. The second is those who hear about WeBS through social media, articles or BTO training courses and who usually find their way to the vacant sites map on the WeBS website.

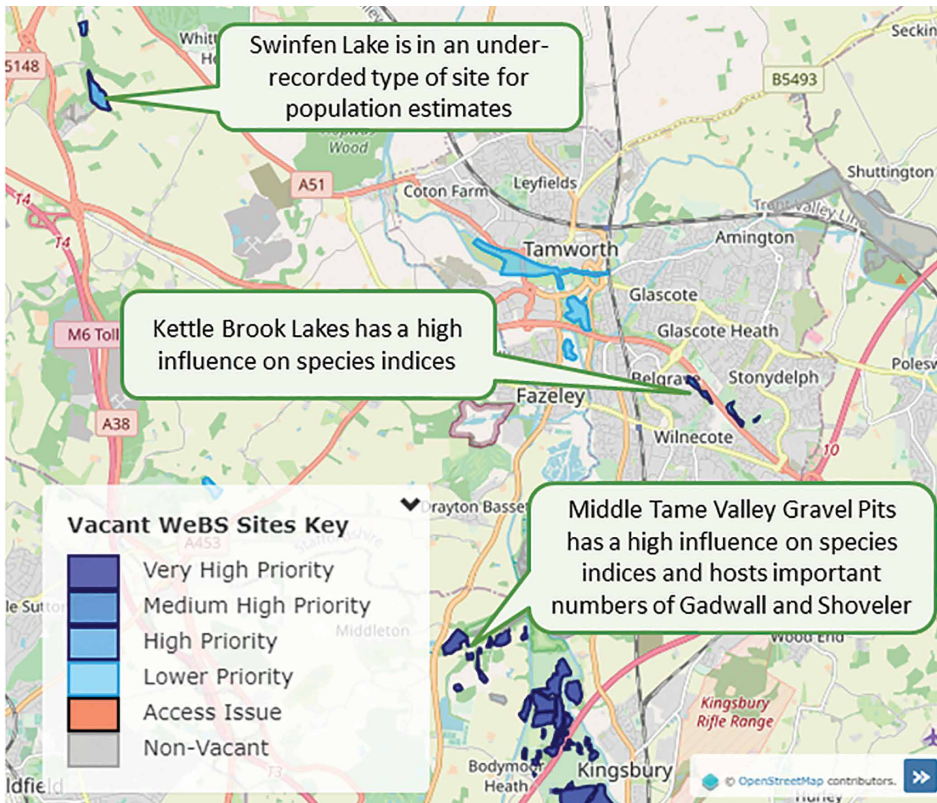
On the Vacant Sites map we show all WeBS sites. The ones that are already being counted are coloured grey, and the ones that need a counter

are shown in shades of blue. The darkness of the blue relates to the priority of the site, with high priority sites in darker shades and a dark blue edge, and all the other vacant sites in a lighter blue with a light blue edge. If we have been told that there is an access issue for the site, it is still shown, but coloured orange.

If a potential counter looks at the map, they might only have a few sites near them that suit their interest – perhaps how far they are willing to travel, whether they have access to a car, and whether they would prefer a certain type of wetland. The Local Organiser can help them find a site that suits them in terms of their skills and experience in identification and counting. Priority status is just one more thing to consider after all of these factors – all else being equal, it is helpful for us for the higher priority sites to be chosen.



▲ All priority WeBS sites prior to the review (left) and following the review (right) which increased the number of priority sites in inland areas. Higher priorities are in in darker blues.



▲ Screenshot of the map at www.bto.org/webs-vacant-sites with example reasons of why some of the vacant sites are higher priority.

HOW IS THE PRIORITY LEVEL SET?

We have just completed a review of the priority status for all sites, based on current national reporting needs. We considered four aspects which were used to score each site individually and then combined into a total score that determined the priority. These were:

1. Sites that hold nationally and internationally important numbers of waterbirds, according to the most recent five year mean of peak counts;
2. Sites that strongly influence one or more national species indices and trends;
3. Sites in two environmental strata that are currently under-represented in WeBS when estimating numbers of widespread waterbird species;
4. Sites that are nationally protected for waterbirds.

Some sites this scoring picked out might surprise you. For example some small inland waterbodies are very important for producing the Mandarin Duck index or are under-represented in our population estimate analyses. In the past most sites identified as higher priority were around the coast, but the new scoring has identified many sites in central Britain which are particularly helpful to get covered where possible.

WILL THE PRIORITIES CHANGE AGAIN?

It is likely that statuses will be reviewed again in the future, for example if we make any changes in the way WeBS counts are analysed, which would change some of the scoring decisions. As a counter this won't affect you, any more than the recent changes have. Whichever site(s) you are counting, you are making a vital contribution, both on a national level to our understanding and conservation of waterbirds, but just as importantly on a local level, for management and protection of the site you count at, or local research.

Your WeBS Core Count priority dates for the 2021–2022 season...

2021...

10 October

7 November

19 December

2022...

23 January

20 February

20 March

17 April

15 May

19 June

17 July

14 August

11 September

9 October

13 November

11 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

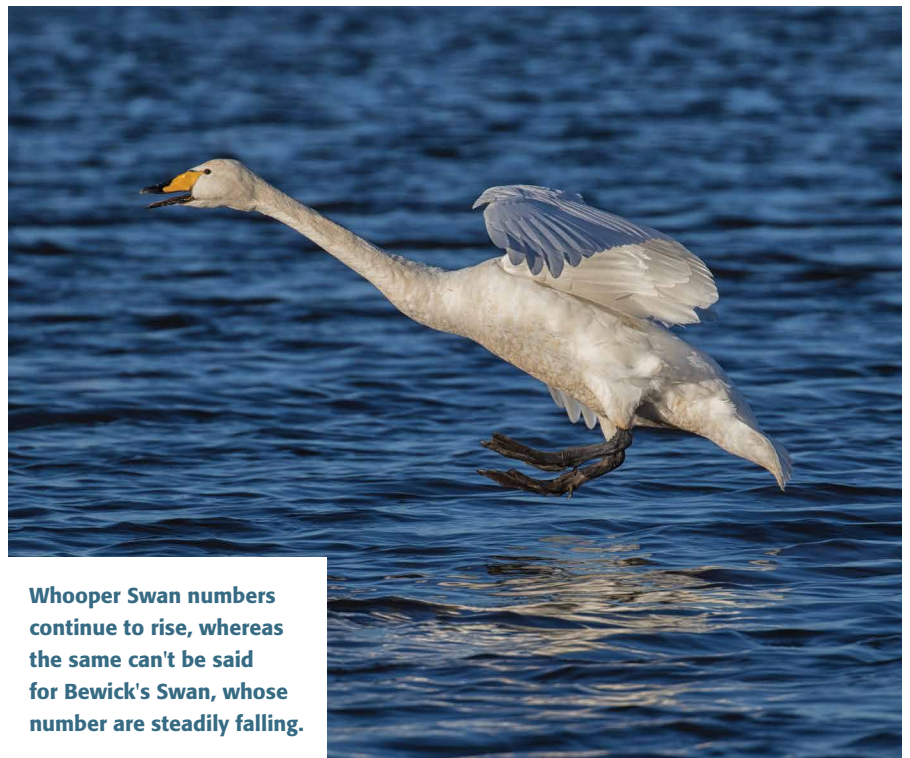
Waterbird counters join forces to help with the International Swan Census

The latest International Swan Census results show mixed fortunes for Whooper and Bewick's Swans.

Kane Brides Research Officer, WWT

January 2020 saw the 9th International Swan Census (ISC) take place, with submitted counts contributing to the revision of the Icelandic Whooper and the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population estimates. The census also aims to provide up to date information on the swans' distribution, breeding success and habitat choice.

Given the variety of habitats that both species occur in, a targeted and coordinated effort is needed to ensure that as near complete coverage as possible is achieved, particularly to ensure that birds using non-wetland habitats at the time of the census are counted. As for a few wildfowl species (such as Pink-footed Geese and Icelandic Greylag Geese), standalone species-specific surveys, separate to in-country monitoring schemes like WeBS and its Irish counterpart I-WeBS, are needed to derive new population estimates for the Whooper and Bewick's Swans. It is, therefore, quite a task to bring everything together. During the coordinated count weekend, the combined effort and support of the WeBS, I-WeBS, Irish Whooper Swan Study Group and Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) networks across Britain and Ireland was needed in order to check wetlands, agricultural land and other habitats for the two migratory swan species. Whilst waterbird counters in Britain and Ireland were out in force, our colleagues over the water in Iceland undertook ground and aerial counts to assess the number



Whooper Swan numbers continue to rise, whereas the same can't be said for Bewick's Swan, whose number are steadily falling.

of Whooper Swans still in the country at the time of the census.

All the counts from Britain, Ireland and Iceland have now been collated and the outcomes highlight very different fortunes for the two species. As per each census since 1995, results from 2020 show that the Icelandic Whooper Swan population has continued to increase, with numbers rising by 27.2% from 34,004 birds in 2015 to 43,255 in January 2020 (Brides *et al.* in press). The population now stands at almost three times the size it was in 1995, when the lowest estimate (15,842 individuals) was recorded. During the 2020

census, England and the Republic of Ireland held the highest proportion of the population. Despite numbers generally rising in most countries, censuses have indicated a south-easterly shift in the mid-winter distribution of the population with an increasing proportion seen in England during each census.

Troublingly, for Bewick's Swans wintering in Britain and Ireland, the 2020 census results paint a very different picture. A total of 1,290 birds was recorded in Britain and Ireland, which represents a decline of 70.6% compared with the total recorded in 2015 and is by far the lowest

census total to date. In Britain, the majority of the birds were recorded at two sites: The Ouse Washes (Norfolk/Cambridgeshire) and the Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire). In Ireland, two sites held a total of 12 birds between them and it is clear from the ever-decreasing numbers that Bewick's Swan is becoming an increasingly scarce bird there.

The lower number of Bewick's Swans recorded during the 2020 census is likely due to the contributing factors of an overall population decline twinned with the so called 'short-stopping' phenomenon, whereby the birds winter further east within Europe than before. At the time of writing, results from elsewhere

along the flyway of the Northwest European population are still being collated. Given the low numbers recorded in Britain and Ireland, it will be interesting to see how these results compare with the bigger picture.

Our sincere and hearty thanks go to the many volunteers who have taken part in the ISC. It truly is a team effort, bringing together waterbird count volunteers from across the flyways to better understand our swan populations. We really could not do this without you!

The results of the Icelandic Whooper Swan census can be found on the GSMP website and detailed results will be published later in 2021 in Brides *et al.* (in

press), whilst overall results for the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population will be published in due course by the IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group.

.....
[Check out the GSMP website at https://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/our-work/goose-swan-monitoring-programme/species-accounts/whooper-swan/](https://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/our-work/goose-swan-monitoring-programme/species-accounts/whooper-swan/)

FIND OUT MORE

Brides, K., Wood, K.A., Hall, C., Burke, B., McElwaine, G., Einarsson, Ó., Calbrade, N., Hill, Ó. & Rees, E. In Press. 2021. The Icelandic Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* population: current status and long-term (1986–2020) trends in its numbers and distribution. *Wildfowl* 71

WeBS ONLINE

Count not carried out

In order to help both Local Organisers and the WeBS Office when chasing for data at the end of the year, it will soon be easier to note where counts were not carried out...

Perhaps one of the least known and understood options in WeBS Online is the tick box on the data entry pages that say "Specify that no count was carried out". As a counter, you might wonder why we would want to know about the times you didn't do a WeBS count!

The reason why it helps us is because in July at the end of each WeBS year, we ask Local Organisers to start contacting their team to check they've remembered to submit all their Core Counts, and then later in the autumn the BTO WeBS Office starts chasing for late data that still haven't been submitted. If you've already used the "no count" option for the months where you were unable to carry out the count, then your Local Organiser can see this and know they don't need to contact you.

In the past this has been a laborious activity, so we have been making some changes to make this process more efficient all round. On page 18 we explain some of the improvements we have made for Local Organisers which make it easier for them to specify the No Counts on your behalf. But we are also making some changes to the data entry pages. You will start to notice that after you have submitted a count, the system will check if it has at least one visit for the site in all the previous months of the WeBS year and prompt you to either

submit those counts, or to specify that no count was carried out in those months. The system will fill in the Priority Core Count date. A similar prompt will be given for Low Tide Counts.

You can ignore the warning box, but it will really help if you can let us know the months that you didn't carry out counts (including summer months).

✓ Count Submitted

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

🔔 You have successfully entered a count for 10/09/2021, but no primary count have been recorded for this location for some earlier month(s) for WeBS year 2021.

July, August

Please enter your count(s), or specify no counts, using the Enter new counts for the same site button below.

Create no count subs

Use the drop-down below to select a location. Then use the tick boxes to select which dates you want to create 'No Count' subs for.

Select a location:

Watersmuir Wood Reservoir

25 Jul 2021	22 Aug 2021
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

🔔 If a date is greyed out, this means a primary count for that month already exists.

Essex playing fields and flood alleviation sites: a look at some less obvious sites for WeBS

For most counters, WeBS Counts are done in our free time, but some are able to combine them with their day jobs.

Tom Simon WeBS Counter

Sunrise at Thornwood Common where Snipe are an annual migratory species.



THORNWOOD COMMON BY TOM SIMON; SNIFE BY LIZ CUTTING

The rural, rolling landscape of mid-Essex might not seem the most logical place to establish WeBS sites, but that is what I've done in my role with Epping Forest District Council's (EFDC) Countrycare Service.

Around the town of North Weald, there are four flood alleviation scheme catchment areas and Thornwood Common Flood

Meadow Local Nature Reserve is one I survey as part of WeBS.

Thornwood Common Flood Meadow was the last flood alleviation scheme developed on North Weald parish by EFDC and its partners. Completed in 1998, the site is managed primarily for flood alleviation, but within this remit the meadows are also being managed for nature

conservation. This was reflected by its designation as a Local Nature Reserve in December 2004.

Up against the sculpted bank, there is an area of almost permanent wet ground on which reed mace and *Juncus* have become established. Additionally, the site is generally left undisturbed by visitors, and so it has proven popular with wintering

Snipe which will return there in mid-October and head off again by April. The largest flock so far recorded is 11 and we have aimed to extend the area of the variable height sward to give them more foraging opportunities.

By surveying regularly, other species get found there occasionally, such as Mallard and even more occasional records of Gadwall and Teal. The other wetland bird found here semi-consistently is Kingfisher, which hunt in the long, winding ditches that cross the site.

Kestrels also hunt in the wildflower meadows and, but for a few hundred meters, Merlin would be on the site species list; I found one by the road after leaving Thornwood Common and driving to my next WeBS site on a Core Count morning in early 2020 and that would have meant the 'full set' of British falcons being recorded here.

The reason for making this and others into WeBS sites was to highlight the importance of an arguably unassuming wet field for migrating Snipe, despite the relatively small size and apparent remoteness in relation to other larger areas of wetlands.



TOWN MEAD LEISURE PARK BY TOM SIMON

I survey another WeBS site for similar reasons: Town Mead Leisure Park (TMLP) is managed by Waltham Abbey Town Council in Essex and happens to be just behind our depot. When I was walking to work one day, I recognised the familiar sound of Wigeon and it turns out that this playing field helps to support about

90 Wigeon throughout the winter. Despite the urban fringe setting, this is one of the larger flocks of Wigeon found in the Lee Valley.

This flock seem to divide their time between here and Cornmill Meadows in the Lee Valley Regional Park, just north of Waltham Abbey, with the River Lee running parallel with the western edge of TMLP. Cornmill Meadows is within the Cornmill Stream and Old River Lea SSSI. On a more permanent basis, about 200 Black-headed Gulls spend time on the playing fields in the early morning.

Surveying wildfowl like this can give you experiences that you wouldn't get from a hide, like having the Wigeon come waddling towards you and feed close by without being too alarmed. This tends only to happen during the early morning counts. During the day, they can be a little more circumspect and appear to stay near the largish pond which is a handy 'safe area' for them to dash to if disturbed.

To summarise, I feel that the sites I survey represent the importance of seemingly uninspiring and perhaps unlikely sites that are vital to migrating wildfowl.



WIGEON BY TOM SIMON

▲ Wigeon winter on the Town Mead Leisure Park.

University society WeBS

In Issue 34 of *WeBS News*, we featured an article about a university bird society that has been undertaking WeBS counts, and now another university has also taken on counts.

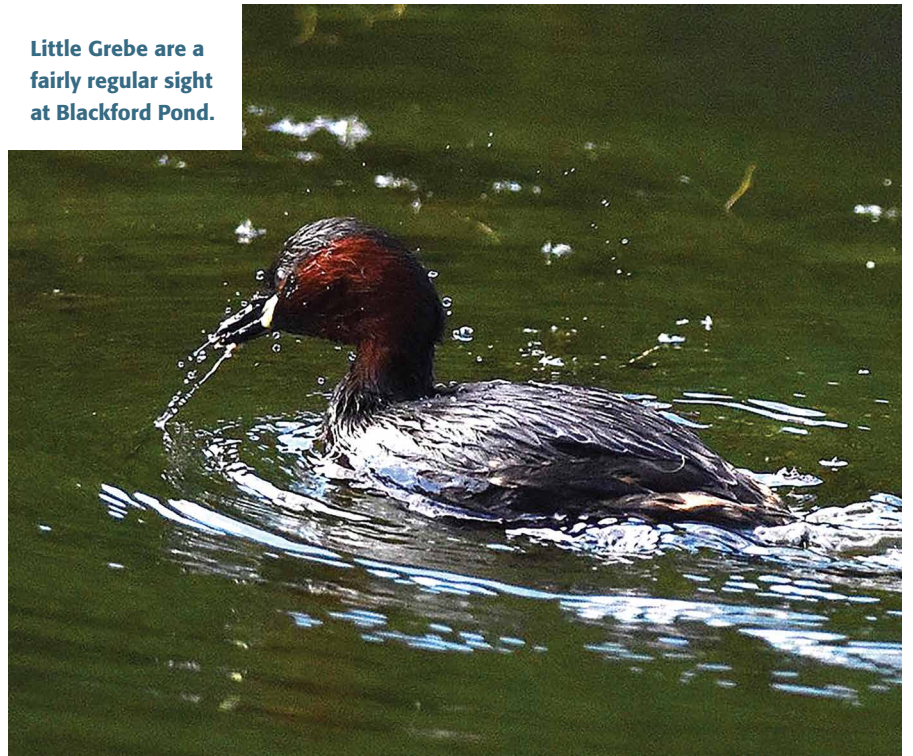
Lauren Evans WeBS Counter

The Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill Local Nature Reserve is a popular woodland in southern Edinburgh, and held within is Blackford Pond, one of Lothian's WeBS Core Count sites. Although small, Blackford Pond holds a pair of breeding Mute Swans and their cygnets, Moorhens, Coots, Little Grebes and a variety of duck species. Elsewhere, the local nature reserve boasts breeding Dippers and numerous Grey Wagtails as well as being a great place to see Treecreepers, Nuthatches and Great Spotted Woodpeckers.

I took over the role of WeBS counter last autumn after my university course inspired me to put the field skills I had learnt in class into practice. I contacted Lothian Regional BTO group to see if there were any local volunteering opportunities available, and Allan Duncan kindly suggested I take over the WeBS count of Blackford Pond. This was my first experience carrying out a nationally organised survey and I really enjoyed understanding the methodology as well as the feeling of contributing to BTO data.

Studying in Edinburgh means I am lucky enough to be part of the University of Edinburgh Ornithological Society (or BirdSoc as its affectionately known) which was set up due to the hard work of Gavin Woodbridge, Phoebe Owen and Sorrel Lyall. BirdSoc is made up of students, studying a diverse variety of subjects, with a common interest in birds, whether as a complete beginner or an 'A' permit ringer. As a society we run a range of walks, talks and workshops. Some of my favourites from the past year have been 'Birding with your eyes shut' by

Little Grebe are a fairly regular sight at Blackford Pond.



LITTLE GREBE BY HANNAH COBURN

BTO Scotland's Ben Darvill, our bird themed virtual pub quiz and a brilliant talk on Urban Ecology by David Dominoni. Hopefully, as restrictions continue to relax next year we'll be able to run trips a little further afield as well as return to birding together as a group.

In March this year, as a committee, we decided that BirdSoc would take over the WeBS counts of Blackford Pond as a society. Unfortunately, under the restrictions at that time, we could not hold an in-person session on conducting the WeBS counts. We did however receive a very informative online presentation from Stephen Metcalfe on some of the history of WeBS as well as learning more about how the data are used to monitor populations and movement across the

country. I gave a short demonstration on Blackford's commonest species and entering count data, including ageing and sexing within flocks and groups.

Since taking over the WeBS site and to stay in-line with the current government guidelines, we have arranged for a more experienced member of the society to head out with a newer member to perform the counts. Blackford Pond is the perfect site to get other students involved in surveys as it is local, very accessible and is a great place to practice species identification since most of the birds are very obliging. Looking forward to the next semester, we're excited to get even more new students involved and maybe even expand our efforts to conduct other surveys.

Low Tide update

Low Tide Counts complement the Core Counts on estuarine sites, and give an insight into the distributions of different species within a site.

Neil Calbrade WeBS Low Tide Counts Organiser

As with the Core Counts, the Low Tide Counts during the winter of 2020/21 were disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions. Despite these restrictions, Low Tide Counts were carried out on 15 estuaries around the UK, including the Firth of Tay, Dee Estuary, Swale Estuary, Portsmouth Harbour and Swansea Bay, though in many cases not all of the four standard months were completed.

The counts for the 2021/22 winter will soon be underway, hopefully with no restrictions, and have already been confirmed to go ahead on The Swale, Firth of Tay, Dee Estuary, Stour and Orwell Estuaries and Pegwell Bay among other sites being counted under the six-yearly programme.

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 to count a whole site yourself and would like to take part.

The counts are carried out, ideally, once a month between November and February, though we do also welcome counts outside of these months, during the two hours either side of low tide. However, unlike Core Counts, Low Tide Counts do not need to be coordinated across a site. On some estuaries, counters take



THE WASH BY MARK COLLIER, KNOT BY NEIL CALBRADE

▲ Intertidal mudflats are a critical source of food for over a million wading birds, such as Knot.

more than one day to cover all sectors. This is justified in that the scheme aims to measure relative bird density on sites: that is, if a sector is important for birds at low water, it does not matter if a flock of Dunlin recorded there was also recorded elsewhere - the outcome is that we know both areas to be important. This will allow comparisons of distributions and densities of species across a site with previous years.

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.

ONLINE REPORT CORRECTION

Please note that a discrepancy was discovered in the low tide calculation of densities given in the WeBS Report Online, which has now been changed for all years to match that used in data requests. The discrepancy arose due to whether the site density was calculated using the sum of the sector maxima or the consolidated site count. Both data requests and the WeBS Report Online now calculate density using the total of the maximum counts from each low tide sector.

It has never been easier to be a Local Organiser!

Modifications to WeBS Online have just been brought in to make life even easier for Local Organisers to keep track of count entries.

Gill Birtles WeBS Counter Network Organiser

During the Local Organiser training sessions conducted in 2020 (see *WeBS News* 36), we asked Local Organisers how we could improve WeBS Online. We received a flurry of helpful ideas which showed that there was potential for some major changes that would make carrying out the role easier.

Based on this, the WeBS and Information Systems teams have been working together on performance improvements and additional functionality for the 'Manage My Team' pages on WeBS Online for most of this year. After lots of testing by ourselves and some Local Organiser guinea pigs (who we owe a big "Thank You" to!), all this hard work culminated in the updates going live at the beginning of September. Counters may be unaware that Local Organisers have extra features when they log into WeBS Online, in the form of the 'Manage My Team' section. In this section, Local Organisers can view the sites that fall within their region, details of counters (where they are counting and their contact information) and the useful Count Summary table, where Local Organisers can keep track of where data have been submitted which highlights where data chasing needs to be carried out.

The improvements are primarily for this 'Manage My Team' section and include a download feature for counters' information so that Local Organisers can download a password protected spreadsheet detailing the counters in their region, their contact information and the sites they cover. Previously, Local Organisers didn't have this function and so would have to select every counter individually to see this information - which proved to be a long process for those regions with a lot of counters!

In the Count Summary Table, Local Organisers are now able to filter

Count Summary

The table below shows all the sites that you manage as WeBS Local Organiser, and indicates whether or not a primary count has been made for the particular months of the current WeBS data entry year. Click on the icons to see the details for each primary count submitted.

Clicking on a column heading in the table will sort the table by that column in ascending or descending order. Look for the grey arrow icons next to the column name if you are unsure which way it is sorted. You can sort the table by multiple columns. To do this press the shift key and then click on another column to add this to the current sorting.

Core Counts | Low Tide Counts | All Unreviewed Counts

Sites with primary Core counts for 2021-2022 season

Not Checked | My Counts | Queried | Accepted | Paper record | No count

Show: All rows

LO Region	Site	Current Active Status	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Deben Estuary (Suffolk)	River Deben - Kyson to Methersgate	Site is not being counted												
Deben Estuary (Suffolk)	River Deben - Sluice House to Green Point	No longer exists												
Deben Estuary (Suffolk)	River Deben - Whitehall to Kirton Creek	Site is not being counted												

▲ The new look count summary page.

by region, sites (and their current active status) and month. There is also a brand new feature of an 'All Unreviewed Counts' tab, where Local Organisers can keep track of which counts they still need to review and validate, which is especially useful at this time of year when the previous WeBS years' data is traditionally checked over by Local Organisers. This tab can also be filtered to make things even easier.

It's not all about Local Organisers, however! We have also added a handy reminder of the next WeBS Core Count date on the homepage for everyone who logs into WeBS Online. This will automatically

update every month and includes a link to the upcoming Core Count dates so that it's quicker to check when the next date will be.

All these updates greatly improve the experience of being a Local Organiser, making the organisational work quicker and more streamlined and we've had some really positive feedback. So if you are thinking that you would be interested in taking on the role, it's never been easier! There are several vacant regions that need a Local Organiser, which you can see in 'Desperately Seeking Organisers...' on page 19, and it would be great to have you on board! To learn more about the role, please contact Gill Birtles at: webs@bto.org

Data Home

Welcome to WeBS Online! From here you can submit your Core, Low Tide, Casual and Roost Counts, view details of your WeBS sites and explore your historic records.

The menus at the top of the page can be used to access other parts of the WeBS website. If you are unsure how to proceed please review the WeBS Online instructions, or the guide to what's new.

BTO and Covid-19 - Read our guidance for survey participants and fieldworkers during the Coronavirus pandemic here.

Species counts in Norfolk (excl. estuaries)

Showing Region: Norfolk (excl. estuaries)

September 2020

WELCOME A VOLUNTEER

- View/Edit My Details

YOUR OPTIONS

- Core Count Entry
- Casual/Roost Counts
- View/Edit Submissions
- View Site Details
- Export Data

Next WeBS Core Count: 12/09/2021
Last Count: 22/08/2021
View upcoming core count dates

HELP

- Counter Resources
- Video Tutorials
- FAQs
- Core Count Method

▲ WeBS Online Homepage.

Local Organiser News

We would like to thank Andrew Moon (Greater London (excl. Thames Estuary)); Claire Young (Wiltshire); David Parkin (Nottinghamshire); Hill Dick (Bann Estuary (Londonderry)); Jenny Lynch (Carlingford Lough (Down)); Keith Duncan (Badenoch and Strathspey); Patrick Lynch (Dundrum Bay (Down)); Stephen Spicer (Crouch/Roach Estuaries and South Dengie (Essex)); Tim Davis (Taw/Torridge Estuary (Devon)) and Tim Strudwick (Norfolk (excl. estuaries)) for all their hard work as Local Organisers and who have retired from the roles since the last newsletter.

We would also like to welcome the following new Local Organisers: Aiobheann Morrison who has become Local Organiser for Carlingford Lough (Down); Andrew Crory who has taken over as Local Organiser for Dundrum Bay (Down); Anne Donnelly who is the new Local Organiser for Durham; Chris Dee for taking on the Taw/ Torridge Estuary (Devon); Chris North who has taken over as Worcestershire Local Organiser; Ciara Laverty who is the new Local Organiser for Tyrone (excl. Loughs Neagh and Beg); Dave Shackleton for taking on the Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary (Cumbria); Jo Hubbard who is the new Local Organiser for Nottinghamshire; John Clarke for taking over the Bann Estuary (Londonderry) region; John Fell for taking on the North Blackwater (Essex) region; Jenny Stunell who is the new Wiltshire Local Organiser; Kez Armstrong for taking on both the South Down Coast (Down) and Down (other sites) regions; Mark Clay for taking over as Norfolk (excl. estuaries) Local Organiser; Phil Hampson for taking on the Derbyshire, Lancashire – West (inland) and Merseyside (inland) regions; Rob Innes who is the new Local Organiser for Greater

London (excl. Thames Estuary); Sean Murphy who has recently taken on Crouch/Roach Estuaries and Dengie (Essex) and Simon Ritchie who is now the Local Organiser for Loch Leven (Perth and Kinross).

Special thanks is needed to several long-term counters who have stepped down in the last year after a great number of years of volunteering with WeBS. Firstly, John Muston, who has retired from counting on the Arthro Estuary in Merioneth for over 20 years, having first started counting in April 2000!

Special thanks also go to Russell McAndrew, who has counted on the Tees Estuary since 1969 when WeBS was the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BoEE)! Over the years Russell has counted a number of sectors north of the River Tees including Hartlepool Bay which he helped establish after noting the importance of this location for roosting waders.

Hearing about the achievements of John and Russell is truly inspiring and makes us feel so lucky to have such dedicated and passionate counters supporting WeBS!

Desperately seeking organisers...

We are urgently seeking new Local Organisers for Badenoch and Strathspey, Cotswold Water Park (Gloucestershire), Buckinghamshire (South), Clwyd (coastal), Clwyd (inland), Forth Estuary – North, Halifax/Huddersfield area (Yorkshire), Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales, Isle of Cumbrae, Jersey (inland), Kent (East), Kent (West), Sutherland (excl. Moray Basin) and Worcestershire. If you would like to know more about becoming WeBS Local Organiser please contact us at the WeBS Office: webs@bto.org.

WEBS OBITUARIES

Geoff Orton

1946–2020

At the beginning of the year, we received the sad news that Geoff Orton passed away on the 26th December 2020 after a long illness.

Geoff had many strings to his bow, but his dedication to BTO surveys is what really made him special to us. Geoff was a counter for WeBS in Kent since 2000 and became the Local Organiser for North Kent Marshes (which is now Thames Estuary (Kent), Swale Estuary and Medway Estuary) in 2012, stepping down when the region was split in three in 2018. He also helped set up the first meeting for North Kent WeBS counters and it was from this, and subsequent meetings, that others became more involved and enabled WeBS to be improved greatly across the area.

As well as his work with WeBS, Geoff was also the Regional Representative for Kent from 2010–2019, through which he contributed to a wide number of BTO

surveys including BBS, *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, House Martin surveys, Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey, and contributed records towards BirdTrack.

Geoff will be greatly missed here at the BTO and in the Kent birding community. Our best wishes go out to his children Emily and Richard and his granddaughter Melissa.

Trefor Owen

1936–2020

Trefor Owen, who was a long time supporter of WeBS in Wales, sadly passed away in the summer of 2020. Trefor started his WeBS career in 2000 when he became a counter for Llyn Trawsfynydd at the same time as becoming the Local Organiser for the Merioneth (other sites) region. He carried out Local Organiser duties until 2017 and continued his counts right up until February 2020.

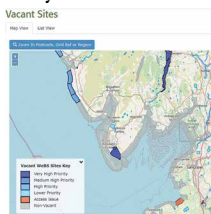
Trefor's positive impact in the region will be felt for many years to come and he will be sorely missed.

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 Gill Birtles at the WeBS Office to discuss.

Missing WeBS site boundaries

We have identified approximately 1,500 WeBS sites where we have never received a map of the site boundary for our files. Many are old sites that are no longer counted, and as a result do not appear on the Vacant Sites page. We have also found many sites which are currently counted and have an allocated counter, yet have no boundary on file. If your site doesn't appear on the 'WeBS Sites' page (www.bto.org/webs-sites-map), please send your Local Organiser or the WeBS Office a map of the area you count so that we can update our maps.

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.

Snap shot



A tern for the better!

Terns may be an optional species group in WeBS but as Tom Cadwallender's superb photo from Twitter of one of 22 Roseate Terns on his AIn Estuary site in August shows, they can certainly brighten up any count.

Look out for colour-ringed birds

Many waterbirds including geese, swans, waders, Coots and gulls have been colour-ringed as part of ongoing projects. Each individual will carry a unique combination of colours or markings which can be used to track that bird during its life.

Information about how to submit sightings of colour-ringed birds and finding out which project a bird is likely to have come from can be found at: www.cr-birding.org

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

Software Development
matthew.baxter@bto.org

Gill Birtles

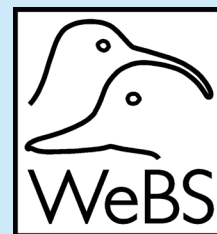
*WeBS Counter Network Organiser
Counter and Local Organiser database management, WeBS Online*
gillian.birtles@bto.org

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



The WeBS Office

The Nunnery
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 2PU
Tel: (01842) 750050
Fax: (01842) 750030
Email: webs@bto.org
Web site: www.bto.org/webs