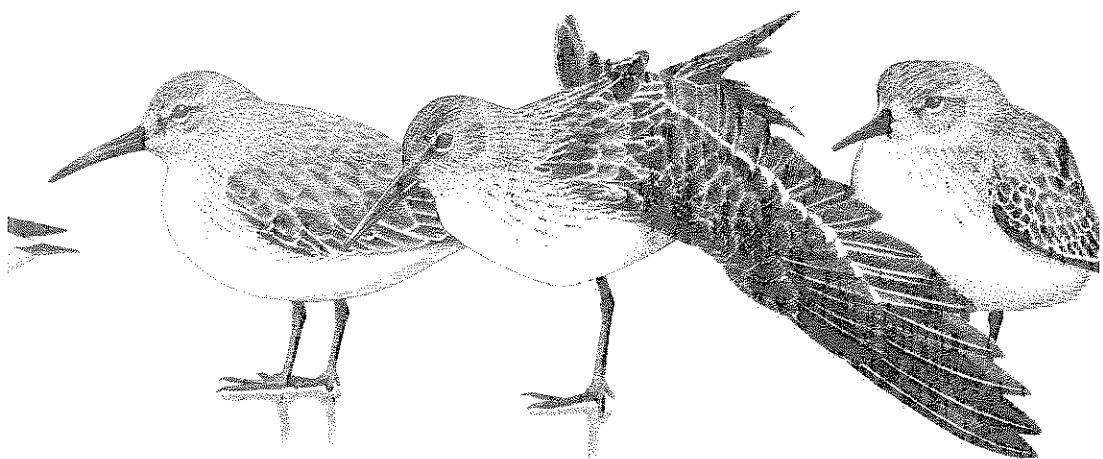


²¹
BIRDS OF
ESTUARIES
ENQUIRY
1975-76



National organiser

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Introduction

This report covers the sixth year of the joint BTO/RSPB/WT *Birds of Estuaries Enquiry* and the fifth year of the IWC's *Wetlands Enquiry*. As in previous years the former project was financed by a grant from the Nature Conservancy Council and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology.

1975/76 was the first year of the new form of the *Estuaries Enquiry*. Instead of counting from July—May, counts were only requested for the three midwinter months of December (21st), January (18th) and February (15th). Information from all months was still welcomed as it would provide a check on the passage populations in autumn and spring. Complete regular counts were made on almost 70 estuaries and midwinter counts were made on a further 90 estuaries. Thus this provided highly satisfactory cover for the monitoring function of the *Estuaries Enquiry*.

In addition to the regularly counted sites, a further 21 areas were counted for the first time. These comprised six estuaries and fifteen sections of coastline or sea-lochs. The continuing and increasing documentation of the non-estuarine coastline is of particular value in that it helps to provide more comprehensive figures for the totals of species such as Turnstone and will also aid the calculation of indices of population changes for another habitat.

This report is much shorter than previous ones for two reasons. First, and most importantly, most of the time at Beech Grove is taken with analysing all of the data accumulated and writing the book on the results. An outline of its contents was given in the 1974/75 reports and we hope that this publication will show how all counts weld together to provide a fascinating overall picture. Secondly, it is shorter because we have altered our main objective from a description of the total numbers and distribution in each month to the calculation of annual indices.

The indices of wader populations have been calculated by comparing the numbers of each species counted during January on each estuary where there are comparable counts in consecutive years. By adding up the totals obtained for each of the consecutive years and referring to a standard which has been given a value of 100, the annual changes can be summarised simply. We have taken the winter 1972/73 as our standard. For example, if the number of Redshank in winter 1972/73 was 100,000 but in 1973/74 it had increased to 120,000 on the same estuaries counted in the previous winter, this would mean the population had increased by 20 per cent. The index values would be 100 and 120 respectively.

The winter of 1975/76 was characterised by its mildness compared with the 25-year average temperatures. The November temperature differed from the average by -0.1°C , December $+0.3^{\circ}\text{C}$, January $+1.1^{\circ}\text{C}$, February $+0.7^{\circ}\text{C}$ and March -0.4°C . It was not, however, as mild as 1974/75 which in December was $+2.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ and in January was $+2.3^{\circ}\text{C}$ warmer.

Another factor affecting our winter numbers is the recruitment on the breeding grounds. Summer 1975 in the Arctic was, as indicated by the success of Brent Geese, very good both in the Soviet Union and in Greenland and Canada. Both these populations had 40 per cent or more young in the winter flocks. In Iceland, however, there was a very low breeding success of both Pink-footed and Greylag Geese.

The section on wildfowl has again been written by G. L. Atkinson-Willes and D. Salmon of the Wildfowl Trust and I am most grateful for their continuing help.

Wildfowl

The population levels derived from the counts carried out for the Wildfowl Trust and the *Birds of Estuaries Enquiry* are summarised below in Tables 1 and 2. The duck indices are based on the average of all the September to March counts for the principal concentrations of these species; this average is then related to a standard year (1959/60) which has been given the value of 100. Table 2 presents the maximum population size of each species of goose recorded in each winter; it should be noted that virtually all of the Icelandic population of both Greylag and Pinkfoot winter in Britain. The rest of this section on wildfowl presents the main counts of each species on estuaries in Britain and Ireland.

Waders

Once again very large numbers of waders were recorded in Britain and Ireland during 1975/76. Table 3 presents the peak winter totals of waders on the top 90 estuaries. A further 17 estuaries supported more than 2,000 waders, 23 between 1,000 and 2,000 and 33 less than 1,000 waders during the winter. The totals here cannot be compared with those shown in previous reports as they do not include passage populations. It is intended that similar tables will appear in subsequent reports. It is apparent that the extensive estuaries in the Irish Sea support very large numbers of waders in winter and that the numbers on the Wash, a known important passage area, were relatively low. However, the low Wash totals were due mainly to a great decrease in the wintering Knot population. On total waders alone no fewer than twenty-five estuaries were of international importance and a further 19 were of national significance; many of the latter support individual species which are of international importance.

All estuaries which had a peak count exceeding 5,000 waders during the whole of the 1975/76 season are presented in Table 4. A further 82 estuaries were counted at least partially outside the winter period. These figures are comparable with those presented in previous reports. Most of the counts are of a similar order of magnitude although there was an increase of over 30,000 birds in the Dee estuary. It is possibly of note that the numbers at Teesmouth once again dropped to what is the lowest peak number recorded since the *Estuaries Enquiry* started. Table 5 presents the counts of estuaries or coastline which had not been counted before during the *Estuaries Enquiry*. Two important areas included for the first time are Ruan Lanihorne, a branch of the Fal complex in Cornwall, and Deersound on the mainland of Orkney. It is particularly encouraging to see the steady increase of counts in north and west Scotland and the north east coast of England.

The numbers of waders counted during the winter period are presented in Table 6. The grand total was again large, with over 1.4 million waders being present in Britain during both December and January, and had data been available for Morecambe Bay and the north Solway for February, no doubt February would have been close to this figure too. There were few great departures in the now well documented monthly levels and specific comments will be made in the section dealing with the results of the index calculations. Although not all sites in the Republic of Ireland, particularly in the west, were covered the totals were also well up.

Annual changes in numbers of waders

The results for the last three years are presented in Table 7; 1972/73, the previous year, has been arbitrarily assigned as the standard year and, therefore, has a value of 100. During this period the majority of species have increased noticeably. This is hardly surprising as most come from

Scandinavia or the USSR and this area has had three good breeding seasons out of the four. By contrast in north-eastern Canada and Greenland there have been two good and two very bad breeding seasons. Only two wader species which winter in Britain and Ireland come exclusively from this zone, they are the Knot and Turnstone; while the latter species does not appear to have suffered, the numbers of Knot have decreased markedly. This decrease is even more striking when the 1971/72 figures are included; then Knot were at a level of 155.4, almost twice the level of the last two years. The Black-tailed Godwit, which breeds in Iceland, has also declined substantially during recent years, indicating that unfavourable breeding conditions may have occurred at even relatively low latitudes. Britain is at the northern end of the wintering range of most species and it is possible that we may see large changes in numbers as a result of varying winter conditions. However, in the case of the Knot there have also been striking decreases in France and smaller, but significantly lower, numbers in the Netherlands too.

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Regional Organisers

England

Cornwall

P Fronteras has now moved away, please contact the BTO.

Devon

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Essex

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Hampshire

D Steventon, 8 Jumar Close, Warsash, Southampton SO3 6JP.

N Humberside

D B Cutts, 8 Beverley Road, South Cave, Nr Brough, N Humberside.

S Humberside

A Grieve has now handed over to R N Goodall, 3 Kettleby View, St Helens Park, Brigg, Humberside.

Kent, north

Capt J N Humphreys, Gate House, Little Chart, Ashford, Kent.

S Lancashire/

Cheshire

Dr P H Smith, 3 Sycamore Grove, Trap Hill, Formby, Lancs., helped by R A Eades (Dee) and G E Thomason (Mersey).

N Lancashire/

Cumbria

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Solway, south

N Hammond, 39 Outgang Road, Aspatria, Carlisle, Cumbria.

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Gloucestershire

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Sussex

R F Porter, 24 Green Court, The Green, Southwick, Brighton, Sussex.

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Wash

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Anglesey/Caernarvon/

Denbigh

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Cardigan

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E Glamorgan

Dr P Ferns, University College, PO Box 78, Cardiff CF1 1XL.

W Glamorgan

R J Howells, 'Ynys Enlli', 14 Dolgoy Close, West Cross, Swansea.

Merioneth

D Brown, Bedwen, Bro Enddwyn, Dyffryn Ardudwy, Merioneth.

Scotland

Ayr/Wigtown

W R Brackenridge, 24 Craigie Road, Ayr.

Inner Clyde

I Gibson, Arcadia, The Glen, Howwood, Renfrewshire.

Firth of Forth

Organised jointly by J Ballantyne, 6 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6NB,
Dr L Vick, 93 Charterhall Grove, Edinburgh EH9 3HT,
and Dr D Bryant, Department of Biology, University of Stirling, Stirling.

Moray/Cromarty/

Dornoch Firths

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North Solway

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Tay, inner

R McMillan, 44 Durley Dene Crescent, Kintillo, Bridge of Earn, Perthshire.

Eire

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Northern Ireland

Strangford Lough National Trust (c/o P Mackie), Mahee Islands, Comber, Co Down.

Londonderry A Bennett, Woodlawn, 17 Castlerock Road, Coleraine, Co Londonderry.

Table 1 Seasonal indices of abundance of the main species of duck

	70/71	71/72	72/73	73/74	74/75	75/76
Mallard	118	102	87	93	98	102
Teal	68	64	75	96	100	97
Wigeon	130	137	124	157	170	146
Shelduck	103	136	121	148	138	238

Note: From main coastal and inland resorts, GB only

Table 2 Seasonal maxima of geese (GB only)

	70/71	71/72	72/73	73/74	74/75	75/76
Greylag*	65,000	64,000	68,000	76,000	69,000	63,000
Pinkfoot*	72,000	65,000	73,000	82,000	89,000	73,000
Russian Whitefront	11,000	6,000	9,000	8,000	2,000	4,000
Barnacle-Svalbard/ Solway pop. only	3,200	3,700	4,400	5,100	5,200	6,050
Dark-bellied Brent	23,500	18,000	28,000	41,000	32,000	50,000
Light-bellied Brent-Svalbard/ Lindisfarne pop. only	650	700	400	470	300	550

**Censused November and March only*

Principal estuarine counts (GB and Ireland), 1975/76

Mallard —Wexford Slobs (3,330, Sep); Humber Refuge (3,220, Oct/Jan); Wash (3,180, Jan); Bridgewater Bay (2,750, Oct).

Teal —Mersey (13,100, Nov); Medway (6,700, Jan).

Wigeon —Lindisfarne (30,000, Nov); Strangford Lough, Co Down (12,000, Dec); Wash (11,300, Feb); Chesil Fleet (7,400, Jan); Exe (7,000, Dec); Cromarty Firth (5,300, Oct); Dornoch Firth (5,100, Nov); Lough Foyle, Co Londonderry (5,000, Nov).

Pintail —Mersey (9,300, Dec); Ribble (4,000, Jan); Cheshire Dee (2,400, Oct); Carse Bay, Solway (2,200, Nov).

<i>Scaup</i>	—Firth of Forth (10,280, Dec); Loch Indaal, Islay (1,300, Dec); Carse Bay (800, Jan/Mar).
<i>Pochard</i>	—Seafield, F of Forth (3,780, Nov).
<i>Goldeneye</i>	—F of Forth (2,600, Dec); Ness Mouth (640, Nov); Invergordon, Cromarty (600, Feb); Inner Clyde (280, Jan); Longman Bay (270, Jan).
<i>Long-tailed Duck</i>	—Burghead Bay (5,000, Dec); Embo, Dornoch (4,000, Nov); Loch Fleet (2,500, Apr); Spey Bay (1,100, Nov).
<i>Common Scoter</i>	—Foulness (7,000, Feb); Burghead Bay (7,000, Oct); Spey Bay (2,800, Nov); Golspie, Sutherland (2,000, Apr); Fleet Bar, Sutherland (1,800, Nov).
<i>Velvet Scoter</i>	—Burghead Bay (2,500, Oct).
<i>Eider</i>	—F of Forth (4,100, Feb); Lindisfarne (2,300, Oct); L Fleet (1,950, Oct); Ythan (1,600, Oct); Inner Clyde (1,500, Jan); Montrose Basin (1,200, Feb); Foulney Is (1,170, Jan); Aberdeen Coast: R Don-Blackdog (1,000, Oct).
<i>Goosander</i>	—Beaully Firth (570, Nov).
<i>Red-breasted Merganser</i>	—Strangford Lough (332, Nov); F of Forth (215, Oct); Poole Harbour (194, Jan); Morecambe Bay (172, Jan); Portland Harbour (150, Jan); Inner Clyde (133, Jan); Loch Ryan (130, Oct); Chesil Fleet (112, Dec).
<i>Shelduck</i>	—Wash (9,690, Feb); Mersey (4,300, Mar); Cheshire Dee (3,200, Dec); Hamford Water (2,800, Dec); Teesmouth (2,800, Dec); Medway (2,700, Jan); Morecambe Bay (2,600, Jan); Poole Harbour (2,100, Feb).
<i>Mute Swan</i>	—Chesil Fleet (990, Nov); Strangford Lough (410, Nov); Essex/Suffolk Stour (300, Dec); Lady's Island Lake, Co Wexford (220, Jan).
<i>Whooper Swan</i>	—L Foyle (620, Nov); Lindisfarne (385, Nov); Strangford Lough (330, Dec); Cromarty (165, Mar).
<i>Bewick's Swan</i>	—Wexford Slobs (675, Dec); New Grounds, Slimbridge (270, Dec); The Cull/Killag, Co Wexford (200, Jan).
<i>Dark-bellied Brent Goose</i>	—Foulness (11,000, Oct); Wash (8,800, Dec); Hamford (7,200, Dec); Langstone (6,500, Nov); Chichester (6,345, Jan); Blackwater (5,300, Nov); Leigh Marsh (4,600, Oct).
<i>Light-bellied Brent Goose</i>	—Strangford Lough (9,100, Nov); Lindisfarne (550, Jan); Wexford Harbour (410, Jan).
<i>Greylag Goose</i>	—Beaully Firth (1,100, Nov).
<i>Pink-footed Goose</i>	—Ribble (13,400, Nov); Inner Solway (8,000, Mar); Wash (4,700, Jan).
<i>Russian White-fronted Goose</i>	—New Grounds, Slimbridge (2,870, Feb); Shellness, Kent (750, Mar).
<i>Greenland White-fronted Goose</i>	—Wexford Slobs (5,550, Dec).
<i>Barnacle Goose</i>	—Inner Solway (6,050, Oct/Nov).

Table 3 Peak counts of Waders in Winter 1975/76

Morecambe Bay	196,382*	Alt	9,239
Solway	149,453	Tamar, upper	8,504
Dee	144,944	Esk	8,023
Ribble	122,642	Cromarty Firth	7,639 ‡
Wash	85,366	Eden	7,201*
Severn	72,549	Thames, inner	7,153
Firth of Forth	55,651	Dungarven Harbour	7,085
Lindisfarne	54,680	Pagham Harbour	6,925
Mersey	48,666	Blackpill	6,623
Humber	45,637*	Wigtown Merse	6,489*
Dundalk Bay	44,637 †	Conwy River	6,396
Shannon	38,375*	Carlingford Lough	6,351
Strangford Lough	37,321	Gwendraeth	6,308 †
Burry Inlet	35,197	Taff/Ely	6,222*
Langstone Harbour	33,447	Moray Firth	6,109 ‡
Chichester Harbour	31,652	Colne	6,104
Foulness	31,549	Rough Firth	6,048
N Kent Marshes	31,091 †	Montrose Basin	5,960 †
Ballymacoda	30,803	Deersound, Orkney	5,939*
Clyde, inner	29,712	Kirkcudbright Bay	5,737*
Duddon	27,328	Cleddau	5,670*
North Bull	25,646*	Tay, inner	5,657 †
Taw/Torridge	23,081	Irvine flats	5,423
Hamford Water	22,190	Malahide	5,291
Conwy Bay	21,378	Waterford Harbour	5,219 †
Leigh/Canvey	18,958	Tramore	5,147 †
Sussex coast	18,653*	Youghall Harbour	4,916
Medway	17,967*	Loch Ryan	4,616*
Stour, Essex/Suffolk	17,859	Beaulieu River	4,552
Southampton Water	17,715	Luce Bay	4,496
Lough Foyle	17,452	The Fleet	4,350
Blackwater	16,754	Newtown River	4,069*
Swale	16,227†	Clwyd	4,041
Orwell	15,967	Dipple/Turnberry	3,807
Portsmouth Harbour	15,757	Rye Harbour	3,590*
Camel	14,697*	Dornoch Firth	3,535*
Exe	13,911	Afon Wen	3,460
Teessmouth	13,258*	Blyth	3,188
Cork Harbour	13,003 †	Boyne	3,087*
Dengie	12,898	Whitley Bay	3,071
Poole Harbour	12,780	Troon/Barrasie	2,997
Solent	11,773*	Hayle	2,982
Wexford Harbour	10,363*	Deben	2,917
Wells-Cley	10,217 †	Kingsbridge	2,896
Bannow Bay	9,332*	Tacumshin	2,874*
Fal	9,284	Pembroke River	2,844

*Two counts only; †Single count only; ‡Partial

Note: Peak count has been obtained by adding together the highest counts made of each species during the period December 1975 to February 1976. They are not comparable with peak counts presented in previous reports.

Table 4 Peak counts of Waders made during the whole of 1975/76

Dee	165,479	Camel	14,773
Solway Firth	161,573	Wexford Harbour	14,649
Severn	83,004	Teesmouth	13,602
Lindisfarne	60,195	Poole Harbour	12,855
Mersey	49,800	Rough Firth	12,696
Shannon	47,194	Solent	12,652
Langstone Harbour	44,092	Dungarven Harbour	9,679
Burry Inlet	41,281	Esk	9,614
Strangford Lough	40,126	Ruan Lanihorne	9,313
Duddon	38,023	Tamar, upper	8,877
Chichester Harbour	37,657	Blackpill	8,596
Foulness	34,985	Thames, inner	8,143
Ballymacoda Bay	31,375*	Wigtown Merse	7,927*
North Bull	26,010*	Pagham Harbour	7,341
Taw/Torridge	23,916	Taff/Ely	6,841*
Dengie flats	23,525	Irvine flats	6,274
Harnford Water	22,535	Piltanton/Luce Bay	5,934*
Leigh/Canvey	19,708	Cleddau	5,914
Blackwater	19,637*	St John's Lake	5,865*
Southampton Water	18,870	Tacumshin	5,373
Lough Foyle	17,838	Newtown	5,319
Gwendraeth	17,582	Malahide	5,295*
Portsmouth Harbour	17,255	Beaulieu River	5,119
Bannow Bay	16,155	Loch Ryan	5,030*
Exe	16,127	Youghall Harbour	5,018*
Orwell	16,081		

*Based on 4-6 counts

Note: These figures are comparable with peak counts presented in previous reports.

Table 5 Peak counts of Waders made in 1975/76 on areas not previously counted

England

Ruan Lanihorne, Cornwall	9,313*	Looe/Hannaford, Cornwall	611*
Whitley Bay, Northumberland	3,147*	Alnmouth beach, Northumberland	577*
River Adur, Sussex	2,883*†	N Druridge Bay, Northumberland	420
Beadnell—Budle, Northumberland	2,080*	Fowey, Cornwall	381*
Alnmouth—Boulmer, Northumberland	1,855	Berwick—Goswick, Northumberland	277
Boulmer—Howick, Northumberland	1,596*		

Scotland

Deersound, Orkney	5,939	W Ross/W Inverness sea lochs	709
Loch Cree, East Kirkcudbright	3,475	Paible, N Uist	630
Buckpool, Banff	1,173	Ardivachar Pt and N Bay S Uist	513
Skye, most beaches	1,102	Tong, Lewis	462
Luskentyre, Harris	799	Traigh Eachkamish, N Uist	354

*At least four counts made

†Counted before as part of Sussex coast

Table 6 Winter population levels of Waders in British estuaries 1975/76 and Irish Totals, January 1976

Species	Dec. 1975	British Jan. 1976	Feb. 1976*	Irish Jan. 1976
Oystercatcher	237,664	207,270	108,357	17,290
Lapwing	118,007	188,343	88,416	36,521
Ringed Plover	7,389	8,400	6,496	720
Grey Plover	10,843	13,337	10,939	635
Golden Plover	55,163	58,228	32,349	28,258
Turnstone	11,838	11,664	10,427	508
Common Snipe	2,842	2,787	2,162	415
Jack Snipe	58	57	59	—
Curlew	53,040	63,416	48,274	10,890
Whimbrel	—	2	2	2
Black-tailed Godwit	3,636	4,371	3,181	2,772
Bar-tailed Godwit	39,495	41,596	30,937	16,739
Green Sandpiper	8	18	15	1
Common Sandpiper	17	28	47	2
Redshank	73,142	79,132	50,070	7,462
Spotted Redshank	73	55	77	11
Greenshank	199	303	189	107
Knot	193,844	198,423	192,048	17,745
Dunlin	603,705	564,605	457,505	47,236
Sanderling	5,644	6,933	3,509	314
Ruff	53	81	1,059	12
Little Stint	2	1	7	1
Curlew Sandpiper	—	—	3	—
Purple Sandpiper	798	819	897	—
Avocet	114	88	61	—
Totals:	1,417,574	1,449,957	1,047,085*	187,641

*Excluding Morecambe Bay and North Solway.

Table 7 Indices for wintering British and Irish Wader populations 1972/73 to 1975/76

	1972/73	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76
Oystercatcher	100	123.4	125.6	152.2
Lapwing	100	174.7	166.4	236.1
Ringed Plover	100	125.2	117.0	143.4
Grey Plover	100	140.2	160.3	160.6
Golden Plover	100	96.0	126.5	126.6
Turnstone	100	130.2	124.3	144.8
Curlew	100	135.3	143.2	135.9
Black-tailed Godwit	100	90.4	82.5	52.2
Bar-tailed Godwit	100	119.4	107.0	107.7
Redshank	100	102.7	111.3	125.1
Spotted Redshank*	100	54.0	66.7	70.0
Greenshank*	100	95.1	101.4	136.0
Knot	100	121.0	73.7	82.6
Dunlin	100	124.7	112.1	113.2
Sanderling	100	100.7	196.0	199.1
Ruff*	100	112.6	79.8	44.0

*Numbers involved are relatively small (less than 2,000).

