

Ringed Plover 1974

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

Note: This survey was run at the same time as a Little Ringed Plover survey but as a separate project.

The Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* breeds widely along the coasts of Britain and in places inland, but many of the favoured sites and habitats were coming under intense pressure from human leisure activities. The aim therefore was to assess the national population level, to find out where were important sites, and to provide a baseline from which future trends of the population and distribution could be determined. There had been no previous census of Ringed Plovers on a nationwide scale, although it was thought that numbers had remained more or less unchanged or perhaps started to decrease in the later stages between about 1840 and 1940, but that there had certainly been a decrease in many areas since then.

In the event there were considerable differences in coverage between the various parts of the UK. In England and Wales coverage was largely complete. There were 1878 pairs found in England and 186 in Wales, with over 90% of the English and all the Welsh ones on the coast, or in fields immediately adjacent to it. Norfolk held about a quarter of these and Essex the second largest number despite the human pressure. There were also significant numbers on the coasts of north Lancashire and the Lake District. There were very few concentrations in SW England, so the 43 pairs recorded on the Isles of Scilly and the 75 pairs on Chesil Beach (Dorset) formed particularly interesting isolated groups.

The population on the Isle of Man was estimated at about 75 pairs, most on the large sand dune and raised beach area of the Ayres at the north of the island. The north coast of Northern Ireland was well covered, but only produced 20 pairs with an overall Northern Ireland total estimated as at least 93 pairs.

Ringed Plovers were particularly difficult to census in Scotland as most are on the west coast and the islands. The main concentrations in the whole British Isles, Norfolk and Essex apart, were in the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland. A tentative estimate of the population in the Outer Hebrides, where they nest widely over the machair as well as on beaches on the west coast, was 1000 pairs, almost half thought to be on South Uist. In Orkney and Shetland there were many small beaches each with one or two pairs rather than large concentrations, so the overall total was large. The overall Scotland population was estimated to be rather over 3500 pairs, giving an estimated UK population of 5800-6300 pairs.

Methods of Data Capture

Peak egg laying by Ringed Plovers occurs from late April through June, with most first broods present in June, later broods found throughout July and a few even later. The unit for this survey was the territorial pair but no attempt was made to prove breeding by

finding nests or broods, because of the potential for significant disturbance. It would also have been very time-consuming. It is probable that "territorial birds" included both breeding adults and some non-breeding one-year-old birds, although most Ringed Plovers do breed in their first summer. Habitat types were also recorded, together with some details of breeding success and past history at the site if these were known.

Observers were asked to visit their sites between May and July 1973, although some additional data were gathered in 1974.

It was realised that a complete census in parts of NW Scotland would be impossible so the population of these areas was estimated by counting the numbers in a sample of 10-km squares and multiplying the average count by the number of squares in which breeding was proven during the 1968-1972 Breeding Atlas.

Purpose of Data Capture

To count or estimate the total numbers of pairs of Ringed Plovers in all of the UK.

Geographic Coverage

All of the UK with the object of counting all pairs although in parts of NW Scotland a sampling strategy was adopted.

Temporal Coverage

The breeding season of 1973 with counts requested between May and July. A few extra sites were counted in 1974.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised, run and funded by the BTO.

Organiser(s)

Tony Prater, who was a staff member at the time.

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Prater, A.J. 1976. Breeding population of the Ringed Plover in Britain. *Bird Study* 23: 155-161.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 51, 57 and 65.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

1 Transfer Case containing data cards and a few letters. All have been scanned.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis