

# Waterbird*news*

Monitoring internationally important  
waterbird populations across the UK

**RECORDING  
DEAD AND  
SICK BIRDS**  
See page 11



## Welcome...

to the newsletter of the Wetland  
Bird Survey and the Goose & Swan  
Monitoring Programme

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## Help us count swans this winter!

In January 2026, the 10th International Swan Census (ISC) will take place across Europe. Now undertaken every six years (formerly every five years), the main aim of the ISC is to estimate the size and distribution of Whooper and Bewick's Swan populations, as well as identify important wintering sites. Age assessments are also made during the surveys, providing a coordinated estimation of breeding success. In addition, counters are asked to record the type of habitat used by the swans during the census. These data are analysed to assess whether there has been any major shift in habitat use over time.

Whooper and Bewick's Swan numbers in the UK and Republic of Ireland are monitored annually through WeBS and the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS), respectively. Although these schemes provide good coverage of a high proportion of wintering sites used by Whooper Swans, a number of non-wetland or temporally flooded areas are not surveyed, hence a more comprehensive census, that focuses specifically on these species, is required to fully assess the size of the population

The most recent ISC, organised in the UK by WWT in January 2020, found that the Icelandic Whooper Swan population had increased by 27.2%, from 34,004 in 2015 to 43,255 in 2020. Conversely, Bewick's Swan numbers continued to fall, with just 1,290 birds recorded on the 2020 census, a 70.6% decline on the 2015 total. The 2026 census, which will again be dependant on WeBS counters and WeBS Local Organisers, will look at the fortunes of these two species since the 2020 census.



# Editorial

By Neil Calbrade, Waterbird Surveys Officer and *Waterbird News* editor, BTO

In recent months, we have been busy preparing for the forthcoming International Swan Census. The fortunes of Whooper and Bewick's Swans in recent years couldn't be more contrasting and this census, which now takes place every six years, will update the populations of these species. There has been a lot of behind the scenes development work carried out, both in GSMP Online but also WeBS Online to ensure it is as easy as possible for WeBS counters to get involved and ensure as full coverage as we can, and I hope you are able to help.

A more cryptic species that is much more difficult to get a full idea of their numbers is the Green Sandpiper. Their flighty nature and the fact that they will inhabit just about any sized waterbody from small farm ponds to river stretches makes them a challenge. In one corner of south Wales, the 'Ely Valley Green Sandpiper Study Group' has been set up to try to assess the population there using coordinated counts (pgs 8–9).

When we carry out our monthly WeBS Counts, it is easy to think these results are only used for UK waterbird monitoring, but as we are a part of the African-Eurasian Flyway, the January WeBS counts are used for flyway-wide reporting via the International Waterbird Census (IWC), which will be celebrating its 60th count next year (pgs 12–13).

An unfortunate feature in recent years has been outbreaks of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI), particularly in waterbirds, which has decimated populations of several species. In order to be able to track and report on outbreaks, we are partners in a project to understand how these viruses spread, and we have added functionality into GSMP Online and WeBS Online to report any sick or dead birds you may find (pgs 10–11).

## The WeBS and GSMP 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 and GSMP team. For those that are not sure who to contact for various matters, the following 'Who's who' should help...

**Teresa Frost**  
Management of WeBS and GSMP  
[teresa.frost@bto.org](mailto:teresa.frost@bto.org)

**Ian Woodward**  
WeBS Alerts, statistical analyses  
[ian.woodward@bto.org](mailto:ian.woodward@bto.org)

**Gill Birtles**  
WeBS Core Count Organiser,  
Counter and Local Organiser database  
management, WeBS Online  
[gillian.birtles@bto.org](mailto:gillian.birtles@bto.org)

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## NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTORS

We are grateful to Annie Shadrake for her account of her WeBS site Barden Reservoirs in North Yorkshire, and to Dan Jenkins-Jones for his article on wintering Green Sandpipers in the Ely Valley, in the Vale of Glamorgan.

## WEBS PARTNERSHIP

The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) monitors the UK's waterbirds and contributes to the International Waterbird Census.

WeBS is a partnership jointly funded by the BTO, RSPB and JNCC, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers.

## GSMP PARTNERSHIP

The Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) monitors the abundance and breeding success of the UK's native geese and migratory swans during the non-breeding season.

GSMP is a partnership, run by and jointly funded by BTO, JNCC and NatureScot, with fieldwork conducted by both volunteer and professional surveyors



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[www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)



[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)



[www.nature.scot](http://www.nature.scot)

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The census covers wetland sites in the UK that are monitored through WeBS, and in Ireland through I-WeBS, as well as any additional sites that wintering Whooper Swans and/or Bewick's Swans are currently known to utilise, including agricultural land and flooded fields.

The 2026 ISC will take place on **January 17–18** to coincide with the WeBS Core Count date for that month, and also the 60th International Waterbird Census (pg 12).

## GETTING INVOLVED

Since the ISC is on the same count date as the January WeBS Core Count, we are asking WeBS counters to also count for ISC. This would be your usual survey, however if any Whooper or Bewick's Swans are seen, we ask you to also record Age Assessments (number of adults and juveniles, plus any broods) as well as what habitat these swans were found on. If you count on an estuarine site that will be counting on a different date to the Core Count date to fit in with the tides, please do an additional count to look for swans on the ISC date to reduce the possibility of double counting.

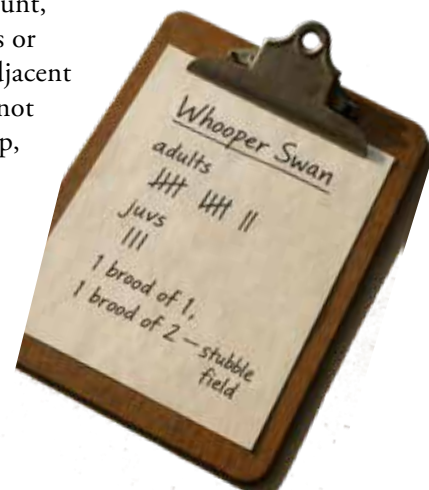
Although the main data entry for the ISC is via GSMP Online, if you already submit your WeBS Counts into WeBS Online, you do not have to sign up to GSMP Online to take part. Once you have opted in to count for ISC by letting your Local Organiser know, they can mark the site as being covered by WeBS. When you then submit your January WeBS Core Count into WeBS Online, if you record either species of swan, a pop-up will appear after you have made your submission asking you to fill out more information for ISC. This will then take you to the online form where you can enter additional ISC information (habitat and age assessments).

If you would like to count for ISC at your WeBS site(s) and have not yet been contacted by your Local Organiser (or GSMP Office where no LO exists), please let us know. Further information and a map showing the vacant sites available to count can be viewed at: [www.bto.org/gsmg-isc](http://www.bto.org/gsmg-isc). You can request any vacant site, but if you will be counting it as part of your monthly WeBS count, please put a note on the request form to let the organiser know that you will also be counting it for WeBS.

Sites available for the ISC were chosen based on any sites having a Whooper or Bewick's Swan recorded in the last 10 years, with 'key sites' having at least 10 Whooper Swans recorded there in the last five years. If your WeBS site isn't listed and occasionally gets either Whooper or Bewick's Swans and you would like to include it, please contact your ISC Local Organiser or email the GSMP team on [gsmg@bto.org](mailto:gsmg@bto.org) with the WeBS Sector name and we can create this site.

On the day of your count, if you see any Bewick's or Whooper Swans on adjacent fields/areas which are not on the vacant sites map, you can enter this in the data entry form in GSMP Online by clicking on the Globe icon labelled 'Map' next to 'Site'.

If you don't count for WeBS, but you are already a GSMP



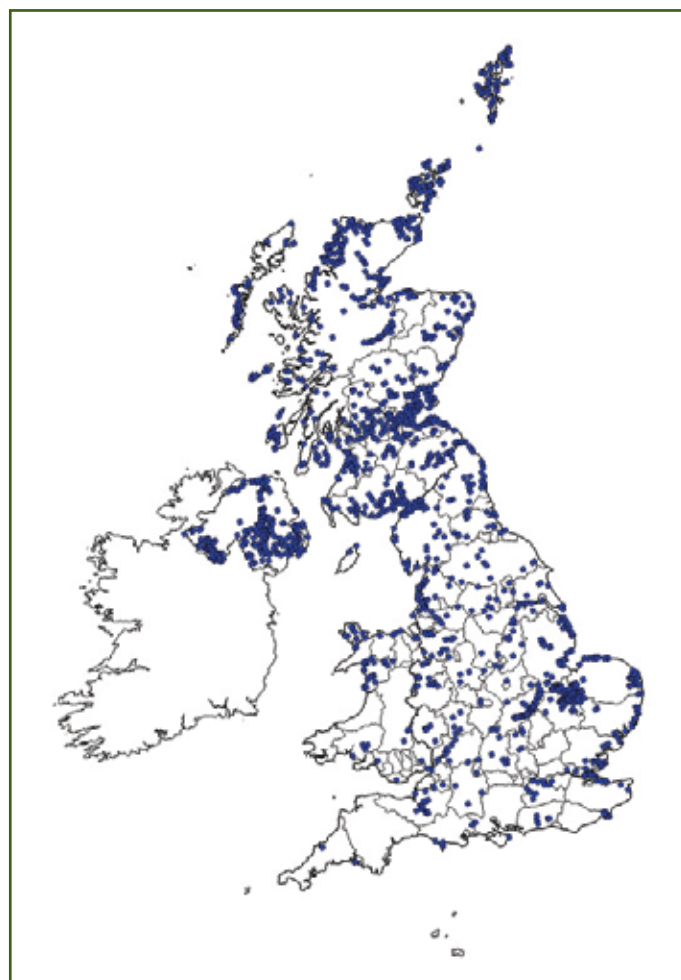


counter and have signed up to GSMP Online, simply log in and request a site via the ISC site map and your Local Organiser will get back to you shortly. You will then be able to enter your data in January after your count under 'ISC Data Entry' in GSMP Online.

We are very keen that all wild swan sites, particularly roosts, are visited during the survey, so please do check sites near you that are used by swans for feeding or roosting are being covered, even if they are not WeBS sites. If you have data from somewhere not shown on the map, then simply sign up to GSMP Online and you can add it yourself through the main swan census data entry page.

As with the 2020 census, many WeBS Local Organisers have offered to be Local Organisers for the ISC. The WeBS Office has already contacted all the Local Organisers and counters in the key regions to ask for their assistance in organising the census in their respective WeBS region – and many thanks to all those who have responded so far – but there are still some gaps to fill.

Other regions with very few historical swan sites or just contain a single WeBS site are also in need of a Local Organiser, but are a lower priority, but please contact the GSMP Office if you would like to take on a vacant region listed in the box below.



▲ All the sites listed for the International Swan Census, check if there are any vacant sites near you.

### ISC LOCAL ORGANISERS NEEDED...

We are looking for Local Organisers to coordinate the International Swan Census in the key regions of Antrim (other sites), Armagh (excl Loughs Neagh and Beg), Avon Valley, Badenoch and Strathspey, Breconshire, Buckinghamshire, Cheshire, Cleveland, East Glamorgan, Essex, Gwent, Harris and Lewis, Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales, Huddersfield/Halifax, Humber Estuary, Lancashire – East and Fylde, Leeds area, Lancashire – North (Inland), Londonderry (other sites), Mull, North Norfolk Coast, Northamptonshire (excl. Nene Valley), Nottinghamshire, Orkney, Oxfordshire (North), Pembrokeshire, Ribble Estuary, Skye, Staffordshire, Uists and Benbecula, Wakefield area, West Inverness/Wester Ross and Wiltshire regions.

If you are interested in taking on a region, please contact: [gsmp@bto.org](mailto:gsmp@bto.org)



# Low Tide Counts update

By Neil Calbrade, WeBS Low Tide Organiser

The wetlands of the UK are vitally important for millions of migrant waterbirds which either spend the winter here or use the UK as a staging post on the way to and from wintering grounds further south.

Large numbers of waterbirds come to UK estuaries in the winter because the climate is relatively mild, because there is a large resource of estuarine habitat and because this habitat supports abundant food.

## COVERAGE

The winter of 2024/25 saw Low Tide Counts carried out on 20 estuaries around the UK, including Crouch/Roach Estuaries, Hamford Water and the Blackwater Estuary.

The counts for the winter of 2025/26 will soon be underway with sites such as the Tamar Complex, Eden Estuary, and Langstone Harbour among the sites due to be counted under the six-yearly programme.

## TAKING PART

We would welcome counts from any estuary, even those that have not yet been counted under the scheme, so please contact the WeBS office ([lowtide@bto.org](mailto:lowtide@bto.org)) if you are able to organise a team or be able 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 and will allow comparisons of distributions and densities of species across a site with previous years.

# WeBS counter wins NBN Young persons award

18-year old Ben Rumsby (from Essex) is the winner of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Young Person's Award 2024. Ben has been a member of RSPB for 11 years, of Essex Wildlife Trust for 12 years, of BTO for eight years and of Essex Bird Watching Society for five years. He has been a registered volunteer for RSPB for over three years, helping with the WeBS counts and Redshank and Lapwing surveys at RSPB Rainham Marshes. Ben volunteers every Saturday surveying birds on site – for around 25 hours per month – opening hides and safety checks and helping to run Young Birders, and 'birding for beginners' walks. He also volunteers with Essex Wildlife Trust doing glowworm surveys – usually three times a year.

Ben Rumsby, winner of the NBN Young Person's Award 2024, pictured here with BTO's Head of Waterbird Monitoring, Teresa Frost, enthuses:

"What excites me about biological recording is the thrill of how each recording session is different and what you might find. Since becoming a volunteer at RSPB Rainham Marshes I help with the Lapwing and Redshank Wader Surveys as well as undertaking breeding bird surveys as well. I enjoy being able to contribute all vital data recording towards the site and nationwide."





# Upper and Lower Barden Reservoirs

By Annie Shadrake, WeBS Counter



My WeBS sites are two upland reservoirs on Barden Moor, near Skipton, within the large private Bolton Abbey estate owned by the Duke of Devonshire. Built in the late 1800s by the hundreds of ‘navvies’ living out on the moors in makeshift huts with their families, these interlinked reservoirs were designed to collect freshwater straight off the millstone grit moors and channel it to the growing industrial city of Bradford.

Today the land enclosing the two reservoirs is intensively managed as a large grouse moor. This moorland is part of the extensive West Nidderdale, Barden and Blubberhouses Moors SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and the overarching North Pennine Moors SPA (Special Protection Area). Walkers can use public rights of way linked by permissive paths (no dogs) across the estate.

The Upper Reservoir sits at 1,100 feet altitude on exposed moorland so can be a bit daunting for winter counts! To survey both reservoirs on foot entails a round trip of over seven miles. Without the kind permission from the head

keeper to drive my car onto the private estate roads I wouldn’t be able to carry out the WeBS counts.

Maybe the challenging terrain and distance are partly why so few surveys were done in the decades before I took on the sites in early 2021. In the preceding 38 years, the Lower Reservoir was only counted on six years and the Upper Reservoir on two years. Sadly this means the historic data can tell us little except for regular sightings of Mallard, Black-headed Gull, Greylag and Canada Geese and a few records in the early 1980s of Goldeneye and Pochard.

I’ve surveyed both reservoirs fairly consistently for the past three or so WeBS years. These counts, plus extra visits I do for my own enjoyment, have helped me better understand the pattern of use by different birds at different times of the year.

Winter highlights are the roosting flocks of 50–100 Lapwings and 20 or so Oystercatchers I’ve regularly seen sleeping out of the wind at the base of the Lower Reservoir’s inner

dam wall. Greylag and Canada Geese (20–50 of each) are usually present across both reservoirs with numbers swelled by large broods of goslings in the summer. Mallard too are resident (10–30 or so) and breed. There are few other ducks using the reservoirs in winter apart from the occasional Teal or Goosander. Cormorant and Grey Heron are resident and must benefit from the stock of fish added to the Lower Reservoir by the local private angling club.

Many surveyors will know the disappointment from a ‘zero count’ – I had a run of five on the Upper Reservoir in late 2023! But this is balanced by unexpected treats. In early March 2024, I drove up the three miles of rough estate track to park at the Upper Reservoir beside the bizarrely Gothic Victorian water keeper’s house. As I crept along the embankment path, I could hear soft musical hooting coming out of the mist. Then in front of me slowly appeared 28 Whooper Swans – gently casting off from their sleeping spot under the bank to turn and sail curiously towards me. These



truly wild swans were on the final stages of their northern flight back to Iceland to breed, after wintering in the UK.

Also in March each year I anticipate the arrival of Black-headed Gulls returning in their many hundreds to breed on the edge of the Upper Reservoir. This inland colony is challenging to count as I can only view at a great distance from the opposite bank – any closer approach flushes the birds. The colony numbers have fluctuated between about 200 and 800 birds even in the few years I have counted and were impacted by HPAI in 2023. I'm fascinated to discover that this Yorkshire inland colony was listed in a 1958 national census of Black-headed Gull colonies. In that survey 155 breeding pairs were recorded, with evidence of occupation for breeding going back to 1938.

This year, 2025, I've been captivated by a pair of Little Ringed Plovers who have taken advantage of the dramatically low water levels to breed on the exposed shingle at the head of the Lower Reservoir. I've squeezed in many extra visits to carefully watch and video this Schedule 1 breeding bird during all the big events in their lives. I've seen them mating (three times) and twice incubate a full clutch of eggs. They've proved be brave and protective parents. I've watched them aggressively chase off Grey Wagtails, Common Sandpipers, a persistent Ringed Plover and even a



large crowd of hungry Greylag goslings. I saw the first chick hatch one summer evening, though overnight the rest of the clutch was abandoned due to rainwater seeping up to the nest. This one survivor benefited from exclusive care of both adults until it was about three weeks old when it was literally 'cold-shouldered' by its parents. They re-mated and raised a second brood of three chicks to full independence.

I regularly see raptors over the reservoirs including Red Kite, Buzzard and Kestrels. This year I have seen Osprey fly over the Lower Reservoir on hunting forays. Osprey bred for the first time in the Yorkshire Dales a few years ago after



centuries of absence due to widespread persecution. Perhaps concerted local effort would enable them to breed safely on Barden Moor and benefit from the ample fish stock in the Lower Reservoir.

My reason for signing up for WeBS was to help science but also to have the regular motivation to go out into the countryside on my own. I've rediscovered that actively watching and learning about birds keeps my autistic brain engaged and happy and bringing feelings of deep calm and joy. Overall doing the regular surveys has had a really positive impact on my mental health and my confidence in the outdoors. I'm sure that's something many WeBS volunteers can relate to, and I look forward to many years of keeping watch over 'my' two reservoirs!

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If you are interested in chatting about nature and neurodivergency, you can contact Annie on [annie.shadrake01@gmail.com](mailto:annie.shadrake01@gmail.com); or on X/ YouTube ([@annie\\_shadrake](https://twitter.com/annie_shadrake)).



# Green Sandpipers in the Ely Valley

By Dan Jenkins-Jones, WeBS Local Organiser

I'm sure a night out for a few pints and a curry with friends has resulted in many strange events, but the creation of a study of wintering Green Sandpipers must be a first. Then again, when those friends are birders you probably won't be surprised by that at all. It was in September 2019 that a small group of Glamorgan Bird Club (GBC) members gathered at that restaurant in Cardiff. Importantly, some of them were WeBS counters. Naturally, we talked all night about birds and birding.

One of those conversations revolved around how two WeBS sites on the River Ely in the Vale of Glamorgan regularly recorded, collectively, around nine wintering Green Sandpipers. The current UK wintering population estimate for this species is 290 birds. Hang on, could we have a nationally significant population of Green Sands on the Ely, we pondered? But, then again, could the birds seen by John on his WeBS site be the same ones Tim was seeing on his . . . or vice versa? Could we answer these questions? Let's have a go! And that's how the joint GBC/local BTO 'Ely Valley Green Sandpiper Study Group' was born.

## WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

The group decided to wait until the following winter to start. In the meantime, we recruited more volunteers and trawled the internet, journals and our local bird

reports for anything we could find on Green Sandpipers. Some members used Google Earth and local knowledge, followed up with field visits, to search for areas of suitable habitat in the Ely valley beyond the two WeBS sites. They looked for stretches of the river with shallow, muddy edges which offered foraging opportunities for the sandpipers. We eventually targeted roughly 13 km of the Ely for our survey, broken down in eight sectors for volunteers to monitor.

## HOW DO YOU COUNT GREEN SANDPIPERS?

With great difficulty! Counting Green Sandpipers is a challenge. They are amongst the most nervous of birds and flush the second they see you. They sometimes flush low and quietly round the next corner of the river and can be easily missed. Sometimes they flush high and noisily, landing far away upstream or downstream. Double or under counting had to be avoided.

We held monthly coordinated counts, always coinciding with WeBS Core Count priority dates, from October to March. These counts started 30 minutes after sunrise. The weather and a basic assessment of the river level were noted. The exact time and GPS of each encounter with a Green Sandpiper were recorded, as well as whether they flew up or downstream and whether they were seen to land in the sector or not. We



tried to ensure that teams of two or more volunteers covered each sector – more eyes/more accuracy – and sightings of birds and their direction of travel were conveyed to the whole team live and in real time during the survey using WhatsApp. At the end of each survey, group members were asked to provide an estimate of the minimum ‘safe’ number and possible maximum number of Green Sandpipers present in their sector.

Every sighting was cross-referenced with all other sightings to create a picture of any potential movements of birds between count sectors. Likely double-counts were excluded from the ‘safe’ minimum count and any birds we were unsure whether they’d been previously counted were recorded in our possible maximum count.

## WHAT DID WE DISCOVER?

Fifteen surveys were undertaken by a total of 20 volunteers across four winters between November 2020 and March 2023, with COVID-19 restrictions putting a spanner in the works in that first winter of surveys. Double-figure counts of Green Sandpipers were recorded in all but three of those surveys and the highest safe count was 15 in January 2023. Three dates had potential maximum counts of 18 birds. Importantly, Green Sandpipers were recorded in all eight survey sectors during the survey period, including those that we’d identified as having suitable habitat but, because they weren’t visited by birdwatchers, had no previous records of Green Sandpipers in them. Our survey suggests that the Ely valley holds up to 5% of the UK’s current estimated wintering population. Our plan now is to organise an annual coordinated count in January to keep an eye on numbers.

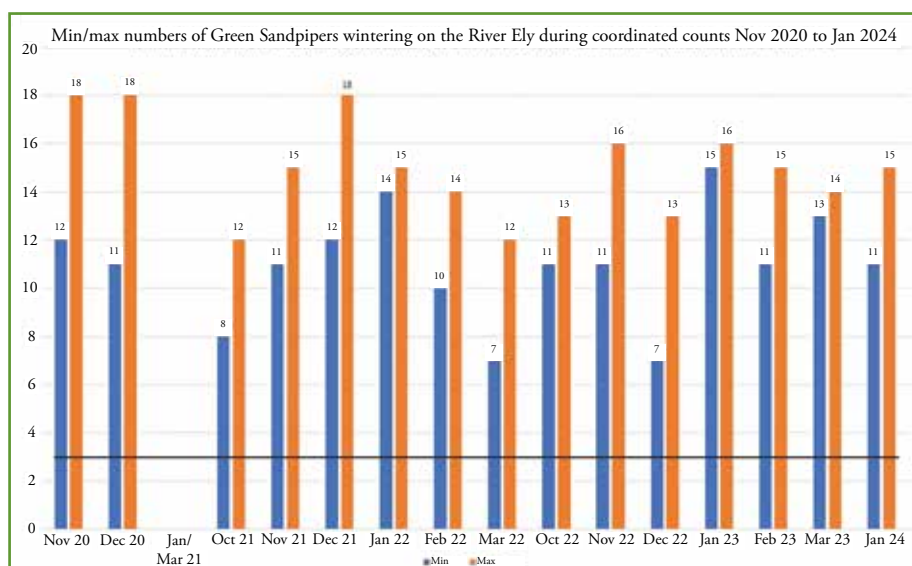


## ARE THERE GREEN SANDPIPERS GOING UNNOTICED IN YOUR AREA?

Establishing a robust wintering population estimate for Green Sandpipers is difficult because they are widely and thinly distributed across much of the country and many birds remain undetected. Estimates, as a result, have varied greatly over the last half century. The UK is at the very north-western edge of Green Sandpipers’ wintering areas and so, as the climate crisis progresses, they are an important species to study. Citizen science definitely has a role to play. Could you help fill in the gaps in our knowledge and search for them in your area?

Green Sandpipers are often found on areas of still water which tend to be well-covered by WeBS. But our survey showed the value of rivers for the species, a habitat which is less well-recorded for WeBS. Perhaps you could take on a suitable new riparian WeBS site?

If you’d like more information you can find out more about how our group approached our survey in a paper published in *Milvus*, the Welsh Ornithological Society’s journal (<https://birds.wales/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Milvus-3-1-2024-text-for-website.pdf>) or please feel free to drop us a line at [eastglamwebs@gmail.com](mailto:eastglamwebs@gmail.com).



And finally, if you’re struggling to find volunteers, organise a night out for a curry. You never know where it might lead!

◀ **Minimum ‘safe’ and potential maximum numbers of Green Sandpipers on the River Ely during coordinated counts: Nov/Dec 2020; Oct 2021 to Mar 2022; Oct 2022 to Mar 2023 and Jan 2024. The black line represents 1% of the estimated UK wintering population (Frost *et al.* 2019).**

# WeBS and GSMP data used to predict waterbird distributions for disease mitigation planning

By Teresa Frost, Head of Waterbird Monitoring

For 20 years, government officials have been using data from WeBS along with other bird surveys to understand patterns in outbreaks of High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI/bird flu) and help guide rules and advice designed to minimise risk in captive birds. The WeBS dataset has been particularly useful amongst the available wild bird data, because large waterbird aggregations can act as a reservoir and vector of the disease, and the virus can persist longer in damp environments, so wetlands are a key part of the picture.

In late Summer 2024 the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and partners including BTO launched the £2.3 million iPREPARE (Influenza Preparedness and Planning for Animal Risks of Emerging Threats) project, funded by Defra. iPREPARE is designed to improve our understanding of how avian influenza viruses circulate in birds and mammals, and to strengthen national preparedness for future outbreaks.

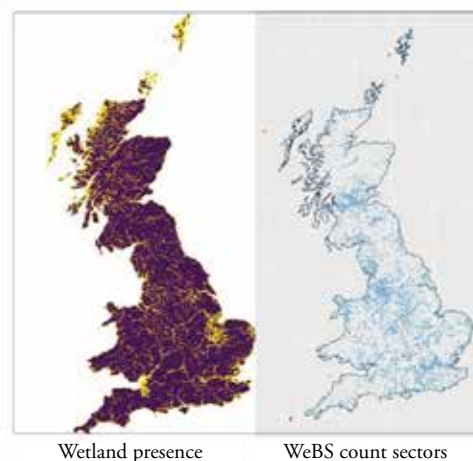
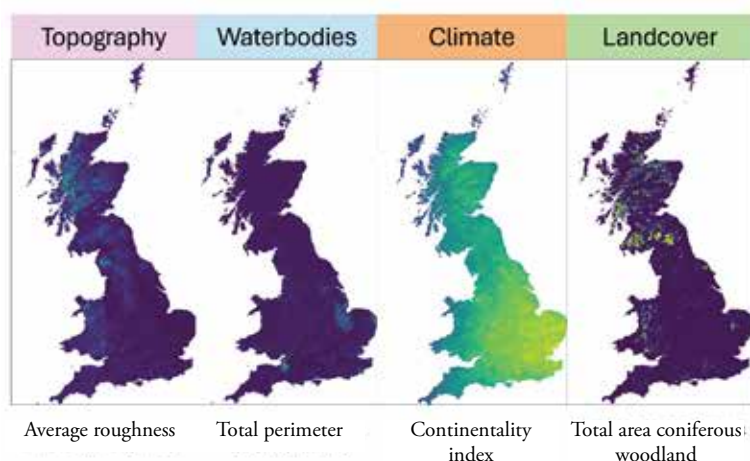
While much attention is rightly given to highly pathogenic strains, iPREPARE is also investigating the role of less visible, non-notifiable viruses that may be moving through bird populations more quietly. By combining field sampling, mapping and laboratory analysis, the project aims to identify which species act as carriers, how infections spread between different habitats, and where the greatest risks lie.

BTO is leading the work package of iPREPARE that is focused on geospatial statistical modelling of waterbird data.

The aim is to better understand spatial variation in the potential underlying infection pressure in wild birds. We have started by looking at key species of interest using data from WeBS, GSMP, WinGS, NEWS and the most recent Bird Atlas dataset. The modelling framework we have been developing aims to integrate waterbird count data from multiple sources (each with different sampling designs, protocols, temporal and spatial resolutions) to achieve a more complete picture of species distribution.

To be able to predict distributions in the wider landscape at the scale required, we have compiled nearly 300 different 'layers' of information, offering a remarkably detailed picture of wetland environments. As well as obvious things like how much saltmarsh or open water a site holds, the finer details are potentially important: the shape of the landscape, how fragmented habitats are, and even the surrounding climate and land cover. The aim is for results that aren't limited to big, well-known sites like large lakes or estuaries but enable consideration of smaller and less obvious places – a scatter of ponds, a corner of marsh, or a patchwork of wet fields.

We will keep you updated on the progress of the project, which is already showing the power of the data that you all collect countrywide. The results will help inform national response strategies, guiding both wildlife conservation and animal health policy.



▲ Examples of environmental layers being used in the models (left) and wetland presence compared with WeBS sectors (right).



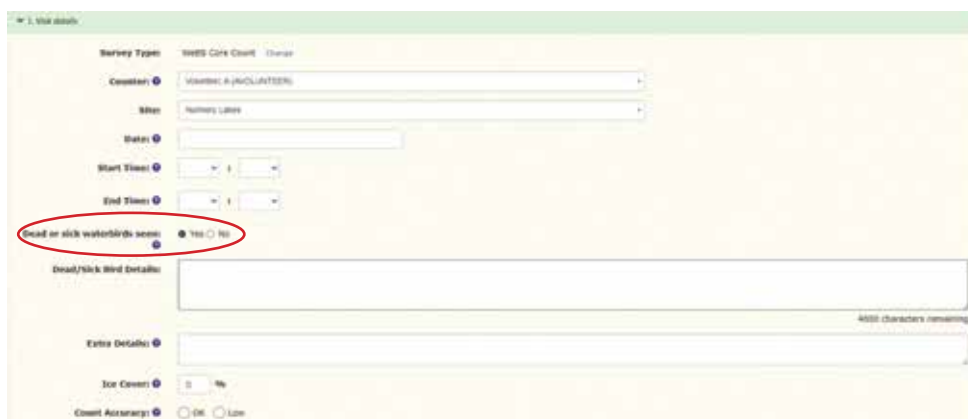
# New option for recording dead or sick birds in WeBS and GSMP Online

By Gill Birtles, WeBS Core Count Organiser

Since 2022, we have asked WeBS and GSMP counters to record any dead or sick birds through the 'Extra Details:' box on their count entry form as a way to identify any potential HPAI-related deaths at their site. However, when extracting the details, this still meant we would have to search for key words in the comments.

In order to make recording simpler and more streamlined, we have now added a new option for recording this information in the first sections of the WeBS Core Count, IGC and ISC data entry forms. In 'Section 1. Visit Details' you can now indicate 'Yes' or 'No' as to whether dead or sick birds were seen during the WeBS, IGC or ISC count and if you select 'Yes', a box will appear where extra details can be included.

This is an optional extra and we ask that counters please use this as it will help us better monitor how HPAI could be impacting birds on our wetlands.

A screenshot of the WeBS Core Count form. The 'Dead or sick waterbirds seen?' section is highlighted with a red circle. It contains a radio button for 'Yes' and a radio button for 'No'. Below this is a text box for 'Dead/sick bird details' and another for 'Extra Details'. The 'Yes' radio button is selected.

## Managing Your Publication Preferences

Don't forget that you can now manage your mailing preferences through either WeBS or GSMP Online by selecting 'View/Edit My Details' after logging in. This includes subscribing to receive electronic copies of the *Waterbirds in the UK* annual report and *Waterbird News* by email instead of by post if you prefer, or opting out of receiving either of them altogether.

A screenshot of the 'Mailing List Preferences' form. It has two columns: 'WeBS Reports' and 'WeBS Newsletter'. Under 'WeBS Reports', there are options for 'Printed copy by post' (selected), 'Electronic copy by email' (unchecked), and 'Opt out'. Under 'WeBS Newsletter', there are options for 'Printed copy by post' (unchecked), 'Electronic copy by email' (checked), and 'Opt out'. A note at the bottom says: 'If you require more than 2 copies of the WeBS report or newsletter please contact webs@bto.org'.

Your WeBS Core Count priority dates for the 2025/2026 season...

2025...

12 October

9 November

7 December

2026...

18 January

22 February

22 March

19 April

17 May

14 June

19 July

16 August

13 September

11 October

22 November

13 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](http://www.bto.org/webs/coredates)

# 60 years of the International Waterbird Census



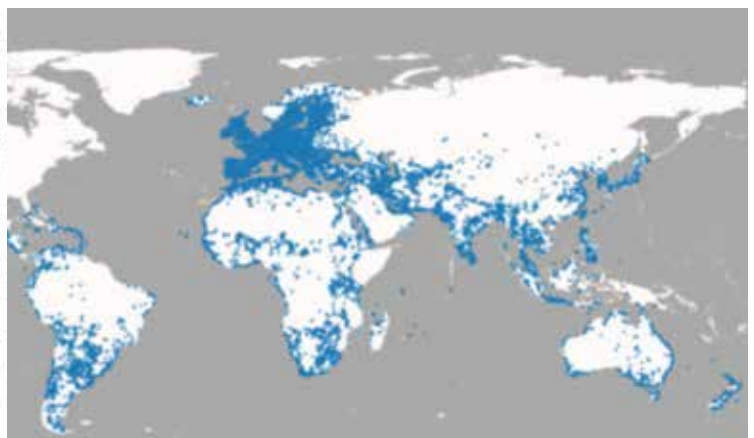
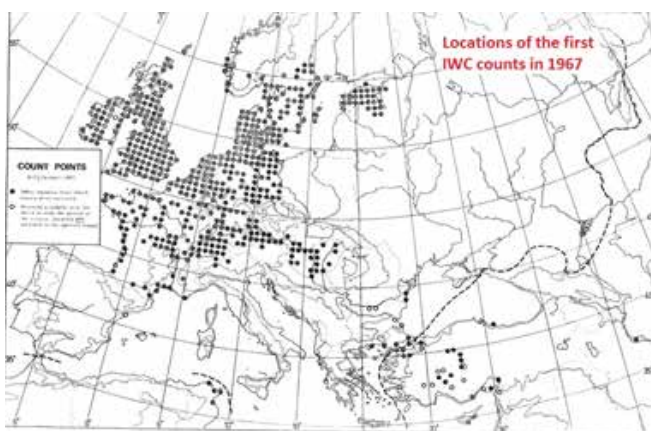
By Neil Calbrade, Waterbird Surveys Officer

This coming January, the International Waterbird Census (IWC) celebrates 60 years of globally monitoring waterbirds. Beginning in 1967, the IWC is a global monitoring programme, operating in over 100 countries across 143 territories and encompassing over 25,000 sites, consisting of an annual synchronised count of all waterbird species. The IWC is coordinated internationally by Wetlands International and nationally or regionally by local partners, with WeBS being the UK contributor, making it one of the world's largest and longest-running biodiversity monitoring programs. WeBS also supports the development of waterbird monitoring in the flyway, and contributes expertise to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership through the Strategic Working Group.

The counts are organised during the non-breeding season when many species congregate in wetlands, with all the January WeBS counts contributing to this important census. IWC data has supported Red List assessments and helped identify 1.5 million square kilometres of internationally important wetland sites, an area over six times the size of the UK.

The Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative coordinates activities to improve integrated monitoring along the East Atlantic Flyway as part of the IWC, particularly in western Africa where waterbirds tend to be poorly monitored. Since 2014, with support from WeBS, important sites on the coast of Sierra Leone have been counted by a small team of volunteers from the UK and colleagues at the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL). As well as collecting important information on numbers of birds at sites in Sierra Leone, the two-week trip included training of CSSL staff in waterbird monitoring methods and engagement with local communities. An article about the 2020 trip appeared in *WeBS News* 36.

To celebrate the milestone 60th IWC count, Wetlands International is asking counters to share their stories to recognise their important contribution to conservation. Postcards can be found at <https://iwc.wetlands.org/postcards>, and a selection of some of the postcards already submitted are opposite. If you would like to add a postcard, you can do so by filling in the form at <https://forms.gle/pca2GTMCMCqiYbF46> and add your photograph and story.



▲ The increase in participating countries and sites since the first IWC Counts in 1967 (left) and in 2020 (right).



## Stella Egbe, Nigeria



Photo credit: Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) (2017)

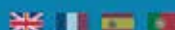


The waterbird count is an annual exercise that my organisation, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, leads in the country. While my participation began as an official assignment, the exercise has evolved into an annual event that we eagerly anticipate. It gives us the opportunity to interact and experience first-hand how the ecological matrix is impacted by human activities and changes in average weather conditions. It also affords us the opportunity to enlighten and interact with local communities that live in critical wetland habitats across the country. Finally, the results from the observations made during this count provide the data that we use to design conservation interventions in some of these sites.

## Gabriele Facchin, Italy



Photo credit: Gabriele Facchin



It all started as a way to introduce me to wildlife monitoring, it became part of my job for almost 20 years, and now it is a volunteer activity for me again. When it was a job, I used to feel it was important because data were used for wildlife and site management. Now it is important for me to share the importance of taking care of wetlands and waterbird species. My favourite moments from the counts regard coastal reserve monitoring, but also some funny facts I always like to talk about, usually involving Bittern as a special guest :)

## Johan Mooij, Germany



Photo credit: Johan Mooij



I am a biologist with a great interest in birds. As I moved from the Netherlands to the German Lower Rhine area in spring 1976, I was surprised to find high numbers of waterbirds in the area. After I heard that some local ornithologist only monitored some focal points or some species (e.g. geese) I started to count geese and waterbirds since winter 1977/78. Until the late 1980s I did the job alone, since then as a part of a network of counters. With the help of our data the Lower Rheine area became a Ramsar Site as well as a EU Natura 2000 site.

## Lisa Paguntalan-Marte, Philippines



Photo credit: Lisa Paguntalan-Marte



It was 2012 and my first time to visit the wetland of Tibsoc. We were there to try freshly caught angel wings shell, a local delicacy called "diwal". I brought my binoculars as I expected waterbirds. It was low tide. As I scan the seascape, my attention was drawn to "moving rocks". I took a closer look. I could not believe it. It was the largest known flock of Black-tailed Godwits and Great Knots in the Philippines. That fateful day changed how the local people look at the wetlands and the waterbirds. From a simple count, it developed into a movement that led to the declaration of Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area (NOCWCA) as a Ramsar and East Asian Australasian Flyway site.

# Obituaries

## Yvonne Benting (1960–2025)

In July 2025, we received the sad news of Yvonne Benting's passing. Yvonne was a long-term supporter of WeBS and GSMP - as well as being a counter for 18 years, she served two stints as the Local Organiser for Harris and Lewis, most recently from 2012 to 2024 and she also for the Uists and Benbecula WeBS region from 2010 to 2024. Yvonne was also a major contributor towards GSMP on Uist, participating in the Greenland White-fronted Goose counts for many years.

Yvonne was a prominent figure in her local and WeBS and GSMP community who will be sorely missed. Our condolences go out to her friends and family.

## Jim Baldwin (1957–2025)

Jim Baldwin, who was a long time supporter of WeBS and the BTO on the Isle of Wight, sadly passed away in May 2025. Since 2009, up until his passing, Jim was the Local Organiser for the island, as well as carrying out WeBS counts at multiple sectors and coordinating WeBS Low Tide Counts at Newtown Harbour.

In addition to WeBS, Jim was the Regional Rep. and the Regional Organiser for the Heronries Census so his passing has been a great loss for the BTO and for all who participate in the surveys on the Isle of Wight. Our condolences go out to all his friends and family.

## Paddy Mackie (1931–2025)

In March this year, we received the sad news of Paddy Mackie's passing, at the ripe old age of 93, just short of his 94th birthday. Paddy was a long-time counter and organiser on Strangford Lough, with his first counts as part of the National Wildfowl Enquiry in 1954 taking over from his late brother (who had tragically drowned on Strangford the previous spring), and his last count at the close of winter 2019/2020 – some 65 years later.



Paddy coordinated Strangford Lough's counts from the start of the National Trust Strangford Lough Wildlife Scheme in 1965, manually computing averages and maxima across all species and months until its conversion to a spreadsheet in the mid 1990s gradually transitioning the responsibility to the next generation.

Similarly on the ringing front he was active from the 1950s, cannon-netting geese in Scotland with Peter Scott and ringing Sandwich Terns on Strangford's breeding islands before the creation of his Mahee Island ringing station. Here he caught ducks and waders from the early 1960s–1970s and again after it reopened with the help of WWT in 1994 and continuing to ring mostly Teal and Redshank until 2012 – with a total catch in excess of 20,000 ducks and waders.

Our condolences go out to Paddy's friends and family.

## Alan Ford (1948–2025)

We are sad to report of the passing of Alan Ford, who was a long-time WeBS counter at Bough Beech Reservoir in Kent – West. Alan had been counting the reservoir not just for WeBS but also for Winter Gull Survey (WinGS) (three times!) and the Heronries Census since the time of the reservoir's creation in 1970, right up until his passing.

Alan's positive impact and contribution to WeBS and BTO will be much missed and we send our condolences to all who knew him.



# Local Organiser News

By Gill Birtles, WeBS Core Count Organiser

We would like to thank Charlie Kitchin (Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire)); Chris North (Worcestershire); Daniel Skeats (Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales); and Tom Wells (Orkney) for all their hard work as Local Organisers and who have retired from the scheme since the last newsletter.

We would also like to welcome the following new Local Organisers: David Broome (Merseyside (inland)); Claire Carpenter (Cotswold Water Park); Dave Dickenson (Clwyd (coastal)); Ian Enlander (Belfast Lough); Ben Hillier (Greater London (excl. Thames Estuary)); Carol Philipps (Dorset (Radipole and Lodmoor)); Mark & Heather Walsh (Lancashire (West inland)); Claire MacNamara (Londonderry (Lough Foyle)); Joanne Whitley (Lincolnshire (South inland)) and Gert Corfield (Worcestershire).

Special thanks are needed to Wally and Karen Gowing, who this year stepped down from counting their sites in Derbyshire after a fantastic 51 years! Thanks are also needed for Roger Thompson, who also retired from WeBS this year after 40 years of counting on the Swale Estuary, Kent and Martin Sage who has retired after 25 years for counting at Shapwick Heath NNR on the Somerset Levels.

We would also like to acknowledge the inspiring achievements of Ron Graham, who this year completed their 40th year of mid-winter counts on the Moray Firth and John Walker, who has been counting their site on the Humber Estuary for 45 years and counting! Hearing about these achievements is truly inspiring and makes us feel lucky to have dedicated and passionate counters supporting WeBS!

## Desperately seeking organisers...

We are urgently seeking new Local Organisers for Badenoch and Strathspey; Buckinghamshire - South; Cheshire - North; Clwyd (inland); Dundrum Bay (Down); Forth Estuary - North (Fife); Harris and Lewis; Harrogate and Yorkshire Dales; Huddersfield/Halifax; Isle of Cumbrae; Isle of Wight; Jersey (inland); Kent - West; Nene Washes (Cambridgeshire); Northamptonshire (excl. Nene Valley; Orkney; Staffordshire; Sutherland (excl. Moray Basin); Uists & Benbecula and West Glamorgan.

If you would like to know more about becoming a WeBS Local Organiser please contact us at the WeBS Office: [webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.org)

## WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) update

The Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) provides an opportunity for the Local Organiser and Counter networks to improve communication with WeBS staff, providing ideas, feedback and advice. In June 2025, the WeBS team virtually hosted the 15th annual meeting of the LOAC, the agenda and minutes of which are freely viewable on the BTO website at: [www.bto.org/webs-loac](http://www.bto.org/webs-loac).

This year, we welcomed Alan Burnham, LO for East Yorkshire and Scarborough (excl. Humber), as the

representative for Northern England. There is currently one vacancy on the LOAC for the North and West Scotland region. If any Local Organisers in this area are interested in serving on the LOAC and would like to learn more about getting involved, please contact Gill at: [webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.org).

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

### WeBS LOAC Representatives

#### Eastern England

Chris Gunn  
[donandchris@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:donandchris@hotmail.co.uk)

#### Midlands

Brian Moore  
[b\\_moore@ntlworld.com](mailto:b_moore@ntlworld.com)

#### Northern England

Alan Burnham  
[alanburnham55@gmail.com](mailto:alanburnham55@gmail.com)

#### Wales

Dan Jenkins-Jones  
[eastglamwebs@gmail.com](mailto:eastglamwebs@gmail.com)

#### South and East Scotland

Andy Riches  
[slioch69@aol.com](mailto:slioch69@aol.com)

#### South West England

Eve Tigwell  
[eve.tigwell@zen.co.uk](mailto:eve.tigwell@zen.co.uk)

North and West Scotland  
VACANT

#### Northern Ireland

Kerry Mackie  
[kerrymackie9@gmail.com](mailto:kerrymackie9@gmail.com)



# Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) Update

The GSMP is a suite of species-specific surveys which monitors the different populations of geese and migrant swans throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, to provide data for the conservation of their populations.

## GSMP survey dates for 2025/26

### ICELANDIC-BREEDING GOOSE CENSUS (IGC)

**Pink-footed Goose:** 18–19 October 2025,  
22–23 November 2025

**Greylag Goose:** 22–23 November 2025

Ideally all sites supporting Pink-footed Geese should be covered during the October and November counts, whilst those holding Icelandic Greylag Geese should be covered in November.

We would like to encourage all counters at sites within the wintering range of Icelandic Greylag Geese to also carry out a count during September if the site also supports British Greylag Geese. September counts are not strictly coordinated but ideally should be carried out during the middle of that month, although any counts made during September will be of value.

If you are unable to count on the above dates, please contact either your GSMP Local Organiser or the GSMP Office so that we may try to arrange cover of your site by another counter.

#### IGC LOCAL ORGANISERS NEEDED

We are looking for Local Organisers to coordinate the Icelandic-breeding Goose Counts in Speyside, Northern Ireland, and Angus (excl. Montrose Basin) regions.

If you are interested in taking on a region, please contact Neil Calbrade: [gsmp@bto.org](mailto:gsmp@bto.org)

### GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE CENSUS

The census is organised by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study (<https://greenlandwhitefront.org>).

Please contact the organiser Tony Fox ([tfo@bios.au.dk](mailto:tfo@bios.au.dk)) for further details about the census.

#### Count dates for the 2025/26 census are as follows:

Autumn and spring coordinated censuses:

**13–17 December 2025 and 21–25 February 2026.**

We very much welcome counts from other dates and times but for the monthly counts, we especially appreciate counts in the following periods:

**15–19 November 2025, 10–14 January 2026 and 14–18 March 2026.**

### COORDINATED WHOOPER AND BEWICK'S SWAN AGE ASSESSMENTS

Three coordinated census dates are set each winter for age assessments of Whooper and Bewick's Swans.

The coordinated dates for winter 2025/26 are as follows (or the nearest date possible within three days either side):

**11 November 2025**

**9 December 2025**

**20 January 2026**

Counts of both species can be made during each month, however for Bewick's Swans please focus on December (to coordinate with international assessment) and January and for Whooper Swans, please focus on January. Assessments made at any other time during the autumn/winter are also welcome. Age Assessments can be entered into GSMP Online.

Details about all the GSMP surveys, including how to get involved can be found on the GSMP webpages at: [www.bto.org/gsmp](http://www.bto.org/gsmp)

# Spring IGC counts

By Neil Calbrade, GSMP Organiser

Every three years, in addition to the October and November IGC Counts, a spring count of Pink-footed Geese, which takes place in March, is carried out. This spring count is undertaken in order to determine the distribution of the geese at a time when they are feeding to build up nutrient reserves for a successful migration back to their breeding grounds. These counts do not provide a way of censusing the whole population, but do help identify the key sites being used by the geese at that time of year.

A spring count was carried out in March 2025, a full write up will appear in the next *Waterbirds in the UK*, but initial results are encouraging. So far, we have received counts from 98 IGC sites which was an excellent take up, compared with 70 in March 2022, with over 160,000 Pink-footed Geese counted. I would like to thank all the counters who took part in this additional count.

If you have any spring counts which you have not yet submitted, please enter these as soon as possible so that they can be used in the final analysis.

**All the sites from where we have so far received IGC counts from spring 2025. ►**





## AGE ASSESSMENTS

Field-based age assessments were initiated in the 1940s, initially for European White-fronted Geese. This was extended to most other populations between the 1960s and 1980s and currently the two migratory swan species and 11 goose populations native to the UK are all assessed.

The aims of the age assessments are to determine the annual reproductive success of each goose or swan population and are mostly carried out at wintering and autumn stop-over sites. Age assessments of geese and swans comprise two measures of annual reproductive success (or productivity): the proportion of young (first-winter) birds in non-breeding flocks and the average brood size.

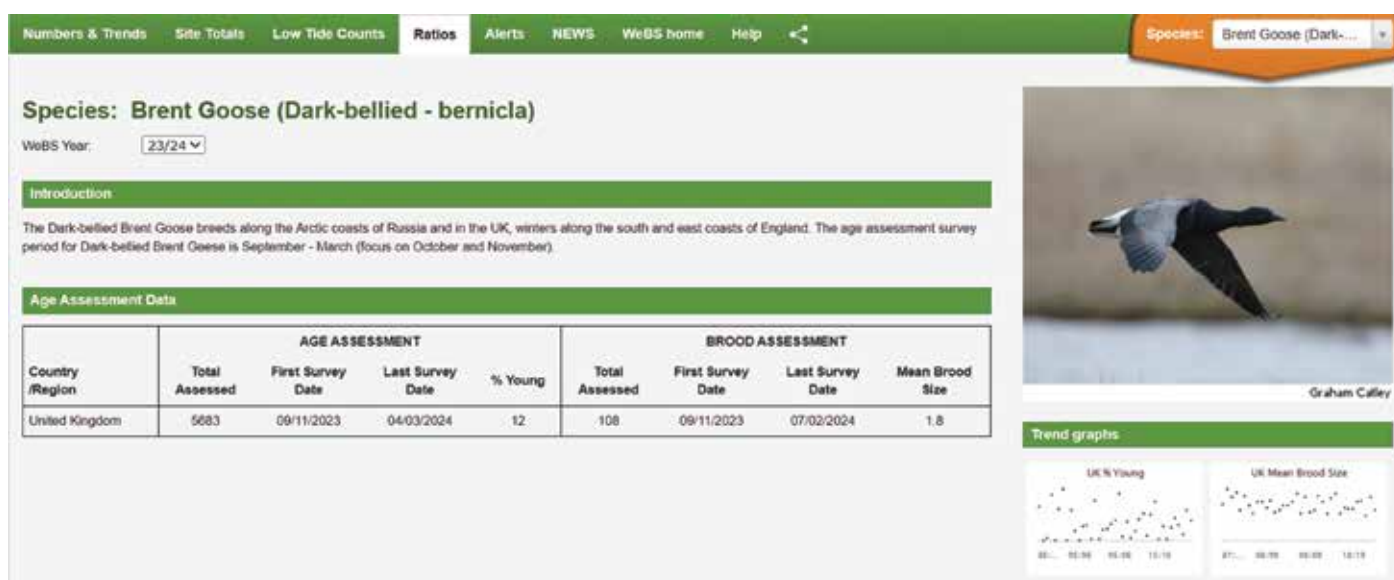
Due to differences in plumage characteristics, swans and geese in their first winter are usually easily separated from adult birds, at least for part of the non-breeding season. In many swans and geese, young birds remain in family units with their parents throughout their first winter, and thus it is also possible to measure the number of young produced by successful

breeding pairs. Counters, therefore, record the number of young birds present in a flock and also identify family groups making a note of the number of young within each family.

The timing of migration and post-juvenile moult differs between species, meaning that the time period in which data can be collected also varies between species (see below). Plumage differences also vary between species and are more subtle for some species than others, meaning that the level of experience required by the observer is greater.

Annual age assessments are reported in *Waterbirds in the UK* and now also via the 'Ratios' tab in the WeBS Report Online. On the 'Ratios' tab you can view the percentage young and mean brood sizes submitted to GSMP Online or WeBS Online. Past years can be viewed by changing the WeBS year or via the plots on the right-hand side. We will soon be adding sex ratios submitted through WeBS Online to the 'Ratios' tab.

Details on how to submit age assessments into GSMP Online can be found in *Waterbird News* 39 and submitting sex and age ratios into WeBS Online can be found in *WeBS News* 36.



▲ The ratios tab in the WeBS Report Online gives the results from age assessments.

### Survey periods for age assessments:

**Bewick's Swan:** November–February (focus on December and mid-January)

**Whooper Swan:** October–January (focus on mid-January)

**Taiga Bean Goose:** October–mid November

**Pink-footed Goose:** mid September–mid November

**European White-fronted Goose:** October–January (focus on January)

**Greenland White-fronted Goose:** October–January (focus on December)

**Icelandic Greylag Goose:** October–mid November (care needed with age identification)

**British Greylag Goose:** August–September

**Barnacle Goose (both populations):** October–December

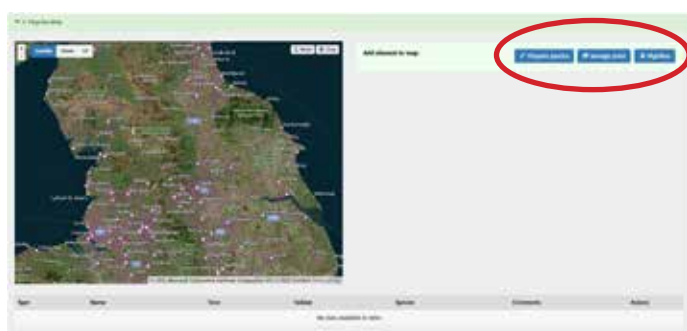
**Dark-bellied Brent Goose:** September–March (focus on October and November)

**Light-bellied Brent Goose (both populations):** September–March (focus on October and November)

## ADDING PINPOINTS TO IGC COUNTS

When submitting IGC data into GSMP Online, you are now able to pinpoint flocks, flightlines and vantage points (optional) in the online data entry form. The purpose of this new feature is to allow people to map where within their site flocks are, which direction birds are flying from/to, as well as mapping vantage points to understand where counters are viewing these birds from their study site, which may be of use to future counters of that site.

After filling out the rest of our IGC data on the form, if you scroll down below species count you will see **'3. Pinpoint Map'** at the bottom of the form:



The view will automatically zoom into the site you chose when entering your count, with the centre point in the middle. Please note that you can only pinpoint within 5 km from the centre of the site. A warning will appear if you try to submit a pinpoint from further afield.

If you are wanting to map a flock or an individual goose, simply press the 'pinpoint species' button (note you won't be able to pinpoint until you have filled in the species count in section **'2. Counts'** above the pinpoint map).

Once you select 'pinpoint species', simply click on the map where you want to mark your flock. You can also zoom in and out either on the '+' and '-' button on the top left of the map or by using your mouse. Once you click on the map, a form will pop up where you can enter details relating to your pinpoint. Everything is optional apart from species count/present.



If you don't know the exact number of birds in your flock, you can estimate the number using [square brackets] to signify an underestimate to indicate the species in your flock without having to give a specific number.

Also note you can move or delete your point using the 'move' or 'clear' buttons on the top right of the map. Once you are happy with your pinpoint entry, simply press 'done'.

This entry will then appear in a table below, where you can edit or delete if needed.

Name	Date	Time	Species	Count	Comments	Action
1234567890	2020-01-01	12:00	1234567890	1		<a href="#">Edit</a> <a href="#">Delete</a>

You can add as many pinpoints as you would like, simply keep pressing 'pinpoint species' and fill in the form until you have mapped everything you wish to.

Similarly, to plot flightlines, press 'flightline'. This will then generate an arrow, where you click once to start the arrow and click again (just once) where you want the arrow to end. This can either be in relation to a flock you have already pinpointed or completely separate from your flocks.



As with pinpoints, you can then fill in the pop-up form with the relevant information (species present/count being mandatory). When finished, press 'done' and this will then appear in the table underneath the map.

Name	Date	Time	Species	Count	Comments	Action
1234567890	2020-01-01	12:00	1234567890	1		<a href="#">Edit</a> <a href="#">Delete</a>

Finally, you can mark a vantage point if you would like to show where you were viewing these birds. Press 'vantage point' and simply click once on the map where you were standing. Optionally, you can add a name and/or comments. You can mark as many vantage points as you want.

# Backchat...

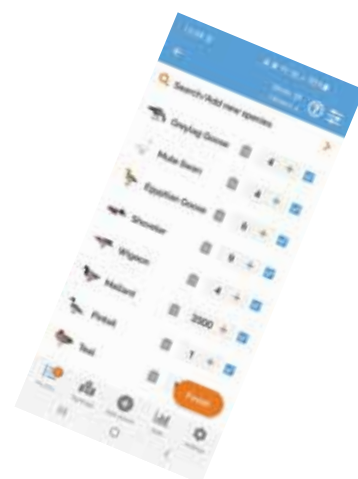
## Eager Beavers...

Although mammals aren't recorded for WeBS, their presence on WeBS sites can often cause interest. During Chris White's January count on his Wiltshire site, he noticed a tree that had been knawed by Beavers, which wasn't in that state on the previous month's count. Being near Longleat, where there are at least two families, as in many areas, Beaver numbers in the area are increasing and may become a familiar site on many WeBS sites in the future.



## WeBS counts in BirdTrack

Since 2020, WeBS counters who use BirdTrack to record their counts have been able to quickly import their BirdTrack counts into WeBS Online rather than having to re-enter them into a different system, details of how to do this can be found in *WeBS News* 36 or at: [www.bto.org/webs-counter-resources](http://www.bto.org/webs-counter-resources). When using BirdTrack for WeBS counts, please remember to mark your count in the 'count type' section of BirdTrack as 'WeBS count' so that county recorders can identify it as a copy of the BirdTrack list. Also, please remember, WeBS counts entered into BirdTrack still need to then be imported into WeBS Online for us to get them.



## Inland seabird counts



Many inland WeBS counters may not realise that their site holds breeding seabirds that could be monitored by the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP). If your site has breeding Cormorants, terns or gulls, please contact [smp@bto.org](mailto:smp@bto.org) to take part.