

# WeBSnews

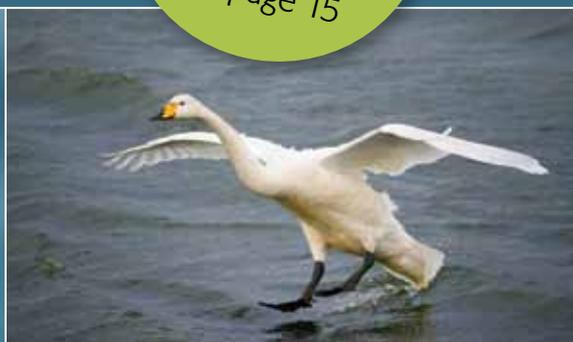
The newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey



50 YEARS OF  
WATERBIRD  
COUNTING  
See page 15



MALLARDS IN DEVON 6



2015 INTERNATIONAL SWAN CENSUS 8



GODWIT STUDIES 12

ISSUE 32 • AUTUMN 2016

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

## Turning your counts from birds to bytes

**Teresa Frost explains why submitting your data promptly is so important...**

Getting out to a wetland and counting some birds is hopefully something every WeBS counter enjoys! It is perhaps a rarer person who enjoys sitting in front of a computer and typing up their counts, so I am impressed and grateful to you all for getting this job done so quickly. The WeBS Online system has made it easier to submit your counts early and by the August deadline. Over 40% of counts are now submitted online within a week and 60% within a month of the count. Many of you also contributed

last winter to the Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey, where prompt data submission was vital in helping us see how the survey was progressing and plug gaps as they arose – see page 3 for more on NEWS.

Last year, 86% of 2014–15 counts were submitted by August 2015, following the end of the WeBS year in June. This is a fantastic effort, as having data available for validation and analysis early is essential for producing the annual report *Waterbirds in the UK* well within a year of each season's end. As well as ▶



## FROM THE EDITOR

## Welcome...

...to the latest issue of WeBS News.

The forthcoming months see a peak in the number of Black-tailed Godwits wintering in and passing through the UK which are increasing year on year. Although the sheer spectacle of watching large flocks of these is a sight to behold, as one observer explains, the interactions between birds within these flocks can be equally as fascinating.

In preparation for the new UK waterbird population estimates, we will need all WeBS Counts for the 2015/16 year so that they can be included. If you have not already done so, please send yours in or enter them in to WeBS Online as soon as possible.

To celebrate 70 years of waterbird counting in the UK, we will be holding a WeBS Counter Conference in the northwest of England next autumn. More details will follow shortly, and I hope to see many of you there.



**Neil Calbrade** Editor & WeBS Low Tide Organiser



## ◀ CONTINUED FROM COVER

making validation more challenging, delayed submissions means the annual report lacks complete up-to-date information for some sites. Submission rates show a similar pattern for the past few years. Ideally we would like close to 100% of counts being submitted by the August deadline, and a greater proportion of submissions within a month of each count date.

This year, your **July 2015 – June 2016** counts are especially needed as soon as possible: we will soon be analysing WeBS core counts, together with NEWS counts and other data sources, to inform revised UK waterbird population estimates. At the time of writing, 1,901 of you have already submitted 33,318 counts for 4,508 separate count sectors for 2015–16 – thank you!

If you still have outstanding counts from last season, please do your utmost to input them into WeBS Online (or use your usual alternate route via your Local Organiser or post to the WeBS office if applicable) by the end of October, otherwise your counts will not be able to contribute to the population estimates.

If you are unsure of what to do or need any help with WeBS Online or how to submit your counts, please contact your Local Organiser or Heidi Mellan at the WeBS office for assistance.

Thank you all once again for not just doing the fun bit out in the field – the less glamorous bit with pen and paper, keyboard and mouse is how you are truly contributing to wetland bird research and conservation.

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## NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

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Thanks to Dawn Balmer, Teresa Frost, Sarah Harris and Heidi Mellan 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. WeBS is a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the last on behalf of the statutory nature conservation bodies: Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland) in association with the Wildfowl & Wetlands



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

# 2015/16 NEWS STORMS TO SUCCESS

Counting coastal stretches in the middle of winter can be a gruelling task, and we would like to say a big thank you to all those who braved bracing conditions to complete NEWS counts...

**Teresa Frost** WeBS National Organiser

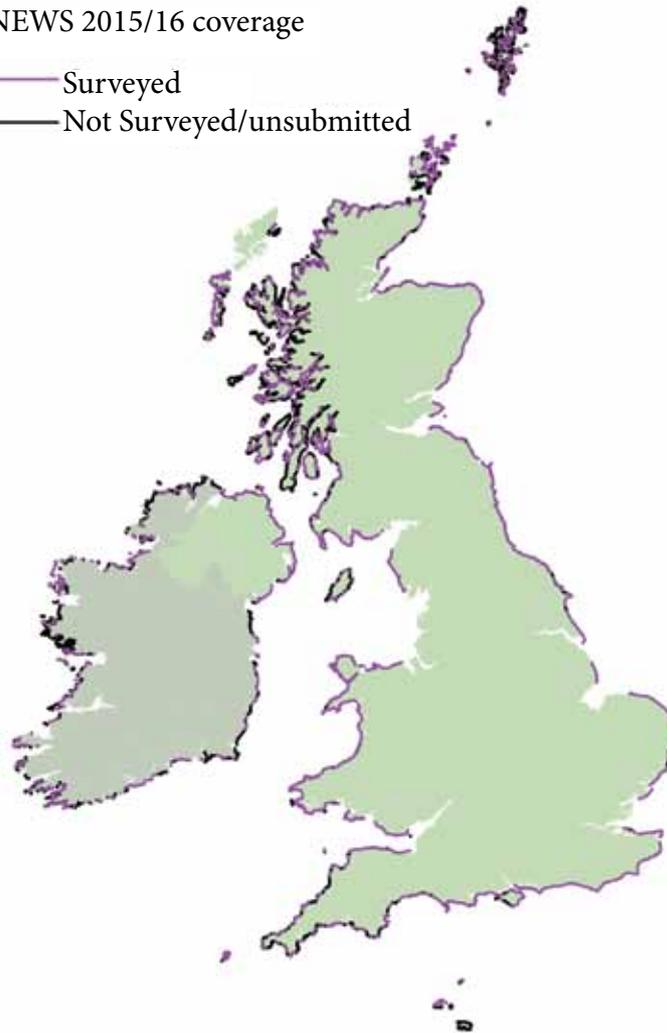


As featured in the last WeBS Newsletter, the third Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) was planned to take place in December 2015 and January 2016, with counting close to the International Waterbird Census date of 17th January being preferred. December was exceptionally warm and wet: indeed, it was the wettest month since records began in the UK, and will be remembered for the extensive flooding it brought across vast swathes of Wales, northern England and Scotland. As strong winds were also a theme, conditions were not ideal for coastal waterbird counting and very few NEWS counts took place in December – only 805 out of the 7,505 sectors being counted.

Most UK surveys were carried out in January (2,484) but as the challenging weather continued into early January, the survey period was extended into February. This allowed another 697 sectors to be counted, resulting in 53% overall coverage, similar to that achieved at the 2006/07 NEWS survey – over 8,300 km of coast! Many regions in eastern Britain achieved near complete coverage of all sectors but, unsurprisingly, attaining satisfactory coverage was more challenging in the more remote terrain of the north and west. At a country level, Wales and Northern Ireland surveyed the highest proportion of their non-estuarine coast, achieving impressive 93% and 86% coverage respectively, followed by England with 70%. Overall coverage in Scotland was 44%, but this included 72% of high priority sectors. We are particularly grateful to the expedition teams that travelled from other parts of the

NEWS 2015/16 coverage

- Surveved
- Not Surveved/unsubmitted



country to the Scottish Highlands and Islands, without whom there would have been several key areas for waterbirds with little data.

Over 700,000 birds were seen, with Herring Gull and Oystercatcher the most widely recorded birds and Grey Seal the most numerous mammal. Over the next few months, we will begin analysis of this rich dataset to estimate coastal populations, look

at the distribution and bird use of the wrack resource and identify key areas for coastal species. Summary results will be included within Waterbirds in the UK 2015/16 and available via the WeBS Online Report. Participants will also soon receive a short, optional online feedback form to help us identify any potential areas of improvement for future extra waterbird surveys.

## WeBS LOCATION SPOTLIGHT



# Bagmoor Mines

Located just north of Scunthorpe in North Lincolnshire, these disused pits were an ideal location for a first site to get into WeBS counting.

**Iain Turner** WeBS Counter

I initially volunteered to take part in WeBS for a few reasons. I'm currently studying towards a foundation degree in Countryside Management; the course encompasses many different aspects of environment, sustainability and conservation issues. During the course I developed a desire to aim for a career in ecological surveying. I already have a decent knowledge of fauna and flora but I'm always looking for ways to improve my knowledge and learn any new surveying skills.

It has been difficult to find opportunities to gain the experience - as well as studying I also work full-time as a postman and have a young (demanding, but lovely) family!

I approached the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) via email, stating that I'd like to gain experience and hopefully be able to help whilst I take part. They put me in touch with Chris Gunn, the Local Organiser

for Lincolnshire. Chris thought the idea of the WeBS count would be a great place to start and gave me a list of sites, close to my home which required surveying. They were places which hadn't been surveyed in a long while and may need access granted by a landowner. I first tried Burton Fishing Ponds but found it difficult to contact anybody, this led me to try and access Bagmoor Mines, land behind Normanby Hall in the village of Normanby, near Scunthorpe.

Bagmoor had been surveyed by WeBS up until the mid-1980s but not since. I discovered the land owner to be Sir Reginald Sheffield, who, as well as owning Normanby Hall, owns a vast amount of the surrounding lands. I arranged to meet him through a secretary to tell him what I'd be doing on his land and why. I was pretty nervous at meeting this busy chap, but he proved to be interested and pleased that the BTO would like to monitor

this site through the WeBS counts. He then sent me to his land manager who explained safe routes, no go areas and joked about watching out for when Sir Reginald went out shooting!

My first count would be due in February 2015, but I thought best to do a sort of reconnaissance of the site first. I couldn't believe how beautiful the area was - I'd lived 10 minutes away from it for the last 30 years and had no idea it existed! There are two large lakes which were previously iron ore mines, surrounded by many trees. What was even better was it was private land and I had access; it felt like (and still does) my patch!

When I took part in my first count I was fairly confident on species identification; as I am a frequent visitor to nature reserves, but took my ID books in case. I am pleased I did... Bagmoor is a haven for many different species and it seemed like there were a thousand birds on one of the lakes! WeBS counts don't ask for too much information, they only focus on what's on the water at the time you survey, so it's not too difficult to record the birds.

I also found that, once registered as a surveyor, historical records of the site you are surveying can be found on the WeBS website. It was interesting to find that a lot of the birds I have noted, such as the Goldeneyes, Pochards and Teals were recorded on the lake over 30 years ago, yet species such as the Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher and Cormorant I have seen lately, do not appear. Records like this help me as they have inspired me to do a study for my final independent project



PHOTOS OF BAGMOOR BY IAIN TURNER



Common Sandpipers and Goldeneye are among the species recorded at Bagmoor Mines.



GOLDENEYE BY JOHN PROUDLOCK; COMMON SANDPIPER BY EDMUND FELLOWES

at college about environmental impacts on Lapwings. Lapwings are numerous at my site but are declining on a national scale, most markedly as a breeding species.

WeBS asks for a volunteer to survey the same designated area once a month, spending around 2 hours to record the birds you see. Even though I have a busy lifestyle it is easy to fit these surveys in (it's also nice to have an excuse to escape for a few hours!).

WeBS counts are a great way to get involved with surveying birds for the BTO, they encompass amateurs and experts alike and are a great way to find out more about the health of Britain's lakes, rivers and streams.

I have recently signed up to take part in the Breeding Bird Survey, also organised by the BTO, which is a

more complex survey undertaken twice in the breeding season.

These surveys are a great additions to my course and I also gain the vital experience required for a career in ecological surveying. I would recommend them to anybody with an interest in birds or any wildlife.

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**If you have an interesting WeBS site that you would like to have featured, please get in touch.**

**WeBS Snippets**



**WeBS goes platinum!**

Next year marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UK non-breeding waterbird counts. We are planning to hold a conference for WeBS counters in autumn 2017 in northwest England. Keep an eye on the WeBS website, Twitter and Facebook pages for more details being announced on this and other special events to mark the occasion.

**Opting out of paper reports**

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

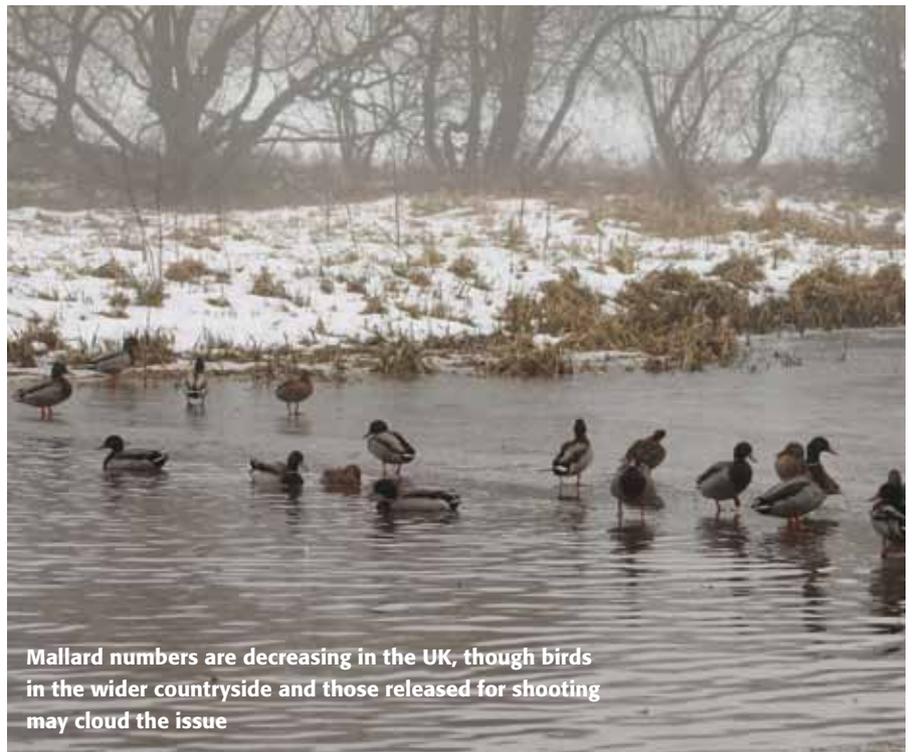
# Are Devon's Mallards going up or down?

Found on a variety of wetland habitats, many of which may not get counted for WeBS, getting a true picture of Mallard populations can be tricky...

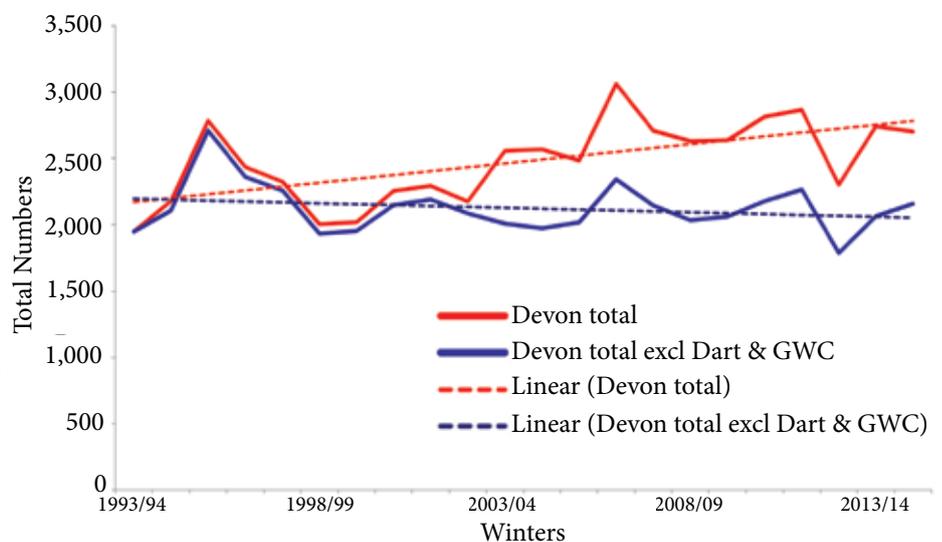
**Pete Reay** WeBS Local Organiser

One of my jobs, as a Devon WeBS Local Organiser, is to produce monthly WeBS county totals from the counts received from over 100 coastal, estuarine and freshwater sites and sectors in the county. The totals, for about 50 species of wetland birds, appear under appropriate species accounts in the *Devon Bird Reports* (DBRs) and in the Devon WeBS report (which used to be published in the DBR, but is now just circulated to counters). I doubt if many people are excited by WeBS county totals, but I decided that it would be a good idea to describe how they are calculated (dull, but the next incumbent, at least, might be grateful) and consider how accurate they are likely to be (much more interesting!). The result was an article entitled 'WeBS county totals – a cautionary tale' or 'Were there really just 3,186 Mallard in Devon in December 2014?', published in *Devon Birds* 69 (1): 14–23.

In fact, aided by the easy search and download option on the WeBS website, and the excellent Excel pivot table facility, producing the county totals is quite straightforward - it must be, because I manage to do it. Before the number-crunching begins, I just need to tweak the downloaded counts to make sure that there is only one count per site per month (the addition of some counters is so serious, that they do several), but I also carry out additional manipulations because at the same time I am producing site counts for the DBR and the site definitions used there do not always correspond to those in the download. But eventually, large numbers of impressive figures



TERESA FROST



▲ Figure 1: Mean winter (Nov–Feb) county totals for Mallard in Devon 1993/94 to 2014/15 (produced by David Price)

emerge, such as the 3,186 Mallard in December 2014, which features in the title of the *Devon Birds* article.

This total was then examined in relation to hybrids and domestics, counting accuracy, count synchronization, WeBS site coverage, use of non-WeBS sites and releases for shooting. It was concluded that it was probably a slight underestimate of Mallard numbers on WeBS sites (the actual number would be closer to 3,500), but a gross underestimate of the county population because of the use of non-WeBS sites by this species. An idea of the magnitude of this comes from the WeBS Dispersed Waterbird Survey in the 2002/03 winter, which indicated that in Devon there were at least as many Mallard on non-WeBS sites as on WeBS sites. A further illustration comes from my own parish of South Brent where Mallard have been recorded in 19 of the 52 1-km squares comprising the parish, only one of which includes a WeBS site ([www.brentbirdsurvey.co.uk](http://www.brentbirdsurvey.co.uk)). It is

thought that several thousand Mallard may be reared and released each year in Devon, but the extent to which these find their way into WeBS counts is a complete unknown. This would not be a problem for other WeBS species of course, and most would also will not have such a large proportion of their population on non-WeBS sites.

Accepting that the county totals for Mallard might at least reflect numbers on WeBS sites, they should indicate whether numbers are stable, increasing or decreasing. At first sight, they appear to show a slight increase over the last 20 years (Figure 1 red lines). However, closer examination of data from the most important individual sites over this period revealed that on some, such as the Exe Estuary, numbers had declined by over 50% (following the national trend), whereas others, such as the Kingsbridge Estuary, had remained steady and some had increased (Grand Western Canal (GWC) and Dart Estuary). The latter increases, however, were

linked to improvements in WeBS coverage in the early 2000s, so any real changes in numbers on these sites were being masked. If counts from GWC and the Dart are removed from the totals, numbers on the remaining sites now show a slight decline over the last 20 years (Figure 1 blue lines). But what was happening happen on the Dart and GWC, and on the non-WeBS sites, and whether releases of reared birds had any impact, remains far from clear.

I am grateful to David Price for extending the number-juggling to produce Figure 1.

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Copies of the *Devon Birds* article are available as a pdf from [peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com](mailto:peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com) or can be viewed and downloaded from [www.ducksg.org](http://www.ducksg.org).

## Big thank you for Pochard sex ratio data

**Kane Brides** WWT

The Common Pochard is undergoing a sustained decline and has recently been listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN's Red List. Therefore in order to improve our knowledge of the population structure of the species and to gain a better understanding of what is driving this decline, during January 2016 many WeBS counters contributed to a coordinated assessment of the sex ratio within Pochard flocks wintering across Europe and North Africa.

The collection of such data can provide useful information on population structures and help us understand relative changes in survival rates between the sexes. There was an amazing response to our appeals for counters to sex Pochard flocks - across Europe and north Africa the sex of 101,979 Pochards was recorded in 28 countries by over 600 waterbird counters.

The analysis is currently being undertaken and we look forward to reporting on the results in due course. Many thanks are extended to all WeBS counters and BirdTrack participants for their help in collecting additional sex ratio counts during their January counts.

Country	No. of birds sexed	Country	No. of birds sexed
Algeria	48	Moldova	21
Austria	714	Montenegro	4,661
Belgium	6,958	Morocco	1,638
Croatia	408	Northern Ireland	1,173
Cyprus	70	Poland	250
Denmark	2,302	Republic of Ireland	257
Estonia	9	Romania	1,361
Finland	18	Slovak Republic	27
France	2,238	Slovenia	780
Germany	231	Spain	1,982
Hungary	819	Switzerland	16,359
Isle of Man	213	The Netherlands	21,194
Italy	13,137	Ukraine	807
Luxembourg	207	United Kingdom	24,097
		<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>101,979</b>

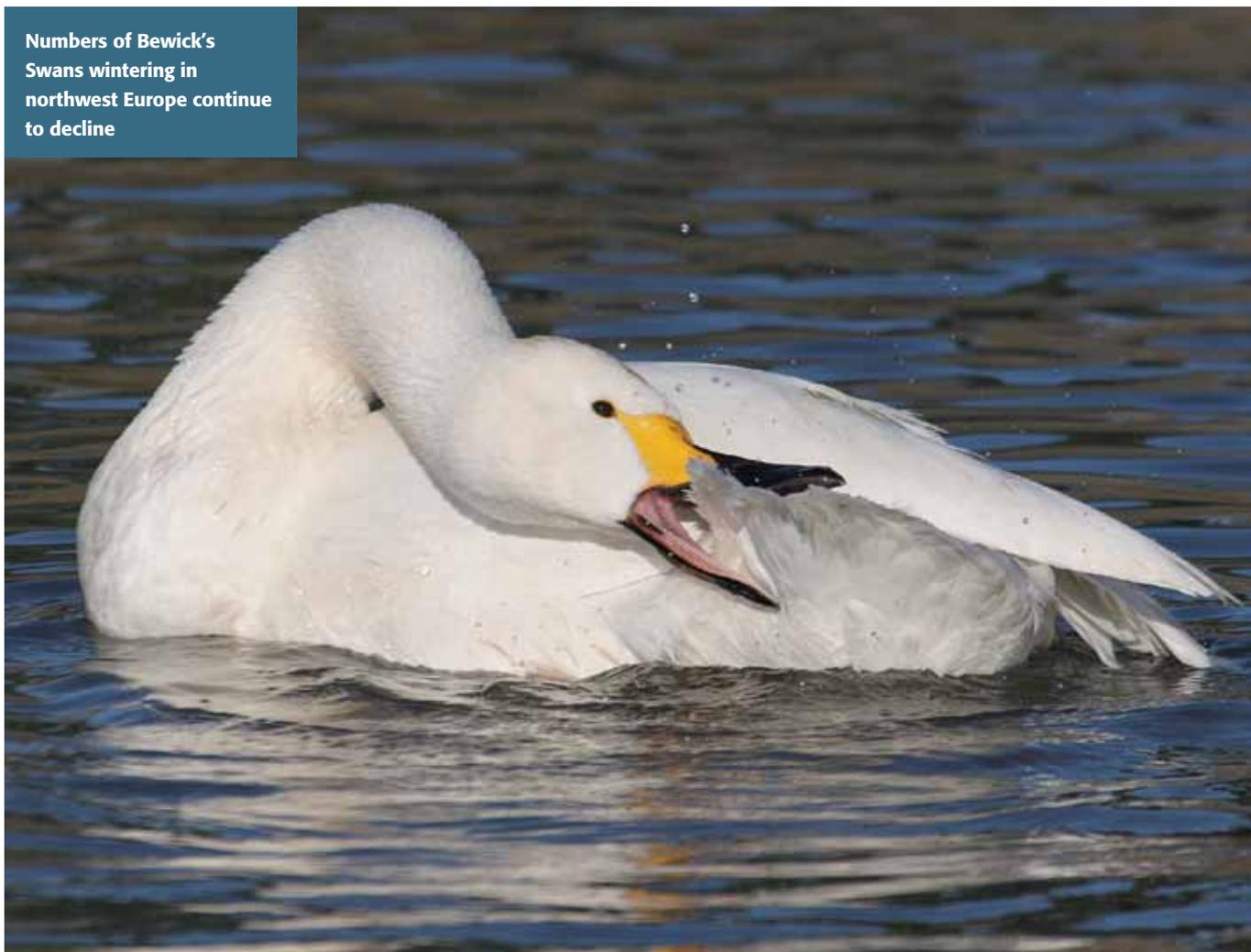
▲ Number of birds sexed by each country

# Results of the January 2015 International Swan Census

As mentioned in *WeBS News 31*, January 2015 saw the International Swan Census take place across northwest Europe, with mixed results for the two species...

**Colette Hall** WWT

Numbers of Bewick's Swans wintering in northwest Europe continue to decline



JILL PAKENHAM

Overall, the census was organised by the Wetlands International / IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group, whilst WWT, in partnership with BirdWatch Ireland, the Irish Whooper Swan Study Group and colleagues in Iceland, coordinated the census of the Icelandic Whooper Swan population and Britain and Ireland's contribution to the Bewick's Swan census. Thanks

to the marvellous efforts of the WeBS, I-WeBS, GSMP and other volunteer counter networks, local organisers, census coordinators and additional helpers, excellent coverage of Britain, Ireland and Iceland was achieved and our gratitude goes to everyone involved.

## Whooper Swan

A total of 34,004 Whooper Swans

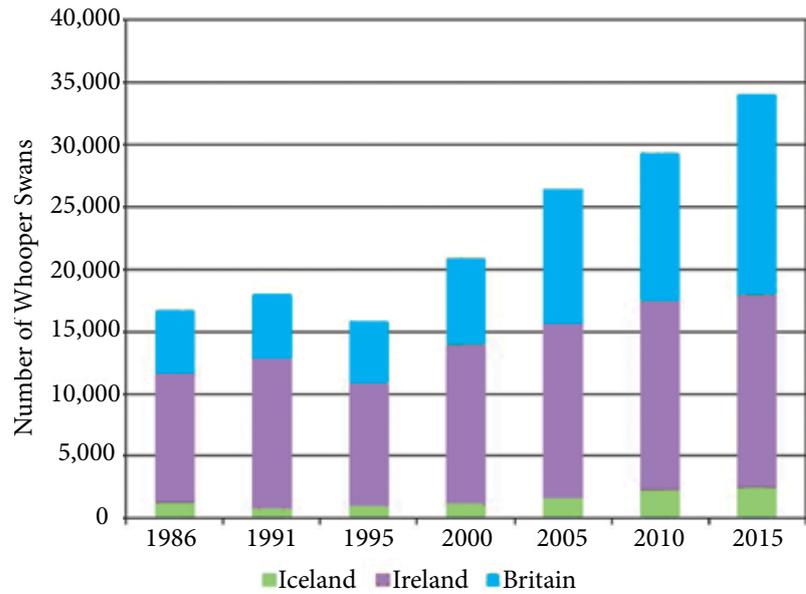
was recorded in Britain, Ireland and Iceland, representing an increase of 16% compared with 2010 (29,300 birds) and the highest census total to date (Hall *et al.* in press; Figure 1). There are also indications of a shift in the population's distribution, with Britain holding an increasing proportion, whilst Ireland has experienced a gradual decline. The main reason for this shift is the

increasing number of Whooper Swans recorded at the Ouse Washes, Norfolk/ Cambridgeshire, with the count in 2015 (7,171) being the highest up till then and representing a seven-fold increase at the site since 1995. There has also been an increase in the number of Whoopers wintering in Iceland. However, as a proportion of the population, numbers have only risen slightly; hence, at present, there is little evidence to suggest a northwards shift in winter distribution.

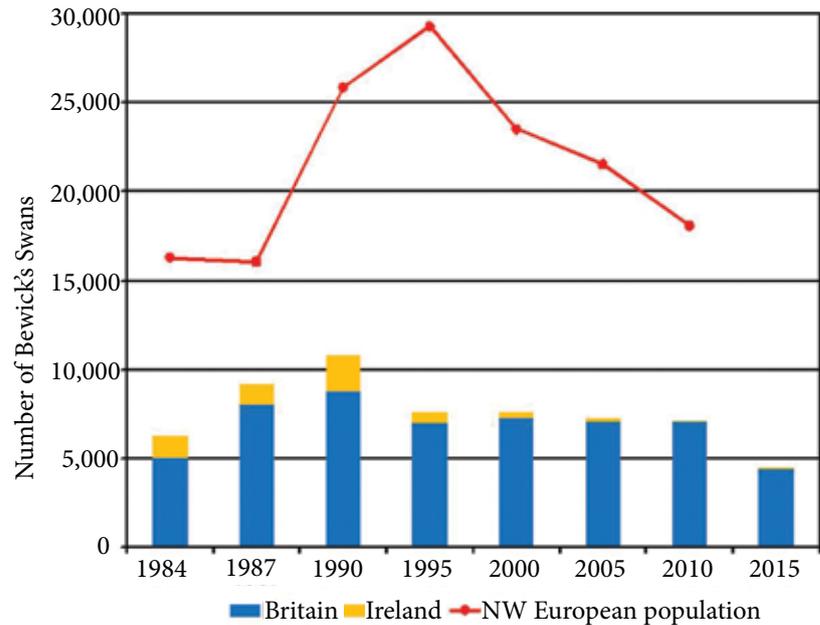
**Bewick's Swan**

The census also revealed a large decline in the number of Bewick's Swans wintering in Britain and Ireland, with a total of 4,392 birds recorded, this being 38% lower than in 2010 (7,079 birds) and the lowest census total to date (Figure 2). Ireland has seen the largest decline, with census totals falling from a peak of 2,004 birds in 1990 to just 21 in 2015. Comparatively, results from the 1995 to 2010 censuses indicated some stability in the numbers wintering in Britain before they fell sharply to 4,371 birds in 2015. Interestingly, Britain has also seen a gradual increase in the proportion of the Northwest European population (to which the birds in Britain and Ireland belong) it supports since the population started declining in 2000 (Figure 2). Given the large decline observed in Britain during the 2015 census it will be interesting to see whether numbers elsewhere along the flyway also fell so markedly - at the time of writing, results from other countries are still being collated but early indications suggest that numbers were lower than those recorded during the 2010 census.

The next census is due to take place in January 2020 and, as always, the census won't be possible without the help of the WeBS counter network; therefore, we look forward to contacting you all again in a few years.



▲ **Figure 1.** Number of Whooper Swans recorded in Iceland, Ireland and Britain during the International Swan Censuses, 1986–2015 (Hall et al. In press).



▲ **Figure 2.** Number of Bewick's Swans recorded in Britain and Ireland during the International Swan Censuses and the Northwest European population estimates (Swan Specialist Group unpublished data), 1984–2015.

More detailed results from the census have been published on the species pages of WWT's Waterbird Monitoring website at <http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/our-work/goose-swan-monitoring-programme/species-accounts/>

# International waterbird conservation: more efforts needed

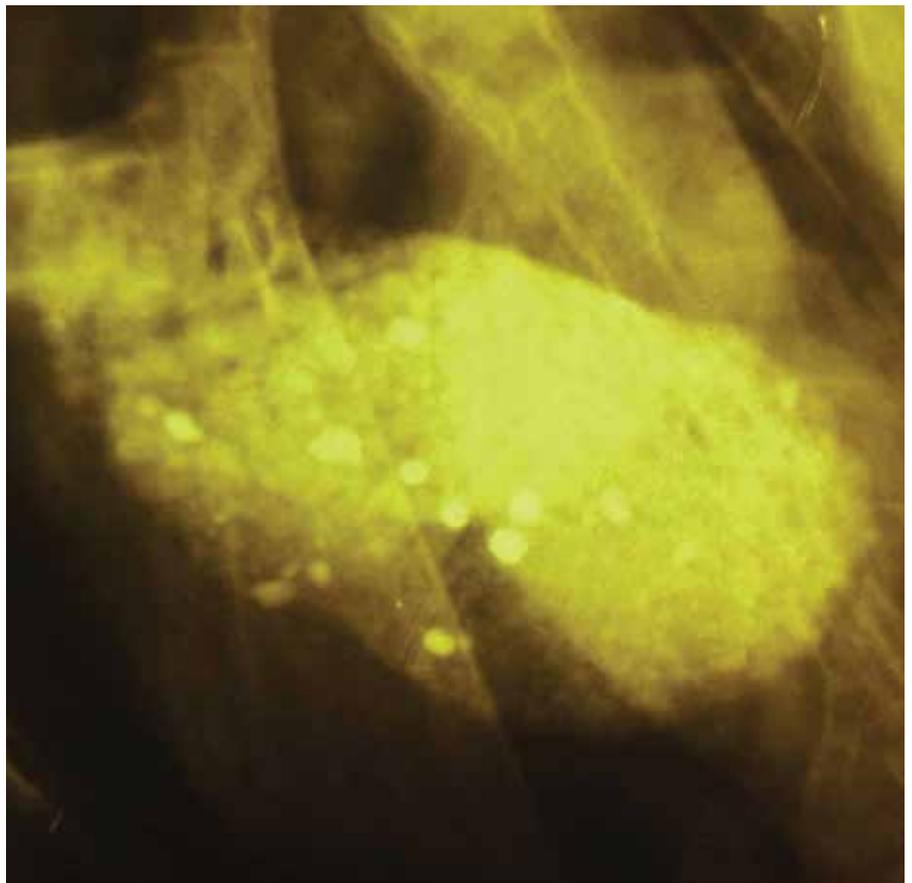
Parties to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) assembled in Bonn last November to consider progress and priorities for waterbird conservation at flyway scales.

**David Stroud** JNCC and **Richard Hearn & Ruth Cromie** WWT

**A**EWAs continues to grow in geographical scope and engagement: last year's sixth Meeting of Parties (MOP 6) was attended by more than 200 representatives of the 75 Contracting Parties, as well as of national and international non-governmental organisations. Since MOP 5 in 2012, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Iceland, Mauritania, Morocco, Rwanda, Swaziland and Zimbabwe have ratified the Agreement, significantly extending its scope within Africa. However, there remain significant gaps on membership in the Middle East and Central Asia. And of course Russia – so important as a breeding area for multiple species and populations – still has to accede to AEWA.

Overall assessment of progress was provided by the sixth Conservation Status Review (CSR 6) – a monumental review of all waterbird monitoring data for the region (including from WeBS) which updates our knowledge on the status of each waterbird population and thereby informs AEWA's priorities for the next three years and identifies required changes in the legal status of listed populations. CSR 6 concluded:

- “The conservation status of many waterbird populations (particularly of globally threatened and near threatened ones) continues to deteriorate, in some cases rapidly. Such declines are occurring throughout the Agreement area, but are particularly higher in areas where there are fewer Contracting Parties and where knowledge of the status of waterbirds and key sites remains very poor;



X-ray of a Whooper Swan gizzard showing ingested lead shot pellets. The causes and consequences of lead poisoning in waterbirds have been known for over a century. AEWA requires its Parties to phase out the use of lead gunshot in wetlands.

- On the other hand, the conservation status of waterbirds is improving where concerted conservation measures are taken, where their key sites are protected and their exploitation is well managed;

**‘better monitoring leads to the designation of a larger number of protected areas and this leads to better conservation status of waterbirds’**

- Results suggests that better monitoring leads to the designation of a larger number of protected areas and this leads to better conservation status of waterbirds;
- It is encouraging that the knowledge of the status of waterbirds and their key sites has significantly improved in areas where active investment and exchange of experience has taken place (such as North and West Africa in the last triennium).”

This is a message not dissimilar to that of the UK's Birds of Conservation Concern 4 published at about the same time as CSR6: essentially, where concerted conservation efforts are made, they can turn around the fortunes of declining waterbirds, but that overall the extent of such efforts are inadequate to address the scale of negative impacts across the region. But importantly, it does highlight the important role that waterbird monitoring plays, not just in collecting data but in stimulating consequent conservation actions.

The MOP discussed and agreed international Action Plans for a number of UK species including Curlew, Long-tailed Duck and Taiga Bean Goose. These outline actions to be taken to restore these species to favourable conservation status and the latter includes elements of adaptive harvest management – reflecting the fact that in the Baltic these declining geese remain legal quarry. Next steps will be to define sustainable bag levels and put in place mechanisms to ensure any harvest does not jeopardise the population.

Adaptive management was also discussed in the context of other, increasing, goose populations that can cause negative impacts on a range of other interests, including air safety, agriculture and biodiversity. The MOP mandated the establishment of a European Goose Management Platform to provide a means by which adaptive management measures can be co-ordinated at international scales – initially for continental Greylag Geese and Barnacle Geese.

The issue of poisoning by lead gunshot has been addressed by every MOP since 1999. Slow progress continues to be made to address this unnecessary and preventable cause of waterbird mortality. Parties' National Reports showed that while a total of 22 reported that lead shot has been fully (17) or partially (5) phased out in wetlands, another 12 confirmed that further work is needed to achieve this. But 44 other Parties either provided no National Report (32) or reported no progress (12) to this end. AEWA's Strategic Plan establishes a target to phase out the use of lead gunshot in wetlands by 2017 – this seems most

**'it does highlight the important role that waterbird monitoring plays, not just in collecting data but in stimulating consequent conservation actions.'**

unlikely to be achieved.

The MOP also considered a large number of other issues, full details of which are available from the AEWA website (see below). Many of these are directly relevant to waterbird conservation in the UK and include:

- priorities for the conservation of seabirds;
- adoption of a range of formal guidance for Parties, including on sustainable hunting and reducing the risk of impacts from renewable energy deployments;
- the urgent need for adaptation responses to climate change impacts on wetlands;
- ways to strengthen international systems for waterbird monitoring;
- a formal definition of "disturbance" within AEWA's legal context; and
- reducing unnecessary mortality of waterbirds from the deliberate killing by poison baits as well as by use of lead ammunition and fishing weights.

The ultimate value of international treaties such as AEWA is not so much in what is adopted in meetings but what is implemented nationally in the periods between. The continuing saga to remove lead shot from wetlands – just one source of unnecessary mortality – shows that progress can be painfully slow. However, the continuing international outlook, with respect to the conservation and management of waterbirds, of so many countries gives hope for the future.

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 The MOP 6 Resolutions, Action Plans and supporting papers referred to can be accessed at: <http://www.unep-aewa.org/en/meeting/6th-meeting-parties-aewa>

**Your WeBS Core Count priority dates for the 2016–2017 season...**

**2016...**

18 September

16 October

13 November

18 December

**2017...**

15 January

12 February

12 March

9 April

14 May

11 June

23 July

13 August

10 September

8 October

19 November

10 December

.....  
 Keep up-to-date with counts and dates at [www.bto.org/webs/coredates](http://www.bto.org/webs/coredates)

# Observations of Black-tailed Godwits - an obsession.

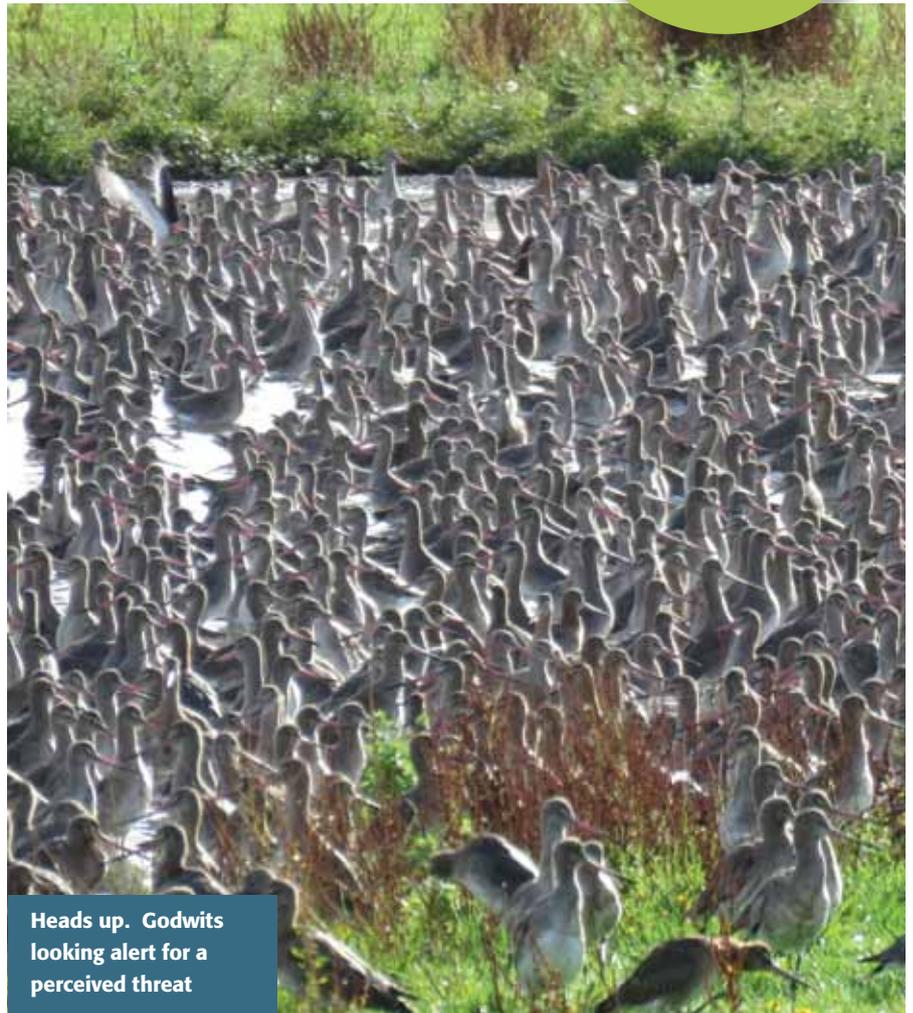
Large flocks of waders will always provide a mixture of interesting interactions between birds to brighten up a WeBS count, but for one counter, this has become more than just a passing interest...

**Richard Smith** WeBS Counter

I am an obsessive when it comes to Black-tailed Godwits. I just love watching them and it has become an obsession since I started logging their colour rings as part of Operation Godwit. I'm lucky enough to live less than a five minute drive to a major moulting site at Gilroy 'Godwit Field' in West Kirby where we regularly get 2,000 or more from mid-July to the end of October. I must spend a total of at least 100 hours there during that period just watching them. Mad? Yes! But they are just so fascinating. In this article I share some of my observations.

## Why here?

Probably the question most asked by passers-by and visiting birders at Gilroy, and it's a very good one. Gilroy isn't the most obvious place to host internationally important numbers of wetland birds, being bordered on one side by a busy housing estate and the other a heavily used cycle track and footpath. However, the field itself is largely unvisited and the great attraction for the godwits is the large area of shallow water making an ideal wader scrape of just the right depth. They like an uninterrupted flight path and there are no tall trees nearby; it is also sheltered and obviously free of tides with the constant movement that entails. The closeness of the estuary is crucial and it is less than a five minute flight to the rich mud south of West Kirby Marine Lake when they feel hungry, and back again when they want a nice safe place to roost.



Heads up. Godwits looking alert for a perceived threat

## Comings and Goings

The comings and goings of the godwits are surprisingly difficult to predict, but to cut a long story short they are usually at Gilroy several hours either side of high tide, often being there over eight hours during the day - we have no idea what they do at night.

The most exciting time is when they come in from the estuary. They fly in, usually in groups of around two

to three hundred over a period of an hour or so. They fly low and you can hear the whoosh of the wings as they come over - flock after flock. Sometimes they circle before landing and at other times they come straight in but it causes great excitement for the birds already on the ground with a great deal of noise made. It's a wonderful sight. Leaving can be similarly spread out, usually preceded by a lot of preening and walking around. Ones and

WeBS STAT...  
**540%**  
The increase in Black-tailed Godwit on the Dee Estuary since 1984/85

twos leave first then suddenly a couple of hundred will jump into the air and be off. Unpredictable as always, sometimes half the flock will decide not to go at all and stay for several more hours, other times the whole flock will leave in one spectacular mass.

### Activities

A quick visit to Gilroy may give you the impression that all they do is sleep. They certainly do a lot of that but look closer and you will always see some movement, with birds preening, scratching, walking and feeding. They also have what I call activity sessions when the whole flock becomes very vocal whilst they have a mass wash and preening session with birds constantly walking in and out of the water.

They also have four other activities at Gilroy:

1. Sky Search. An amusing behaviour they have is to put their head on one side whilst looking up at the sky, presumably to search for raptors. Their vision is monocular (i.e. each eye has a separate field of view, unlike our own binocular vision) so they need to do this for one of their eyes to view the sky fully, but it looks very comical.
2. Wing Stretch. This seems to be an infectious behaviour as when one or two birds do it the whole flock often follow. They stretch both wings fully above them so the whole flock

suddenly flashes white. This can occur at any time but becomes more frequent as the time to leave for the estuary approaches.

3. Lying Down. Probably best described as an inactivity rather than activity! But how often do you see waders actually lying down? On a sunny day the majority of the birds at Gilroy do it, and what a great luxury it must be for them being able to lie on dry grass. It also must say something about how safe they feel at Gilroy.

4. Heads Up. This happens very quickly with the flock seemingly fast asleep then in a split second they all have their heads up with neck fully stretched. Obviously this is due to a perceived threat but more often than not it's a false alarm and heads go back down almost as quickly. If it's a real threat then what they do next depends on what it is, which brings me on to the next section.

### Disturbances

"Those bl\*\*\*y powered para-gliders again" I muttered as the birds disappeared into the distance. The godwits absolutely hate them and one has only to appear on the horizon for them to take flight and fly in the opposite direction. Luckily, this year they have so far been absent but they have been one of the worse causes of disturbance both at Gilroy and over the Dee estuary and north Wirral as a whole over several years.

You would think a low flying noisy helicopter would have the same effect but that isn't the case. When the Golf Open was at Hoylake a couple of years ago the helicopter landing field was just a few hundred yards away with low flying helicopters coming right over the Gilroy field. Yet the godwits hardly reacted. The difference between something that looks like a large bird of prey and something that looks like a flying brick!

You get to know what bird of prey is about by their reaction. A Peregrine really scares them whilst Kestrels are ignored. Buzzards and Sparrowhawks get the whole flock into the air but they soon come back down again, I was lucky enough to have a Red Kite overhead last year and they reacted in the same way as with a Buzzard.

Of the birds that are a potential threat Crows are the most numerous. Although the Godwits don't like them they are obviously not that scared of them; if a crow flies low overhead some Godwits might take to the air but rarely the whole flock, and if one lands nearby in the field they just walk away from it. Last year I saw a Crow deliberately single out a godwit and chase it across the field, it didn't catch it but you can certainly understand their nervousness when they are nearby.

Other disturbances are perhaps more unexpected. One spring we had an 'angry Coot' which quite clearly did not like Godwits on its territory and



◀ An activity session with birds preening and washing

would charge at them. We loved that Coot as it got the Godwits walking around so we could see their legs and hence the colour-rings! Quite often we get Moorhens having territorial disputes through the middle of the flock with the Godwits hastily getting out of the way as the Moorhens chased each other. Geese and horses blunder their way through the flock so they have to move. You wouldn't expect Lapwings to cause a disturbance but they are so flighty they fly up in a panic at absolutely nothing - which in turn disturbs the Godwits.

### Noise

Black-tailed Godwits talk to each other. That's the only way I can describe it and when you get 2,000 birds chatting away that's quite some noise! They are at their loudest when they have an 'activity session', it's a bit like the sound a large flock of starlings make - but louder and more musical. They make a different sound when about to leave for the estuary, much more of an urgent call repeated several times - you can almost imagine them saying "let's go, let's go, let's go". In spring, whilst they 'talk' to each other, we sometimes hear snatches of their display song - exciting to hear when you think the next time they will utter that song will be in the wilds of Iceland.



TANNY ROBINSON

▲ A horse causing disturbance to the flock

### Flock Position Fidelity

"I see YNRX\* is in the usual place". After several days of this it dawned on us that the same colour-ringed individuals were in the same place day after day. It was three years ago when we first noticed this phenomenon and the day I'm writing this, at the end of August 2016, YNRX, along with several other colour-ringed birds, is still in its favourite position in the field. We don't know why they do this or what significance it has, but it seems pretty remarkable behaviour.

\* for those not familiar with the Black-tailed Godwit codes YNRX means the rings are Yellow over Black on the left leg and Red over a white ring with an engraved X on the right leg.

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 For more information on Black-tailed Godwits observations and all other happenings on the Dee Estuary, check out the Dee Estuary Birding website at [www.deeestuary.co.uk](http://www.deeestuary.co.uk)



RICHARD SMITH

▲ YNRX in its usual place - can you spot it?

# Five decades of Wildfowl counting

Next year WeBS celebrates its 70th birthday, and one counter looks back on his own personal milestone...

**Mike Trubridge** WeBS Counter

I first started counting wildfowl back in the winter of 1976/77, when I was working in the Brecon Beacons. At the time I was a novice birdwatcher with limited experience of bird monitoring, so it was probably just as well that I was allocated an easy National Wildfowl Count (NWC) site when I offered my services to the County Recorder. The site in question was Talybont Reservoir, which was only a few miles away from where I was staying. There is a minor road running along one side of the reservoir which makes counting very straightforward and there was only a limited selection of wildfowl, mainly Teal and Mallard as far as I can remember. Certainly it was a very gentle start to my wildfowl counting days.

## Tetney Marshes

By comparison my next location was the complete opposite, a coastal site with large numbers of wintering waders. I spent October–December 1977 on the east coast of England at Tetney Marshes, at the mouth of the Humber Estuary. Here I was counting waders and wildfowl both at high tide roosts and on low tide feeding areas as part of the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (BoEE), the forerunner of WeBS. Unfortunately my initial attempt to count waders arriving for a high tide roost at the end of October was not a qualified success. While I was sitting out on the edge of the saltmarsh busily engaged in plotting flight lines and counting incoming birds, the rising tide was busily engaged in cutting me off. Too late I realised that my peninsular had become an island! As I was not particularly keen on the idea of sitting out the high tide in the

dark and cold for several hours, there was nothing for it but to strip off and plunge in. It was absolutely freezing!!

## Minsmere

By 1980 I had migrated south to Minsmere, on the Suffolk coast. Here my wildfowl count area for the next five years was the west end of the main reedbed, where a series of meres and dykes usually produced good numbers of Teal, Mallard, Moorhen and Coot. Care had to be taken not to disturb the birds and access was tricky in places, but it was certainly an interesting site.

## Forth Estuary

There was then a long gap before I undertook any more WeBS counts. In the winter of 1994/95 I began a three year association with an eight mile section of the River Forth, where it meanders across the Carse of Stirling. Here I was able to take a bus ride to the eastern end of my section, before walking back along the river bank to my car on the roadside. The river was a good place for Goosander and occasionally Goldeneye, while the surrounding carse often produced large numbers of grey geese.

From there I moved further downstream to the Forth Estuary and spent a number of years counting at Skinflats, close to Grangemouth. Using several vantage points along the shoreline I was able to see most of my count areas. However, I also had to walk out onto the old Kincardine Bridge and count from the public footpaths on both sides of the bridge. The traffic was always very heavy and crossing over from one side of the bridge to the other could entail quite a lengthy wait for a break in the traffic flow. But much worse were the extremely annoying drivers who would

blow their horns at me just as they were passing. Goodness knows why, I certainly didn't know them, but they really made life hell for me.

## Poole Harbour

In 2005 I moved nearly 500 miles south to Dorset and took on two sections of Poole Harbour as my next count areas. This was very rewarding, with a good selection of waders and wildfowl in a lovely peaceful setting. Here I notched up a particularly nice new species for my WeBS counts, with Avocets now regularly featuring on my list.

## Somerset Levels

Finally, to complete my current tour of duty round the UK, I moved to Somerset in 2010. I am now into my fifth winter counting Witcombe Bottom and King's Moor, two sections of the Yeo River floodplain that are generally included in the Somerset Levels. Normally there are not too many birds to count, but if there is shallow flooding in some of the fields, there can be large numbers of Lapwing and Golden Plover. However, in early 2014 severe flooding reduced my 6km<sup>2</sup> site to just a very thin strip of dry land on the river bank. This resulted in large numbers of ducks and gulls arriving, especially Wigeon, Shoveler and Black-headed Gulls. But far and away the best record so far was the flock of 60 Cranes flying over the site just a couple of months ago.

So over the last five decades I have undertaken counts for NWC/BoEE/WeBS at seven very different locations in England, Scotland and Wales in just about all conditions – I think I have only missed one count due to the weather! It has certainly been a very interesting and rewarding time, with some amazing wildlife sightings, not just birds.

## IN THE NEWS...

### CORE COUNTS

## Year round and supplementary counting

While the vast majority of waterbirds occurring in the UK peak in number during the winter months, and indeed many of our analyses are done using data from these months, counts from other times of the year can be equally valuable.

Species such as Little Ringed Plover and Garganey only occur in the summer and may get missed from winter-only counts.

Numbers of other species like Ringed Plover, Whimbrel and Sanderling peak during passage periods and Shelduck may peak when they gather to moult, and even at these times, counts may vary dramatically by the day. Goosander roost on lake and reservoirs, only arriving at dusk but may be absent during the day when a WeBS Count would be carried out as they often inhabit nearby under-watched rivers. Swans and geese too spend much of their day away from traditional waterbodies, feeding in fields and may only return to these areas to roost. In these cases, additional supplementary or roost counts may be required to get a better idea of the number of birds using a site.

Additional supplementary or roost counts can be submitted for any species, particularly for those species whose numbers may be under-represented by a single monthly Core Count.



EDMUND FELLOWES

**Ringed Plover numbers peak during passage periods**

### Further information...

To submit specific roost or supplementary counts in WeBS Online, please use the 'Casual & Roost Counts' button to ensure they get properly assigned and treated as such.

### SURVEY

## Low Tide Update

**Neil Calbrade** WeBS Low Tide Counts Organiser

The winter of 2015/16 saw Low Tide Counts carried out at 15 estuaries around the UK, including the Dee and Severn Estuaries and both Wigtown Bay and Hayle Estuaries.

The counts for the 2016/17 winter will be underway shortly, with the North Norfolk Coast and Severn Estuary and Pegwell Bay among those confirmed. Although possibly too late to be included this winter, there are many sites due for a recount under the six-year cycle, especially large sites with an increasing pressure from development, such as Solway Estuary, Firth of Forth

and Southampton Water.

We would welcome counts from any estuary, even those that have not yet been counted under the scheme. Please email [lowtide@bto.org](mailto:lowtide@bto.org) if you would be able to organise a team of counters or be able to cover a whole site yourself.

Dot density maps for most sites and years have now been uploaded onto the WeBS Online Report and can be viewed at [www.bto.org/webs-reporting](http://www.bto.org/webs-reporting) where distribution maps and density statistics are available.



▲ Sites where full Low Tide Counts have not been carried out for six years or more

## IN THE NEWS...

### CORE COUNTS

## Flyway Focus in January 2017

UK waterbird counts have contributed to international monitoring since the inception of the International Waterbird Census, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Just as national trends and estimates are crucial to understand changes at individual wetlands, flyway and population level assessments are essential context for UK trends and understanding how waterbirds respond to global changes in land use and climate.

In *Waterbirds in the UK 2014/15*, we reported on *Status of coastal waterbird populations in the East Atlantic Flyway 2014*, led by the Wadden Sea Flyway initiative. Every three years, countries along the East Atlantic Flyway in west Europe and Africa are asked to



Teresa with other African-Eurasian IWC Co-ordinators in Halle, Germany, September 2016.

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL

make a special effort so this report can be updated. We would therefore be very grateful if you could make a special effort to complete your WeBS counts in January 2017, particularly at estuarine and coastal sites. If you are not able to take part for any reason, please work with your Local Organiser to organise a replacement counter if possible.

### ENVIRONMENT

## Clean as you count

WeBS Counter Martyn Anderson wrote in to us with this great idea to help the environment while counting: *"I normally do the WeBS count on a stretch of the Northumberland coast between Cresswell Village and Newbiggin Church Point. Due to the terrain and transport availability I need to walk the beach between Church Point and Beacon Point (which is about a quarter of the stretch of coast I do) twice, i.e. there and back. I have been disappointed in the past at the amount of flotsam (plastic*

*bottles and tin cans mainly) accumulated on the beach, so the last time I was there, I took my gloves and an old compost bag which I filled with old plastic bottles and cans to dispose of in a dustbin area near church point. I was thinking I wonder how many other WeBS counters have the same opportunity to do a bit of a beach clean and hoped you might put a note in the next issue of the volunteer magazine to possibly encourage others to do the same."*

### WEBS 2014/15 REPORT ERRATUM

## Supplementary counts omitted

After publication of the 2014/15 WeBS Annual Report, we were made aware of an error in the peak counts of a few sites in the principal sites table (pg 13). The error was due to supplementary counts not being included which for some sites, Breydon Water and Berney Marshes in particular, meant that

the year total and subsequent five-year average were much lower than should have been.

We apologise for this oversight and have corrected the table on the website and in the downloadable pdf of the report available from the website.

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### Long standing WeBS Counters

Back in the 1990s, we asked in a WeBS Newsletter for people to let us know of long-standing WeBS Counters. We have a few names of people who have taken part for an several decades, but we'd really like to have more of a complete list. If you or someone you know has taken part in WeBS for 35 years or more (even if now retired), please let us know at the WeBS Office.

#### Do you have any good counting anecdotes?

Next year, WeBS celebrates its 70th birthday. With this in mind, we would like to hear any interesting anecdotes from counters from over the years.

Send them to [webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.org) and we will publish the best ones in next year's celebratory newsletter.

#### Keeping it Local

Local Organisers (LOs) play a pivotal role in the running of WeBS, and should be the first port of call for WeBS Counters, both current and new, with any queries about their site or region. You can find the current list of Local Organisers in the latest WeBS report and their contact details online at [www.bto.org/webs/taking-part/contact-your-local-organiser](http://www.bto.org/webs/taking-part/contact-your-local-organiser)

#### WeBS Counting with a difference

If you dream of warmer climes whilst standing in the cold doing your WeBS Counts this winter, then why not help Wetlands International survey waterbirds along the Indian Ocean coast. Experienced surveyors are being sought to help out with counts in Djibouti and Iran. For more information, see <https://www.wetlands.org/support-us/coastal-counts/>

## WEBS OBITUARY



# Hugh Boyd 1925–2016

**H**ugh Boyd, who died in July aged 91, helped put in place the scientific study of waterbirds in the UK and was hugely influential in catalysing waterbird research and conservation at international scales. Hugh was appointed in 1950 by Peter Scott as the very first “Resident Biologist” of the fledgling Severn Wildfowl Trust (now WWT) with a remit to develop the scientific role of the Trust. In the years that followed, he developed and pioneered methods and approaches to the study of wildfowl across multiple areas of research which provided the foundation for much of the current monitoring and conservation work we now take for granted.

Although a national wildfowl census had been established in 1947, he encouraged more systematic approaches to waterbird census including undertaking the first aerial censuses of Barnacle Geese in western and northern Scotland, and undertaking first systematic counts on Islay and other islands in important gap-filling exercises.

Working with Scott and others Hugh encouraged wildfowl ringing at the developing Trust centres and elsewhere, leading to better defined populations and migratory routes. Innovatively, he used information from recoveries and recaptures to provide first information on mortality rates for many British waterbirds (studies which remain important baselines to this day). Hugh’s interest in all aspects of waterbird demography led to his encouraging wildfowlers to record and share bag returns, as well as promoting the first collection of age-ratio data for some

duck species. Stimulated by contact with Konrad Lorenz, his interest in goose behaviour led to exploration of dominance hierarchies in goose flocks and resulted a classic 1953 paper in *Behaviour*.

Working with Scott, Geoffrey Matthews, Luc Hoffman and others, Hugh was closely involved with the development of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau (now Wetlands International) as a network to encourage data sharing and international collaboration. This led, via the influential St Andrews’ Conference of 1963, directly to the development of the Ramsar Convention in 1971 and laid foundations for 1995’s African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement.

Hugh’s wide-ranging interests included all wildfowl but in particular he was fascinated by the arctic geese – both races of Whitefront, Barnacle Geese, the Canadian/Irish population of Light-bellied Brent Geese, both Icelandic grey goose species, and - later in Canada - the Snow Geese. He undertook a large number of pioneering studies of all these UK populations, many of which continue to be quoted.

In 1965 he moved to Scotland to establish the International Biological Programme’s studies at Loch Leven, and then in 1967 migrated to join the Canadian Wildlife Service to head their Migratory Birds Office. His long-established international outlook soon resulted in major collaborative work at continental scales (both in research and conservation policy), and working with, and through, the government he was instrumental in bringing

Ramsar’s third Conference of Parties to Canada in 1983. Needless to say, he soon became deeply involved in both supporting and undertaking studies of Snow Goose populations in arctic Canada, and was one of the first to explore the consequences of high arctic climate change for breeding waterbirds – long before ‘mainstream’ academic consideration.

In retirement he continued to engage with UK waterbird research and conservation, and ‘cross-fertilise’ ideas between North America and Europe, and was an active participant into his 80s on many Greenland White-fronted Goose Study research trips to Iceland. Hugh’s curiosity and scientific outlook was undimmed. In Iceland, he would ‘purloin’ vehicles to seek out staging Irish Brent Goose flocks on the coast, spending hours collecting data on the differential condition of paired geese. By the following morning, the data would have all been analysed and fresh hypotheses generated for discussion over breakfast.

His written output was prolific and wide ranging, with over 180 papers spanning six decades. Never demonstrative, his quiet support and engagement of others, both individually and through multiple networks of collaborators has left a major legacy. For all of us working in waterbird biology, this modest mentor was one of the giants on whose shoulders we now stand.

**Ruth Cromie, WWT**

## COUNTER NETWORK

## Local Organiser News

**Heidi Mellan** WeBS Counter Network Organiser

We would like to thank John Armitage (Islay, Jura and Colonsay); Gavin Foster (Essex (other sites)); Helen Baker (Greater London); Michael Rooney (North Norfolk Coast); Adam Burrows (Blyth Estuary (Suffolk)); James Parkin (Chichester Harbour); and Peter Mason (Crouch/Roach Estuary and South Dengie) for all their hard work as Local Organisers and who have retired from the scheme since the last newsletter was published.

We would also like to thank the following new Local Organisers: Andrew Moon who has recently taken over as the Greater London Local Organiser; Neil Lawton for taking on the North Norfolk Coast; Will Russell who is the new Blyth Estuary (Suffolk) Local Organiser; Anne de Potier who has temporarily taken over as the Chichester Harbour Local Organiser; Stephen Spicer for taking on the Crouch/Roach Estuary and South Dengie; and David Wood for taking on Islay, Jura and Colonsay. Welcome to you all!

Our special thanks go out to Neville Skinner who counted at Benacre Broad for 25 years; Roger Forster who has been counting at Hallington and Colt Crag Reservoirs for past 16 years. Both were nominated by their Local Organisers to receive a special mention as a thank you for their support over the years! We would also like to thank Keith Fox, an ex-WeBS Local organiser, who has recently retired as a WeBS counter after 50 years. When Keith first started out, he used to go birding with the illustrious Bernard King, and Julian Rolls. Soon after marrying Veronica, 48 years ago, Keith started organising the Avon and Somerset Wildfowl Counts and was very instrumental in developing the skills and knowledge of Keith Vinicombe, along with Andy Davis and Dick Senior. Keith was well known to WWT staff at Slimbridge and to the Natural History Department at the BBC, as he was the founder Secretary of Bristol Ornithological Club. Over the years Keith and Veronica have taken part in many different surveys alongside WeBS, and have made a tremendous contribution towards the conservation of waterbirds in the UK.

### WeBS LOAC

## LOAC Update

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

This year was the 11th meeting of the LOAC and with it came several Committee Member changes. We said a sad farewell to Neil Bielby, who will remain as WeBS Local Organiser but has stepped down from the LOAC and to John Armitage who will be staying on as a counter but has stepped down from both the LOAC and as a Local Organiser – a huge thank you to them both for their contributions to the Committee! We would like to welcome Allan Brown, who is the new South and East Scotland Representative.

One of the main topics of discussion was counter succession planning. When counters retire from WeBS if a new volunteer is not quickly found then information about landowners, the best route to take and suitable vantage points etc can be lost. Without the possibility of a hand-over period, new counters have to discover these things for themselves.

Whilst this might not be a big issue at small sites, it could have an impact at large, complex sites where, for example, important roost sites could be missed. WeBS staff will be looking at ways to help counters to record this kind of information but counters looking to retire soon are encouraged to make notes about their site to hand over to their Local Organiser or to the WeBS Office.

The next meeting of the WeBS LOAC is scheduled to be held at the Nunnery in the summer 2017 (date TBC). The minutes from the meetings are available via the website at [www.bto.org/webs-loac](http://www.bto.org/webs-loac).

We are looking to hear from any Local Organisers who may be interested in serving on the LOAC as the North and West Scotland representative. If you would like to know more about what is involved please contact Heidi ([webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.org)).

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

### WeBS LOAC Representatives

#### Southwest England

**Brian O'Leary**

*wayfarer1@icloud.com*

#### Eastern England

**Chris Gunn**

*donandchris@hotmail.co.uk*

#### Midlands

**Brian Moore**

*b\_moore@ntlworld.com*

#### Northern England

**Colin Wells**

*colin.wells@rspb.org.uk*

#### Wales

**Andrew King**

*andrew.king53@virgin.net*

#### South and East Scotland

**Allan Brown**

*swans@allanwbrown.co.uk*

#### North and West Scotland

**Position Vacant**

*c/o webs@bto.org*

#### Northern Ireland

**Kerry Mackie**

*kerrymackie9@gmail.com*

or

**Shane Wolsey**

*shane.wolsey@btinternet.com*

## BACKCHAT

### Word of mouth...

### A warm welcome...

...to **Teresa Frost** who has replaced Chas Holt as the WeBS National Organiser. She first worked with WeBS data back in 2005–09, as a statistics research student looking at WeBS wildfowl data analysis. From 2008 to 2015 she worked in Local Environmental Records Centres in Kent and Cumbria, managing habitat and sites datasets and species records of all taxa, increasing effective biodiversity data use and encouraging more people to get in to wildlife recording and monitoring.



### Site photographs request

Following on from last year's appeal, we are still looking for photographs of every site for use in the WeBS Online Report. If you haven't already sent us a photograph but have a photograph you would be happy for us to use, please send labelled images to [webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.org)

### Vacant Sites...

Do you have a friend who would make a good WeBS counter? 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](http://www.bto.org/webs). Over the next few months we plan to refresh these pages to make it easier to see which sites are in need of a counter. 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 and Heidi Mellan at the WeBS office to discuss.

### Snap shot



### Super Scaup!

Reader and WeBS counter, **Trevor Harris** sent this photograph of a female Scaup he recorded on his WeBS site at Clumber Park, Nottinghamshire. This long-staying bird was the first recorded at that site.

### Desperately seeking organisers

We are urgently seeking new Local Organisers for Angus; Buckinghamshire (South), Clwyd (coastal), Durham, Essex (other sites), Halifax/Huddersfield area, Morecambe Bay (North), Sutherland (excl. Moray Basin), Co. Down, Co. Londonderry and Co. Tyrone. If you would like to know more about becoming a WeBS Local Organiser please contact us at the WeBS Office [webs@bto.org](mailto:webs@bto.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](mailto:graham.austin@bto.org)

#### Matthew Baxter

*Web Software Developer*  
[matthew.baxter@bto.org](mailto:matthew.baxter@bto.org)

#### Neil Calbrade

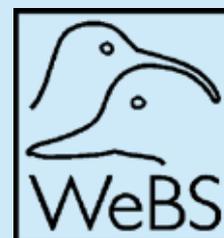
*WeBS Low Tide Counts, WeBS Data Requests, WeBS News Editor*  
[neil.calbrade@bto.org](mailto:neil.calbrade@bto.org)

#### Teresa Frost

*Management of WeBS, WeBS Core Counts, Annual Report*  
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