



# WeBS News

Newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey

Issue no. 22 Summer 2006

## WeBS data and avian influenza

*As most of you are doubtless already aware, WeBS data are used regularly by the government conservation agencies to designate reserves and other areas of protection, and to fight potentially damaging developments. Recently however, WeBS data have proved invaluable in our fight against avian flu. David Stroud from JNCC explains ...*

**T**he spread of the Asian lineage highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 across Eurasia during the last 12 months has been the subject of considerable (though often inaccurate) media attention. During this period, the WeBS Partners have been working with the UK government and the European Union to provide the necessary data and information for a number of risk assessments. From a policy perspective, the central question asked by government has been "what is the risk of H5N1 arriving in the UK, when and where?"

Late last summer, the role of wild birds in transmitting H5N1 was unclear, but it is now apparent that wild birds are one of the multiple routes of transmission of the virus, (as was demonstrated by the arrival of the virus in Europe prior to any outbreak in poultry.) Other transmission routes such as the movements (both legal and illegal) of poultry and poultry products, the wild bird trade and mechanical transfer have all contributed to the global spread of the disease to varying degrees.

The wealth of existing data on wetland sites, waterbird distribution and movements within the UK has been invaluable in responding to the fast-changing events of the last year. In assessing the risk of transmission specifically by wild birds, WeBS data

have been used in the major risk assessment undertaken by the European Food Safety Authority<sup>1</sup> as well as a recently published assessment by the European Commission<sup>2</sup>.

Closer to home, WeBS has been a primary source of data for national risk assessments undertaken by DEFRA in response to the rapidly changing situation<sup>3</sup>.

During the spring of this year, the ability to be able to rapidly advise government was tested with a 'false alarm' in Orkney in mid-March. Unfortunately this was soon followed by the confirmation of the real thing (of the HPAI H5N1 strain) in Fife in early April, when a decomposing Whooper Swan was found in Cellardyke Harbour near Anstruther. A few weeks later, an infection of poultry in Norfolk by the by low pathogenic H7 strain was confirmed. For each of these incidents the immediate questions asked were related to the location of and composition of any concentrations of waterbirds in the vicinity, coupled with questions as to spread through onward waterbird movements.

Ringling data, such as that summarised by BTO's Migration Atlas, have also been crucial to an understanding of waterbird movements, and

*Continued on page 3*

### CONTENTS

Editorial .....	2
RAFOS helps out with WeBS Counts .....	4
Mixed fortunes for Whooper & Bewick's Swans .....	6
A vagrant counter on the East Asian Flyway .....	8
Special Surveys .....	10
Golden Plovers & Lapwings .....	11
Correction .....	12
A request from the WeBS Office .....	13
Other News .....	14
Who's who in the WeBS Team .....	15
WeBS Online .....	16

### WeBS Core Priority Count Dates

As requested by many counters, we have included a separate insert with the priority count dates for the rest of 2006 up to the end of 2007. We have also put them on page 7 of this Newsletter, as some folk prefer to refer to their WeBS News. Counters and organisers may also find the dates on the WeBS website, so hopefully these contingencies please and inform all of you!



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 Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the last on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Environment & Heritage Service in Northern Ireland).



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Information in this Newsletter is compiled from a variety of sources and does not necessarily reflect the views of the WeBS partner organization

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# Editorial

Summer again and it has been another busy year for WeBS. As if the everyday tasks of running the scheme, collating all your records, writing reports and answering requests for data weren't enough, in August 2005 (shortly after WeBS News 21 went to press), the "bird world" was plunged into the issue of Avian Influenza. A year on, many of us now know more than we ever expected (or wanted!) to know about virus strains, disease control, the poultry industry, the workings of governmental and inter-governmental agencies and, of course, the media. We had already featured an article on the virus in WeBS News 21 but I have to admit I hadn't realised the significance of the piece at the time!

In many ways, the massive attention suddenly given to AI was unwelcome, a distraction from ongoing work (and indeed, life outside work!) However, on the other hand there has been no greater opportunity in recent years to demonstrate to the government, the media and the public the value of the volunteer bird monitoring carried out in the UK. Given that the majority of cases have involved waterbirds, WeBS and the ringing scheme have obviously been at the forefront, but data from almost all surveys, ranging from those looking at garden birds to the large-scale atlases have been brought into play to inform the debate. JNCC Chief Ornithologist David Stroud talks about this in his article (see front page).

One of the features of avian influenza is that it is very much an international phenomenon. Luckily, so is bird monitoring. Ornithologists have suddenly been needed across the world to inform their local policy-makers and to contribute to the global view of the virus. In a way that would have been impossible in previous decades, transfer of information, ideas and theories has been made straightforward by e-mail and the internet. An e-mail discussion forum was set up in August 2005 for ornithologists to discuss AI issues. At the time of writing, there have now been 2,352 messages posted and there are 120 members of the group, from all over the world. Such international cooperation between national counting and ringing schemes has long been the case, but situations such as AI underline the importance of international organisations such as Wetlands International and Euring. WeBS counts

are fed into the International Waterbird Census, a collation of January counts across the world by Wetlands International. As well as helping to answer questions about specific issues such as AI, the IWC is also of crucial importance in determining international population sizes and trends.

Of course, we keep saying it but it's true: none of this would be possible without you. The counts we all make at our individual sites not only make up part of the national picture, but also the world view. Once again, thanks for all your help and have a good 2006-07 season!

*Andy Musgrove*



MARK

## Colour comes to WeBS News

Hopefully you will not fail to notice that this, the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of WeBS News, has changed! We are introducing a colour section to each issue, which we hope you will enjoy, and which will serve to better illustrate some of the featured articles. We couldn't resist the beautiful photographs of waders in South Korea to start things off, particularly as one of the most desirable species for many birdwatchers (the Spoon-billed Sandpiper) is shown in glorious close-up. Maybe one day it will feature on an East Coast WeBS form . . .

*Steve Holloway*



## WeBS data and avian influenza

....continued from page 1

along with information deduced from the virus have helped us learn more about the likely source of these infections. Thus, the genotype of the H5N1 isolated from the Fife Whooper Swan was virtually identical to those of HPAI H5N1 viruses then circulating in the Baltic, indicating the ultimate source (although whether it had actually been brought across the North Sea by the swan or other species is obviously unknown).

Whilst last winter saw largely reactive use of WeBS data to advise government, the BTO and WWT are currently involved in a major project for DEFRA to assess areas of potential higher risk of avian influenza occurrence; identifying where there are large concentrations of poultry in close proximity to significant numbers of waterbirds. This will provide important information to allow a more strategic approach to the targeting of AI surveillance activity in the months ahead. It will also help the UK to start to develop an 'early-warning system' related to circulating avian influenza viruses. This is crucially important given the huge potential economic impacts that outbreaks of influenza can have. The 2003 HPAI H7N7 outbreak in the Netherlands, for instance, resulted in direct costs to the poultry industry of €270 million and indirect costs exceeding €1,000 million with over 30 million chickens killed before the outbreak was stamped-out.

The spread of H5N1 also has implications for bird conservation as the mortality of a significant proportion of the world population of Bar-headed Geese demonstrated last year in China. Government contingency planning highlights the potential need to minimise disturbance to birds in infected areas and thus reduce the risk of local spread of the virus. To this end, the ability to map waterbird distributions with respect to outbreaks is critical and will aid conservation also.

The events of the last 12 months have especially highlighted three themes:

- The immeasurable importance of the WeBS data archive representing countless days of voluntary survey effort over decades. This voluntary effort is never taken for granted, and without it a monitoring scheme of the size and scope of WeBS would simply not be feasible. The end result, constantly growing, allows increasingly sophisticated questions to be addressed.
- The fact that, however good our data archive is, its value in advising government, especially in real-time emergencies, is only as good as the information systems that allow the retrieval of key data and its summarisation to provide readily understood information for decision-makers within government. To this end, the increasingly GIS-based information systems used by WeBS performed well, and more than justified the investment that the WeBS Partners

have been making in recent years. The current development of on-line systems of data capture through the WeBS Online project and associated work will further enhance capabilities to extract and organise past counts.

- The importance of specialist professional staff being able to interpret collated WeBS data so as to advise and inform government agencies.

It seems unlikely that the issues raised by the spread of HPAI H5N1 will go away soon, and there is currently much planning within the government and its agencies to develop rather more sustainable systems of advice provision. This is seeing the development of information modules that can readily extract necessary data in advance of its need. Watch this space!

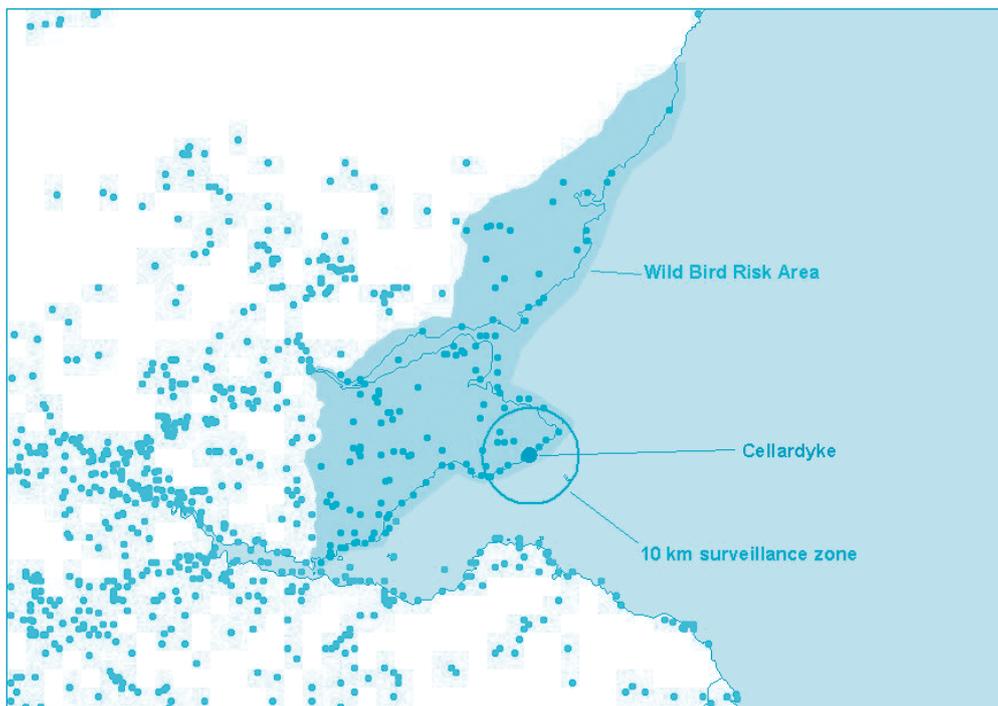
For more information:

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/ahaw/ahaw\\_opinions/1484.html](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/ahaw/ahaw_opinions/1484.html)

<sup>2</sup>[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature\\_conservation/focus\\_wild\\_birds/avian\\_influenza/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/nature_conservation/focus_wild_birds/avian_influenza/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup><http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/monitoring/riskassess.htm>

*David Stroud  
Senior Ornithologist, JNCC*



Wildbird risk area surrounding the H5N1 outbreak site at Cellardyke, Fife.  
Dots show position of WeBS sites

# RAFOS helps out with WeBS Counts in NW Scotland



Good numbers of Shag were recorded during the RAFOS counts *Photograph by Stuart Newson*

**T**he Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) aims to monitor the changing fortunes of the UK's non-breeding waterbirds. It remains one of the most popular of volunteer surveys and coverage is excellent across much of the UK. However, in common with many other surveys, there is a perennial problem in getting the more remote parts of the country covered.

One such area is the north-west coastline of mainland Scotland, from Skye up to Cape Wrath and then east along the north coast of Sutherland. This is a wild and windswept region, with numerous deeply-indented sea-lochs backed by a hinterland of mountains and moors. Relatively few people live in the region and the weather in the winter months can be particularly harsh. Small wonder then that getting regular coverage of the



Andy Musgrove (centre) with John Wells (left) and Eric Howlett from RAFOS during their visit to WeBS HQ *Photograph by Steve Holloway*



Map of the area covered by RAFOS

area for WeBS has been difficult in all but a handful of areas.

We have been delighted, therefore, that the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) have mounted expeditions to this coast during February 2005 and 2006, following similar surveys back in the 1990s. A small number of hardy souls have counted waterbirds along as much of the coast as possible, concentrating on the larger sea-lochs but with more open areas of coast covered also. The results have been extremely interesting, with several species regular up here that are considered scarce further south. For example, in February 2005 the team found totals of 46 Black-throated and 95 Great Northern Divers, 12 Iceland Gulls and eight Glaucous Gulls, not to mention occasional guest appearances by both Golden and White-tailed Eagles.

In addition, the RAFOS team have also provided counts for some of the inland lochs in the region. As might be expected, these lochs have been found to support extremely low densities, with many having no birds at all and others perhaps holding a Goldeneye or two. Whilst perhaps not so exciting as the coast, we have been very pleased indeed to get these inland counts. We are currently investigating analytical approaches to estimating the numbers of waterbirds

present on uncounted waterbodies, both in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. To do so, we need counts from at least some of each “class” of waterbody. Whilst an average small loch in Sutherland may only hold one bird in winter, there are tens of thousands of these lochs in northern Scotland. Given that the British estimate for Goldeneye is only about 25,000 birds, the potential interest in learning more about such sites is clear.

RAFOS, organised by John Wells and Jerry Knights, are to be congratulated for their support in this area and have already announced their willingness to be involved in the forthcoming Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey (NEWS) (see page10) during winter 2006-07, which is fantastic. We look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

*Andy Musgrove*



Eider were commonly recorded by RAFOS Photograph by Mike Weston

# Mixed fortunes for Whooper and Bewick's Swans – results of the January 2005 International Swan Census



Whooper Swans Photograph by Paul Docharty

Wintering populations of Whooper and Bewick's Swans are monitored every five years by an international mid-winter census involving the efforts of hundreds of volunteer and professional ornithologists across the wintering ranges. Very many thanks go to all those WeBS counters who were involved in the January 2005 census, not only for covering their usual patch, but for all the extra effort involved in searching the countryside for additional sites that had the potential to

hold swans but are not routinely covered by WeBS.

Results of the January 2005 census have helped to determine the current size of each population, as well as trends in population growth (or decline), and have provided valuable information regarding important feeding and roosting sites, habitat use and breeding success. The results show very different trends for these two species within Britain and Ireland.

The Icelandic Whooper Swan population (which winters mostly in

Britain and Ireland) has undergone a period of sustained growth since the mid 1990s. Results show a staggering rise from around 16,000 individuals in 1995, to over 26,000 in 2005. Of all birds counted, 37% were recorded in the Republic of Ireland, 25% in England, 16% in Scotland, 16% in Northern Ireland and 6% in Iceland.

Although numbers have increased in all countries (with the exception of Wales), proportionally the largest growth was seen in England. Continuing increases concentrated at just two sites in England (Ouse Washes in Norfolk/Cambridgeshire and Martin Mere in Lancashire) are largely responsible for the rise in total numbers in England.

As in 2000, the Highlands region held the largest numbers of birds (829) in Scotland in 2005, although many areas experienced substantial changes in numbers between the two censuses. Decreases were apparent in central Scotland and Borders, but were accompanied by increases of more than 50% in Lothian, Fife, Tayside, Grampian, Highlands and Shetland regions. Increases of

Total numbers of Whooper and Bewick's Swans in January 2005

	Number of Whooper Swans	Number of Bewick's Swans
Northern Ireland	4,331	13
Republic of Ireland	9,748	211
England	6,495	6980
Wales	94	12
Scotland	4,142	0
Iceland	1,556	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,366</b>	<b>7,216</b>

between 25–50% occurred in Dumfries & Galloway, Western Isles and Orkney. In Northern Ireland, numbers decreased in Co. Fermanagh and Co. Antrim but increases were seen elsewhere, particularly in Co. Londonderry and Co. Tyrone (80% and 71%, respectively). In Iceland, most birds were located in the southern lowlands and the southwest, the latter region showing the largest regional increase (57%). Smaller numbers were present in the north of the country and remained similar to that of the previous census.

It is possible that the increasing British numbers of Whooper Swans, particularly in east central England, may be inflated by an increasing proportion of birds from the Northwest European population wintering in Britain. This population breeds from Fenno-Scandia to north-west Russia and winters in continental Europe, but it is known from ringing studies that a small number winter in Britain. A greater understanding of the extent of interchange between populations, and use of British and Irish wintering grounds by the Northwest European population, is necessary to ascertain the true size of these expanding populations.

In contrast, numbers of the north-west Europe population of Bewick's Swan wintering in Britain and Ireland have decreased by 5% since 1995 to around 7,200 individuals. Numbers in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have decreased dramatically from 1,244 birds in 1984, to just 224 birds in January 2005, and declines have also occurred in many western regions of Britain.

Two areas which have seen increases in numbers, however, are East Anglia and southeast England which suggests a possible eastward contraction of the wintering range. East central England continues to hold the largest concentrations of Bewick's Swans in Britain and Ireland; the Ouse Washes regularly holding internationally important numbers of birds. Although annual fluctuations at the Ouse Washes occur, numbers have continued to rise with a 7% increase between January 1995 and January 2005.

The northwest Europe population of Bewick's Swans as a whole (including those on the continent) underwent a substantial increase from 16,046 to 29,277 from 1987 to 1995, largely due to expansion of numbers in the Netherlands. The population throughout the rest of northwest Europe was also censused in January 2000 and 2005, but full results are still awaited. These results will help to

determine whether declining numbers in parts of Britain and Ireland are indeed cause for concern in relation to the true size of the entire northwest Europe population, or whether changing climatic conditions and warmer winters, are causing more swans to remain closer to their breeding grounds.

An assessment of the number of juveniles present in flocks showed that both species had a relatively good breeding season in comparison with other census years. The overall percentage of young Whooper Swans was 19.2%, ranging from 17.9% in Iceland to 20.6% in Britain and overall mean brood size was 2.3 cygnets. This is the highest percentage of young recorded in a census year since 1986, when 22.9% was reported. Likewise, the percentage of young Bewick's Swans recorded in flocks was found to be relatively high at 13.9% and mean brood size was comparable to that of previous years (1.98). This is the highest productivity recorded in a census year since 1991.

As with previous censuses Whooper Swans were recorded most commonly on pasture in Britain and Ireland, although use of arable land has increased over the last three censuses. Results suggest potential agricultural conflict is limited since only a small proportion of birds were found on growing crops. Instead, the majority of birds recorded on arable land in January 2005 were using waste stubble and harvested potato fields. In contrast, Bewick's Swans were most commonly recorded on arable land in 2005, and similar to previous years, most were using winter cereal and sugar beet.

The January 2005 census has shown a continuing upward trend in numbers of Whooper Swans and with the consistently good breeding success seen over the last ten years, it will be interesting to see if this trend continues. Results of the Bewick's Swan census from the continent are

eagerly awaited to determine the status of the northwest population of Bewick's Swan throughout Europe.

*The full results will be published later this year and will also be available on WWT's Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme web pages at [www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/)*

*Jenny Worden*

## PRIORITY CORE COUNT DATES

### 2006 – 2007

13 August 2006

17 September 2006

8 October 2006

19 November 2006

17 December 2006

21 January 2007

18 February 2007

18 March 2007

15 April 2007

13 May 2007

17 June 2007

### 2007 – 2008

15 July 2007

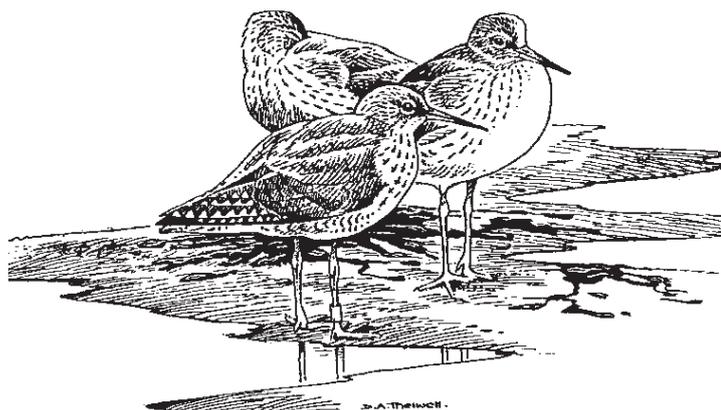
12 August 2007

16 September 2007

7 October 2007

11 November 2007

9 December 2007



# A vagrant counter on the East Asian Flyway

It is easy to forget that many countries lack monitoring schemes such as WeBS, with sites being damaged or destroyed almost before they have been 'discovered.' However, in this particular instance, the Saemangeum tidal flats of South Korea are known to be of international importance for migrating shorebirds but this has not stopped the construction of a barrage as a first stage to reclaiming the area. WeBS counter Simon Cohen describes a recent visit he made to the area.



Bar-tailed Godwits

Photograph by Jan van de Kam (Birds Korea)

In April I packed my telescope and tally counter and headed for South Korea. I had responded to a request in the Wader Study Group Bulletin asking for experienced shorebird counters to take part in the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program (SSMP). The vast Saemangeum estuarine system on the west coast of South Korea is the single most important known site for migratory shorebirds in the Yellow Sea, itself a core area on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Internationally important concentrations of at least 18 species of shorebird have been regularly supported by the site, as well as nine or more other waterbird species.

Despite its enormous ecological importance, Saemangeum had been targeted for reclamation by the South Korean government and following fifteen years of legal battles was about to be finally enclosed. Few organised shorebird counts had been conducted there in recent years and very little government data had been made publicly available. In addition there appeared to be no program in place to

monitor the impact of this reclamation project on shorebirds.

Recognising the need to monitor and publicise the impact of what is probably the largest single ongoing coastal reclamation project in the world, the domestic conservation organisation **Birds Korea**, partnered with the **Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG)**, set up the SSMP. The intention was to undertake intensive shorebird surveying in the Saemangeum system through April and May 2006 (with similar survey effort planned for 2007 and 2008). The SSMP also aimed to count the adjacent Gomso Bay and Geum Estuary, where the proponents of the reclamation claim the birds displaced from Saemangeum will move to.

I left Scotland on April 21<sup>st</sup>, the day that bulldozers closed the last remaining gaps in the 33-km long Saemangeum seawall. This finally dammed 40,100 ha of tidal-flats and shallows and left tidal exchange controlled by two sluice gates totalling only 540m in length. By the time I left on 30<sup>th</sup> April the tidal range had been drastically reduced from a near-natural

7 m peak in March to less than 1m. Forecast models indicate that 90% of the tidal-flat will be either dried out or permanently flooded within the next year, and construction of inner dykes is expected to start in 2008. The impact on the area is already enormous with the livelihoods of an estimated 25 000 local people affected. A report by a Korean government institute suggests that this single reclamation could even cause a region-wide rise in sea level, leading to a loss of a further 5% of the Yellow Sea's tidal-flats. Worst of all this terrible damage has been done without any clear end-use for any land created.

There were several reasons why I volunteered for the SSMP. I had been aware of the Saemangeum reclamation for a while and I thought that there was still a possibility to stop it and further disastrous coastal reclamations in South Korea if Birds Korea could get enough data to convince the courts. It was also an opportunity to use the skills and experience I have gained as a WeBS counter in an international project. Finally, there was the chance to see two of the most enigmatic





**Spoon-billed Sandpiper**  
 Photograph by Jan van de Kam (Birds Korea)



**Great Knot**  
 Photograph by Jan van de Kam (Birds Korea)

waders in the world, Spoon-Billed Sandpiper and Nordmann's (Spotted) Greenshank, for which Saemangeum is a major stopping-off point.

I have been a WeBS counter on and off for 15 years and on the Cromarty Firth, my present patch, I have survived sub-zero temperatures, gale force winds and the occasional blizzard. However counting in Korea posed some new challenges. Heat haze and dust blowing down from the Mongolian steppe made for poorer visibility than I have ever experienced in the UK. The numbers and diversity of species was also vastly different from Northern Scotland. I saw more than 30 species of shorebirds during the counts, including four Spoon-billed Sandpipers, three Nordmann's Greenshanks and an Asiatic Dowitcher. Some species were also present in vast numbers. There was one flock containing 56,000 Great Knot. As the only 'vagrant' Brit on the team (I was working with Australians, New Zealanders, Americans and Koreans) my excitement at seeing flocks of species like Red-necked Stint and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers caused mild

amusement to my antipodean colleagues although they were unbelievably keen on seeing the Great Spotted Woodpeckers in the small scrubby woodland near the hotel!

The SSMP gathered a massive amount of data that is still being analysed. However, initial estimates show that the three most abundant shorebird species recorded in the combined Saemangeum/Geum area were:

- Great Knot, with 116,126 in mid-May (approximately 30% of the world population)
- Dunlin (82,718, also in mid-May)
- Bar-tailed Godwit (15,876 in mid-April).

Additionally 34 Spoon-billed Sandpiper and 14 Nordmann's Greenshank were recorded within the Saemangeum area in mid-May, with 70 Nordmann's Greenshank at the Geum Estuary. The Geum is also now scheduled for reclamation.

During the programme counters also spent time searching for legged flagged and colour ringed waders.

More than three hundred were recorded showing that birds from Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan and China all pass through the site.

Birds Korea and AWSG are seeking experienced counters for future years, as well as financial support. As the best developed shorebird monitoring programme in the world, it would be great if members of the WeBS network could go and share their expertise with local Korean counters. If you are interested in volunteering, or any other aspect of the SSMP, including more detailed count information, visit the Birds Korea website at [www.birdskorea.org](http://www.birdskorea.org)

If you want to express your concern about the ongoing reclamations write to the South Korean embassy. Background information for preparation of such letters is provided on [www.birdsaustralia.com.au/articles/saemangeum](http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/articles/saemangeum).

*Simon Cohen*

# ... Special Surveys ...

## The Northwest Scotland Greylag Goose Census 2006

Due to a lack of funding it has been necessary to postpone the planned Northwest Scotland Greylag Goose Census from 2006 until 2008. Unfortunately, this means that there will be an 11 year gap since the previous census, but this postponement does provide the time needed to ensure adequate funding is available and that a full census can be carried out. We would like to thank everyone who has so far contacted us to express their interest in helping with this census, and hope that we can look forward to their participation in 2008.

Further information about this postponement is available on the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme web pages ([www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/)), and will also be given in the next issue of *GooseNews*, available from WWT or online at [www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/reports.asp](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/reports.asp).

*Richard Hearn  
Waterbird Monitoring Unit  
WWT Slimbridge*

## Breeding Little Ringed and Ringed Plover Survey 2007 (NOTE: subject to funding).

The BTO is planning to organise a national survey of Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover during the 2007 breeding season (currently pending funding). This will be the first census since 1984.

The first pair of Little Ringed Plover nested at Tring Reservoirs in 1938. Ever since breeding numbers have increased continuously, accompanied by a west and northwards range expansion. The latest population estimate available, in the BTO *New Atlas of Breeding Birds*, is about 800–1,000 summering pairs for the 1988–91 period.

The 1984 census of Ringed Plover revealed a national total of ca. 8,600 pairs, about two thirds of which bred in Scotland. There had been several local and regional population declines and a distinct spread from the coast to inland sites since the 1970s. The species is now Amber listed, and the UK and the Republic of Ireland together hold around 80% of the temperate breeding population of the nominate race, making it important to monitor the national population on a regular basis.

The main objective of the survey is to obtain updated population estimates for Ringed and Little Ringed Plover. Also, we are interested in the current spatial distribution, habitat dependencies and patterns of co-occurrence of the two species. There will be a large number of sites involved, and we will

probably aim to survey a sample of previously recorded sites and sites known to have been colonised subsequently, plus a stratified selection of random sites. The field methods will involve three site visits between April and July 2007 counting the number of pairs / adults present. The level of skill required for this survey is the ability to identify Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers.

If you would like more information about this survey or know of a site which you would like to survey, please contact Markus Handschuh at BTO HQ (E-mail: [markus.handschuh@bto.org](mailto:markus.handschuh@bto.org) Tel.: 01842 750050).

*Markus Handschuh & Niall Burton*

## Breeding Great Crested Grebe Survey 2007 (NOTE: subject to funding).

In 2007, the BTO will possibly also run a national Great Crested Grebe survey (currently pending funding). This will be the first national survey of the species in over 30 years, which will provide an updated breeding population estimate. The breeding population has increased considerably, as illustrated by the results of the previous surveys in 1931, 1965 and 1975, which revealed estimates of ca. 2,800, 4,700 and 6,800 individuals, respectively. A further increase was indicated by the BTO *New Atlas of Breeding Birds* (1988–91), which estimated 8,000 breeding individuals in Britain and a further 4,150 in Ireland. Together with increasing breeding numbers the species' distribution has also expanded.

The methods for the survey are being trialled during spring/summer 2006, however, it is likely that two to three survey visits will be required during the survey period (April to July). The bulk of the survey will involve counting the number of breeding adults as well as nest and family parties. Some basic information on the type of water body will also be collected.

If you would like more information about this survey or know of a site which you would like to survey, please contact Greg Conway at BTO HQ (E-mail: [greg.conway@bto.org](mailto:greg.conway@bto.org) Tel.: 01842 750050).

*Greg Conway & Niall Burton*

## The Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey (NEWS) December 2006 – January 2007

The United Kingdom is internationally important for its numbers of wintering waterbirds, and many of these are monitored annually by the Wetland Bird Survey counts (WeBS). However, most WeBS counts are made on estuaries and inland waterbodies, thereby leaving the majority of



our coastline uncounted. Important populations of several species occur around our shores outwith estuaries, and consequently their numbers are not monitored annually by the WeBS counts.

In a bid to bolster our knowledge of waterbird populations around our coastline, the 1984–85 Winter Shorebird Count (WSC) was organised by the BTO, and found that the non-estuarine coast held particularly important numbers of Ringed Plover, Sanderling, Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone. Building on the success of the WSC, a repeat survey, the Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey (NEWS), was carried out over the 1997–98 winter.

Comparing the results from NEWS to those of the WSC revealed declines in the numbers of Ringed Plover (-15%), Sanderling (-20%), Purple Sandpiper (-21%), Bar-tailed Godwit (-44%) and Turnstone (-16%) wintering around the UK coastline. NEWS also revealed changes in the winter distribution of species such as Ringed Plover and Purple Sandpiper, with the greatest densities of birds recorded on the Western Isles. These changes could be linked to our changing climate, with milder winters allowing birds to winter further north.

It is nine years since the 1997–98 survey, and we are running it again this winter (December 2006–January 2007). There is plenty of anecdotal information to suggest that the populations of species such as Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone (amongst others) have further declined since the previous survey, whilst the distribution of other species has continued to change.

We achieved good coverage during the last survey, but inevitably, we are likely to have a shortage of counters in some regions, such as Highland Scotland, the Inner Hebrides, the Western Isles and Shetland. So, if you think that you would like to contribute to a worthwhile survey over the festive period, then please contact Steve Holloway at BTO HQ.

Email: [Steve.Holloway@bto.org](mailto:Steve.Holloway@bto.org) Tel: 01842 750050

*Steve Holloway*

# Golden Plovers and Lapwings – do they really count?



Golden Plover Photograph by Tommy Holden

**T**hey are in the book in the wader section and they've got long legs, but do they count as real waders? Moreover, do *we* count them as waders? Of course the answer is YES they are waders, and NO, we don't count them, at least not well enough. This is where your WeBS counts can help BTO develop a more reliable estimate of the numbers of Golden Plovers and Lapwings in the UK this coming winter.

Recent years have seen growing interest in these species and it's not just restricted to the UK. Last Autumn's International Wader Study Group conference included a workshop bringing together scientists and conservationists from across Europe to discuss gaps in knowledge and work towards coordinated European surveys of Golden Plovers. This follows on the success of the October 2003 count that was coordinated across several north-west European countries. WeBS counts were central to the count of 143,000 Golden Plovers recorded in Britain. But we can do better and this winter's full survey will be another major step up in our knowledge of these species, and will set the

scene for the next European coordinated count in October 2008.

The BTO/JNCC Winter Plover Survey will run from October 2006 to February 2007 and will involve counts of key known sites plus surveys of random tetrads and casual records. We've planned for all counts to be synchronised with WeBS Core Count dates as a means of minimising count duplication in these highly mobile dates. So what would we like WeBS counters to do? Well, broadly speaking, nothing! Simply survey your usual WeBS count sectors as normal and your totals for Golden Plovers and Lapwings will be extracted from your forms upon submission to the WeBS Office. If you see flocks of either species just outside your normal count area, please do not add them to your section totals, but instead please would you report them through a simple online form at [www.bto.org/goto/winter-plovers.htm](http://www.bto.org/goto/winter-plovers.htm). If you do not have access to a computer and/or the web, then please include the details of any additional flocks on a separate piece of paper and include them when you return your WeBS forms.

There may be large flocks that you know roost on your site at low tide, but are not normally present when making your Core (high tide) counts, as they are likely to have moved a little way further inland. Why not see if you can track them down? The same online form can be used to submit any records of Golden Plovers or Lapwings seen anywhere in the UK between October and February. If you are interested in helping out in a more systematic way, or have any questions concerning the survey and wintering plovers more generally then please contact me. [simon.gillings@bto.org](mailto:simon.gillings@bto.org)

*Simon Gillings*



## ... Correction ...

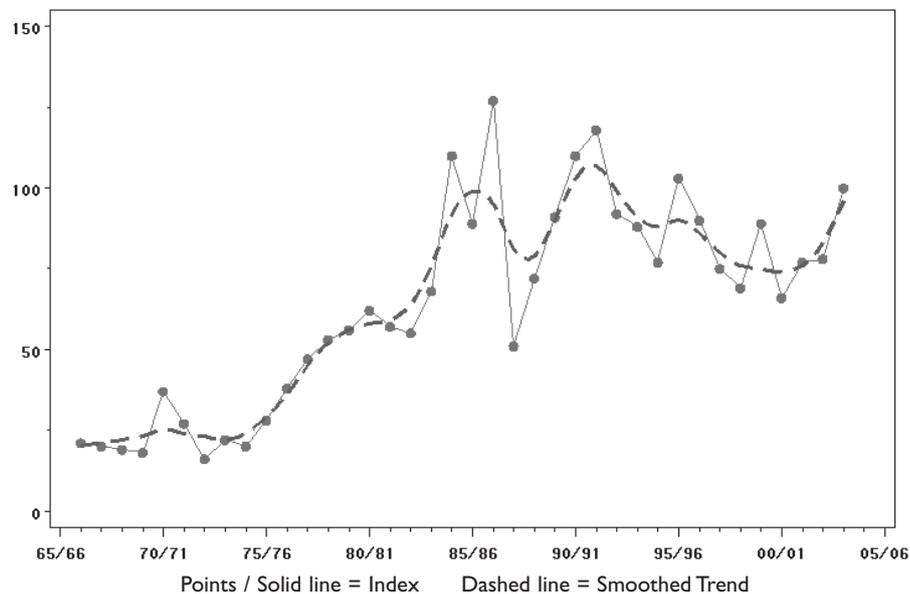
### Wild Swan Indices – Not all doom and gloom!

Given the enormous amount of data generated by WeBS counters each year, it is perhaps inevitable (if regrettable) that there may be a few errors introduced into each season's annual report, *Wildfowl & Wader Counts*. Such errors are flagged at the start of the report for the following season. However, one problem with the 2001–02 / 2002–03 and 2003–04 reports has come to light that we feel is worth promptly correcting in a more public manner to ensure that any problems arising can be minimised. In addition, it may be of interest to counters to see how this problem has arisen.

A glance at the accounts for Bewick's Swan in the last two reports would suggest that there has been a major decline in numbers in Great Britain, with the main decline between the 1997–98 and 1998–99 winters. However, perusal of the text also points out that numbers at the main site, the Ouse Washes, were very high in 2003–04. Given that the Ouse Washes supports about 70% of all the Bewick's Swans in Britain, it is hard to reconcile these two observations.

Happily, it is the picture of decline that is the false one (see the article on page 6) Numbers of Bewick's Swans are relatively healthy in the GB. The true annual index plot for Bewick's Swan up to 2003–04 is reproduced here. As can be seen, numbers of Bewick's Swans in Britain fluctuate but

Bewick's Swan – Indices for GB and the constituent countries of the UK  
Annual Index for Great Britain



have been broadly stable since the mid 1980s.

The reason this error occurred is related to the fact that, on the Ouse Washes (and Nene Washes and Martin Mere) Bewick's Swans are counted not only during standard day-time WeBS Core Counts, but also as they fly in to roost in the evening; many swans spend the day feeding in surrounding agricultural landscapes. Prior to 1998–99, such roost counts had not

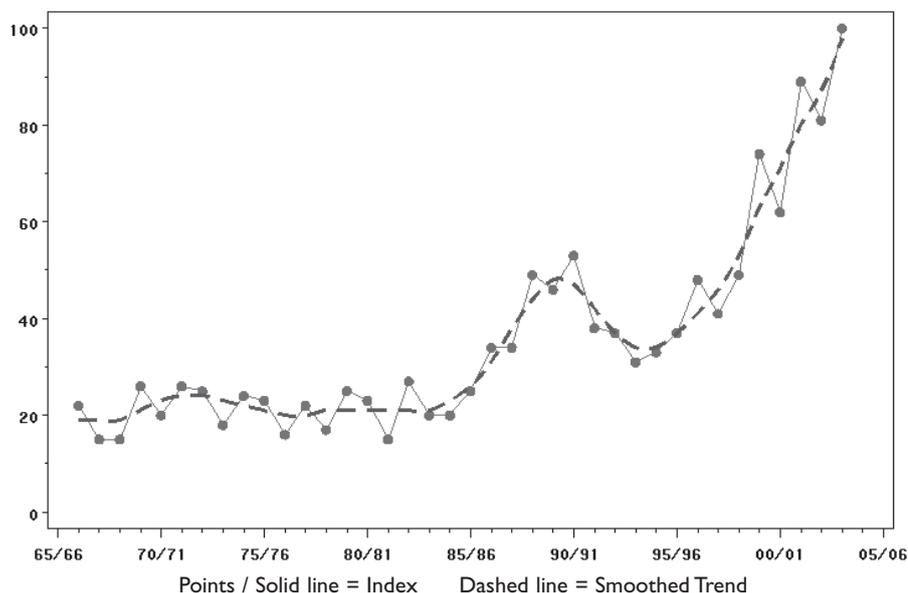
been differentiated from core counts in the database. Thus, our original index which was based only on "core" counts, included roost counts up to 1997–98 but not thereafter. This led to the apparent decline. We are now including the roost counts from these three sites within the index calculation for Bewick's Swan.

Moreover, the same problem affected Whooper Swan, which also roosts on the Ouse Washes in very large numbers. The previously published trend information for this species in Britain showed a relatively stable population. However, accounting for the roost counts in the same manner leads to a somewhat different picture. Numbers of Whooper Swans in Britain have risen substantially over the last few years, reaching a new peak level in 2003–04.

We apologise for any problems caused by this error. However, it is heartening to see both these fine winter species doing well in Britain. Unfortunately, Bewick's Swan remains at a very low ebb indeed in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and have also shown a worrying decline in some of the key wintering sites of the Netherlands. It will be important to maintain a close eye on this species in years to come.

Andy Musgrove

Whooper Swan – Indices for GB and the constituent countries of the UK  
Annual Index for Great Britain



# A Request from the WeBS Office

We are a fun-loving lot (generally) in the WeBS Office, and we don't mind having a go at most things. However, even our powers of deduction are strained when we receive count forms with no site name, date or counter details on them! These appear to be from individual counters, rather than via an LO, which only adds to the mystery. Unfortunately, we are unable to use the data on the forms as we have no idea where it is from. These

instances are few and far between, but please do check that your counter details, the site name and the date are on the forms before returning them to the office. Many thanks.

In the meantime, do you recognise the mystery form below? If you think it is yours, please identify yourself to a member of the WeBS Office. All replies will be treated in the strictest confidence!



<b>1 COUNTER CODE</b> If you have changed address or do not know your counter code, please provide your full name and address below		<b>2 COUNT UNIT:</b> Central Grid Ref. <table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table> Count unit code <table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table> Site (if part of larger site) <table border="1"><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>																																					
<b>3 DATE</b> (e.g. 13/10/97)		15/11/06	2/2/06	12/3/06	9/4/16	14/5/08	11/6/06	16/7/06																															
<b>TIME</b> (use 24 hour clock) Start (e.g. 0900)		11:15	12:00	11:00	11:15	12:00	09:00	10:00																															
Finish (e.g. 1400)		11:50	13:00	12:15	12:30	13:30	10:00	11:00																															
<b>4 WATERBIRDS</b>																																							
Please ✓ box if NO waterbirds were present		XX	<input type="checkbox"/>	XX																																			
Red-throated Diver	RH								RH																														
Black-throated Diver	BV								BV																														
Great Northern Diver	ND								ND																														
Little Grebe	LG								LG																														
Great Crested Grebe	GG								GG																														
Red-necked Grebe	RX								RX																														
Slavonian Grebe	SZ								SZ																														
Black-necked Grebe	BN								BN																														
Cormorant	CA		4	3		1	2		CA																														
Shag	SA								SA																														
Bittern	BI								BI																														
Little Egret	ET								ET																														
Grey Heron	H								H																														
Mute Swan	MS								MS																														
Bewick's Swan	BS								BS																														
Whooper Swan	WS								WS																														
Pink-footed Goose	PG								PG																														
European White-fronted Goose	EW								EW																														
Greenland White-fronted Goose	NW								NW																														
Greylag Goose	GJ								GJ																														
Canada Goose	CG								CG																														
Barnacle Goose	BY								BY																														
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	DB								DB																														
Light-bellied Brent Goose	PB								PB																														
Egyptian Goose	EG								EG																														
Mandarin	MN								MN																														
Shelduck	SU	2			30	18	25	1	SU																														
Wigeon	WN								WN																														
Gadwall	GA								GA																														
Teal	T								T																														
Mallard	MA					3	3	1	MA																														
Pintail	PT								PT																														
Garganey	GY								GY																														
Shoveler	SV								SV																														
Red-crested Pochard	RQ								RQ																														
Pochard	PO								PO																														
Tufted Duck	TU								TU																														
Scaup	SP								SP																														
Eider	E								E																														
Long-tailed Duck	LN								LN																														
Common Scoter	CX								CX																														
Velvet Scoter	VS								VS																														
Goldeneye	GN								GN																														
Smew	SY								SY																														
Red-breasted Merganser	RM								RM																														
Goosander	GD								GD																														
Ruddy Duck	RY								RY																														
Water Rail	WA								WA																														
Moorhen	MH								MH																														

### AEWA Update

*The Agreement on the Conservation of African Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is a daughter agreement of the Convention on Migratory Species. The third Meeting of Parties was held in Dakar, Senegal in October 2005 and was attended by around 150 delegates representing 49 Contracting Parties plus the European Union (EU), 29 non-Contracting Parties, nine non-governmental organisations and three intergovernmental organisations. The UK, holding the EU Presidency, played a prominent part in the meeting.*

#### Major highlights and conclusions of the meeting included:

- A decision not to expand the taxonomic scope of the Agreement through the addition of migratory seabirds, but rather to focus on the implementation of the requirements of the Agreement's Action Plan for currently listed waterbirds that occur mainly in terrestrial and coastal wetlands. The debate highlighted the need to develop concerted international action for a considerable number of the most threatened waterbird species, especially in Africa. The majority of international action plans developed by AEWA have so far been for European species. The UK, on behalf of the EU, strongly noted the need to focus the implementation of the Agreement especially on waterbirds in Africa. The agreement of a Resolution on climate change and waterbirds, promoted by the UK. This requests that the Agreement's Technical Committee start to assess the implications of climate change for migratory waterbirds, and bring forward technical guidance and amendments to the Action Plan to the next Meeting of Parties. The impacts of climate change will be of major conservation significance for waterbirds and their habitats and this Resolution commences a process to consider how countries may best respond to the challenges raised.
- Agreement to give priority to the drafting of a series of international reviews of different aspects of the conservation status of waterbirds, to come to the next Meeting of Parties, and to be updated triennially thereafter. Such reviews are crucial to inform the

parties to the Agreement as to the priorities for their implementation of the Agreement.

- Agreement of technical guidance related to the definition of the term 'serious long-term decline' as well as procedures for the review and update of knowledge on international biogeographic populations of waterbirds—important units of conservation management.
- A decision to develop a strategic plan for the Agreement that would give guidance as to the priority areas for its implementation.
- Finalisation of international action plans for Corncrake, Northern Bald Ibis, Ferruginous Duck, the East Canadian population of Light-bellied Brent Geese and White-headed Duck.

*David Stroud/Helen Baker*

*For more information:*

[www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3\\_docs/daily\\_coverage/day1\\_mop3\\_230ct\\_coverage.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3_docs/daily_coverage/day1_mop3_230ct_coverage.htm)

[www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3\\_docs/mop3.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop3_docs/mop3.htm)

### The Wash to face another public inquiry over mussel beds

The inquiry was called after English Nature refused fishermen permission to scare birds away from their mussel farms on The Wash. The RSPB fears its reserves in Norfolk and Lincs (Snettisham, Frampton Marsh and Freiston Shore) will be harmed if action is taken against the birds. Fishermen blame Eider ducks in particular for feeding on the mussels. They are demanding the right to protect their artificial beds by scaring birds off.

Many birds are present throughout the year in The Wash, whilst others use it as a stopover during their long migration flights. The RSPB is also calling for shell fishing to return to a sustainable level to protect the long term future of both birds and fishermen.

Mark Avery, Conservation Director at the RSPB, said: "The Wash is protected by international European and UK law. Birds that eat shellfish, including Oystercatcher, Knot, Shelduck and Pintail, have dropped in number by more than 100,000 on The Wash."

### WeBS bird ties the Knot!

Congratulations to Assistant WeBS Secretary Emma Davis who became Mrs Glaister in May of this year.



## WANTED – ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF WeBS News

Perhaps Simon Cohen's article in this issue about his trip to South Korea has brought back some memories of exciting days counting birds that you would like to share with us? If so we would love to hear from you, whether as a counter or a Local Organiser. If you are a budding journalist and have a story to tell, start writing now or get in touch with the WeBS Office for further information or guidance. We are looking forward to being able to feature more articles from WeBS volunteers in the future

## Photographers and Artists – please read on

We are always on the look out for good quality photographs and line drawings that we can use for WeBS publications (with full credits given of course). Any species or habitats covered by WeBS would be welcomed. Digital images would be easiest, but we can scan slides (which will be returned) if necessary.

So get snapping!



## Who's Who within the WeBS team 2006

Many counters and Local Organisers are in regular contact with the WeBS team at BTO. For the benefit of those that are not sure who does what and who to get in contact with for various matters, the following 'Who's who' is included to clarify the roles of the various personnel.

**Graham Austin**, WeBS Database Manager  
WeBS Alerts  
WeBS database management  
Statistical analyses

**Alex Banks**, WeBS National Organiser (Low Tide Counts)  
Low Tide Counts  
Carmarthen Bay Common Scoters, etc

**Mark Collier**, WeBS National Organiser (Core Counts)  
*Annual report*  
Standard data requests  
WeBS News

**Iain Downie**, Web Software Developer  
WeBS Online

**Emma Glaister**, Assistant WeBS Secretary  
Counter and Local Organiser database management  
Mailing of count forms, newsletters and annual reports

**Steve Holloway**, WeBS Counter Coordinator  
Counter and Local Organiser liaison  
Recruitment of new counters and Local Organisers  
WeBS News  
Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird (NEWS) Organiser

**Ilya Maclean**, Research Ecologist  
WeBS Alerts

**Heidi Mellan**, WeBS Secretary  
Counter and Local Organiser database management  
Mailing of count forms, newsletters and annual reports  
Jointly responsible for the production of this edition of WeBS News

**Andy Musgrove**, WeBS National Coordinator  
Overall management of WeBS  
WeBS database management  
WeBS Online

### Email

use the format of [firstname.surname@bto.org](mailto:firstname.surname@bto.org) e.g. [andy.musgrove@bto.org](mailto:andy.musgrove@bto.org)

### Web site

WeBS web site: <http://www.bto.org/survey/webs/index.htm>

### WeBS Alerts

WeBS Alerts report: <http://blx1.bto.org/webs/alerts/index.htm>



# WeBS Online – Almost There!

**WeBS**  
The Wetland Bird Survey

WeBS Data Home > Site summaries > Site by year > Site and year by month

user: Niall Burton

## Monthly Site summary for Taff and Ely Estuary during 2004

The table below compares the maximum counts per month for Taff and Ely Estuary during 2004. Known undercounts are surrounded by [ ].

Species	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Max
Mute Swan	112	31	27	10	3	8	8	6	14	19	34	80	112
Shelduck							12	10	30	2	4	1	30
Teal			8	27	104	57	107	98	55	6			107
Mallard	137	81	77	74	54	89	120	75	123	89	69	122	137
Pochard								1	1				1
Tufted Duck	2	2	9	23	22	61	8	37	25	20	8	14	61
Scaup						4							4
Goldeneye						1	4	4					4
Goosander							1	4					4
Little Grebe		3	2	6	4	13	16	7	9				16
Great Crested Grebe	20	16	12	11	8	9	22	18	20	36	16	14	36
Cormorant	17	20	29	55	48	20	35	25	20	25	44	19	55
Little Egret	2	1	3								1		3
Grey Heron	3	2	2	3	4	3	3	1	3	1	3	2	4
Water Rail							2	1					2
Moorhen	12	6	14	18	20	20	15	13	18	6	5	12	20

Screenshot of a WeBS Online Site Summary.

In last year's *WeBS News* we talked at some length about the forthcoming WeBS Online system. Those people paying attention might be wondering where it has got to, particularly those who kindly offered to help pilot the system. Well, as the NHS, Child Support Agency and the Passport Office have proved, IT systems sometimes over-run a little in the development stages. However, we're pleased to announce that we are finally just about ready to go live.

Obviously, we don't want to set you all loose on the system until we're sure we've ironed out at least most of the inevitable bugs that will crop up to start with, and we're still planning on a pilot phase with volunteer testers. However, once we've resolved any initial teething troubles we'll be going live, at some time this autumn.

Whilst much of the detail about the system was given in *WeBS News 21*,

the main features of WeBS Online can be summarised as:

- Counters will be able to type in their WeBS counts (Core, Low Tide, or Supplementary) directly,
- Counters will be able to view any historical counts for sites they cover,
- Local Organisers will be able to keep track of submissions made by their counters.

We must stress, of course, that use of WeBS Online will not be compulsory by any means. We still envisage that we will receive many counts using the traditional paper forms for many years to come. However, given the level of support and number of enquiries we've already received concerning WeBS Online, it looks like many of you are keen to make use of it.

Although we can't say a precise date by which time WeBS Online will be up-and-running this autumn, we can confirm that we will be sending out detailed instructions on the use of the system in spring 2007 to all counters. Therefore, if you're the sort of counter who transfers their counts from notebook to count form at the end of the year (as I do), you'll be able to transfer them directly to WeBS Online instead should you so desire. If you just can't wait to get stuck into using WeBS Online at the earliest opportunity, however, then keep an eye on the WeBS website where the latest update will be posted, or else call the WeBS Office to find out more.

*Andy Musgrove*