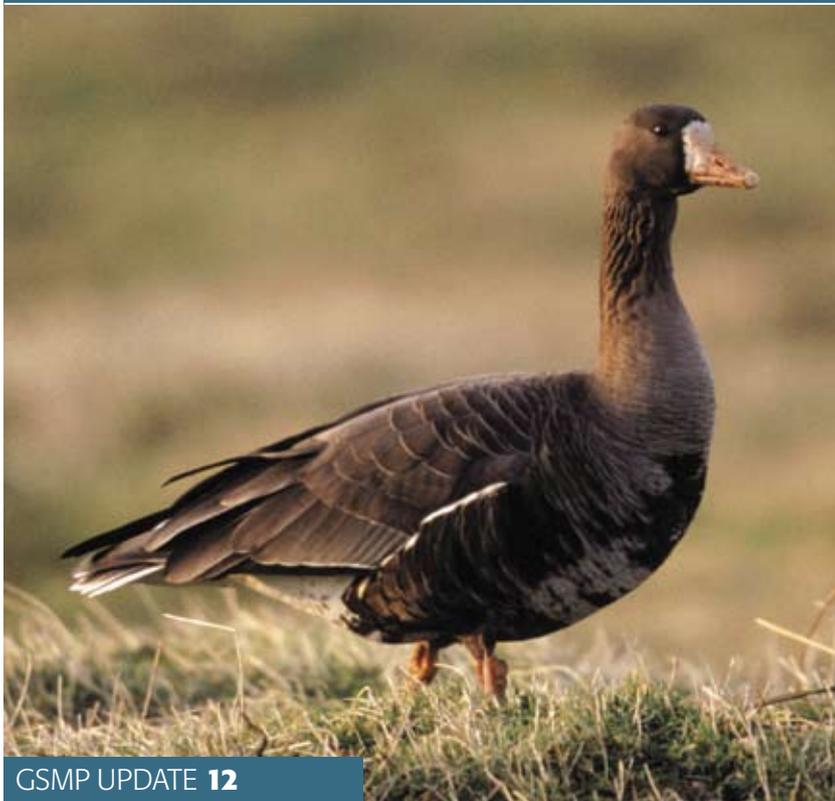


# WeBSnews

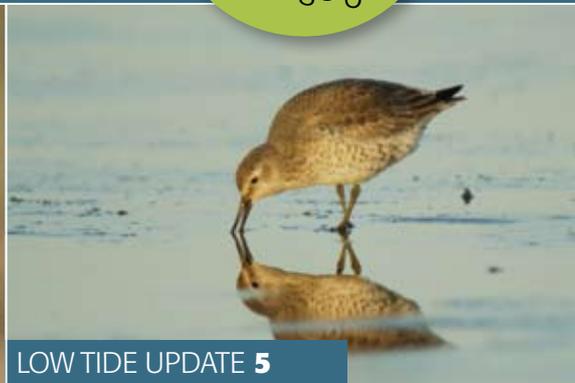
The newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey



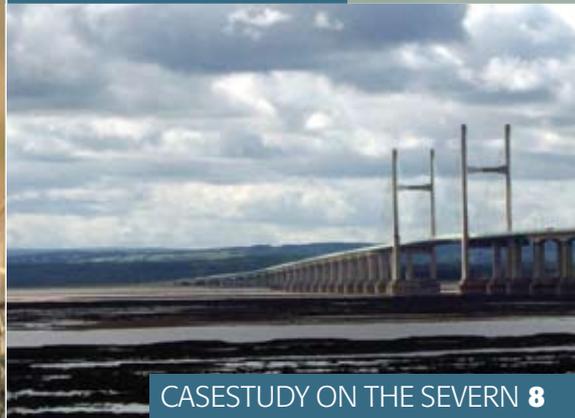
LOOK  
OUT FOR  
COLOUR  
RINGS  
See page 6



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LOW TIDE UPDATE **5**



CASESTUDY ON THE SEVERN **8**

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

## WeBS joins the Social Media revolution



You may have already spied the new Facebook logo that has appeared in the top right corner of the home page, by clicking on it you will be taken to our brand new Facebook Page ([www.facebook.com/WetlandBirdSurvey](http://www.facebook.com/WetlandBirdSurvey)).

For quite a while now we've been toying with the idea of having some kind of forum where our volunteers can chat with each other, share photos or any exciting news about the birds they've seen and give you all a way to feel more involved with WeBS. With so many people joining Social Media networking sites like Facebook and Twitter we thought this could provide the perfect medium for such a forum. To be able to join us in Facebook you

will need to have access to the internet (either at home or at your local library/internet café) and you will need your own Facebook profile. A Facebook profile is easy to set up, they give you step-by-step instructions on what to do (visit [www.facebook.com/help](http://www.facebook.com/help) for more details).

Near the Top of our page you'll find a 'like' button. By clicking on that you will be able to make comments, join discussions and add photos. ▶



## FROM THE EDITOR

# Welcome...

...to the latest issue of WeBS News in its new format. The winter of 2010/11 has been another cold one with waterbodies in many areas being frozen for many weeks. We received several reports of concentrations of species such as Goldeneye on rivers having been forced off their usual favoured lakes.

Whilst carrying out their counts, many WeBS Counters don't realise how their counts are used away from contributing to the annual report. However, the conflict over the proposals for a Severn Tidal Power Development was often in the news and WeBS data were used by the government when making their decisions.

Following the piece on the relatively small Axe Estuary in Devon in the last newsletter, this year we have a piece from Wash counter Robin Dobson on a different challenge of counting such large numbers and the changes through the seasons.



**Neil Calbrade** Editor & WeBS National Organiser



### CONTINUED FROM COVER

◀ *Why should I join your Facebook Page when I can look at your website?*

We will of course be adding things to the Facebook Page about WeBS but we will try to make it original and interesting. There will be waterbird news from all the WeBS Partners and if we see anything about waterbirds in general that we think you might find interesting we will be adding that as well. The page won't be just us telling people about WeBS, everyone can join in, you will be able to post your own photographs of birds seen on WeBS Counts share interesting news or join in discussions about anything WeBS related.

But the main thing we are hoping for is that it will be a way for our volunteers to get to know each other and share experiences. Keep an eye out on the events section as we'll be adding details

of all the conferences and talks that we'll be attending so if you're nearby perhaps you can pop in to say hello.

If Tweeting is more your thing, you can also follow us on Twitter. Although we haven't got our own Twitter profile we have been sending the occasional Tweet (or should that be quack?) via the BTO's Twitter profile and adding "#UKWeBS" to the end of each message. If you are a fan of Twitter, you can search for this hash-tag, as it's called, to see what we have said. If you would like to get in touch with us via Twitter, simply add #UKWeBS to the end of your tweet and we will see it.

We hope you'll find using these social media fun as well as informative and we look forward to seeing you there...

**Heidi Mellan**

WeBS Counter Network Organiser

## WEBS NEWS

People and organisations responsible for WeBS News.

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**Photography** Cover: Neil Calbrade (Knot), Andy Hay (RSPB-Images.com) (White-fronted Goose) and Lauren Tucker (Severn Bridge from Severn Beach). Inside: Derek Belsey, Niall Burton, Neil Calbrade, Graham Catley, Mark Collier, John Harding, Chas Holt, Catherine Moore and Nick Moran

### NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

**Design and Typesetting** Neil Calbrade

**Printing** Crowes Complete Print, Norwich

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 latter on behalf of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage) in association with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.



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Information in this Newsletter is compiled from a variety of sources and does not necessarily reflect the views of WeBS partner organisations. © BTO 2011. Published by BTO/RSPB/JNCC.



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

## IN THE NEWS...

### TRAINING

## WeBS Courses



NEIL CALBRADE

As part of the wider BTO Training Programme, WeBS is offering training in carrying out WeBS Counts. To date, training courses have taken place at Loch of Skene (Aberdeenshire) and Gartmorn Dam (Fife) under the Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland project (BBMS), and more recently two events at the Nunnery in Thetford. The courses so far have been aimed at beginners to WeBS, covering the methods and basic identification of common species. It is planned to extend this training to

include aspects such as counting large sites and large flocks, which is something we get asked for advice about time and time again.

If you know somebody who would like to get involved in WeBS but feels they do not possess the required skills or confidence, these courses could just be what they need.

.....  
**For more information, check our website at [www.bto.org/webs/training](http://www.bto.org/webs/training)**

### EVENTS

WeBS staff will be attending the Rutland Bird Fair again this year on the weekend of 19th-21st August. We will be handing out the new WeBS Report to counters and look forward to meeting you, so if you are going, please drop by. We will be at the Lincolnshire/ Nottinghamshire Regional BTO Conference in April and the BTO/Staffordshire Wildlife Trust Conference in October this year giving

talks on aspects of WeBS. We have recently given talks to Bradford Ornithological Society and Somerset Ornithological Society and are available to give talks to bird clubs, especially in areas where the profile of WeBS could be raised. If you know of a local club or society which has a programme of talks then please bear us in mind.

### RESEARCH DATA

## Listing Sites in WeBS Report

For each species covered in the annual WeBS Report, we not only show up-to-date population trends, but also list sites where counts have surpassed the thresholds for national or international importance. Indeed, a scroll through the site tables is probably the first thing many counters do when receiving the report! The British wintering population estimates

have recently been revised using the most recent data available and the paper is likely to be published this summer. We will show the new national 1% thresholds for each species in *Waterbirds in the UK 2009/10*, but be aware of this if 'your' WeBS site suddenly appears to have dropped out of, or indeed appeared among, the wetlands listed for a particular species...

### IN THE FIELD

## Remembering the big freeze

Memories of last winter's freezing conditions in December and January are fading. However, before you pack away your winter notebooks, remember we are keen to receive all interesting records of waterbirds from the big freeze - not just those relating to standard Core Counts which are of course a priority!

We know the cold weather displaced birds from freshwater sites and probably led to influxes of wildfowl from the frozen continent. Help us to fully describe how different species responded. Supplementary records can be submitted easily via WeBS Online - just select "Casual/Roost Counts" and fill in the details.

### CENSUS NEWS

## IWC update

You may not realise that your January WeBS Counts contribute to each year's International Waterbird Census (IWC), organised by Wetlands International. Recently, the organisation of IWC has become affected by financial constraints, but ways of overcoming these are being sought, and we will keep you updated with any further developments.

Collating January waterbird counts from around the world, the IWC is very important in enabling assessment of populations at the flyway level. It has helped in understanding how core shifts in species like European White-fronted Goose have led to declines in the UK but concurrent increases in the Netherlands as a result of 'short-stopping'.

## WEBS LOCATION SPOTLIGHT



# Friskney Flats

The Wash is the most important site in the country for wintering waterbirds, and WeBS is indebted to the dedicated team of counters there, for many of whom, doing the counts is a labour of love.

**Robin Dobson** WeBS Counter

Part of the Lincolnshire Wash, Friskney Flats is at a point where the marsh is narrow enough to see the mud flats and the sea when it comes in, on some parts a rare treat.

The habitat progression is sea, sand/mudflat, saltmarsh, seabank, and farmland. The latter is mainly arable – brassicas, some cereal, potatoes and there is a herd of cattle which grazes part of the marsh area.

The other major area is the RAF bombing range, which tends to limit access to the mudflats. The activity has more impact on people than birds. Waders and especially Dark-bellied Brent Geese arriving in autumn adapt quickly. Whether this is a combination of the adults remembering from previous seasons and the young responding to parental behaviour I don't know but they react decreasingly with familiarity and by late December the guardians barely raise their heads. Though sudden, low level and unbelievably loud it doesn't impinge on their feeding territory, nor is it threatening. It's almost as though it's a natural phenomenon – a bit like high tide and the birds accept it.

The Wash is controlled by the tidal system. The critical factors are high tide times and heights. Bird counting happens either side of high tide. It's a strange tidal system, 2 hours before high tide the sea is on the horizon, 1 hour before the creeks are filling faster than you can run and the birds are funnelling back towards you making counting and identification easier. It's at this point you want the tide to stop, the birds have feeding and roosting space and they are confined to a specific area. It doesn't happen very often and usually the sea keeps coming. The waders and Brent Geese



MARK COLLIER

largely cope with this. The counting problems occur when there is a very high spring tide when the mudflats and marsh begin to disappear under water 2 hours before high tide or even dawn. Come high tide and life gets better! Slack water can last between 10 and 45 minutes and within half an hour of it turning you can stand there scratching your head saying "what high tide?" with the sea galloping back towards the horizon and the birds following.

In winter, flocks of mixed wader predominate mainly Dunlin, Knot, Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit and both Golden and Grey Plover. There are small numbers of Redshank and Turnstone with combined numbers of waders and geese of up to 15,000. Little Egret are increasingly common with a small number (30) of Eider regularly offshore. If I'm really lucky there's a wintering peregrine or short-eared owl.

As of autumn last year (2010) the bombing range has been closed and as yet its future is undecided but with the amount of buried ordinance that must be out on the mudflats nobody is rushing to exploit it. The only visual changes are the removal of two observation posts and lines of marker buoys showing the approach path.

I have been counting different patches on The Wash for almost 30 years and each time it's different, possibly frustrating, always interesting, never boring. In winter you can stand there muffled up to the eyeballs with an easterly gale freezing the coffee in your flask top and feeling as though you're standing on a naturist beach. I love it.

[If you would like to write an article to highlight your WeBS site, please do get in touch.](#)

# Birds of a feather...

With over 28% of the European estuarine resource and relatively mild winters, Britain's shores are a magnet for hundreds of thousands of waterbirds each winter.

**Neil Calbrade** WeBS Low Tide Organiser

Since they began back in 1992, the WeBS Low Tide Counts have gone from strength to strength, counting bird numbers and mapping the distributions of the wide range of waterbird species to be found there, often in very large numbers. To date 83 estuaries have been included in the Low Tide Count scheme from the 22,000ha expanse of the Severn Estuary to the much smaller Adur and Clwyd Estuaries.

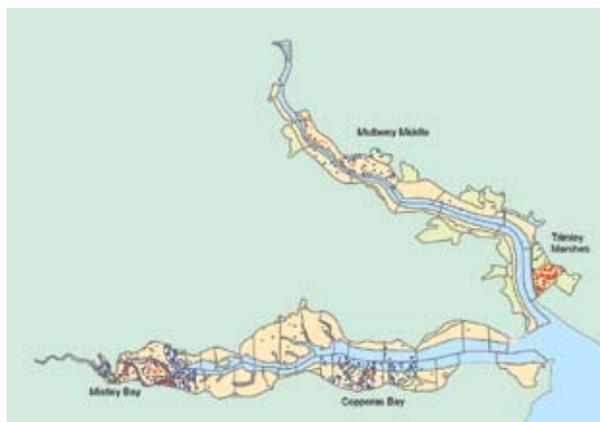
The Low Tide Counts complement the Core Counts, which quantify birds present at high tide roosts by helping to identify important feeding areas. This can be especially useful when investigating environmental changes or assessing a proposed development such as dock developments, recreational activities, tidal power barrages, marinas and housing schemes and the resulting impacts.

By plotting the results as dot density maps, we can see how different species use the estuaries within the same winter and we can also compare distributions with previous winters. These maps highlight the important areas with a site for each species, as some birds are more localised within the site than others. In the example opposite, the distribution of Pintail within the Stour and Orwell Estuaries has changed within the last ten years with Trimley Marshes now more favoured whilst Copperas Bay has seen a marked decline. Numbers at Mistley Bay on the Stour and Mulberry Middle on the Orwell remain fairly stable.

The winter of 2010/11 has been a very busy time for Low Tide Counts, with some large sites such as Solway, Traeth Lafan, Crouch/Roach, Alde and Chichester Harbour being counted.



NEIL CALBRAD



▲ Sanderling are one of the most familiar tideline waders

◀ Distribution of Pintail within the Stour and Orwell Estuaries in 2009/10 (red dots) and 1999/00 (blue dots).

Loch Indaal on Islay was counted for the first time. We will soon begin the process of organising counts for 2011/12 at sites such as the Humber and Mersey, though we would welcome counts from any estuary, even those that have not yet been counted under the scheme. Please contact the

WeBS office (email: [lowtide@bto.org](mailto:lowtide@bto.org)) if you have time to count one or more sectors once a month between November and February and would like to take part.

**WeBS STAT...**  
**64,707**  
The area in hectares of intertidal habitat covered by Low Tide Counts in 2008/09.

# Colour-ringed birds - can you help?

WeBS counters are ideally placed to see colour-ringed waterbirds, and by reporting these birds you may find that the local Coots aren't so local after all....

**Lee Barber** Recoveries Officer, BTO

The ringing of waders and wildfowl has provided a wealth of information about where birds go and how long they live but while doing your WeBS counts you may see that some birds have coloured rings on their legs as well. The combination of colours together with the species in most cases will identify that specific bird as an individual and with this information the bird can be tracked during its life and provide much more information on its movements and life history.

One such bird, a female Pink-footed Goose, wearing neck collar bL73, which was ringed in Denmark in 1994 was seen in Norfolk, Lancashire, Fife and on the Humber Estuary in subsequent years.

Many different species have been colour ringed, from Whooper Swans to Greylag Geese and Cormorants to Sanderlings. Each one will have its own history and the more people that report these individual birds the more complete a picture we will have about its movements. Some of these movements can be very impressive with birds moving to and from their Arctic breeding grounds.

A good website to find out who is colour-ringing certain species and how to submit data can be found at [www.cr-birding.be](http://www.cr-birding.be). Alternatively you can report a colour ringed bird at [www.ring.ac](http://www.ring.ac) or email the WWT at [colourmarkedwildfowl@wwt.org.uk](mailto:colourmarkedwildfowl@wwt.org.uk) and be sure to check out the BTO's Demog Blog at <http://btoringing.blogspot.com> to find out about more interesting movements.



NICK MORAN



GRAHAM CATLEY

# A final call to arms...

From 1 April, volunteers across Britain and Ireland start fieldwork for the fourth and final breeding season of Bird Atlas 2007-11, and there are still gaps to fill...

**Dawn Balmer** Atlas Coordinator, BTO

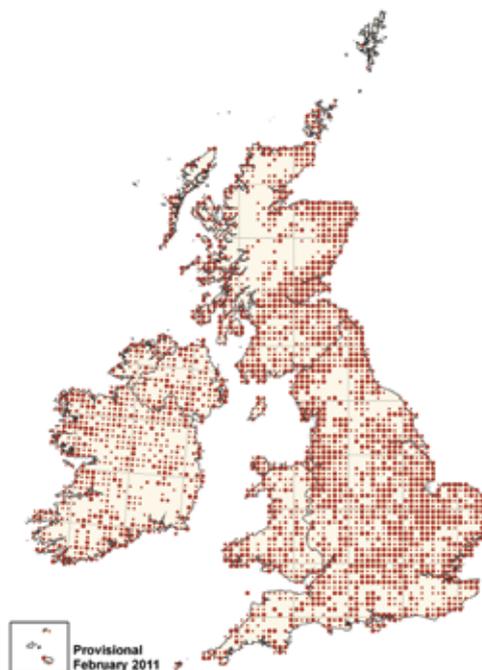
**W**e have made excellent progress over the first three breeding seasons and now have fairly comprehensive species lists for most 10-km squares in Britain. In Ireland, we still need a lot more help with fieldwork to produce species lists in many of the 10-km squares not covered by timed counts.

The priority this spring and summer is to focus on recording breeding evidence and upgrading the breeding status for many of the species already recorded in a 10-km square. The aim is to record the highest level of breeding evidence for each species, based on the observations you make in the field. Before you start recording breeding evidence, consider carefully if the species is in suitable nesting habitat. By observing behaviour and listening for calls, it is possible to confirm breeding for many species. Some species will require more luck than skill! The kind of things we need to look for are adult birds carrying food back to a nest (or a faecal sac away), distraction display, recently fledged birds still showing some dependency on the adults, occupied nests or nests with eggs or young.

If we can't see any signs of confirmed breeding, then we ought to be able to record evidence of probable or possible breeding. Birds nest building, visiting probable nest sites, courtship and display, exhibiting territorial behaviour or simply a pair (all in suitable nesting habitat) are good signs of probable breeding. Any bird in suitable breeding habitat or singing in a likely nesting area can be coded as possible breeding. There is a full list of codes at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdatlas/taking-part/breeding-evidence>.



DEREK BELSEY



◀ **Provisional breeding distribution of Sedge Warbler in 2008-2010.**

Whilst you are out doing your WeBS counts during the spring and summer (if you do them during these months) or just out birding, it would be really helpful if you can note signs of breeding evidence for all species and submit your records as Roving Records online at [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) or request paper forms from BTO. It is surprising how many species, including common and widespread species, still need to be confirmed breeding.

# The Severn Million Dollar Question

WeBS data were used to assess the potential impacts of tidal power development on the Severn Estuary.

Lucy Wright, Niall Burton and Nigel Clark, BTO

**WeBS STAT...**  
**85,631**  
 The number of Waterbirds  
 counted on the Severn  
 Estuary in 2008/09

The data collected by WeBS counters are really valuable. They help us to monitor some of the most important wetlands around the UK and inform the designation of protected sites such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs). When there is the possibility of changes to these protected wetlands, such as man-made developments, WeBS data can be used to predict how those changes might affect bird populations. One of the highest-profile examples is the government's recent study of the feasibility of tidal power schemes on the Severn Estuary. As part of this process it was vital to understand the likely environmental impacts of any such development, to ensure that the internationally important biodiversity of the Severn is conserved. Involvement in previous studies of potential tidal power schemes on the estuary meant that the BTO was in an ideal position to help in this work. As with past studies, it was the partnership of scientists and volunteers participating in surveys like WeBS that enabled us to provide answers to inform this important decision.

The Severn Estuary has one of the highest tidal ranges in the world, leading to extreme conditions such as high water flows, high turbidity (murkiness) and highly variable salinity and water temperature. These unusual physical conditions mean that the ecology is also unusual compared to other estuaries. The Severn contains some of the largest areas of intertidal mudflat, sandflat and saltmarsh in southern Britain and internationally important populations of waterbirds and fish. Average annual peaks of over 70,000 waterbirds are recorded by Wetland Bird Survey counts and the



NIALLBURTON

**The Severn Estuary is an Internationally Important Site for many species of wetland birds, but the effects of a tidal power development would be felt much further afield.**

estuary is internationally protected under European Directives as both a Special Protection Area and a Special Area of Conservation.

The high tidal range of the Severn also makes it a candidate for the development of tidal power schemes – structures incorporating underwater turbines to generate electricity from the energy in the tidal currents. The idea of a barrage across the Severn was first proposed in 1849, and proposals for tidal power generation were investigated in the 1980s and 1990s, though no development occurred. In recent years, renewable energy has become a high priority in the effort to minimise climate change. The UK government has committed to a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, and to produce 15% of UK energy from renewable sources by 2020. To meet this challenging

target a wide range of options must be considered.

In this light, a study began in 2008 to consider the feasibility of five tidal power options on the Severn. These included the large 'Cardiff-Weston' barrage, two smaller barrages ('Shoots' and 'Beachley') and two lagoons, one across Bridgwater Bay and one across the Welsh Grounds (Figure 1).

BTO's experience in providing independent scientific advice meant that we were asked not only to assess the likely effects of these options on birds, but also to co-ordinate the assessment of effects on biodiversity including fish, marine ecology and terrestrial ecology, collaborating with specialists from other organisations. The study assessed the likely effects of the tidal power options over their entire lifetime until the year 2140. This meant that other predicted future



**Figure 1. The five proposed tidal power options on the Severn Estuary.**

effects, for example resulting from climate change, had to be considered in addition to the effects of the developments.

All five tidal power options were predicted to have significant negative effects on biodiversity. All would lead to a reduced tidal range upstream of their structure, and therefore reduced intertidal habitat. Schemes would also operate in such a way that the remaining intertidal habitat would be underwater more of the time than at present, so birds would have less time to feed on it. This means the numbers of intertidal-feeding waterbirds on the Severn would decline.

Fish would be at risk of colliding with the underwater turbines included in any tidal power development but we are uncertain about the proportion of fish passing the turbines that would die. Nevertheless, it was predicted that any of the tidal power options could potentially cause the local extinction of several internationally protected migratory fish populations in the Rivers Severn, Wye and Usk.

Some effects were also predicted outside the estuary. Groundwater levels inland were predicted to increase, affecting the ecology of freshwater wetlands in the area, and a Cardiff to Weston barrage might increase tidal levels in the southern Irish Sea.

For many of the non-bird species that occur in the Severn, we lack basic data on population status, distributions

or ecology. This means it is difficult to assess exactly what is there now, and even more challenging to predict the consequences of tidal power development. Undertaking this work really highlighted how fortunate we are to have such a good understanding of birds, thanks largely to the incredible datasets collected by skilled volunteers participating in Wetland Bird Surveys over many years.

The BTO's role in this work was not to recommend any particular course of action; instead we advised on the likely consequences for biodiversity of each of the options (including the "do nothing" option). After reviewing the findings of all aspects of the feasibility study, the government announced in October 2010 that "there is not a strong enough strategic case to proceed with a scheme at this time".

#### *Acknowledgements*

*Thanks to the many volunteers who have participated in WeBS counts over the years. The Severn Tidal Power SEA was funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Thanks to our collaborators at Black and Veatch, ABPMer, APEM, Parsons Brinckerhoff and Bournemouth University. We are also grateful to Natural England, the Countryside Council for Wales, RSPB, WWT, Environment Agency and all those who contributed to the assessment.*

Your WeBS Core Count priority dates for the 2011-2012 season...

#### **2011...**

17 April  
15 May  
12 June  
17 July  
14 August  
18 September  
16 October  
20 November  
18 December

#### **2012...**

15 January  
12 February  
11 March  
8 April  
20 May  
24 June  
22 July  
19 August  
16 September  
14 October  
18 November  
16 December

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

# WeBS Questionnaire

An online questionnaire sent out to WeBS Counters revealed some interesting information about the counters themselves and their thoughts on the survey.

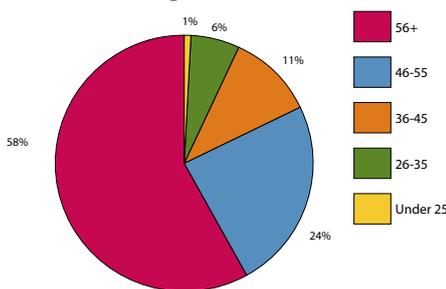
**Neil Calbrade**

Last October, an online questionnaire was sent out to all 1,789 WeBS Counters for whom we have a current email address. Unfortunately, the cost of postage meant it was not feasible to send paper copies out to the rest. However, we did get an excellent response, with 1,010 counters (56%) completing the questionnaire.

### About the counters

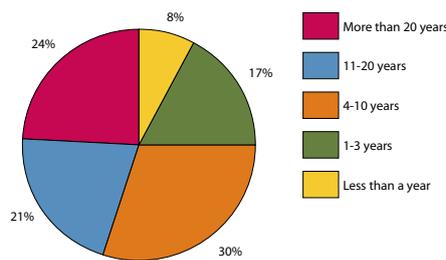
As with most BTO and RSPB surveys, the majority of WeBS Counters who responded are mid-40s or older, with 82% falling in these categories. We hope the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter may help us connect with a younger audience, with the hope of finding new counters to step into the well-worn shoes of retiring counters.

those who responded have been



**Figure 1: Age of counters**

The way in which WeBS Counters are recruited is very interesting and highlights the fantastic job our Local Organisers do, with 38% first hearing about WeBS this way. Local bird clubs and publications accounted for 25% of new WeBS counters. Once they begin doing their counts, WeBS Counters are a very loyal bunch. Three quarters of



**Figure 2: Longevity of counters**

counters for over four years, with nearly a quarter having been WeBS Counters for more than 20 years, many of whom began counting under the auspices of the Wildfowl Counts or BoEE.

WeBS Counters are by and large not just interested in counting waterbirds, the majority of counters also take part in other surveys, with just 10% solely doing WeBS.

### Survey points

Other than finding out a bit of background about WeBS Counters, we also wanted to find out what they thought of WeBS Online, the Annual Report and other issues. We are currently working through the

comments and suggestions regarding improvements to the website, WeBS Online, the Annual Report and Newsletter and recruitment. The feedback received has been excellent and will be implemented where possible to help us make WeBS more enjoyable and efficient for you.

### What happens next?

Being an online survey, 70% of those who responded said they submit their counts through WeBS Online. The overall feeling amongst counters was that they found submitting, editing and downloading their counts to be easy.

With purse strings being tightened, we have started to look at ways of potential efficiency savings, including the possibility of reducing the size of the Annual Report. The WeBS Report is available to download from the website, either directly from the homepage or through the publications section, but it was clear that counters enjoy receiving and reading the paper copy. Over half of respondents said they would like the report to stay in its current format with a further quarter

### The different surveys WeBS counters take part in

Survey	Number of respondents	%
Bird Atlas 2007-2011	683	68
Breeding Bird Survey	415	41
RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch	389	39
BirdTrack	280	28
BTO Garden Birdwatch	214	21
Ringling	162	16
WWT GSMP surveys	143	14
Heronries Census	132	13
Nest Recording	111	11
Waterways Breeding Bird Survey	69	7
None, just WeBS	100	10

**Counters views on using WeBS Online**

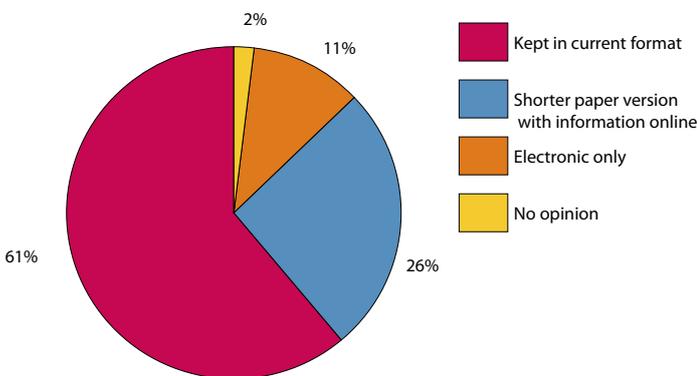
	Very Difficult	Difficult	Neutral	Easy	Very Easy
Ease of data submission	0%	2%	10%	49%	39%
Ease of editing records	0%	4%	18%	51%	26%
Ease of viewing past submissions	1%	2%	16%	52%	30%
Ease of downloading your records	0%	3%	31%	41%	24%
Ease of viewing your WeBS site	1%	5%	33%	41%	20%

suggesting a shorter paper version with more information appearing online. Only 10% suggested that the report should only be available online. Since the 2008/09 issue, the methods and introduction have been moved to the website and in future more content may move there, however knowing how loved the report is amongst counters and have no immediate intention of going solely online. We appreciate that not all counters read their reports, and would rather we saved money and resources on sending them out. If this is the case, and you

would like to opt out of receiving your report, please let us know.

We apologise if you were not included in the survey this time around and so didn't get to have your say, however, we plan to repeat the questionnaire every three years, so if you want to be included next time please ensure you keep our records of your contact details up to date.

**Figure 3: Opinion on the report format**



**WEBS ONLINE SUGGESTIONS AND FEEDBACK**

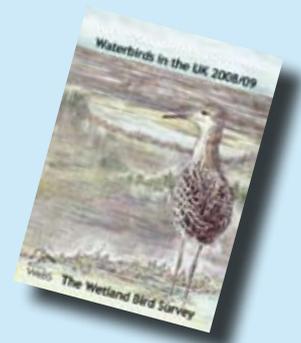
*"Better integration between WeBS Online and BirdTrack so as not to have to enter everything twice"*

We agree this would be very helpful and are now actively looking at how to enable BirdTrack reporting outputs to also include your WeBS data.

*"When submitting a series of records for several visits, it would help if I did not have to go back to the beginning for each visit"*

We agree that this would save a lot of time and has been raised as a high priority with our IS development team and will be incorporated shortly.

**The WeBS Report**



**The possibility of turning the report to be available online only was raised, yet despite being a web-based survey, the over-riding response was to keep the report in its current format.**

*"My counters love the present WeBS Report and being given a copy makes them feel special and valued."*

*"Your WeBS Report is a gem. True, it is hardly bedtime reading but it is full of fascinating information and it is particularly interesting when it comes to the species I count most. It is a great effort – thanks"*

*"The actual book does mean a lot, and makes counters feel worthwhile much more than accessing a website would"*

*"I have always maintained that the Annual WeBS Report is one of the best examples of ornithological feedback and provides an excellent overview and analysis of trends and the conservation value of the waterbirds monitoring scheme."*

# GSMP Update

The WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP) consists of a suite of integrated surveys that monitor the abundance, breeding success and survival of most British/Irish goose and swan populations, typically at a flyway scale..

**Colette Hall** Species Monitoring Officer, WWT

**DETAILED DATA...**  
It is possible to download the annual GSMP newsletter, Gooseneeds at [www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring)

Almost the entire population of Pink-footed Goose, Greenland and Svalbard Barnacle Goose, East Canadian High Arctic (ECHA) Brent Goose, Icelandic Greylag Goose and Greenland White-fronted Goose winters each year in Britain and Ireland. Five of these populations have been increasing in recent years: Pinkfeet, Icelandic Greylags, both Barnacle populations and the Brent Geese. Up until the last couple of years, the Whitefront population was rapidly declining, due to poor breeding success and hunting (until the ban in Iceland in 2006). However, the downward trend now appears to have slowed, with numbers having been stable since 2008.

Between 40-60% of the East Atlantic (EA) Light-bellied Brent Goose and around 40% of the Dark-bellied Brent populations migrate here for the winter. Numbers of Light-bellied Brents have been generally increasing, however, until 2004/05 numbers of Dark-bellied Brents were steadily declining, due to a number of poor breeding seasons and short stopping. Since then, the population has seen improved breeding success and the trend has turned upward. An even smaller proportion of the Taiga Bean and European White-fronted Goose populations choose to winter in Britain, with less than one percent visiting our shores; the former does so in relatively small and in declining numbers, but fewer of the more numerous Whitefronts move across from the Continent almost every year (due to short stopping in mainland Europe).

Our two native Greylag Goose populations, the Northwest Scotland and the Re-established, have both



CHAS HOIT

**Pink footed Goose numbers at many sites reached record levels**

been rapidly increasing. The overlap between these populations is now, however, so great that it is impossible to differentiate between them in many places and it is now necessary to treat them as one British-breeding population, which in many respects they always have been.

Winter in Britain and Ireland also sees almost the entire population of Icelandic Whooper Swans and almost 40% of the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population. Whilst numbers of Whooper Swans have been increasing, the opposite is true for Bewick's Swan; wintering numbers having gradually fallen since the early 1990s, reflecting the overall population decline.

## **"another record year for Pink-footed Goose"**

### **Results from the 2009/10 GSMP surveys**

It was yet another record year for the Pink-footed Goose, the population estimate being over 364,200, an increase of just under 4% on 2008/09. The geese arrived reasonably early, with large numbers recorded at several important wintering haunts, including 51,000 at Montrose Basin in October, the highest ever count for the site. Pinkfoot breeding success was a little below average, with 17.3% young recorded amongst aged flocks.

Icelandic Greylag Geese also reached the UK in greater numbers, the population estimate of just under 109,500 being over 11% higher than the previous winter. The concentration of Greylags on Orkney continued to increase, with a record count of 80,500 seen in December. A summer survey on Orkney in 2008 estimated 10,000 geese, thus approximately 70,500 of

the wintering birds were thought to be Icelandic which equates to around 64% of the entire population. Age assessments of the Icelandic Greylags recorded 21.9% young, indicating an average breeding season.

Monitoring the whole Northwest Scotland population of Greylag Goose every year is not possible due to the remoteness of much of the range. Annual counts are, however, conducted in two key areas, the Uists and Tiree. A total of nearly 9,000 was recorded at these sites in late August, less than 400 fewer than in 2008, with the majority on the Uists. The count from Tiree was, however, thought to be an underestimate due to shooting causing the geese to disperse more widely than usual, although numbers here are still thought to have declined following the peak in 2006. As with the Icelandic birds, the Scottish population had an average breeding season, with 30.3% young recorded on Uists and 36.4% on Tiree.

Like the Scottish Greylag population, Greenland Barnacle Geese winter at many remote sites in the UK, which in this case can only be monitored by aerial survey. A complete count of the entire population is, therefore, not possible every year. However, five of the key sites in Scotland are monitored annually, and in 2009/10 a combined total of c. 49,300 geese was recorded - nearly 70% of the current population estimate (70,500 in 2007/08). Recent counts from these sites indicate an apparent decrease in Scottish wintering numbers since the peak in 2006/07. It is possible that mortality, through hunting and control, along with low breeding success over the last ten years may have halted the long term increase in the population. Results from the next complete census in 2013 will show whether the decrease at these key sites is representative of the whole population. Age counts undertaken on Islay and Tiree suggest 2009 was a poor breeding season, with only 3.9% young observed amongst flocks.

The first Svalbard Barnacle Geese to arrive at the Solway Estuary were recorded in September, 36 being seen on the reserve at WWT Caerlaverock. Numbers built up quickly to a peak in late October, followed by a second peak in mid December. The overall

**‘Despite the high numbers, age counts indicated that 2009 was a very poor breeding season for this population - only 0.4% of over 17,000 aged birds were juveniles.’**

population was estimated to be 32,800, nearly 3,000 more than the previous winter. By the end of April, less than half the geese remained at the Solway, and gathered at Rockcliffe Marsh where they stayed until mid-May. Mass departures then occurred over the next few days until by the end of May only 16 were left. Breeding success was below average, with 5.1% young recorded – the last three years have seen a drop in breeding success, which, given the continued increase in numbers, suggests annual survival rates are currently high.

The spring census of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Britain and Ireland produced a population estimate of 22,800, which is around 1% lower than in spring 2009. The British total was, however, believed to have been an underestimate and it is thought that the true number present may actually have been slightly higher than the previous year. Despite the population size having remained stable since 2006, the lack of any clear recovery is still a cause for concern. There was a slight recovery in breeding success following the low productivity of recent years, 12.9% young being seen amongst sampled flocks in Britain.

A total of c. 37,000 ECHA Light-bellied Brent Geese was counted at key sites in Ireland and Iceland in October. With data outstanding from several sites, approximately 38,000 is a conservative estimate of the overall population size in 2009/10, which is less than 1% higher than the previous year. Despite the high numbers, age counts indicated that 2009 was a very poor breeding season for this population - only 0.4% of over 17,000 aged birds were juveniles!

The Taiga Bean Geese arrived earlier than usual at the Slamannan Plateau, the first being seen in early October. Numbers rapidly increased throughout the month to a peak of 260, just five birds less than in

2008/09. By December and January, few geese remained at the site, possibly having dispersed more widely than usual in search of suitable grazing fields during the cold spell we experienced in mid-winter. In contrast, the geese were unusually late arriving at the Yare valley, doing so in low numbers during November. A peak of just 81 birds was recorded in December, nearly 40% lower than the previous winter. The proportion of young in 2009/10 (14.8%) was below average and also one of the lowest recorded, although age assessments of Bean Geese have only been undertaken at the Slamannan Plateau since 2004.

Whilst the abundance of European White-fronted, EA Light-bellied Brent and Dark-bellied Brent Geese are measured by WeBS Core Counts, the GSMP reports on the breeding success of these three populations. Results indicate that 2009 was a particularly successful breeding season for the Whitefronts (26.2% young), however, the opposite was true for the Light-bellied Brents, with only 2.2% of geese aged being juveniles, suggesting a very poor year. The Dark-bellied Brents had better breeding success than the previous year, though the 5.1% young recorded is still below average.

Although Bewick's Swan breeding success has gradually improved since the particularly poor season in 2007, age counts suggested that 2009 was still a relatively poor year, with the proportion of young recorded (9.1%) being below average. A coordinated age count at sites in Britain and on the Continent during December recorded 7.0% young confirming that 2009 was a poor breeding season for the Northwest European population. Whooper Swans, however, had an average breeding season, with the overall proportion of young recorded as 15.4%.

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Full species accounts and reports, along with more information about the GSMP, can be found on the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust's website at [www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring), where it is also possible to download the annual GSMP newsletter, GooseNews and other more detailed reports.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

## Goose population estimates

By Chas Holt

WeBS Core Count Organiser

For those of you into reading scientific journals, a recent issue of *Ornis Svecica* (Vol. 20, Nos. 3-4) is devoted to work on expanding goose populations and their subsequent management. The papers represent the Proceedings of the 12th Meeting of the Goose Specialist Group, held in Sweden in October 2009. Of particular interest to UK readers are current estimates of goose population sizes in western Europe, a review of trends in numbers in Britain & Ireland since 1995 (which partly used WeBS data), and a paper on the movements of Dutch-ringed Greylags. The latter shows that over 90% of Dutch birds are resident wintering close to breeding sites, and suggests that the use of more distant wintering areas such as wetlands in Spain has declined.

The identification of 'Grey Geese' can sometimes be a challenge, especially to those who don't live in areas where they regularly appear. The BTO's Youtube Channel has an online identification workshop which will help you to be able to identify these birds both in flight and on the ground at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QSOuKmwbeo>



JOHN HARDING

**Greylag Geese are the most common and widespread of the 'Grey Geese' with three distinct populations occurring in the UK.**

### FURTHER INFORMATION

You can download the full proceedings of the Goose Specialist Group conference from <http://www.zoo.ekol.lu.se/waterfowl/Hollviken.pdf>

### THE LIGHTER SIDE OF WEBS

## Valuable Comments

As part of the data processing ahead of writing the Annual Report, we check through any comments added by counters after their monthly WeBS Counts. Counters can add further detail and provide useful context to sightings.

Four comments 'caught our eye' this year, so we thought we'd share them with you. They remain anonymous of course!!

*"Could not do survey due to thick snow conditions and being unable to park car"*

*"I had to stop for 1.5 hours to allow extreme wind to pass"*

*"Blocked at bridge making swimming entrance very difficult"*

and our favourite....

*"Delayed count due to Volcano"*

### DEVELOPMENTS

## New WeBS Website

As you may have seen, WeBS has got a new website. We were aware that the navigation around the old site was not that intuitive and hopefully you will find the new site much easier to use.

We have several ideas in development including a more interactive vacant sites section to make it easier to find a site near to you and highlight gaps at priority sites. At the time of writing, it is possible to download old WeBS reports back to 2004/05 but we are going to be making older reports available shortly. In response to feedback from the questionnaire, we will also be adding more regional information and a more extensive suite of Low Tide species maps, so we hope you will keep checking and let us know of any issues you may have.



## LOCAL ORGANISER NEWS

## Local Organiser comings and goings

By Heidi Mellan

WeBS Counter Network Organiser

We would like to thank Gavin Foster (Berkshire), Chris Burnett (Derbyshire), Steve Coney (Herefordshire), Grant Hazelhurst (West Kent), Sally Jennings (North Kent Estuaries), Jeffrey Wheatley (Surrey), Ron Youngman (Perthshire) and Brian Rabbits (Uists & Benbecula) for all their hard work as Local Organisers and who have retired from the scheme within the last year. We were greatly saddened to hear that Pete Wellington, the Local Organiser for Clwyd (coastal), passed away just before Christmas as did Catherine Ross, ex-LO for Oxfordshire South. Our condolences go out to their families, they will be greatly missed.

We would also like to thank Ken White & Sarah Priest who have taken over as LOs for Berkshire, Chris Robinson for taking on Herefordshire, Liz Morgan who has taken over as LO for Alderney, Gordon Allison, the new LO for North Kent Estuaries, Penny Williams who has taken over in Surrey, Yvonne Benting for taking on Uists & Benbecula, Daniel Jenkins-Jones for taking over in East Glamorgan, Matthew Griffiths who has joined us as the new LO for Warwickshire, Adam McClure who has taken on Montrose

### Vacant LO Regions

■ Vacant Region



### Current vacant regions

Basin and Mike Bell who has taken on Perth & Kinross in addition to the Inner Forth Estuary.

If you would like to know more about becoming a WeBS Local Organiser please contact us at the WeBS Office.

## LOAC

### Local Organiser Advisory Committee Update

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

We are pleased to announce that Shane Wolsey has joined the LOAC as the Representative for Northern Ireland, Andrew King has taken on the position of Representative for Wales and Gladys Grant who is taking over as the South West Representative. Andrew and Gladys are taking over from Rhion Pritchard (Caernarvonshire) and Pete Reay (Devon) respectively, both of whom have decided to step down after serving on the committee since it started in 2007, although both will stay on as

Local Organisers. We would like to thank both of them for their time and input on the committee over the years.

The next meeting of the WeBS LOAC is scheduled to be held in Thetford at the Nunnery on 19th July 2011. The minutes from previous meetings are available via the website at [www.bto.org/webs/loac](http://www.bto.org/webs/loac)

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 Regional Representative listed here.

As always we are looking to hear from any Local Organisers who may be interested in serving on the LOAC in the future. If you would like to know more about what is involved please contact Heidi.

### LOAC REPRESENTATIVES

#### South West England

Gladys Grant: [gladysgrant@talktalk.net](mailto:gladysgrant@talktalk.net)

#### Eastern England

Nick Mason: [nick.mason4@btinternet.com](mailto:nick.mason4@btinternet.com)

#### Midlands

Ian Lees: [ianlees@me.com](mailto:ianlees@me.com)

#### Northern England

David Shackleton: [dave.shack@care4free.net](mailto:dave.shack@care4free.net)

#### Wales

Andrew King: [andrew.king53@virgin.net](mailto:andrew.king53@virgin.net)

#### South and East Scotland

Neil Bielby: [n.bielby@sky.com](mailto:n.bielby@sky.com)

#### North and West Scotland

John Armitage: [jsa@ornquest.plus.com](mailto:jsa@ornquest.plus.com)

#### Northern Ireland

Shane Wolsey: [shane@swolsey.biz](mailto:shane@swolsey.biz)

## BACKCHAT

### Word of mouth...

## WeBS Bird Fair Prize Winners...

Many thanks to all those who came to the WeBS stand at Rutland last year and entered our quiz. The lucky winners were Russel Carter, Chris Park, and Emma Townsend who were the three entrants drawn from those with the most correct answers and Phil Clapton who was the nearest to guessing the number of birds in this photograph.



Answer was 392 birds

## Completing your forms - a plea

Each year we receive several hundred paper forms and we are finding that a high proportion of them have details missing which increases the cost of processing them. Please can you remember to fill in your Counter Code, or full name and address if you don't know your Counter Code, and the Count Unit Code (site code) so that the data can be allocated to the correct site.

## Artist error

We would like to apologise to Thelma Sykes whose name was wrongly listed in the 2008/09 WeBS report next to her excellent artwork

### Snap shot



### Born in the USA?

Ok, so it probably hasn't flown all the way from the States, but reader and WeBS participant, **Catherine Moore** sent us this photograph of a fine drake Wood Duck that she saw on the Union Canal in Falkirk. Please let us know if you photograph any unusual birds on your WeBS Counts.

## News about submitting your data

We would like to publish the 2010/11 WeBS report earlier than normal, but to do that we need your help! Please can you submit your counts as soon as possible after the June count (or earlier if you only conduct winter counts), the deadline for returning data this year will be the end of August.

### The WeBS team & contacts

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 Database Manager, WeBS Alerts, WeBS database management, Statistical analyses  
[graham.austin@bto.org](mailto:graham.austin@bto.org)

#### Neil Calbrade

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

#### Iain Downie

Web Software Developer, WeBS Online  
[iain.downie@bto.org](mailto:iain.downie@bto.org)

#### Chas Holt

WeBS National Organiser (Core Counts), Core Counts, Annual Report  
[chas.holt@bto.org](mailto:chas.holt@bto.org)

#### Heidi Mellan

WeBS Counter Network Organiser Counter and Local Organiser database management, WeBS Online  
[heidi.mellan@bto.org](mailto:heidi.mellan@bto.org)

#### Andy Musgrove

Head of Monitoring, Overall management of WeBS  
[andy.musgrove@bto.org](mailto:andy.musgrove@bto.org)

#### Marcia Sayer

WeBS Secretary Mailing of count forms, newsletters and annual reports  
[marcia.sayer@bto.org](mailto:marcia.sayer@bto.org)

#### The WeBS Office

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