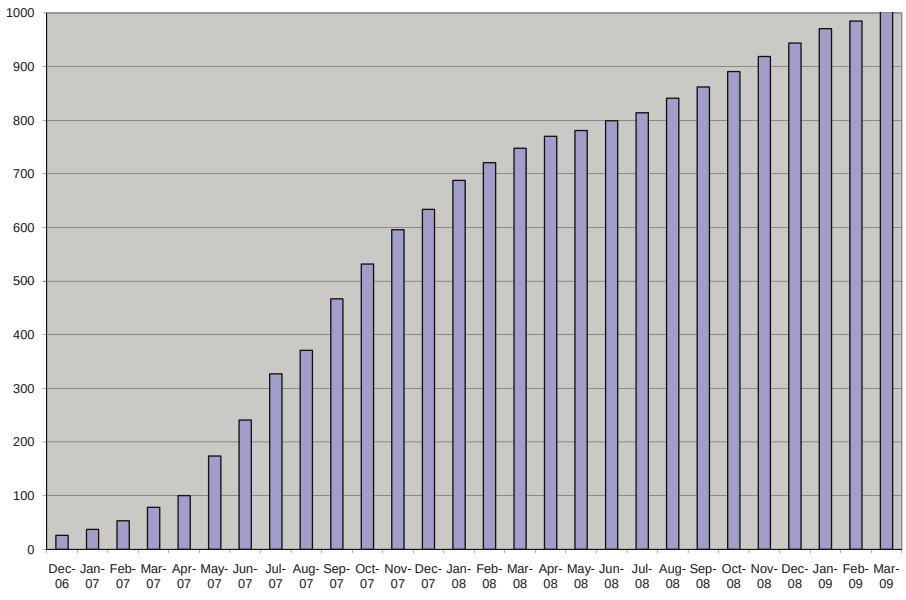
WeBS News
Newsletter of the Wetland Bird Survey
Issue no. 25 Spring 2009

1,000 Online WeBS Counters

Since it went live in the spring of 2007, WeBS Online has been greatly welcomed by WeBS counters and Local Organisers alike, and the number of users continues to grow. Neil Calbrade explains…

In just two years, over 34,500 visits have been entered into WeBS Online with over 365,000 individual records entered. Indeed, the 1,000th WeBS counter has now signed up to use WeBS Online. We are very pleased at the take up of online use, and now receive over 50% of counts online. This not only helps us be more environmentally friendly, reducing the mountains of paper forms we have to input, but it also greatly speeds up how quickly we can load the counts into the database, which can then become available. In some parts of the country, county bird recorders have requested access to the counts in order to feed them into local bird reports much more rapidly than has been possible in previous years.

If you already take part in BTO online surveys, such as the Atlas or BBS, you will be able to use the same username to log on to WeBS Online; we just need to let the system know to expect you. However, we continue to stress that the use of WeBS Online for submitting your WeBS counts is not compulsory, many counters still use paper forms and are very welcome to continue to do so. We have a number of developments in the pipeline for WeBS Online, to help counters, Local Organisers and ourselves get the most out of the system. One development that we



WeBS Online uptake

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The Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, which aims to provide the principal data for the conservation of their populations and wetland habitats. The data collected are used to assess the size of waterbird populations, assess trends in numbers and distribution and identify and monitor important sites for waterbirds. A programme of research underpins these objectives. Continuing a tradition begun in 1947, around 3,000 volunteer counters participate in synchronised monthly counts at wetlands of all habitat types, mainly during the winter period. WeBS is a partnership between the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (the last on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency in association with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.

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Editorial

Spring is now just around the corner following the coldest winter for over a decade in the UK. Temperatures dropped to well below freezing and birdwatchers (including WeBS counters) were asked to minimise disturbance to waterbirds where possible. Had the conditions lasted longer, greater restrictions may have been considered, but thankfully the temperature rose before this was needed. It will be interesting to see what effect this has had on the numbers of birds that have braved the prolonged freezing conditions and whether we see any obvious patterns. These conditions brought only the second ever record of Smew to the Nunnery Lakes, a welcome patch tick for many BTO staff.

We are currently in the process of loading the 2007/08 counts into the database, which with the advent of WeBS Online and the amazing take up of the system by WeBS counters has made this arduous job less onerous. The rate of take up of the online system has been truly amazing; much more rapid than we had expected. It really does make it easier for us to deal with your counts and last year we were able to launch the annual WeBS report at the Rutland Bird Fair. It was good to meet all the counters who came along to the stand to pick up their copy and put faces to names and we look forward to repeating that again this summer.

Neil Calbrade

1000 Online WeBS Counters

....continued from page 1

will soon be introducing is for helping us to validate records. Whilst you are asked to double check any unusual records as you submit them at present, we currently also carry out a further check of the records after the year has ended whilst loading them into the database, to minimise the chance of us storing erroneous counts. Typical errors involve writing or typing a species count into the wrong box on a form (we've all done it!). Of course, doing this after the end of the count year means that it may be quite awkward for us, and for you, to check an apparently suspicious record, involving digging out an old notebook. It would be much better to be able to investigate any queries immediately. Therefore, we now plan (following the implementation of a similar system for the Bird Atlas 2007-11 and for BirdTrack) to have a quick check over any of the records that WeBS Online flags for you within a few days of you entering the record. In most cases, the flagged counts will quite evidently be fine and we'll just OK them. Occasionally, however, we may spot something that seems a little more out of the ordinary, and the new system will allow us to send out an automated email asking you for confirmation or otherwise on that record. You'll then be able to confirm it, or tell us what the record actually should have been. Everyone makes mistakes in inputting counts, and it is obviously important to the reputation of WeBS that we minimise the chance of these mistakes making their way into the final database. Please don't be offended if you receive an email asking for confirmation of any of your records – it's all in a good cause!

Neil Calbrade

It's not the size that counts.... it's the count!

One of the most common replies we receive when we ask people if they would like to take part in WeBS is "I don't live near an estuary or big lake", but as Chas Holt explains, size isn't everything…

Although over 75% of all waterbirds counted in the UK are found at just 20 key sites, we are still interested in counts from any wetland area such as streams, rivers and even farm or village duck ponds. For example, if you pass a small village pond on your way to work every morning or walk your dog along a stretch of river and the only birds you see are the occasional Mallard, Grey Heron or Kingfisher – **or indeed if there are no waterbirds present at all** – we would still like to receive your counts. These records are important. In order to effectively monitor species such as Little Grebe, Mallard, Moorhen, Snipe and Water Rail, we need to have a better idea of how abundant they are at small wetland sites throughout the wider countryside. This information will then also assist in deriving sensible national population estimates.

Moorhen / Neil Calbrade

In the last WeBS Newsletter, counter Nicholas Watts gave his perspective on the continuing decline in the WeBS index for Mallard. Although this decline may be a true reflection of what is happening to our most familiar waterbird, the complete picture may be masked as many birds using small ponds may go uncounted. The same is true for Moorhens for which in 2006/07, the British maximum counted in one month was fewer than 13,000 birds. Such counts are undoubtedly only a small proportion of birds actually present in the country, due largely to their preference for small ditches and ponds rather than larger waterbodies that are traditionally counted for WeBS.

Pond at Great Massingham, Norfolk / Dorian Moss

In the near future we are hoping to repeat the Dispersed Waterbird Survey of 2002/03, as part of a push to collect more data on these poorly monitored species that frequently use smaller sites. In the meantime, if you can help WeBS by counting a small wetland near you, please get in touch in the usual way.

Chas Holt
WeBS Core Count
National Organiser

Bird Atlas 2007–11 — Into year two

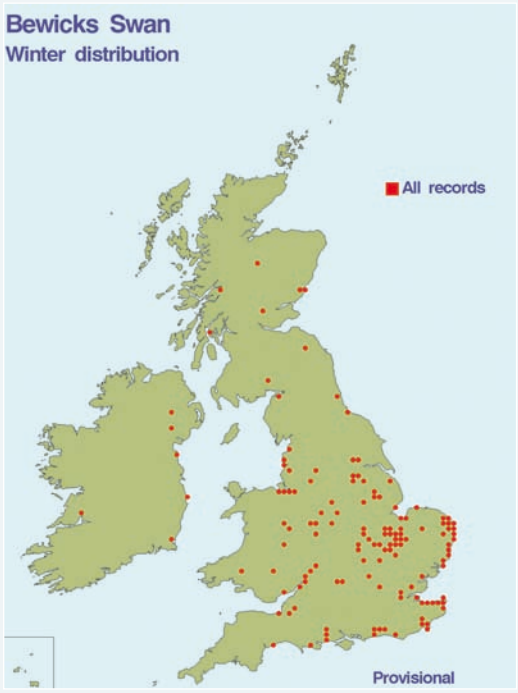
After one year of incredible effort by volunteers across Britain and Ireland the provisional maps are already starting to tell stories of exciting range expansions and hinting at likely range contraction for some of our familiar species as Dawn Balmer explains…

In Britain we are aiming to carry out Timed Tetrad Visits in at least eight tetrads (2 x 2 km squares) in every 10-km square. In the Republic of Ireland we are aiming to use a chequerboard approach and cover at least eight tetrads in every other 10-km square as a minimum. The timed counts from the winter and the breeding season will enable us to produce maps of relative abundance for each species in each season, as well as contributing to the species distribution maps. The very nature of the timed counts (a minimum of two one-hour counts in a tetrad in a season) means that we tend to record the common species and miss the scarcer species in the tetrad. The idea of the Roving Records is to fill in the gaps in the species list in a 10-km square. We are aiming for comprehensive species lists for every 10-km square for both winter and the breeding season so the distribution maps can be as accurate as possible.

We are also building up a picture of where we need to focus volunteer effort in order to achieve minimum coverage of all 10-km squares in Britain and Ireland – holidays in Ireland and Scotland in both summer and winter are encouraged!

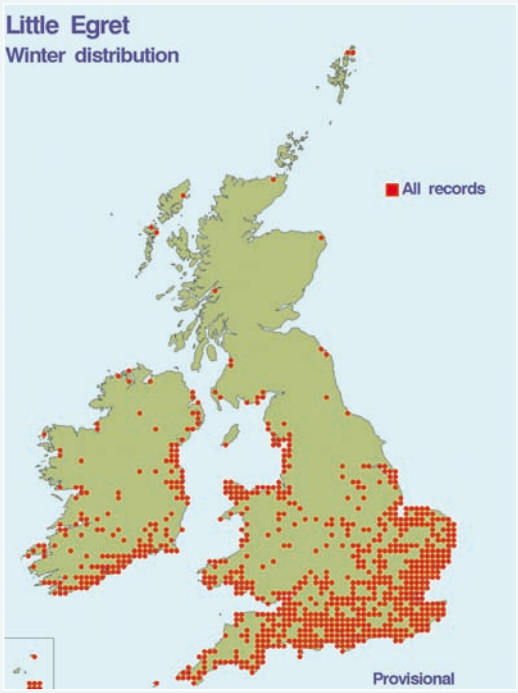
Where are all the Bewick's Swans?

The provisional map for Bewick's Swan (Fig 1) suggests they were rather thin on the ground in the 2007/08 winter. There is a good scatter of records from the East Anglia coast, North Kent marshes and the Norfolk / Suffolk / Cambridgeshire fens. In the 1981-84 Winter Atlas there were also many records from Somerset and the area surrounding the Severn Estuary. There were also a good scatter of records from inland counties in Ireland in the last Winter Atlas, but is seems this species is really quite unusual in Ireland in recent winters. WeBS and I-WeBS counts suggest that Bewick's Swans have been declining and the index is now at its lowest level since the mid 1980s. One suggestion is that birds are remaining further east, in Europe, and for longer, perhaps as a response to milder winters.



Widespread Little Egrets

The Winter Atlas of 1981-84 recorded just one Little Egret, on Orkney (of all places!). The spread of Little Egrets in winter across Britain and Ireland over the last 10-15 years is quite phenomenal. They are now widespread in southern England, both coastal and inland, and well recorded from north and south Wales. Further fieldwork in Ireland will no doubt produce more records – there are still 99 10-km squares that have not received any visits in winter at all. A birdwatching trip to Co. Cork, Galway, Kerry, Tipperary, Londonderry or Tyrone could really make a big difference to coverage in Ireland.



One area where you can all help with Atlas fieldwork is to record the breeding status of species in your garden, your local park or reservoir. In every 10-km square we are aiming to record the maximum breeding status for each species. There are three levels of breeding evidence: Possible, Probable and Confirmed. In addition, there are codes for summering birds (U) and migrants (M).

For most species it ought to be possible to record birds as either in suitable breeding habitat in the breeding season (H) or singing birds (S). Both these codes indicate possible breeding. Moving to the next stage, probable, can take a bit more time and effort.

One of the most useful codes is permanent territory (T) and you can use this where you have several territorial birds singing against each other at the same time at the same place. A pair present in suitable breeding habitat (P), visiting probable nest site (N), courtship and display (D) for species such as Great Crested Grebe, and nest building (B) are other codes representing probable breeding. The ultimate aim is to confirm breeding for each species and this is much easier for some species than others! A Moorhen on a nest with eggs (NE) or a Great Spotted Woodpecker entering a nest site in circumstances indicating occupied nest (ON) are fairly straightforward ways of confirming breeding.

For some breeding wader such as Ringed Plover, distraction display (DD) is a sure sign of confirmed breeding. Carefully watching adult birds carrying a faecal sac or food for young (FF) will be best way of confirming breeding for many thrushes, warblers and finches. Recently fledged young (nidicolous species) or downy young (nidifugous species) (FL) is also a useful code but you need to be cautious when using this code as young birds can travel considerable distances from their natal area. Evidence of dependency on adults is helpful so look out for adults providing food for young.

The easiest way to submit breeding evidence is through Roving Records but it can also be done via BirdTrack (www.birdtrack.net).

Further details about the Bird Atlas can be found online at *www.birdatlas.net* or by contacting Dawn Balmer at BTO HQ (Tel: 01842 750050, Email: *dawn.balmer@bto.org*). The 'Any Square Summary' button in Atlas Data Home will generate species lists for any 10-km square or tetrad and is a good starting point for a visit to a square.

Dawn Balmer
Atlas Coordinator

Change to the WeBS Partnership

During 2008, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust undertook a comprehensive review of its conservation activities. As a result, a decision was made to increase emphasis on species of conservation concern, both internationally (e.g. Madagascar Pochard and Brazilian Merganser; both Critically Endangered) and within the UK (e.g. Greenland White-fronted Goose, Bewick's Swan and Common Scoter; all listed within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan), along with a range of non-avian wetland species. We will place particular emphasis on identifying the reasons behind the poor conservation status of these species, and taking action to try to reverse their declines. WWT will also use its expertise to continue to develop, and where possible expand, waterbird monitoring capacity in key areas overseas.

This investment has necessitated a reallocation of resources, and thus from April 2009, the relationship between WWT and the WeBS Partnership will change, with WWT becoming an associate partner rather than a full partner of WeBS, and a non-voting member of the Steering Group.

Fundamental to this decision was an understanding that a reduction in WWT funding would not undermine the viability of WeBS or its capacity to provide the waterbird abundance and distribution data that are so essential to set conservation priorities; this was not considered to be the case. WWT remains firmly committed to the delivery of sound monitoring, and will continue to provide annual financial support to WeBS, but at a reduced level. WWT also currently provides significant financial support for the monitoring of geese and swans as part of a Partnership with JNCC that currently co-funds this work. WWT will continue to contribute technical expertise and staff time to the delivery of WeBS outputs, in particular contributing to the production of the annual report and newsletter.

As a founder of the WeBS scheme, WWT appreciates the fundamental importance of baseline monitoring data; they are essential for the prioritisation process that it has recently carried out, and will continue to be essential for future assessments of priority species, both to WWT and other conservation NGOs and organisations. WWT greatly values the input of the WeBS network of counters and our commitment to this essential activity remains firm.

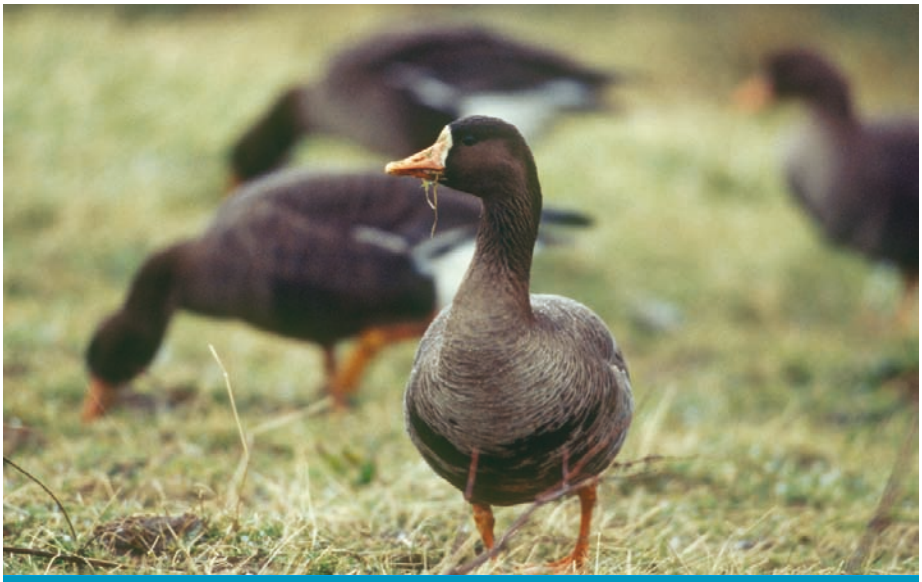
Richard Hearn
WWT Species Monitoring Unit

Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme Update

Colette Hall gives a summary of the surveys conducted in 2007/08 through the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP)…

As is often the case, results from the GSMP surveys brought some good and some not so good news on the status of swan and goose populations. For most species the long-term outlook is good, with many showing stable or increasing population sizes. Doing particularly well are the Svalbard and Greenland Barnacle Geese, and the East Canadian High Arctic (ECHA) Light-bellied Brent Goose. Almost all birds from these populations winter in Britain and Ireland, and in 2007/08 their population estimates were the highest recorded thus far. Typically, almost all the **Svalbard Barnacle Geese** had arrived at the Solway Estuary by the end of October, with the total population estimated at 29,000, an increase of 16% on the previous year. The ECHA **Light-bellied Brent Goose** Census, covering all major sites in Ireland, Iceland and Britain, recorded a population estimate of c. 39,000, representing a 30% increase on the previous year; a reflection of their particularly good breeding season, with the number of young (25%) the highest recorded since 2000/01. In March 2008, a full international census of **Greenland Barnacle Geese,** covering sites in Scotland and Ireland, produced a total population estimate of 70,500, this being 25% higher than the total recorded during the previous census in 2003 – for more on the results from this census see page 17.

Only a small number of **Taiga Been Geese** winter in Britain, with the majority of those found at two key sites, the Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk, and Yare Valley, Norfolk. Whilst numbers at Slamannan have been increasing since the 1990s, numbers at Yare Valley have fallen. Counts in 2007/08 continued this trend; a peak of 300 was recorded at Slamannan, equalling the record count made in 2005/06, while at Yare Valley a peak of 136 was reported, one of the lowest peak counts recorded since 1977/78. Age assessments are only regularly made at Slamannan, where in 2007/08 the proportion of young (25.2%) was the highest recorded since 2004, when estimates were first made. However, as sample sizes remain small and with only a few years' data, it is not possible to examine the trends in breeding success at the site.



Greenland White-fronted Goose / Andy Hay (RSPB Images)

Counts for the Icelandic-breeding Goose Census were received from Norway, the Faroes, Ireland, Iceland and Britain. The overall total of **Pink-footed Geese** was the second highest ever recorded, and a number of major resorts reported higher than average numbers, in particular the South Lancashire Mosses where record numbers were present. The number of Pink-footed Geese has increased ten-fold in the last 50 years from c. 30,000 to c. 290,000, with the largest increases at the southern end of their range, in Norfolk. This shift southwards is in contrast to the distribution of **Iceland Greylag Goose**, which has shown a northerly shift. Numbers on Orkney have rapidly increased since the early 1990s, and this latest winter saw the highest count there to date, with an estimated 62,500 (over 50% of the population) present in December. While the change in distribution of the Greylags is thought to be a consequence of milder winters, allowing the geese to stay closer to their breeding grounds (though the increased acreage of improved grasslands in Orkney is also implicated), for Pinkfeet it is more likely that a change in feeding habits is causing the shift in their distribution; in particular the availability of waste sugar beet in Norfolk, which now sees nearly half the population during mid winter compared to 15 years ago they were only present in small numbers.

The number of Icelandic Greylags decreased by about 20% during the 1990s, but there has been some suggestion of an improvement in

recent years; the population estimate in 2007/08 was one of the highest since 1990/91. However, there are still considerable difficulties with accurately counting them in Britain, mainly because it is impossible to separate them from birds from the re-established and Northwest Scotland populations with which they increasingly mix during the winter, most notably in Orkney. Therefore, uncertainty remains as to whether these numbers truly reflect the trend in the Iceland population.

The Northwest Scotland population of Greylags is monitored annually on the Uists and Tiree, where numbers are continuing to increase. The August 2007 count produced a new all-time peak for the Uists, and although on Tiree the total number was down on the previous year, it was still one of the highest recorded there. In summer 2008 a survey of this population was undertaken throughout the whole of Scotland, and provisional results from this census can be found on page 12.

For the **Greenland White-fronted Goose** the outlook is currently not good as the population is rapidly declining. The spring 2008 census produced a population estimate of 23,208, this being 35% lower than that recorded in spring 1999 when numbers were at their highest. This significant decline means Greenland White-fronted Goose now qualifies as Endangered under IUCN Red List criteria. Since 1998, the population's annual breeding success has been continually poor, remaining below the level required to sustain annual losses. The cause of this is unknown, but the two most likely explanations are i) competition from the increasing number of Canada Geese in Greenland, where it appears they are displacing White-fronts from breeding areas, or ii) heavy spring snowfalls in recent years which may have affected nesting success.

In February 2009, a workshop was held on Islay to review the status and threats of this sub-species and develop a Species Action Plan for eventual government endorsement by the four Range States. This will hopefully lead to a much-needed coordinated flyway-wide approach to the conservation of the Greenland White-front.

The status of the Dark-bellied Brent Goose population is also still of concern, with numbers falling by approximately 30% since the 1990s leading to the population qualifying as Vulnerable using IUCN Red List criteria. This decline is also due to a reduction in breeding success, with fewer good breeding seasons recorded in the past 20 years. Breeding success in Dark-bellied Brent Geese generally follows a three-yearly cycle of good, poor and variable success, and is greatly influenced by lemming and predator abundance. Between the mid 1990s and 2005, the pattern changed and there were fewer than expected good breeding seasons, suggesting that the connection between rodent abundance and breeding success no longer functioned in the same way, or that rodent abundance was no longer following a predictable pattern. Since 2005, however, when breeding success was good and there were exceptionally high numbers of lemmings, this pattern appears to have become re-established. With this higher breeding success, the population trend has also shown a slight upturn. Whilst this is encouraging, it will require a continued increase in the frequency of good breeding seasons before any significant change in the population trend or status occurs.

Full species accounts and reports, along with more information about the GSMP, can be found on the WWT website at www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring, where it is also possible to download the annual GSMP newsletter, GooseNews, and other more detailed reports.

Colette Hall
WWT Species Monitoring Unit

WeBS Core Count Priority Dates 2009-2010

15th March 2009	19th April 2009	10th May 2009	14th June 2009
12th July 2009	23rd August 2009	20th September 2009	11th October 2009
22nd November 2009	20th December 2009	17th January 2010	21st February 2010
14th March 2010	18th April 2010	16th May 2010	20th June 2010
18th July 2010	15th August 2010	19th September 2010	10th October 2010
14th November 2010	19th December 2010		

Why it is better to be little...

During 2007, the BTO ran UK-wide surveys of breeding Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers, the first national surveys for these species since 1984. Niall Burton and Greg Conway look at the results…

Little Ringed Plovers first nested in the UK in southeast England in 1938. Numbers have increased steadily since then, accompanied by a west and northward range expansion. During the last national survey, in 1984, the population had increased to 608–631 pairs at 370 sites in England and Wales but there were no breeding records from Scotland or Northern Ireland and a few years later the 1988–91 New Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland provided an estimate of 825–1,070 pairs.

A different pattern was shown by Ringed Plover in 1984. An estimated 8,617 pairs bred in the UK, of which two thirds were in Scotland, an increase since the previous survey in the early 1970s, possibly associated with an increase in the number of gravel pits and reservoirs. Despite this, Ringed Plover is on the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Amber list due to significant decreases in the wintering population.

Little Ringed Plover / Neil Calbrade

Ringed Plover / Rob Robinson

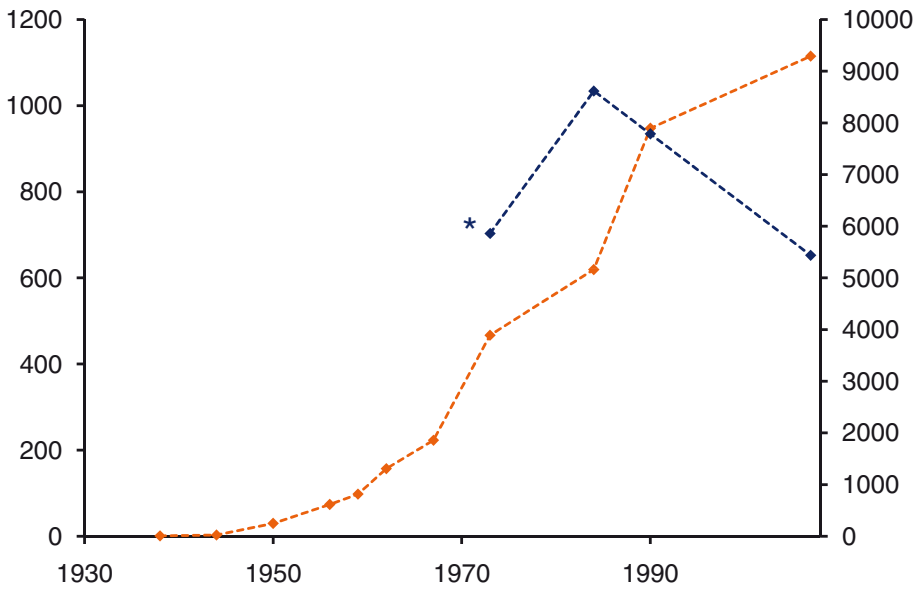
The 2007 surveys: methods

The 2007 surveys used a dual approach: firstly a survey of 'Key Squares' – 2 km x 2 km grid squares known to be occupied by the species in 1984 or up to 2006 – and secondly a survey of 'Sample Squares' used to determine numbers elsewhere. Survey coverage was good and the data collected have now been used to provide new population estimates for the two species in the UK. The results of the surveys indicate that the two species have experienced contrasting fortunes since the 1980s.

Little Ringed Plover

In total, 746 pairs of Little Ringed Plovers were recorded in 2007. The majority – 585 pairs (78%) – were recorded in England, 141 (19%) in Wales and 20 (3%) in Scotland, but none in Northern Ireland or the Isle of Man. Using these counts, it was estimated that there were 1,115 pairs of Little Ringed Plovers breeding in Great Britain in 2007, an increase on both the 1984 and 1988–91 Breeding Atlas estimates. This is thought to be due both to a population increase and range expansion, and the sampling of areas outside known key sites.

The Little Ringed Plover's core range in Great Britain remains in an area from southeast England through the Midlands to the north-west, though the species has spread further into Wales, northern England and south and east Scotland since 1984. Gravel and sand pits remain the most important habitat for this species, supporting 224 (30%) of the pairs recorded. A total of 159 pairs (21%) were recorded on river shingle, reflecting the species' range expansion into northern and western regions.



Population Trends
(Orange – Little Ringed Plover, Blue – Ringed Plover).
UK population estimates for Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover
(* - the 1973 survey greatly underestimated the Ringed Plover population in Scotland).

Ringed Plover

Of 4,232 pairs of Ringed Plovers recorded during the surveys, 2,656 (63%) were recorded in Scotland, with 1,184 (28%) in England, 214 (5%) in Wales, 62 (2%) in Northern Ireland and 116 (3%) in the Isle of Man. Analysis suggested that an estimated 5,291 pairs of Ringed Plovers bred in Great Britain in 2007 and a further 147 each in Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, a large decrease compared to the respective 8,483, 134 and 70 pairs estimated in 1984. Changes on individual sites surveyed in both 1984 and 2007 suggest decreases of 47%, 6%, 41%, 66% and 9% in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man respectively and that the largest decreases have occurred at inland sites.

The core of the Ringed Plover's breeding distribution in the UK remains in Scotland, with 1,008 pairs recorded in a survey of the Uists and Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides. Aside from the 'machair' habitat found here and elsewhere in north-west Scotland, other important habitats were coastal shingle and coastal sand which supported (outside the Uists and Benbecula) 39% and 14% of the pairs recorded.

Ringed Plovers are a feature of six Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in England and Scotland, five of which each held over 1% of the GB population estimate in 2007. Given the large decline in the numbers of the species across the country, it is important that the species' status in these key sites is maintained.

The data collected during the 2007 surveys will be invaluable in assessing the factors that have driven population change in the species. The survey as a whole will provide a benchmark for assessing future change.

Acknowledgements

The Breeding Plover Surveys were funded by NE, SNH, CCW, NIEA (Northern Ireland), Anglian Water and the D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust; BTO funding came from the legacy based fund Birds in Trust, and the Christmas and New Year Bird Count. We are also grateful to the RSPB and JNCC for their support, and SNH and the RSPB for funding surveys on the Outer Hebrides. We would also like to thank Jon Brain, Graham Austin, Rob Fuller and Markus Handschuh for their input and, most importantly, all the volunteers, BTO Regional Representatives and landowners who helped with the surveys.

Greg Conway and Niall Burton, BTO

Introducing the LOAC

Local Organisers (LOs) play a pivotal role in the running of WeBS, and without them, the scheme would not run as smoothly. In order for LOs to better communicate opinion regarding the running of the scheme, the Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) was formed as Heidi Mellan explains…

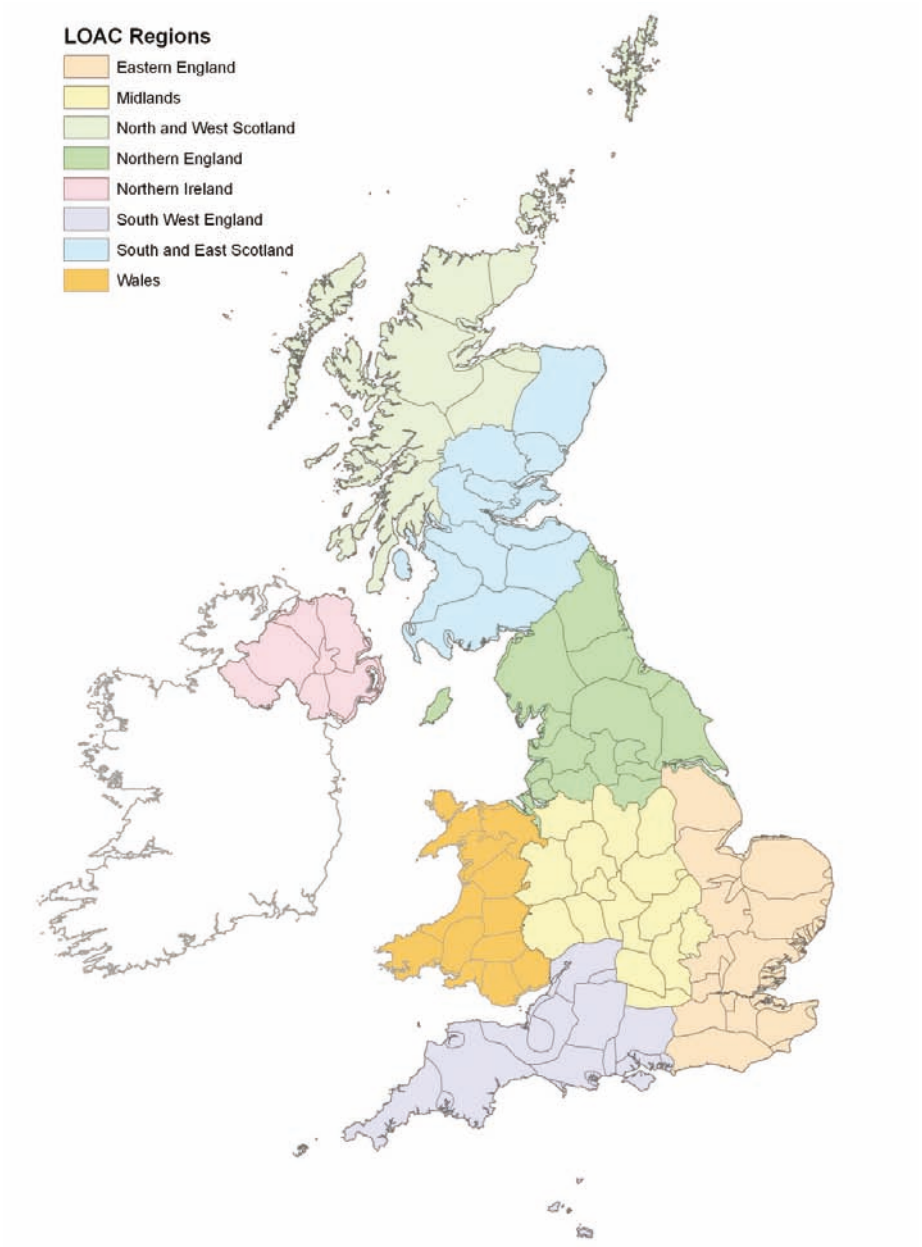
In the last WeBS Newsletter we announced the formation of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC).

The WeBS LOAC should provide an opportunity for the counter network to communicate opinion as to whether WeBS staff are doing things right or wrong and bring to the attention of the WeBS staff any issues regarding the scheme as a whole. Conversely, staff will be able to explain why some things are done in the way they are. The LOACs role is to advise and provide ideas and feedback. It has no remit to make decisions, especially concerning funding and spending issues (which is the role of the WeBS Steering Group).

Each broad region (see map) has been assigned a Local Organiser to act as a voice on the committee:

- Nick Mason (nick.mason4@btinternet.com) for Eastern England;
- John Armitage (jsa@ornquest.plus.com) for North and West Scotland;
- David Shackleton (dave.shack@care4free.net) for Northern England;
- Gregor Watson (gregor.watson@doeni.gov.uk) for Northern Ireland;
- Pete Reay (peter.p.j.reay@btinternet.com) for Southwest England;
- Rhion Pritchard (rhion678pritchard@btinternet.com) for Wales;
- Neil Bielby (n.bielby@sky.com) for South and East Scotland.

The position of regional representative for the Midlands is currently vacant.



The fourth meeting of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee is scheduled to be held at the Nunnery on 22nd July 2009.

The minutes of previous meetings are available via the website at *http://www.bto.org/webs/resources/LOAC/*.

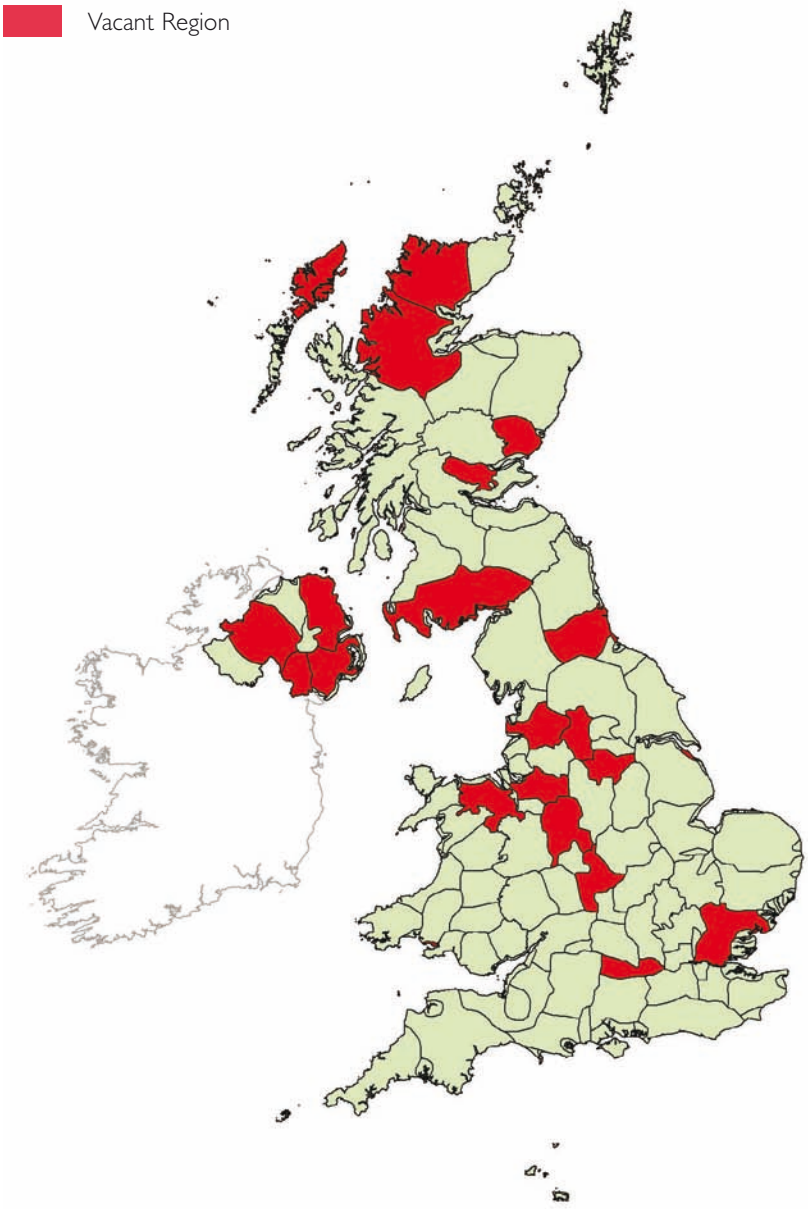
We are looking to hear from any Local Organisers who may be interested in serving on the LOAC in the future.

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.

LO changes

We would like to thank Graham Elliott (Huntingdonshire), Kevin Sharpe (Bedfordshire), John O'Boyle (Belfast Lough), Steve

Vacant LO Regions



Cooper (Dumfries & Galloway and Solway Estuary North), Alan Davies (Conwy Estuary), Phil Davey (Lindisfarne), Mick Shepherd (Radipole and Lodmoor), Dominic Harmer (Ribble Estuary), Louise Soanes (Alderney) and Gilly Jones (Staffordshire) who have retired as Local Organisers after many years of dedicated work.

We would also like to thank Mike Smart who has temporarily taken up the post of Local Organiser for Gloucestershire, Ken Abram who will be covering the LO role for Ribble Estuary, Shane Wolsey who has kindly taken over as a temporary LO of Belfast Lough, Bruce Martin who has combined Huntingdonshire with his existing organisation of Cambridgeshire, Nick Tomlinson who has taken over as LO at Radipole and Lodmoor, Andrew Craggs who has taken over as LO for Lindisfarne, Richard Bashford who has taken over in Bedfordshire, Alan Hetherington who has been taken on as Co. Londonderry LO, and finally, Melanie Broadhurst is now the temporary contact for Alderney.

Whilst we have been able to find replacements for many of the LOs who have retired, we currently have vacancies (see map) for Local Organisers at Angus, Co. Antrim, Co. Armagh, Berkshire, Burry Inlet (North), Cheshire (North), Clwyd (Inland), Isle of Cumbrae, Co. Down, Dumfries & Galloway, Durham, East Lancashire & Fylde, Essex (other sites), Harris/Lewis, Huddersfield/ Halifax, Co. Tyrone, Humber (mid-south), Sutherland, Kinross, Solway (North), South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Inverness/Wester Ross.

If you would like to take on the role of Local Organiser in any of these vacant regions, please do get in touch.

Heidi Mellan
WeBS Counter Network Organiser

WeBS Staff changes

It has been quite a busy year in the WeBS office with more comings, goings and a staff reshuffle. Mark Collier, who has been running the Core Counts and producing the annual WeBS report since 2004, left the BTO at the end of October to move to the Netherlands and has been replaced by Chas Holt.

Heidi Mellan has now taken up the new role of WeBS Counter Network Organiser, so will still be the first point of contact for counters.

As part of an internal reorganisation at the BTO, Andy Musgrove now heads up the Monitoring Team, which includes WeBS, BBS, BirdTrack and Atlas, and so has less day-to-day involvement with WeBS but will still oversee the running of the scheme. Finally, Marcia Sayer has joined the unit as WeBS Secretary.

The population size of breeding Greylag Geese *Anser anser* in Scotland in 2008/09

Carl Mitchell summarises the results from the summer breeding survey of Scottish Greylag Geese…

From a low point of c. 500 birds in the 1930s, Greylag Geese have increased 40 fold in Scotland in 70 years. This can be seen as a success story, aided by conservation measures, a favourable change in agricultural systems and hunting mortality not keeping pace with recruitment. The re-establishment of populations in the south and east of Scotland started a period of expansion there too.

In order to better assess the current abundance and distribution of the species, a simultaneous comprehensive survey of summering Greylag Geese throughout Scotland was carried out in summer 2008. Counts of moulting Greylag Geese were undertaken at 49 lochs over 5 ha in size, where moult gatherings were thought to occur, in areas to the south and east of the Great Glen in Scotland. A random stratified survey of another 200 (from total of 752) lochs over 5 ha in size was also carried out. Habitat categories, or strata, used in the stratification process were based on the proportion of water cover and the proportion of woodland (both conifer and broadleaf) in each 10km square. In addition, post-moult counts were undertaken in areas to the north and west of the Great Glen (but not in Orkney where counts were undertaken in early July). The provisional population estimate was 40,529 birds (range 38,088 to 43,134; Table 1). This figure represents a minimum, since more survey work is planned for 2009, which will further refine this population estimate. Overall, breeding success was estimated at 24.4% and the mean brood size was 3.15 goslings per successful pair. This suggests there were c. 3140 successful pairs of Greylag Geese breeding in Scotland in 2008 (range 2950 to 3341).

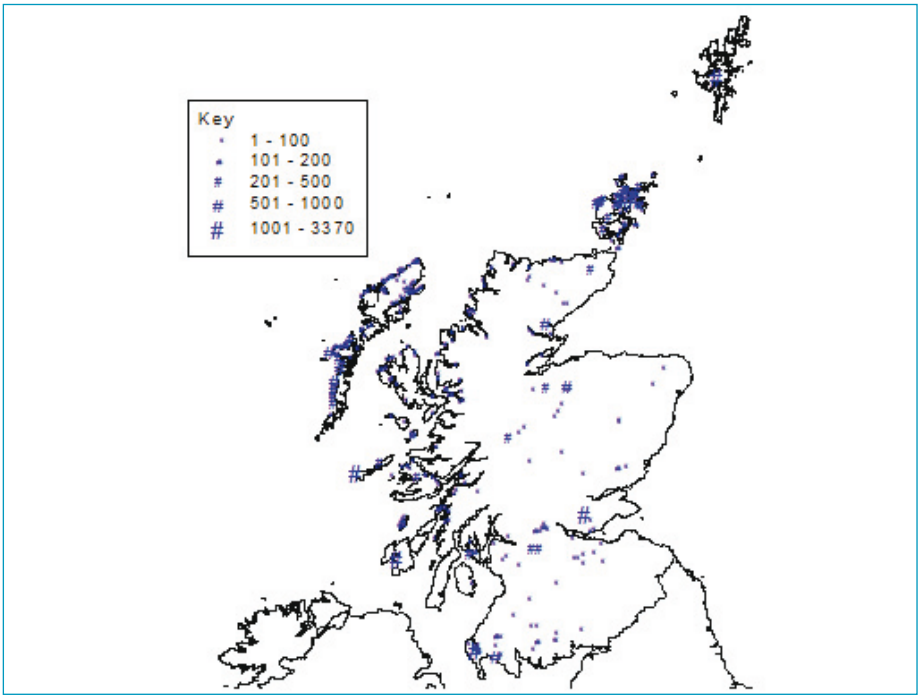


Figure 1. Summary distribution of Greylag Geese encountered during the 2008 survey of Scotland.

Table 1: Summary results of the abundance of Greylag Geese in Scotland in 2008.

	No. Greylag Geese	Range
Known moult sites and random stratified survey	9537	8864– 10,317
Post-moult counts	30,992	29,224 - 32,817
Total	40,529	38,088 – 43,134

Using the average breeding success rate, the population was considered to comprise of c. 9889 goslings and c. 30,640 adults. The annual rate of increase was estimated at 10.8% in north and west Scotland (1997 to 2008) and 7.8% in south and east Scotland (1991 to 2008). No counts were undertaken in Shetland and Caithness; for both areas the most recent counts available, from 2006 and 2007, were used to derive estimates.

However, both areas will be surveyed in 2009. In addition, during early July 2009, a survey of smaller waterbodies (<5 ha) is being carried out to the south and east of the Great Glen. If you are interested in helping with this please contact me on the email address below or via the Species Monitoring Unit at WWT Slimbridge.

Carl Mitchell
WWT
carl.mitchell@wwt.org.uk

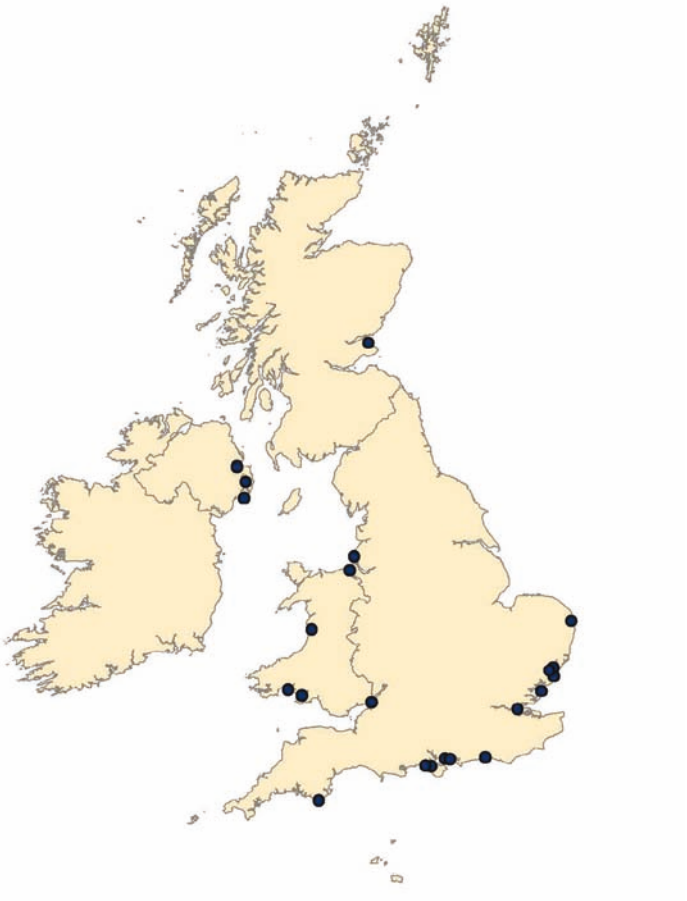
WeBS Low Tide Counts: Update

The winter of 2008-09 has been another busy time for Low Tide counting, with 22 different sites being covered under the scheme. Thanks to a team of dedicated fieldworkers, the arduous task of counting the Severn Estuary was completed.

Other sites counted were the Adur, Thames (partial count), Dee, Stour, Orwell, Langstone Harbour, Strangford Lough, Killough Harbour, Burry Inlet, Carmarthen Bay, Breydon Water, Belfast Lough, Newtown Harbour, Kingsbridge, Northwest Solent, Dyfi, Portsmouth Harbour, Eden, Alt, Dengie Flats and Hamford Water.

We will soon begin the process of organising counts for 2009/10, with some large sites such as Humber, Firth of Forth, Solway and Ribble Estuaries and Lough Foyle being targeted. These are just a handful of the estuaries we will be looking to get counted.

Knot / Neil Calbrade



Low Tide sites counted in 2008/09

We would welcome counts from any estuary, so please contact the WeBS office (email: 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 in the scheme.

A quick reminder that it is now possible to input your Low Tide Counts online in the same way as you can for core counts. Once you are registered for WeBS online, just contact us to let us know which site and sectors you count and we can set you up.

We are in the process of loading the 2007-08 data from the 19 sites covered into the database, the results of which will be produced in Waterbirds in the UK 2007/08 due later this year.

Neil Calbrade
WeBS Low Tide Count
National Organiser

Waterbird declines: governments debate need for urgent actions

David Stroud (JNCC), Ruth Cromie, Baz Hughes & Rebecca Lee (WWT), Andy Musgrove (BTO) and John O'Sullivan (RSPB) report on the outcomes of recent international conventions…

Autumn 2008 saw a flurry of international conservation meetings that included important discussions on future priorities for the conservation of waterbirds and their wetland habitats. These included the fourth Meeting of the Parties (signatory governments) to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA MoP4), held in Madagascar in September; the tenth Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar CoP10) in the Republic of Korea at the end of October; and the ninth Conference of Parties to the Bonn Convention on Migratory Species (CMS CoP9) in Rome in December.

These inter-governmental meetings gave opportunities to reflect on current issues and set priorities for action. Debates on waterbird conservation at these meetings were significantly influenced by the latest findings of national waterbird programmes such as WeBS.

AEWA MoP4 didn't pull its punches: a series of blunt Resolutions were adopted by the 62 Contracting Parties and these can be found in full on the AEWA web-site (see final box). The overall status of migratory waterbird populations in the Agreement area of Africa, the Middle East and western Eurasia was acknowledged as poor and declining. Despite international targets to reduce and halt the decline of biodiversity loss by 2010, monitoring evidence suggests that for waterbirds, the overall situation is actually becoming worse rather than showing signs of improvement.

The MoP expressed concern that "*the trend status of waterbirds in the Agreement area has worsened between 1999 – when the Agreement came into force – and 2008, with twice as many populations (41%) showing decreasing rather than increasing trends (21%).*" It further expressed deep concern as to the continued negative trend of the Red List Index for all AEWA species "*which indicates that the overall conservation status of all migratory waterbirds continues to decrease within the Agreement area.*"

The main causes of these declines were identified as continued widespread habitat loss and degradation, and locally unsustainable waterbird harvesting. The effects of pollution, including the widespread continued use of toxic lead gun-shot throughout most of the Agreement area was highlighted, together with the consequences of climate change on habitats and species which will result in further unwelcome and unpredictable impacts.

Responses to the looming crisis were characterised in debates as inadequate with the Contracting Parties stressing "*the need to take such immediate action in light of the progressively worsening status of Africa's and Eurasia's migratory waterbirds, and that much more needs to be done by the Parties to this Agreement if [the 2010 biodiversity] targets are to be attained.*"

Accordingly, a range of responses were identified for priority implementation, including the need to:

- undertake adequate Environmental Impact Assessments for development proposals that may impact on important wetland habitats;
- enhance monitoring and reporting so as better to understand the distribution and status of populations, and thus improve their management;
- implement fully-funded Action Plans for most threatened species;
- develop greater human capacity and training within developing countries (and especially in Africa) so as to improve the development and implementation of effective

The scientific assessment under-pinning most of the AEWA Resolutions was – in major part – a substantive review published by Wetlands International (AEWA/MOP 4.8: Report on the conservation status of migratory waterbirds in the Agreement area) which, as with other texts referred to, is available on AEWA's website). This status review includes substantial UK data submitted by WeBS to the International Waterbird Census.

Other major reviews informing MoP4 conclusions are listed below including several which were prepared for AEWA by WWT and BTO:

- seven new species action plans, included those for Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa, Eurasian Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia, Lesser White-fronted Goose Anser erythropus and Lesser Flamingo Phoeniconaias minor; and a progress report on the implementation of previously adopted action plans;
- progress report on phasing out lead shot for hunting in wetlands;
- review of the hunting and trade legislation;
- review of waterbird re-establishment projects in the AEWA area and best practice recommendations;
- review of the status of introduced non-native waterbird species;
- report on effects of climate change on migratory bird within the African-Eurasian flyways, together with AEWA Conservation Guidelines on measures needed to help waterbirds to adapt to climate change; and
- AEWA Conservation Guidelines on how to avoid, minimize or mitigate impact of infrastructural developments and related disturbance affecting waterbirds.

national conservation policies and programmes; and

- enhance international co-operation concerning the conservation of shared migratory species.

Key wetlands continue to be threatened or even lost to development, and in recent years many sites of major importance for waterbirds have been lost or damaged. A proposal that would have severely damaged Lake Natron in Tanzania – home to 75% of the world's Lesser Flamingos *Phoenicopterus minor* – was a topical example. The Parties agreed a new process that will allow the AEWA Secretariat to work with a country in the event of future threats to important sites or species. Whilst such things can appear to be creating further international bureaucracy, this was actually an enormously important step in defining the ways that the AEWA Secretariat, on behalf of the Contracting Parties, can enter a dialogue with a country concerning reported threats. A similar process established under Ramsar some decades ago has, on many occasions, used international expertise and experience to help find positive solutions to difficult national conservation problems.

An interpretation of the unusually 'full and frank' language adopted by the Parties at MoP4 is a recognition that despite the establishment of AEWA to achieve a visionary objective — "*the need to take immediate action to stop the decline of migratory waterbird species and their habitats … for the benefit for present and future generations…*" — overall progress to this end since the Agreement was finalised in 1995 has been limited. In large part, this is because through much of the Agreement area, the sheer scale of the negative impacts (whether direct, such as locally unsustainable harvests, or indirect, such as wetland loss and degradation) is simply overwhelming the important and positive actions that have been stimulated by the Agreement. Actions are often too little and too late (despite the best intentions of the relevant governmental and other decision-makers).

An unusually large number of Lesser Flamingos were found dead at Lake Nakuru in 2006. Such, and more serious mortality events, have occurred in the Rift Valley lakes with increasing frequency. The root causes of this mortality remain unknown although it is likely to involve the interaction of environmental factors as well as impacts on the lake ecosystem which combine to influence the susceptibility of flamingos to both toxic and infectious disease. Issues posed by the increased frequency of such severe disease events were addressed by CMS CoP9, whilst a WWT-drafted Action Plan for Lesser Flamingos was approved at AEWA MoP4. This plan stresses the urgent need for integrated studies so as to better understand the long-term implications of such die-offs. Both Ramsar CoP10 and AEWA MoP4 discussed other major threats to key sites for flamingos in East Africa from development and other activities. Photo: *Ruth Cromie*.

Such an international 'wake-up call' is timely and hopefully should aid both Contracting Parties and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to redouble, and better focus, their efforts.

Ramsar's CoP10 was a larger meeting – as befits a global convention. Indeed, nearly all Ramsar's 158 Contracting Parties were represented in South Korea, together with a very large number of national and international NGOs including the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT). Two Resolutions were adopted with particular significance for waterbird conservation (see final box for details on how to find the full texts of the Resolutions).

Resolution X.21 (*Guidance on responding to the continued spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza* [HPAI]) provides a major compilation of technical and policy guidance related to HPAI H5N1. In particular, it provides a 'roadmap' of such material produced over the last three years, as well as presenting significant new guidance aimed at reducing the risk of HPAI infection at wetland reserves. Further and complementary Resolutions on HPAI H5N1 were adopted by both AEWA MoP4 and CMS CoP9 – the latter also reflecting on the wider issues of disease in waterbirds and other wildlife. The emergence and spread of novel diseases in waterbirds – of which HPAI H5N1 is just one example – is increasingly recognised as an important conservation issue which needs to be addressed at international scales – not least because of the potential spread of pathogens through globalised trade as well as potentially by migratory species themselves.

Drafting of the three avian disease Resolutions was led by WWT and they included aspects drawn from the successful recent responses to H5N1 cases in the UK. The UK has developed processes that ensure ornithological advice and assessments can be rapidly provided to decision-makers within government in the event of disease outbreaks. The WeBS Partners have worked closely with DEFRA and other government agencies (WeBS News 22: 1 & 3) to develop these mechanisms which have now been internationally adopted as recommended good practice for other countries.

Resolution X.22 (*Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways*) reflected on the conservation of the world's waterbird flyways. It noted alarm "at the continuing decline in abundance of many waterbirds throughout the world, resulting not only from unsustainable exploitation, but especially from the loss and degradation of wetland habitats (in particular through both small-scale and larger-scale land claims and other land use changes of intertidal wetlands)." It highlighted "that waterbirds using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway are the most poorly known of all flyway populations, that the greatest number of globally threatened waterbird species occur there, and that that flyway extends across the most densely populated part of the world, where there are extreme pressures not only on unprotected wetlands but also on protected sites," and that such inter-tidal wetlands also support significant human communities through the ecosystem services (such as fisheries) that they provide.

In particular, the global importance of the inter-tidal mudflats of the Yellow Sea (which support more than two million shorebirds alone during spring migration) was repeatedly stressed, and the CoP in particular welcomed the statement by the Republic of Korea that inter-tidal mudflats should be preserved and that no further large-scale land-claim projects (such as that at Saemangeum) are now being approved. This was indeed welcome news. The massive implications of the Saemangeum land-claim and its consequences for huge numbers of waterbirds dominated Korean reporting of the CoP. In particular, the monitoring data now coming from the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program (SSMP), and to which a number of WeBS counters have contributed in recent years (*WeBS News* 22: 8-9; 2006), is proving of great importance in unambiguously demonstrating regional-scale declines in species such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*. The most recent SSMP report was distributed at CoP10 and is available on Birds Korea's website:*www.birdskorea.org*

An abandoned fishing boat, Saemangeum, Republic of Korea. This former estuary was one of the most important shorebird site in the whole of the Yellow Sea, supporting internationally important numbers of at least 17 species of waders (including several globally threatened species) as well as providing livelihoods for over 25,000 people from local fisheries. However, following the construction of a 33 km barrage, the estuary is now non-tidal and the wetland will now be subject to progressive development. Ramsar Parties welcomed a statement from the government of the Republic of Korea that no further large-scale land-claims of inter-tidal areas are now being approved. Photo: *David Stroud*.

WHERE TO GO FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

AEWA MoP4: *www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop4_docs/mop4_final_resolutions.htm*

Ramsar CoP10: *http://ramsar.org/res/key_res_x_index_e.htm*

CMS CoP9: *http://www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/cop9_meeting_docs.htm* (final texts of Resolutions not yet available)

Slender-billed Curlew identification tool-kit: *www.slenderbilledcurlew.net*

Current flamingo conservation issues: *www.flamingoresources.org*

The Ramsar Parties called also for an exchange of best practice approaches to the international conservation of migratory waterbirds in recognition that there are a number of different legal and other conservation frameworks around the world. Ramsar, CMS and AEWA will be working together to that end over the next few years.

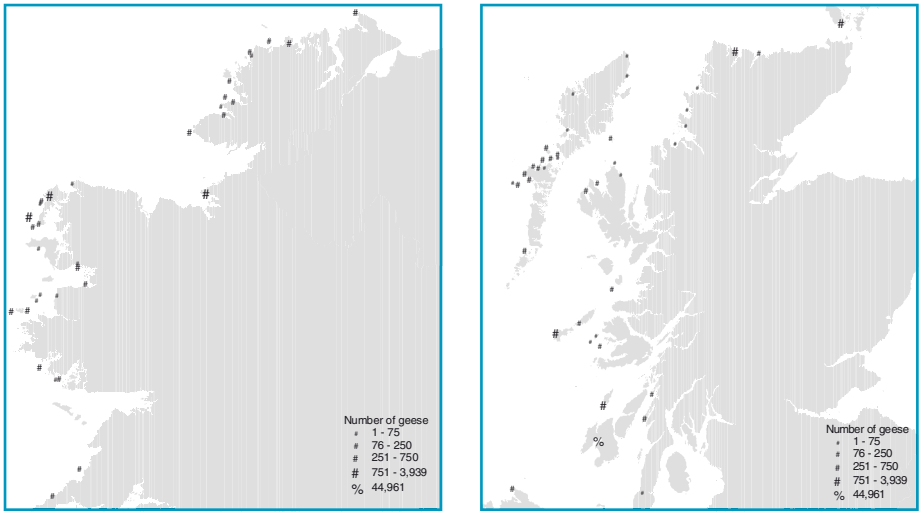
CMS CoP9 endorsed a call for a final search for the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*. There have been no verified records since 1999, and an international working group for the species established by CMS launched a tool kit to assist people to identify and report Slender-billed Curlew in the field. A downloadable identification leaflet, an mp3 file of the call and a map of all recent sightings by season (all from *www.slenderbilledcurlew.net*), mean that travelling WeBS counters will now know what to look for, and when and where to search for this elusive wader!

All three international meetings called for follow-up actions related to the priorities identified. The WeBS Partners will be contributing to these actions so as to ensure that the UK's long-developed and significant expertise in waterbird monitoring and conservation can be used to help halt the progressive decline of the world's waterbirds.

If you want to download the AEWA Migratory Waterbirds and climate change leaflet, visit: http://www.unep-aewa.org/publications/popular_series.htm

2008 Greenland Barnacle Goose Survey results

Greenland Barnacle Geese winter almost exclusively in north and west Scotland, throughout the Inner and Outer Hebrides and north to Orkney, and west Ireland, where the main concentrations occur between the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry, and Inishowen in north Co. Donegal. Since 1959, twelve full international censuses have been conducted at these wintering sites, most recently in March 2008. While some sites can be surveyed by ground counts, the inaccessible nature of most (many are uninhabited, comparatively remote islands) means that an aerial survey is needed to achieve full coverage.



The distribution of a) 33 sites in Ireland and b) 38 sites in Scotland holding Barnacle Geese in March 2008.

In 2008, 328 islands and mainland sites along the Scottish and Irish coasts were surveyed. In Ireland, 33 sites were found to hold over 12,200 geese, and just under 58,300 were seen at 40 sites in Scotland. This resulted in an overall population estimate of 70,500, representing a 25% increase on the 2003 census total.

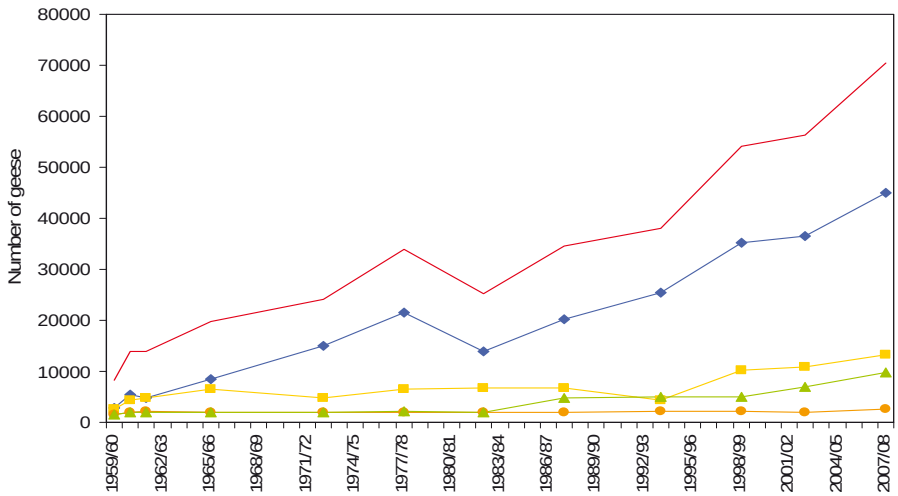
The population of Greenland Barnacle Goose has been increasing since the 1960s, and results of recent censuses have indicated that this increase is largely occurring at a small number of key sites. Currently, Islay, Tiree, Coll and South Walls in Scotland, and Inishkea Islands and Ballintemple/Lissadell in Ireland, hold the majority of the population (80% in 2008), with Islay alone holding nearly 64%. It has been suggested that habitat deterioration at many uninhabited islands may have led to decreases in goose numbers, whilst intensive farming methods and goose management schemes have attracted geese to alternative sites.

It appears that the demographic explanation for the overall increase relates to increased survival because the proportion of young recorded on Islay has decreased since the mid-late 1980s, yet numbers there have continued to increase. Some immigration may also have contributed to this increase but it is likely that decreases in mortality and the introduction of goose management schemes, aimed in part to benefit geese, supported the continued population growth during that time. Furthermore, it has previously been shown that the population is more susceptible to changes in mortality than productivity.

The 2008 census found 26 sites that exceeded nationally important numbers and nine that exceeded internationally important numbers. The number of sites qualifying as nationally important decreased between 1959 and 1983, but has stabilised since then. The number qualifying as internationally important, however, shows a long-term decline, highlighting the increased concentration of the population at a small number of locations.

A full report on the census can be downloaded from *www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/reports.asp*

Colette Hall
WWT



Census totals for the Greenland population of Barnacle Goose, 1959-2007 (— Total population, —◆— Islay, —■— Scotland excluding Islay, —●— Inishkea Islands, —▲— Ireland excluding Inishkea Islands).

The value of annual measures of breeding success

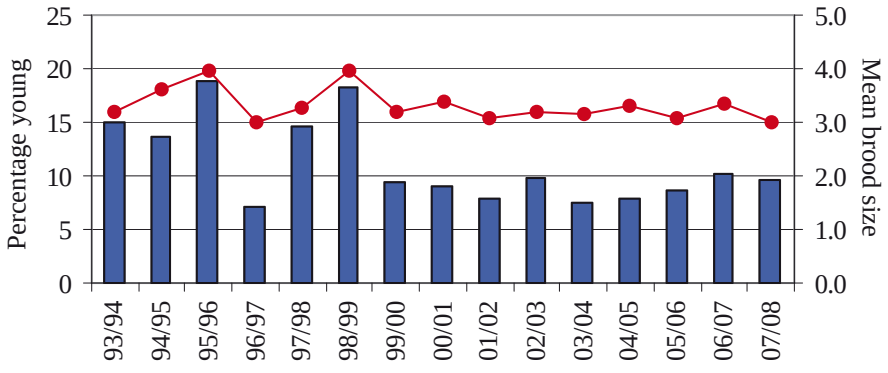
As the majority of WeBS counters will no doubt be aware, Integrated Population Monitoring (a term you will have often encountered) is the approach taken by many monitoring schemes. It essentially means the coordinated collection and analysis of data on different demographic parameters, namely abundance, breeding success, survival, and movements (immigration and emigration), and allows an understanding to be developed of whether populations are increasing or decreasing, and why (i.e. which demographic factors are driving these changes). Such information is extremely valuable in the setting of conservation priorities and the development of remedial action for species of conservation concern.

For most waterbird species, the collection of these data, with the exception of abundance, requires the capture of individuals because only in the hand can rings be fitted to birds and their age determined. As most experienced bird watchers will know, some species, however, can be readily aged without capture. Well-known examples are swans and geese, as well as gulls and some waders. This presents an excellent opportunity for the collection of data and the assessment of annual breeding success (ABS) for different populations.

Whooper Swan Family / John Dingemans

Such assessments are well established for most geese and swans, with datasets extending back to the 1950s for some species (e.g. European White-fronted Goose). Results are regularly reported in *GooseNews*, (which is available from the WWT website), and in *Waterbirds in the UK*. For such species, two standard measures are taken to estimate ABS – the proportion of first-winter birds in the population as a whole, using counts of the ratio of first-winters to adults in wintering flocks (FWR), and the mean brood size (MBS), using counts of the number of first- winters in individual family groups. Experienced observers generally carry out this work, since in many species the separation of first-winters from adults can only be carried out confidently with experience. However, in other species (e.g. brent geese), the differences between first-winters and adults are more marked, and so larger networks of observers participate in data collection.

It is important to note though that simply being able to age individual birds does not mean that getting an accurate estimate of ABS is straightforward; there are a number of biases that first need to be understood, and then accounted for in the sampling strategy. For example, estimates of FWR and MBS are valid for geese and swans because we know that family groups remain together for the whole of the winter period and that, largely, family groups are distributed evenly within the non-wintering population. However, other biases exist because we also know that family groups are more likely to be found at the edge of feeding flocks, and in certain habitats and flock sizes. For these



Productivity data for Greenland White-fronted Goose
Percentage young Mean brood size

reasons it is important that sampling is conducted across different flock sizes and habitats, and that flock scans cover all parts of the flock.

The value of these data to conservation practitioners is readily demonstrated by the current decline of the Greenland White-fronted Goose. Detailed monitoring by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study (*http://greenlandwhitefront.homestead.com/*) has been instrumental in determining that the current rapid decline is being driven by a reduction in the production of young, allowing research and conservation action to be targeted at the breeding grounds in west Greenland.

Further developments in the assessment of waterbird breeding success are also taking place. Currently, measures of breeding success (such as breakdowns of counts into adults and juveniles, or mean brood size) can be submitted using WeBS Online, via the comments boxes that appear on the species count inputting page. Any information entered here by WeBS counters will be forwarded to WWT on an annual basis for incorporation, where possible, into the calculation of annual productivity statistics.

A recent review of goose and swan ABS monitoring in the UK has highlighted, among other things, the greater need for flyway-wide coordination and data analysis. WWT and SOVON (*http://www.sovon.nl*) are currently moving this issue forward under the auspices of the IUCN-SSC / Wetlands International Goose Specialist Group, and in conjunction with this a new web- based ageing guide for these species will shortly be available. The development of data collection for other species would also be extremely valuable, and in recent years much work has gone in to developing this for waders, particularly in the East Asian-Australasian flyway[1]. However, it is essential that the biases are fully understood because these will be different to those for geese and swans, e.g. unlike those species young and adult waders do not remain together during the non-breeding season and usually exhibit different phenology during autumn migration, making it harder to be certain that these two cohorts have been sampled evenly.

Richard Hearn
WWT

[1] E.g. see Rogers DI, Rogers KG & Barter MA. 2005. Measuring recruitment of shorebirds with telescopes: a pilot study of age proportions on Australian non-breeding grounds. In: Straw P (ed.). *Status and Conservation of Shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway: Proceedings of the Australasian Shorebirds Conference 13-15 December 2003, Canberra, Australia.* Wetlands International Global Series 18 and International Wader Studies 17, Sydney, Australia.

International Swan Census, January 2010

The next International Swan Census is taking place in January 2010. This census takes place every five years and is organised by the IUCN-SSC / Wetlands International Swan Specialist Group to count migratory (Whooper and Bewick's) swans throughout their European wintering grounds. Coordinated counts aim to cover all known sites, thus providing accurate estimates of population size that complement annual trend indices derived from monitoring schemes such as WeBS. Counts therefore include many agricultural and other non-wetland areas, since large numbers of swans feed away from wetlands during the daytime.

The 2005 census recorded the highest number of Iceland Whooper Swans to date; throughout the wintering range (Iceland, Ireland, and the UK), 26,366 birds were counted, representing a 26% increase on the previous census total (20,856) in January 2000, and a 66% increase compared with the census total of 1995 (15,842). Within the UK and the Republic of Ireland, 7,216 Bewick's Swans were counted, representing a 5.0% decline in numbers since 2000 and a 4.6% decline since 1995. Since then, anecdotal evidence from across the flyway suggests that the Bewick's Swan population has continued to decline (it certainly has in the UK, by around 30% in the past decade), so the results of this next census are urgently needed to inform potential conservation action.

In the UK the census is coordinated by WWT with a large input from WeBS and I-WeBS counters, and The Irish Whooper Swan Study Group. The date of the 2010 census is yet to be finalised but will coincide with the International Waterbird Census count, and is thus likely to be on 16/17 January 2010. Data collected by WeBS counters will be collated, but we also need to ensure coverage of non-wetland areas not regularly counted by WeBS, for example river valleys and farmland areas, and to undertake counts of roosting birds at dawn and dusk. In addition, we are seeking to record information on the breeding success and habitat use of these swans.

Further information will be available in due course, and we will shortly be contacting people who assisted with the local organisation of the previous census in 2005. Updates will also be available from the WWT monitoring web pages (*http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/*) and will include recording forms and instructions to download. These will also be distributed to all WeBS regions that hold significant numbers of Bewick's and Whooper Swans in the autumn. In the meantime, if you have any queries or would like to register your interest in helping with this census, please contact me at WWT Slimbridge. Many thanks in advance for your help.

Jacqui Reed
WWT

....Other News.... Other News....

Calling all artists...

Would you like your piece of artwork to be seen by thousands of people? We are always on the lookout for artwork for the cover of the annual WeBS report and would love to hear from anyone who would like to contribute. If you have any existing artwork that would be suitable or would like to produce something just for the occasion, please get in touch.

Put your patch in the spotlight...

For forthcoming WeBS Newsletters, we are planning to do a feature on WeBS sites through the eyes of the counters who spend the hours carrying out the counts. If you regularly count a site, no matter how big or small and would like to write a short article highlighting it, please let us know.

Sending in your forms – a plea...

Please can you ensure that you return your core count forms to reach us by end of August. Last year was the first year where we have been able to get the WeBS report published in time for launch at the Bird Fair, and this is dependent on counters returning their counts on time. Obviously if you submit your counts online there is no need to send in the paper forms as well.

WeBS at the Bird Fair

We will again have a stand at this summer's British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland. As with last year, we will be unveiling the new WeBS report, so please come along and pick up your copy before they are sent out.
We will again have a stock of WeBS clothing (fleeces, polo shirts, baseball caps, woolly hats) for sale. For more information on colours, sizes and prices, please contact the WeBS Office.

Who's Who within the WeBS team—2009

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

Neil Calbrade, WeBS National Organiser (Low Tide Counts)
Low Tide Counts
Data Requests
WeBS News

Iain Downie, Web Software Developer
WeBS Online

Chas Holt, WeBS National Organiser (Core Counts)
Core Counts
Annual Report

Heidi Mellan, WeBS Counter Network Organiser
Counter and Local Organiser database management
WeBS Online

Andy Musgrove, Head of Monitoring
Overall management of WeBS

Marcia Sayer, WeBS Secretary
Mailing of count forms, newsletters and annual reports

Email:
General correspondence: webs@bto.org
or
Specific person, use the format of firstname.surname@bto.org e.g. andy.musgrove@bto.org

Web site - WeBS web site:
www.bto.org/webs

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