

## **Golden Moments: a review of Golden Plover in Ireland**

There are two populations of Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* that occur in Ireland. During the breeding season, a relatively small proportion of the nominate form *P. a. apricaria* is restricted to the uplands of northwest Ireland. This population winters in northwest Europe, though numbers wintering in Ireland are thought to be small. Ringing recoveries have shown that most Irish wintering birds are from the *altifrons* population, which breeds in Iceland and the Faeroes. During the winter period, Golden Plover occur in a variety of wetland and non-wetland habitats. There are two sites, Ballymacoda in County Cork and the Little Brosna Callows on the County Offaly/Tipperary border, that regularly support internationally important concentrations. As a result of their highly dispersed distribution and extensive use of non-wetland habitats, total wintering numbers are difficult to quantify. However, numbers present at sites that are regularly monitored as part of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey and the Wetland Bird Survey in the Republic and Northern Ireland respectively appear to have remained relatively stable since the winter of 1994/95. The mean of season peaks between 1999/2000 and 2003/04 was estimated at 154,000. However, this is an absolute minimum, as it is based on counts made on or adjacent to wetlands only. Assuming that these birds are all from the *altifrons* population, this implies that Ireland is highly important, supporting at least 17% of the population.