

## Ireland's Wintering Waders 1994/95-2003/04

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Wintering waterbird populations and the wetlands upon which they rely have been monitored in Ireland as part of the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) in Northern Ireland and the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) in the Republic, since the winters of 1993/94 and 1994/95 respectively. Both surveys employ the 'look-see' method, where counters record the number of individuals of all waterbird species present on frequent visits to pre-defined discrete wetland sites. Of the waterbirds recorded during these surveys, 15 wader species regularly occur in significant concentrations and at a relatively large number of sites in Ireland. Many migrate to Ireland from the northwest, predominantly Canada, Greenland, Iceland and the Faeroes (Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Knot *Calidris canutus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*). Others (principally Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*) come from breeding grounds ranging between northern Europe east to Siberia. It is likely that some proportion of wintering Oystercatcher, Curlew and Redshank in particular include residents from the respective Irish-breeding populations. In recent seasons, eight species have been shown to occur in internationally important concentrations at one or more sites, including Black-tailed Godwit at 19 sites, Redshank at eight sites and Bar-tailed Godwit at four sites. Ireland supports significant proportions of the flyway populations of both Black-tailed Godwit (40%) and Ringed Plover (20%). In total, 23 sites in Ireland regularly support in excess of 10,000 waders. Dundalk Bay, Strangford Lough, the Shannon & Fergus Estuary, Cork Harbour and Wexford Harbour & Slobs are the top five most important wader sites. Of the 24 sites that support internationally important concentrations, Dundalk Bay supports the most (Oystercatcher, Knot, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit and Redshank). Dublin Bay and Strangford Lough each support internationally important concentrations of four species while a further five sites support internationally important concentrations of two species. Over the 10 seasons between 1994/95 and 2003/04, seven species have shown declining trends, in particular Grey Plover, Lapwing, Knot and Dunlin, while there were increases in five species, most notably Sanderling and Greenshank. The trends of Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Ringed Plover appear to have remained stable.