

Summary

The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) is a joint scheme of BirdWatch Ireland (BWI), Dúchas *The Heritage Service* and The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), with additional funding and support from The Heritage Council and the World Wide Fund for Nature (UK) to monitor the numbers and distribution of waterfowl in the Republic of Ireland during the non-breeding season. Monthly counts of waterfowl are carried out at wetland sites throughout the winter months throughout the Republic of Ireland, and concurrently in Northern Ireland as part of the similar UK-WeBS scheme.

This report presents the results of the fourth successive season over which the I-WeBS scheme has been operating and also includes summary data from the UK-WeBS scheme in Northern Ireland, provided by the WeBS Secretariat. Details of coverage, total numbers of each species, provisional trends and the distribution of individual species are given.

Counts from a total of 305 sites, comprising some 602 sub-sites were made by some 150 observers in the winter of 1997-98, coverage being greatest in January (558 sub-sites). The frequency of coverage improved significantly over previous years, with 16% of sites being counted in each month (Sep – Mar inclusive). Almost three-quarters of a million waterbirds were counted by I-WeBS and WeBS, in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Provisional analyses of trends since 1994-95 showed increases in a number of species including Gadwall, Shoveler, Grey Plover, Curlew and Redshank; declines were noted for Cormorant and Greylag Goose. The majority of species, however, showed no discernible trend and further analysis is required to determine population trends more definitively.