

Summary

The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-W ϵ BS) is a joint scheme of BirdWatch Ireland (BWI), National Parks & Wildlife of 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 fifth consecutive season over which the I-W ϵ BS scheme has been operating and also includes summary data from the UK-W ϵ BS 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.

Significant improvements in coverage were made over previous years and the frequency of coverage at many sites also saw some improvement. Though not reflected in the absolute numbers of birds recorded in January (when coverage) was at its greatest, peaks of many species were amongst the highest yet recorded by I-WeBS. This is most likely a result of more regular monthly counts from many, but especially the most important, sites. Overall, some 375 sites (815 subsites) were covered by around 230 observers.

Trends, based on sites counted in January of each year since 1994-95, remain provisional and should be interpreted with caution. Upward trends evident through progressive increases in the population index are apparent for a number of species including Gadwall, Teal, Black-tailed Godwit. Indices for Little Egret, Great Crested Grebe, Greenland White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Pintail, Goldeneye also exceeded or equalled their highest levels in 1998-99. Grey Heron is the only species for which there appears to have been a consistent decline over the last four years. Population indices for a number of species including Cormorant, Bewick's Swan, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser and Grey Plover. however, reached their lowest levels. Most other species show a fluctuating or stable pattern. Since some of these trends are consistent with those observed elsewhere, for example those relating to increases in Gadwall, Black-tailed Godwit, Little Egret and Canada Goose, it is likely that these trends are an accurate reflection of the real situation.