



I-WeBS

The Newsletter of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey

Issue 10 August 2006

Introduction

Welcome back to the start of another I-WeBS season.

As you will see in this issue of I-WeBS News there is quite a lot going on this winter to keep us all busy. The second Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) will be taking place in December and January. NEWS aims to survey stretches of coastline that are not regularly covered in the usual I-WeBS counts, and the last one took place in the winter of 1997/98. You can read some more about that inside and about how you can get involved.

The next Bird Atlas project will run for four years between 2007 and 2011. The production of this new Atlas is exciting in many ways not least because, for the first time, both the wintering and breeding bird distribution information will be combined in the one Atlas publication. Stephen Newton has put together some information for you here about it and we will keep you updated as things develop. No doubt some surveyors will be required to carry out some of this work in 2007/08 so you will be kept informed!

Last winter much attention was focused on Avian Influenza, particularly as it was the first time it had been detected in Europe. Thankfully it did not reach our shores but we must remain vigilant this season. Please see inside for the latest update on bird flu from Olivia Crowe.

This year, the I-WeBS report has been combined with the Countryside Bird Survey report in one publication. The I-WeBS section of this report details results from two recent seasons, the 2003/04 season and the 2004/05 season, together with the longer term trends. The 2004/05 season is the most recent season for which we have counts collected and analysed so we have caught up nicely with the reporting process as the only other season left to be reported on is 2005/06, and we have not received all count forms for that yet. There are still a lot of forms yet to come in so please forward them to us as soon as possible. The faster they are returned the faster the time in which feedback can be given.

Please get in touch if you need anything for the season ahead. I hope you enjoy it.

Helen Boland



Shoveler (Clive Timmons).

Contents

Counting Sligo Bay	2
The Second International Survey of Non-Estuarine (NEWS) Coastline in Europe, December 2006 – January 2007	3
Light-bellied Brent Goose monitoring 2005 and 2006 seasons	4
Light-bellied Brent Goose satellite-tracking 2005 and 2006 seasons	
Irish Brent Goose Research Group Ringing & Resightings Report 2005/2006	5
Is the grass really greener? An update from the Black-tailed Godwit project	6
The 'Next Atlas' in Ireland – implications for winter monitoring	7
Avian Flu - please be vigilant this winter	8

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Recommended count dates for the 2006/07 I-WeBS season

The I-WeBS core count dates are listed in the accompanying table and have been chosen to maximise coordination of counts. The selected dates are naturally not always going to suit everybody each month but do please try to count your site as close to the recommended dates as possible and, where applicable, try to co-ordinate any change with counters and co-ordinators of adjacent sites (between which movements are likely to occur). It is essential that counters of large complex sites communicate with each other and co-ordinate their counts to avoid any double-counting of birds. I-WeBS counts should be done in the morning and, at coastal sites, during or near high-tide. With this in mind, we have chosen dates when the high-tide is as close to midday as possible for all parts of the country. There should be at least a three-week gap between each count you conduct. As always, it is the January counts that should be prioritised as it is these figures that we send to the International Waterbird Census.

	East Coast & Inland counties		South & West Coast counties	
		HT Dublin*		HT Cork*
Sep	9th/10th	14:01	16th/17th	15:12
Oct	7th/7th	12:56	14th/15th	13:12
Nov	4th/5th	10:57	11th/12th	10:23
Dec	9th/10th	15:09	16th/17th	15:17
Jan	6th/7th	13:57	13th/14th	13:43
Feb	3rd/4th	12:56	10th/11th	11:29
Mar	3rd/4th	11:58	10th/11th	09:52

*All times approximate to high-tides in Dublin and Cork on the Sunday of each count weekend, and are in GMT.

All-Ireland Light-bellied Brent Goose Census: 14th/15th October 2006 and 13th/14th January 2007.

Greylag Goose Census: 25th/ 26th November 2006.

Counting Sligo Bay



Barnacle Geese at Lissadell, Sligo (Dick Coombes).

Nestled between the distinctive limestone plateau of Benbulbin, and Knocknarea where Queen Maebh's Grave is located, and the rustic, granite Ox Mountains lie the three estuaries which constitute Sligo Bay. Ensnared in the middle bay is the original "Coney Island". Each bay has its own particular character and dynamic. There is some movement of birds between all three bays, given their close proximities, but the degree of flux appears to be small.

Drumcliffe Bay, the northern-most bay, is the smallest of the bays. The inner estuary empties into the outer bay at the sand spit of the Lower Rosses. The state of the tide, tide height, and wind speed and direction are critical when counting this site. At low tide the inner estuary can be desolate apart from duck species, particularly Shelduck, Long-tailed Duck and Red-breasted Merganser. The small waders and Light-bellied Brent Geese, at this stage, will generally be spread out along the patches of sandy shore, namely Lisadell, Johnsport and Ardtarmon, out to Roughly Harbour. On the incoming tide, these birds funnel back into the inner estuary so control points are critical. The Lisadell goose field is well known as the site that holds up to 3000 Barnacle Geese, and the pond there also holds significant numbers of wildfowl and waders, particularly Wigeon and Lapwing. In the past winter, Shoveler, a rarity in this region, turned up in the pond.

If the Barnacle Geese are absent from the field, our resident Barnacle Goose expert, Martin Enright, will scour their usual haunts, particularly Ballintemple, to complete a count. The major threat to this bay has been extensive commercial shellfish farming since the early 1990's.

Sligo Harbour, the middle bay, has Coney Island at its mouth. Outer Sligo Bay can be counted from Rosses Point car park, from which, flocks of Eider,

Common Scoter and Divers are to be seen, though conditions are rarely calm enough to count the Divers. Opportunistic counts in good conditions have yielded Great Northern Diver counts of over 45 birds. There is quite a flux of birds between Rosses point, Coney Island and Dorrins Strand which necessitates having a counter out on Coney Island. Coney Island holds Golden Plover and Lapwing so I find myself racing over to the island, counting, and trying to cycle back before the tide cuts me off (on one occasion I had to cycle through two feet of water to get back on the mainland!).

The vast mudflats of Dorrins Strand and Cummeen Strand can be difficult to count in bad light on a windy winter's day. Over 1000 Oystercatchers will shuffle out westwards as Cartron Bay and Gibraltar start to fill with the incoming tide. Mixed, large flocks of Dunlin, Sanderling and Ringed Plover, as well as Bar-tailed Godwits and Knot, can be located but are often unstable as aircraft and a marauding Peregrine are commonly present. The Bar-tailed Godwits and Knot have increased significantly in the last few years. Brent Geese arrive in the harbour in

internationally significant numbers in October, and disperse to both Drumcliffe Bay and Ballisodare Bay as the *Zostera* supplies exhaust later in the winter. They particularly favour the area west towards the airport and around to Killaspugbrone.

Ballisodare Bay, the southern-most bay, has a different feel, being overlooked by Knocknarea, and being surrounded by a more rural and arboreal border.

Artificial dykes at Streamstown and Tanrego trap ponds which harbour large numbers of wildfowl. Heading west towards Portavaud there are a number of smaller bay offshoots which can hide wildfowl and waders, and walking is a must on this shoreline.

At the head of the estuary there is a complex dynamic between mudflats at Ballisodare itself, Ballisodare Quarry, the Inishes, and Streamstown. Waders can jet from one area to another very quickly when prompted by the tide, by food or by a Peregrine Falcon. Ballisodare Quarry shore used to be a significant wader roost but has been used less in the last number of years, this may be because of disturbance. It regularly holds passage migrants such as Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper.

This long, crenulated coastline of Sligo Bay stretches for 75 km with vast areas of tidal mudflats. For the I-WeBS counter who likes some exercise there are plenty of opportunities for walking! Many stretches are inaccessible or difficult to monitor using motorised transport so there is no choice but on with the boots and wellies, and we have a great team of dedicated volunteers who brave all conditions to complete our counts.

Trevor Hunter
I-WeBS Regional Organiser, Sligo



Common Eider (Killian Mullarney).

The Second International Survey of Non-Estuarine (NEWS) Coastline in Europe, December 2006 – January 2007



During the winter of 1997/98, the first international survey of wintering waterbird populations of non-estuarine coast of Ireland (NEWS) was carried out throughout many other parts of the East Atlantic Flyway of Europe, including Britain and Ireland. The principal aim was to quantify proportions of wintering waterbirds occurring along coastal stretches which are not normally counted during regular monitoring schemes. In Ireland, a significant, and largely representative, proportion of the coastline was covered. Relatively large numbers of several wader species in particular were recorded. It has been estimated that almost 85% of Purple Sandpipers, 70% of Sanderling, 60% of Ringed Plover and 55% of Turnstones occurring in Ireland occur on such habitats. Furthermore, significant proportions of a number of wildfowl species, chiefly the divers and seaducks, were recorded in the offshore waters. The results of this survey have contributed towards more robust population estimates for wintering waterbirds in Ireland.

In the UK, the results of this survey have been compared with those of the Winter Shorebird Count, the first UK survey of non-estuarine birds carried out there during the winter of 1984/85.

Purple Sandpipers inhabit coastal stretches that may not be regularly covered during I-WeBS (Ken Kinsella).

The distributions of several wader species were shown to have altered substantially, with declines shown along the coastlines of western Britain and increases shown along the east. It has since been implied that an eastward shift in the distribution of these species, towards their breeding areas, has resulted from warmer winters. Furthermore, it is expected that this range shift will continue in an increasingly warming climate. Thus, it is likely that Ireland, situated on the edge of the migration routes of several wader populations, may experience large-scale declines. Already, declines in several species are apparent in Ireland since the mid-1990s, particularly Grey Plover, Lapwing, Knot and Dunlin. It has also been predicted that global warming will impact on waterbirds reliant on non-estuarine coast in a number of ways, chiefly by reducing available habitat (as sea levels rise) and increased competition with other species which may be shifting north.

Therefore, it is quite important that we continue to monitor our non-estuarine waterbirds on a regular basis, and Ireland will be contributing towards the next international survey due to take place in December and January of this coming winter (2006/07). We will shortly be selecting stretches of coastline on a county by county basis. These will be based on the 700 sections which were defined for the 1997/98 survey, the majority of which are between 2 and 4 kilometres in length. As in the previous survey, we aim to cover a representative portion of the coastline of each county. We also intend on improving coverage in counties Donegal and Mayo, both which were relatively poorly covered during the last survey.

However, we need your help! The 1997/98 survey was only made possible thanks to the significant coverage undertaken by volunteers and professional conservation staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We are hoping to receive similar input this coming winter, and will be making contact with Regional Organisers in due course.

Olivia Crowe & Helen Boland
I-WeBS Office

Light-bellied Brent Goose monitoring, 2005 and 2006 seasons

Multiple surveys of the population were carried out in 2005/2006. To investigate the importance of individual spring-staging sites in western Iceland, aerial and ground surveys were carried out in May of 2005 and 2006. Between 22,000 and 30,000 Light-bellied Brent were recorded during these surveys, with the largest numbers in Faxaflói (average 14,510) and slightly smaller numbers in the northern bay of Breidafjörður (average 11,684).

Autumn and mid-winter counts were also carried out in mid-October and mid-January respectively. Iceland was surveyed in mid-October and data was received from both Jersey and France in January.



'Douglas', caught in Tralee Bay on 3rd April 2006' (Kendrew Colhoun).

A co-ordinated international census was carried out in October 2005, during which 31,400 birds were recorded at sites in N. Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Iceland. Co-ordinated counts of 21,885 (Strangford Lough), 3,641 (Lough Foyle), 2,023 (Tralee Bay and Castlemaine Harbour) and western Iceland (1,496) were made on 13th/14th October. The remaining 2,397 were recorded at 15 sites around the Irish coast (Table 1).

Productivity was estimated at 12.9% based on an aged sample of 21,526 birds.

A mid-winter count produced a total of 10,998 birds, following coverage of 33 sites in Ireland and several in France and Jersey.

The totals in excess of 30,000 birds recorded in October 2005 and May 2006 confirm beyond any

doubt that the population size has continued to increase and is currently in excess of 30,000 birds. Further refinement of survey methodologies including use of aerial photography and multiple autumn censuses will aid development of robust census techniques to continue to monitor this population in coming years.

Thanks to all who participated in this important survey. Please get in touch if you wish to participate in counts in your area.

Contact Kendrew Colhoun on i.webs@virgin.net or kendrew.colhoun@wwt.org.uk).

Kendrew Colhoun, Gudmundur A Gudmundsson & Kerry Mackie



'Douglas', the same bird, pictured again one month later in south west Iceland. Douglas is currently (end July 2006) on Ellesmere Island in Arctic Canada! (Kendrew Colhoun).

Table 1. Provisional results of the 2005/06 International Light-bellied Brent Goose Census: October 2005. Counts in square brackets are estimates based on counts from these sites at this time in previous/subsequent years and are not used in the calculation of the overall total.

Site	Date	Count	% Juvs	Comments
West Iceland	13/10	1,496	-	None aged (mostly aerial survey)
Lough Foyle	14/10	3,641	12.8%	Aged sample (07/10): 1,849
Larne Lough	-	-	-	
Belfast Lough	15/10	6	-	
Strangford Lough	13/10	21,885	11.1%	Aged sample (13/10): 16,390; Count on 20/10 - 23,438
Dundrum Bay	13/10	173	47.4%	
Killough Harbour	13/10	0	-	
Outer Ards	-	-	-	
Carlingford Lough	15/10	273	65.5%	Aged sample: 145 (09/10)
Dundalk Bay	16/10	149	43.8%	Aged sample: 32
Louth/Meath coast	16-17/10	141	56.7%	3 sites in addition to Dundalk Bay; Aged sample: 127
Dublin Bay	16/10	836	-	
Rogerstown Estuary	15/10	222	71.8%	Other Dublin site covered - nil return: Seagrangne
Baldoyle Bay	15/10	42	47.8%	Aged sample: 23
Broadmeadow (Malahide) Estuary	16/10	3	100.0%	Aged sample: 3
North Wicklow Marshes	-	-	-	
Dungarvan Harbour	14/10	167	-	
Tramore Backstrand	16/10	278	-	Blackwater Estuary - nil
Co. Cork	14-16/10	4	-	Cork Harbour, Ballycotton - nil. Positive count refers to Ballymacoda
Castlemaine Harbour	16/10	778	25.0%	Aged sample: 100
Tralee Bay	16/10	1,245	23.9%	Aged sample: 443 (15/10); nil return from Dingle peninsula
Shannon & Fergus Estuary	17/10	0	-	
Inner Galway Bay	14/10	0	-	
Blacksod Bay	16/10	7	28.6%	Aged sample: 7
Killala Bay	14/10	63	-	
Sligo Bays	-	[200]	-	Incomplete
Co. Donegal	15-16/10	33	100%	Aged sample: 2; 2 sites surveyed
TOTAL		31,442	12.9%	Aged sample: 21,526 (68%)

Light-bellied Brent Goose satellite-tracking 2005 and 2006 seasons

Between spring 2005 and spring 2006 we satellite-tracked a total of 23 Brent Geese along the Canadian – Irish flyway. Birds were tracked in a number of directions - from Ireland north in spring (4 in 2005 and 4 in 2006), from Iceland to Arctic Canada (6 in 2005 and 6 in 2006) and from Arctic Canada south (3 in 2005).

Supported by a grant from the Heritage Council, four transmitters were fitted to birds from a catch taken by Alyn Walsh at the North Slob, Wexford. These four birds departed in southerly tailwinds in mid-April, most stopping further north in Ireland or on the western coast of Scotland en route to Iceland. Two of the four individuals were observed during our spring work in western Iceland and three were observed over the winter in Ireland, having successfully made the round-trip to the breeding grounds in High Arctic Canada. We think that one of the birds was shot on spring migration in western Greenland, and

we have since recovered the transmitter from one of the others in an Icelandic catch this May.

Six further birds were tracked from Iceland north in May 2005 and their migration featured on BBC NI Supergoose documentaries. All six successfully made the journey to the Canadian breeding grounds and three were subsequently observed in Ireland last winter. We know that at least one of these birds "Espie" was shot in western Greenland during autumn migration.

As part of an associated project with the Canadian Wildlife Service, 20 satellite tags were implanted in Western High Arctic Brent on Melville Island (www.washingtonbrant.org), and 3 Eastern High Arctic ("Irish") Brent on Bathurst Island, Nunavut. The southward migration to Ireland was especially interesting confirming, for the first time, that Iceland is not used for autumn staging by all birds, and suggesting that passage through

western Scotland may be more intensive than previously thought. At the time of writing, individuals from both populations had successfully returned to the breeding grounds having spent the winter, respectively in Washington State and Ireland!

In 2006 we embarked on another project, aimed at increasing our sample size of birds still further for studying the spring and autumn migration. This is tracking the migration of 10 geese from Ireland (4 in April) or Iceland (6 in May) to the Canadian Arctic and back. Their movements featured on BBC Springwatch and will continue to be followed in October on BBC Autumnwatch. Throughout, information on the progress of these birds is available on-line on www.wwt.org.uk/supergoose and www.bbc.co.uk/nature/animals/birds/supergoose/. Currently six of these individuals are in the breeding grounds, spread out between Baffin, Devon, Ellesmere, Amund Ringnes and Bathurst Islands. Two further geese are in Greenland, one missing early in the project and one remains in Iceland.

Having tracked this migration over several years and in a number of directions detailed analysis of the results is underway.

Kendrew Colhoun, Gudmundur A Gudmundsson, Sean Boyd & Alyn Walsh

Irish Brent Goose Research Group Ringing & Resightings Report 2005/2006

Ringing

The 2005/2006 winter again saw exceptional success on the development of our ringing programme. The overall number (including retraps) of Light-bellied Brent Geese caught since the current project commenced in 2001 is now nearing 1,500, which represents a healthy c. 4% of the flyway population.

The season got off to a great start in August 2005, with a helicopter-driven catch of 34 moulting adult and (flightless) juvenile birds on Bathurst Island, Nunavut, led by Sean Boyd from the Canadian Wildlife Service - this was the first dedicated capture of birds from this population on the breeding grounds for nearly two decades. Over the winter, a further 383 geese were caught in Ireland, under operations led by Robin Ward (WWT) on 15 different occasions at various sites around Strangford Lough (205 caught), Dundrum Bay (67), Dungarvan Harbour (44), Carlingford Lough (14), Boyne Estuary (1) and Tralee Bay (52). As well as being a new record, it represents a much greater spread of our sampling sites around Ireland, which should lead to greatly enhanced knowledge of the birds' movements. Finally, in May 2006 a team again travelled to the

staging grounds in Iceland to assist in catches led by Gudmundur Gudmundsson from the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, and Alyn Walsh (NPWS). A total of 191 birds were cannon-netted there, resulting in a yearly total of 511 new birds (i.e. excluding retraps and metal-only) ringed with readable Darvics throughout the flyway.

Resightings

My worst fears from last year were realised when I discovered I had to give up the night job (as well as the daytime one) to keep track of all the records which flowed in – many thanks (yes, I can say that now that the pain has receded!!) to all 118 of you who submitted (at the time of going to

press) 8,485 records of 957 individual birds. Figure 1 shows the distribution of records from around Ireland, from which the greatly enhanced coverage, both from the distribution and constant-effort aspects, can be seen. A further c. 600 observations were made in Iceland at a variety of the main spring staging sites on the west coast.

The increase in the ringed population has also drawn records away from Ireland and Iceland. 'CIWW', ringed in October at Strangford Lough, was recorded passing through Normandy on its way down to the Isle of Oleron on the southwest coast of France. 'XXYY' passed through Strangford Lough, and then was seen on the Dee



Release of geese after catch at Dungarvan (Graham McElwaine).

Estuary before ending up at Langstone Harbour in Hampshire. Other birds read in Great Britain were at Foryd Bay, Gwynedd, Loch Ryan, Morecambe Bay and on North Uist in the Outer Hebrides, and there were the usual couple of records of ringed birds ending up 'in the pot' in West Greenland. Perhaps the most interesting resightings history was of 'LCLY', ringed in Iceland in May 2005, which came back for the summer to the Humber Estuary in the UK instead of heading for Canada, and which has been recorded in Denmark this spring! It is particularly of note that one of the East Atlantic population of *hrota*, which has taken to visiting Ireland, has gone the whole hog this year and been recorded from Iceland.

As the proportion of marked birds increases so too does the likelihood of your local site having a marked bird or two. Every observation is important to us as, for example, they provide valuable information on the ways that sites are utilised within- and between-years, survival rates, linkages between wintering, staging and breeding areas and a host of other questions.

Please send any records of ringed Brent to me – details below, and I would also be pleased to issue our standard Recording Sheet on request. Detailed feedback and acknowledgement is given for all records. Many thanks go to all who participated last year. I hope we can rely on your support again next winter.

The catching and resightings programme requires a huge amount of input from a variety of individuals and organisations. Thanks to all. The programme is supported by Environment & Heritage Service, National Parks & Wildlife Service and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, with additional key funding and support for aspects of the work undertaken in 2005/2006 from the Canadian Wildlife Service, Icelandic Institute of Natural History and The Heritage Council.

Graham McElwaine, Ring Resightings Co-ordinator, IBGRG, 100, Strangford Road, Downpatrick, Co. Down, N. Ireland BT30 7JD Ph: (028) 44612915 e-mail: graham.mcelwaine@virgin.net

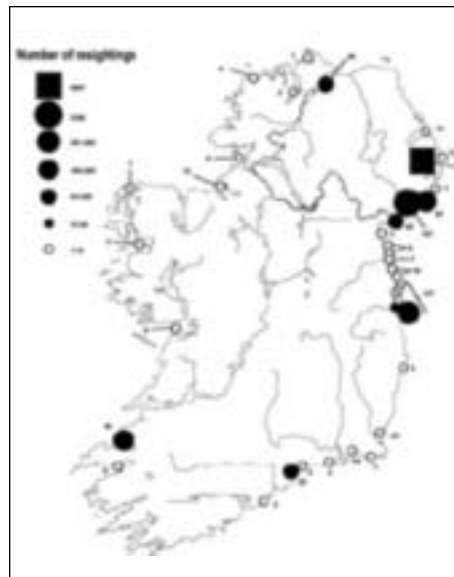


Figure 1. Resightings map: Shapes refer to number of resightings including multiple observations of the same birds; numbers refer to the number of different individuals observed.

Is the grass really greener? An update from the Black-tailed Godwit project

When exploring the coast of County Cork, it becomes obvious why we have chosen Ireland as our study area. We needed somewhere with lots of estuaries, lots of mud, lots of grassland... and lots of godwits!

The complex mosaic of estuarine areas and wet grassland is unique to Ireland, providing an ideal winter habitat for the Icelandic Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica*. Godwits face a choice in this unusual mix of habitats. Where is the most profitable place to feed: estuarine mudflats or freshwater grassland? For migratory birds the non-breeding season is fundamentally about survival, but they also have to build up sufficient reserves to fuel the return flight to the breeding grounds, with enough energy to breed successfully. If mudflats and grasslands differ in profitability, the choice that godwits make could influence both their survival and breeding success.

We have been studying the migration and habitat use of Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits in great detail for several years. Thanks to a network of birdwatchers throughout Europe, we are building up a huge database of reports of colour-marked godwits, which allows us to track their annual

movements, survival and breeding success. These data have shown that breeding success in Iceland is related to winter habitat type, in particular the use of saline and freshwater habitats, which vary in different parts of the winter range. As birds wintering in Ireland have both mudflats and freshwater sites available to them, it is an ideal place to work out exactly how winter habitat can influence breeding success in sites thousands of kilometres away.

How do Black-tailed Godwits make this habitat choice? We know that godwits do use both habitats, but what controls movement between them? To what extent do they use grassland? How does the changing tide, rainfall, and temperature affect habitat choice? My job in Cork is to address these questions. Through observations of feeding behaviour, habitat use and by tracking movements of colour-marked individuals, I will unravel some of the costs and benefits of feeding on mud or on grass. In England, godwits shift to grassland-feeding towards the end of the winter when mudflats have been depleted of food, which suggests that mudflats may be more profitable. However, these fields are usually only available in late winter when there has been enough rain to soften the ground. Ireland's wetter climate may allow grassland feeding throughout the winter.

I want to find out when and to what extent the Irish wintering godwits feed on grasslands. From I-WeBS counts we have good data on numbers of Black-tailed Godwits using estuaries, but grassland sites are more easily overlooked. So, if you know of sites that the godwits use I'd love to hear from you! When is the grassland used? By how many godwits? And for how long? (See

details below). Anyone who can help us out with sightings of flocks or colour-ring sightings will receive feedback of my research and details of ringing and resighting records. Highlighting how important wet grasslands are to migratory birds like the Black-tailed Godwit will help to conserve this threatened habitat.



Becca Haychow at work in Cork

Grassland Black-tailed Godwit flocks, please record:

- 1) location: (Grid reference if possible)
- 2) brief description of site
- 3) date
- 4) time of day
- 5) number of birds in flock
and, if possible,
- 6) approximate % of flock showing any summer plumage
- 7) proportion of juveniles in flocks

We are really grateful for all the colour-marked sightings we receive but, as ever, we'd love to receive more. Black-tailed godwits are marked with FOUR separate rings of varying colours, some of which may have a large letter marked on them and some of which may be flags. If you see any of these birds, please record:

- 1) the positions of all colour-rings (which can be above or below the 'knee')
- 2) date
- 3) location (with a grid reference if possible)
and, if possible:
- 4) time of day
- 5) habitat type the bird is using
- 6) approximate extent (%) of summer plumage on the bird
- 7) flock size
- 8) proportion of juveniles in the flock

Please send all flock details and sightings to:
Becca Hayhow, School of Biological Sciences,
University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ, UK
Email: (b.hayhow@uea.ac.uk):

Becca Hayhow



Black-tailed Godwit (Clive Timmons).

The 'Next Atlas' in Ireland – implications for winter monitoring

The majority of I-WeBS counters should know that BirdWatch Ireland are about to embark on a 'new' bird atlas project covering the whole of Ireland and Britain in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Scottish Ornithologist's Club (SOC). This will be the third such atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland, and, of more concern to I-WeBS, the second atlas of wintering birds. For those with their thinking caps on it should be dawning on you that we intend to map the distribution of both wintering and breeding birds in the same 4 year period commencing in November 2007 i.e. the winter after the coming I-WeBS season.

So, the purpose of this short article is to keep you briefed on how the 'Next Atlas' (as I will call it) methodology is taking shape. The basic units of all previous atlases have been 10x10 km squares – around 800 in the Republic of Ireland. The broad aim has been to map the range of all species i.e. presence/absence in 10 km squares, assess breeding status (possible, probable and confirmed), and during the second ('New') breeding atlas and original winter atlas, some semi-quantitative assessments of species abundance were made ('counts' to you and me!). The 'Next Atlas' intends to improve on this and be much more rigorously quantitative in that all species will be counted in a suitable sample of 'sites' within the 10 km square. These sites will be tetrads, 2x2 km squares, of which there are 25 in each 10 km square.

At the moment, the winter component of the Next Atlas, commencing winter 2007, will be organised as follows: the winter season, November – February inclusive, will be split into early (Nov-Dec) and late (Jan-Feb) periods, and those taking part will be asked to visit a representative number of tetrads (possibly 8, in common with the breeding atlas component) for a fixed period of time, likely to be about 2 hours. All birds will be counted, with totals and lists given for each 10-15 minute period within the two hours. This will give an indication of how easy, or hard, a species is to find in the tetrad. Ideally, tetrads will be covered twice, in both the early and late winter periods. This systematic coverage will be supplemented by casual records of interesting species seen elsewhere in the 10 km square or before or after the 'official' 2 hour recording period in the selected tetrad.

A lot of decisions still have to be made by the 'Atlas Working Group', which steers the project, on how 'Next Atlas' fieldwork will run alongside other annual ongoing BWI/BTO surveys. At the time of writing I do not know the answer, though hopefully it will be resolved at an Atlas Working Group session in mid-September. We are hoping that many of you will want to get involved in the Atlas fieldwork, and for those that do, there would seem little point in counting waterbirds for I-WeBS one weekend and returning the next

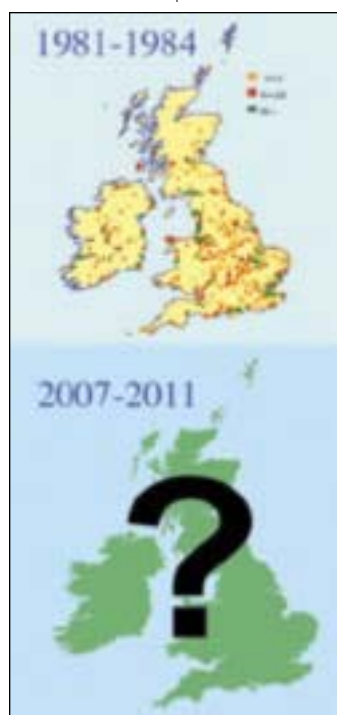
day/weekend to do the same for the winter atlas. What would seem to make sense is that having made the effort to get out to your site for the former, you could use the rest of the day to cover an adjacent tetrad, or the non-wetland bit of the

tetrad in which your I-WeBS site lies. Coastal sites, saltmarshes and the environs of estuaries can support interesting aggregations of passerines including Twite and Snow Bunting. In this way, it may be possible to contribute to both schemes simultaneously. In the least, a special effort to count all waterbird species during your I-WeBS counts including those that are currently considered optional, i.e. include the gulls and terns if you do not already do so(!), would greatly assist with both the Atlas and I-WeBS. Much clearer guidelines will be available by the time you receive your I-WeBS Newsletter next summer but in the meantime please watch for articles in Wings in the coming months and if possible you could attend one of the winter atlasing workshops that are to be held around the country this

winter (2006-07) in preparation for next year. An Atlas National Organiser will be in place within the next few months. Until then, any enquiries can be directed to snewton@birdwatchireland.ie

Stephen Newton

BWI representative on the Atlas Working Group



Pintail distribution, Winter Atlas 1981-1984, (1986 BTO).
How will things have changed in next Winter Atlas, 2007-2011?

Avian Flu - please be vigilant this winter

The H5N1 Avian Influenza virus was first detected in China in 1996, and has since been detected in poultry and wild birds in a number of countries across Eurasia and in Africa. There has been a substantial increase in the spatial distribution of the infection since last winter, when the virus was first detected in Europe. A total of 19 European countries have been infected since January 2006.

In April this year, the virus was detected in a Whooper Swan in eastern Scotland. However, most of the evidence suggests that this bird had been infected elsewhere, before it washed onto the Scottish coast. To date, Ireland and Britain have remained free of a H5N1 outbreak.

Wild waterbirds have been implicated in the spread of H5N1. While some waterbird species,

particularly Mallard, are capable of carrying H5N1 without exhibiting any symptoms (asymptomatic), it is clear that many others do become infected and are taken by the virus. However, a number of other causes for the spread of H5N1 cannot be ruled out, particularly in relation to trade in poultry and poultry products.

What can you do?

It is promising that the spread of H5N1 appears to have lessened since the early spring. Additionally, we now know that with stringent measures in place, this virus can be contained once detected. However, as wild birds are now known to be involved in the spread of AI, we must be vigilant when the migration of waterbirds begins again this autumn. However, please note that birds die from many other reasons. Last winter, hundreds

of dead waterbirds were collected in Ireland and all tested negative for H5N1.

If you find any dead waterbirds or an unusual number of wild bird deaths in one locality, please contact the Department of Agriculture and Food hotline number 1890 252 283 now operating on a 24 hour/7 day week basis (or please leave your name and phone number on the answering machine – they will get back to you).

See www.agriculture.gov.ie for further details.

Olivia Crowe

Purple Sandpipers from Iceland – please search for colour-ringed birds

The Highland Ringing Group (Scotland) made two trips to Iceland in May 2003 and 2005, collaborating with Gunnar _or Hallgrímsson on a study of migrating Purple Sandpipers. The study aimed to find out more about the migration of long-billed Purple Sandpipers (one of the wintering populations in Britain and Ireland), which probably migrate to breed in Canada after stopping over in Iceland. One of the aims of the trips was to individually colour-ring the birds in Iceland on passage, so that the extent of the winter grounds could be established. Over the two springs 300+ birds were colour-ringed in Iceland. The map below shows where these birds have been seen to date. There is clearly a big gap in the winter range in Ireland.

The ringing team are keen to get records from the next few 'winters' and have asked us to encourage bird-watchers interested in waders to check Purple Sandpiper flocks they encounter during the course of I-WeBS core counts or NEWS surveys this winter (see page 3 of newsletter).



Localities in northwest Europe where colour-ringed Purple Sandpipers, marked in Iceland in May 2003 and 2005, have been seen. We need to know more about Ireland.

'Negative' information is useful too – as it gives an indication of the limits of the winter range. Thus, if you see a flock of 'Purps' please count them and, with bins or scope, see how many pairs of legs you can see and report the number of colour-ringed and unringed individuals to me at HQ (contact details below). The birds have combinations of 5 colour-rings (red, green, blue, orange, white etc. and a metal ring). The colours are bright so you will notice them! Please remember to record on which leg (left/right) and whether the colour was above or below the 'knee'. At the end of the season I will collate this information and forward it on to Ron Summers in Inverness, the project co-ordinator. Thanks.

Steve Newton

Forward information to:
snewton@birdwatchireland.ie
or
hboland@birdwatchireland.ie



The Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) is the monitoring scheme for non-breeding waterbirds in the Republic of Ireland which aims to be the primary tool for monitoring their populations and the wetland habitats on which they depend. The data generated are used to assess the sizes of non-breeding waterbird populations, identify trends in their numbers and distribution, and assess the importance of individual sites for them. I-WeBS is a joint project of BirdWatch Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

Many thanks for all your help

Many thanks for all your help. The success of the scheme is largely due to the input that you give as counters. We hope you enjoy the 13th season of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey and we look forward to working with you again this season.

General enquiries about I-WeBS should be made to:

The I-WeBS Office, P.O. Box 12, Greystones, Co. Wicklow.

Email: hboland@birdwatchireland.ie