I-WeBS News I-WeBS

The Newsletter of the Irish Wetland Bird Survey

Issue 23 August 2019



A year of many milestones

We are happy to be starting off the 26th season of I-WeBS having hit a few big milestones. Not only have our dedicated participants now collected a whopping 25 years of data but we have also been able to analyse this database for an updated view of how our waterbirds are faring (read about the two recent publications on page 4). Although the results are largely grim, last winter we were glad of the opportunity to share the findings, and to meet some of you, on our $25^{\rm th}$ anniversary 'road-show' at BirdWatch Ireland branches around the country.

The recent launch of the long-term service award pin badges is also very exciting as it allows us to recognise the dedication of those who take part in I-WeBS year in, vear out.

If you are looking for something a little bit different this winter, we have just the thing for you: the International Swan Census has come around again and we will be recruiting extra help to census swans in January (see page 2). We will also need your Pink-foot and Greylag records throughout the winter (please record both feral and Icelandic Greylags). The annual Icelandic Greylag Goose Census will still be taking place in November, as per usual (see page 3).

Inside this issue of *I-WeBS News* you can also read about the ins and outs of surveying the Sligo Bay Complex; a profile of Pochard; and how waterbirds are responding to climate change. As in previous issues, you will find count dates for the coming season on the back page along with details of upcoming workshops and a couple of other snippets that may interest you.

Thank you for your contribution to I-WeBS. We hope you enjoy the newsletter and the season ahead!

Contents

- 2 International Swan Census 2020
- 3 Request for goose records
- 4 Wintering waterbird trends
- 5 Site Focus: Sligo Bay Complex
- 6 Species Profile: Pochard
- 7 Climate-driven distributional changes
- 8 I-WeBS dates and information

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@BirdsCount_ie

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Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht BirdWatchIreland



International Swan Census 2020

Extra help is needed to track progress of Whooper and Bewick's Swans.

By Brian Burke (I-WeBS Office)

he eighth census of Whooper and Bewick's Swans in Ireland will take place on the weekend of January 11-12th, 2020. As in previous years, we're appealing for help to count the myriad of additional areas away from the regular I-WeBS wetland sites where our migratory swans feed during the day. The census provides us with a really valuable snapshot of how the populations of both species are doing, how numbers and distribution have changed and what habitats the swans are relying on when they're here. The International Swan Census occurs at four- or five-yearly intervals and is fully coordinated throughout the species' flyways (Britain, Iceland and continental Europe).

The swan censuses, to date, have documented the very contrasting fortunes of our wintering Whooper and Bewick's Swan populations. At the turn of the last century, Ussher and Warren described Bewick's Swans as "the swan which visits Ireland in the greatest numbers," whereas Whooper Swans were a "rare and irregular visitor to all the provinces." Fast-forward to the mid-1980s and we had almost 8,000 Whoopers and just over 2,000 Bewick's Swans, and numbers of the two species have continued to diverge further from there.

By 1990 we only had 1,500 Bewick's Swans, and their numbers continued to fall through each five-yearly census, leaving us with only 21 birds in January 2015. Numbers elsewhere in their range were increasing until 1995, indicating that Bewick's Swans had simply stopped migrating as far as Ireland. Since then, the flyway population (NW Europe, wintering) has declined, which has accelerated their disappearance from Ireland.

Contrast that with our Whooper Swan population, which numbered 7,000-8,500 birds in the 1980s and 1990s and has only increased from there, to 11,852 individuals recorded in the 2015 census. The Icelandicbreeding population as a whole has undergone a similar increase, with numbers up across much of their wintering range as a result.

The important information gathered from the swan census isn't just limited to changes in total numbers. It gives us a detailed insight into their distribution, breeding success and habitat preferences too. Based on the previous census, as well as regular I-WeBS counts, five sites around Ireland supported numbers of international importance in recent years, with an additional seven sites hosting numbers of all-Ireland (national) importance.

Almost 40% of Whoopers were recorded on improved pasture during the 2015 census, highlighting the importance of agricultural grassland habitats. Irish Whooper flocks had the highest brood sizes and % young in 2015 too, compared to other countries, helping shed light on breeding success and drivers of population growth.

We shouldn't forget the international element of the census too. Although total numbers here have increased, the percentage of the Icelandic Whooper Swan population that winters in Ireland has decreased over the years (to 35% in 2015), with England hosting an increasing proportion. The proportion of Irish birds utilising pasture was much higher (69%) than in Britain (13%) or Iceland (0%), which will influence conservation and protection measures in different parts of their range.

The International Swan Census is carried out in collaboration with the Irish Whooper **Swan Study Group** (via Graham McElwaine) in Northern Ireland, the Icelandic Institute of Natural History in Iceland (via Ólafur Einarsson) and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (via Kane Brides) in Britain, who coordinate the overall census. Here in Ireland the census comes under the umbrella of I-WeBS and is coordinated by the I-WeBS office. It's a hugely important survey to monitor one of our best-protected and most-loved wintering waterbirds and gives counters an excuse to investigate parts of their locality that they mightn't have previously considered.

⇒ As part of the census we need help counting 'swan sites' not normally counted or assigned as part of I-WeBS in other years. If you're available to count Whooper Swans in your normal I-WeBS sites on the weekend of January 11-12th, 2020, or if you can take on a few extra swan sites in your area, please let **Brian Burke** know at **iwebs@birdwatchireland.ie.**

To submit swan census records, visit https://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/getinvolved/isc-2020 or go to bit.ly/swans2020.









Greylag Goose. Brian Burke



Request for Greylag Goose and Pink-footed Goose records

Records of Pink-footed Geese and Greylag Geese help us better understand their status in Ireland.

By Brian Burke (I-WeBS Office)

ver 500,000 **Pink-footed Geese** winter in Britain, as well as almost 90,000 **Greylag Geese**. Numbers in Ireland are only a fraction of that – but what fraction? The I-WeBS Office is appealing for more 'roving' records of Pink-footed Geese and of both feral and Icelandic Greylag Geese so that we can better understand their numbers and distribution in Ireland each winter.

November is the most important month for records, as this is when the **Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust** (WWT) coordinates a census in Britain, but records from other months will be useful for getting to grips with what sites they use, and when.

Two Greylag populations

Both feral/naturalised and Icelandic-migrant populations of Greylag Geese spend the winter in Ireland, as in Britain. Unfortunately, there's no way to differentiate between them in the field, and they are known to mix at some sites (notably the Lough Swilly/Foyle area). The feral/naturalised Greylag Geese breeding here in the summer can undertake seasonal movements of varying distances in the winter months, further hampering any attempt at separating the two populations.

Recent analyses have indicated that the range of our feral/naturalised population has possibly decreased, though numbers have definitely increased, so we're particularly eager to receive records of Greylag Geese in July and August to get an idea of breeding locations, numbers and, if possible, productivity.

The more we know about our summering/breeding population, the more confident we can be with counts and monitoring of our Icelandic-breeding Greylags. These tend to mostly stick to traditional sites, including Lough Swilly/Foyle, Dundalk Bay, Skerries and Rogerstown in north Dublin, Poulaphouca and the coastal wetlands in Wicklow, as well as the River Suir in Kilkenny and Waterford. We have a core group of dedicated counters who monitor these sites annually. However, we know much less about our wintering Pink-footed Geese.

Pink-foot mysteries

Numbers of Pink-footed Geese in Britain have increased considerably over the last six year, and amounted to over 500,000 in 2015 and 2017. Numbers have also increased in Ireland – almost doubling, in fact. This is less impressive when you realise that it means a jump to almost 200 birds, but who knows what heights their numbers might reach in the coming years! With that in mind, we would welcome any additional one-off counts of Pink-footed Geese to help improve our knowledge of their numbers in Ireland, where they winter, and what sites they spend some time at on migration.

Like all of our migratory goose and swan species, the fact that Pink-foots and Greylags feed on agricultural grasslands away from wetland sites means they're often unrecorded or at least under-recorded at I-WeBS sites. They're often a point of focus for birdwatchers, however, whether it's someone looking for something rare or unusual amongst flocks, reading collars or leg-rings, or just taking the time to appreciate the size and noise of a flock! So if you come across any Pink-foots or Greylags on your travels this winter, please do make a note and let Brian know at **iwebs@birdwatchireland.ie** or via **www.surveymonkey.com/r/IrishGooseSurvey**).

News in brief

Greenland White-fronted Goose numbers dip

National figures for the 2018/19 season are currently being compiled, but numbers in Wexford were down slightly for the spring census at 7,346 birds (7,637 in March 2018), according to **Alyn Walsh** of the **National Parks and Wildlife Service** (NPWS). The NPWS and the **Greenland White-fronted Goose Study Group** continue to catch and mark birds as part of their research, so counters are asked to keep an eye out for neck-collared birds amongst the Irish flocks and to report them to **Alyn Walsh** at **alyn.walsh@chg.gov.ie** and to **Tony Fox** at **tfo@dmu.dk.** All sightings are appreciated!

Light-bellied Brent Geese

The **Dublin Bay Birds Project** (funded by **Dublin Port Company)** recorded a total of 4,316 Light-bellied Brent Geese in Dublin Bay on February 7th 2019 during the annual census for this species. The census is carried out by a team of observers at dawn so that the total number of birds roosting in the bay can be counted before any move at first light to inland grassland areas.

The national census is coordinated by the **Irish Brent Goose Research Study Group** each autumn. Results from the 2018/19 census are still being compiled.

A high proportion of the Light-bellied Brent Goose population is colour-ringed, and resightings feed into ongoing research by the **IBGRSG** and **University of Exeter**, so please do make note of the colour and letter of rings and what leg they're on and send the details to:

grahammcelwaine@btinternet.com.

Colour-marked birds

Several other goose populations have been colour-marked both here and abroad, so we urge counters to keep an eye out and report any rings or collars they come across. Here are details of just two of these schemes:

Greylag Geese

Orange collar with black inscription. Three letters with a line separating the first and second letters (e.g., B|SH). Primary catch sites were at Inch/Lough Swilly and near Blessington Lakes in Wicklow. Report to the **Irish Greylag Goose Study Group** at **irishgreylags@gmail.com**.

Barnacle Geese

White leg rings. Black inscription made up of three digits. Ringed on Inishkea Islands (Mayo), Lissadell (Sligo) and Malin and Trawbreaga (Donegal). Also ringed annually in Scotland and Iceland (late summer). Report sightings to **steve.percival@ecologyconsult.co.uk.**

Also, read about two new **gull-ringing schemes** on the back page.

It's all about the numbers

Two new publications outline the numbers and trends in our wintering waterbird populations.

By Lesley J Lewis (I-WeBS Office)





Figures 1a & 1b. Trends in wintering numbers of Ringed Plover (top) and Wigeon (above) over the period 1994/1995-2015/2016, produced using I-WeBS data.

ount data collected through I-WeBS enable regular assessment of the numbers and trends of our wintering waterbirds - important tools in the conservation of waterbirds, as well as their wetland habitats. As waterbirds can be long-lived, monitoring schemes such as I-WeBS are vital for tracking long-term trends in abundance and distribution. However, waterbirds can also respond quickly to changes in their environment, and short-term trends in numbers can be important in identifying changes in their wetland habitats, highlighting the important role of waterbirds as 'indicator' species for Ireland's environment.

This year, two important new publications have resulted from the analysis of I-WeBS data, and this article explains the differences between them and how each are important in different ways.

Earlier in the year we published *Estimates* of waterbird numbers wintering in Ireland, 2011/12-2015/16 in BirdWatch Ireland's peer-reviewed scientific journal Irish Birds (No 41). This provides updated waterbird population estimates and 1% thresholds for 44 waterbird species occurring here. Essentially, this tells us how many of each regularly-occurring waterbird species have been present at Irish wetlands in recent years. Analyses primarily utilised I-WeBS data, although species-specific data (e.g., International Swan Census), NEWS (Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey) and WeBS (Northern Ireland) were also used, as appropriate. Estimates for each species were calculated using data from all sites. A fiveyear mean approach was used whereby, for each of the five seasons (2011/12 to 2015/16), the month with the highest count for each species was selected to reflect maximum bird numbers.

The results were then compared with previous estimates to see how waterbird numbers had changed over time. This showed that the number of our wintering waterbirds had declined by 15% over the past five years, while, more alarmingly, since the mid-1990s, total numbers have declined by almost 500,000 (40%).

Most recently, the Irish Wetland Bird Survey: Waterbird Status and Distribution 2009/10-2015/16 was published in the NPWS Irish Wildlife Manuals series (No 106).

This document provides information on waterbird numbers (based on the above population estimates) in addition to distribution maps and tables showing sites supporting numbers of international and national importance for each species.

A range of species trends are also given. These species trends, produced using a sequence of modelling methods, used I-WeBS data from the period 1994/95 to 2015/16 inclusive, and only included data from sites with good coverage, the underlying assumption being that the pattern of change in numbers across these sites was representative of the pattern of change in numbers at national level.

Unlike the population estimates (based on peak monthly counts), trend analyses sum counts across months, and therefore take in how numbers may have changed over the course of a season, too. The resulting trend estimates are based on annual indices, where an index number is a measure of population size in one year expressed relative to a base year (i.e., 1994/95, the start of the I-WeBS dataset).

Indices also enable differences (percentage change) between different I-WeBS seasons to be assessed (e.g., the 5-, 12- and 22-year seasons assessed in *Irish Wildlife Manuals* No 106.

To easily visualise trends, annual indices are plotted as a graph. So, for example, while a species' population size may have been stable over the long-term, this will highlight where short-term fluctuations in numbers have occurred (illustrated through Figure 1a and 1b, above).

Collectively, the two publications provide a comprehensive account of the current status of wintering waterbird species and their key sites in Ireland. Both highlight significant declines for many of our wintering waterbirds. Importantly, they will inform national and local decision-making processes relating to the sustainable use of our wetlands. We hope that you find them both interesting and informative.

Three bays, one mammoth effort

Counting the Sligo Bay Complex is a big but rewarding task.

By Trevor Hunter (I-WeBS volunteer)

ramed between iconic Benbulben and the Ox Mountains, the Sligo Bay Complex consists of three sheltered estuaries with Special Area of Conservation status, covering an area of some 5,703 hectares.

For over twenty years a dedicated team of local birdwatchers have counted the Sligo bays every winter, come rain, hail or shine. A number of us - Don Cotton, Noel Raftery, Martin Enright and myself, Trevor Hunter have been surveying since before I-WeBS even started twenty-six years ago this September. Each bay requires at least eight counters to cover it, with typically 12,000 birds being recorded in our January counts.

Drumcliff Bay and estuary to the north is a very dynamic area. Starting at Raghly after low tide, our counting team takes a threehour shoreline walk to Lissadell. Large flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits, Knots, Ringed Plovers, Dunlins and Sanderlings feed on the exposed sandy shore. This is also a good area for Grey Plover and, as you walk towards Lissadell, Slavonian Grebes are often spotted on the water, together with sizeable flocks of Common Scoters, Eiders and Light-bellied Brent Geese. As the tide fills, the birds flush in to Lissadell and the inner estuary.

The estuary itself holds good numbers of Oystercatchers, Shelducks and Brent Geese, with small numbers of Long-tailed Ducks. Adjoining the inner estuary is Ballygilgan Nature Reserve, or 'The Goose Field,' named for its regular wintering flock of Barnacle Geese. We are often greeted by the amazing sight of 1,000+ Barnacle Geese alighting or feeding there. It also has a seasonal pond which holds good numbers of ducks and common waders.

Sligo Harbour is a Special Protection Area (SPA) and an internationally important site for Light-bellied Brent Geese, whose numbers peak at 1,000 before Christmas.

The vast area of Cummeen Strand usually lies exposed for most of the tidal cycle. This allows us to make a quick dash over the



causeway to survey Coney Island. The island holds a dwindling flock of Golden Plovers and is a good spot for recording Ringed Plovers, Cormorants, Shags and Brent Geese.

Cummeen Strand itself is best counted on a rising tide as flocks of waders are concentrated on shrinking sandbars. Sanderling numbers are nationally important and are stable in the harbour, whereas Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot and Dunlin numbers have declined significantly over the last twenty years.

Cartron Marsh holds a good mix of waders and wildfowl and there is always the chance of something unusual such as the six Cattle Egrets that alighted for five minutes during one count, never to be seen again!

Ballysadare Bay is the wildest and most



inaccessible of the bays. There is little disturbance from recreational users and, in contrast to the other two bays, there are no active shellfish farms. The whole of the southern shore must be walked.

Manmade dykes with abandoned oyster ponds give a certain linear aspect to the coastline. This habitat supports the largest wildfowl concentration in the Sligo Bay Complex, with over 1,500 ducks, including Shovelers and Pintails. The Tanrego count unit regularly holds nationally important numbers of Greenshanks and you are almost guaranteed to see a Kingfisher. Waders are mainly found in Portavaud lagoon, Streamstown and the Inishes (Inishmore, Inishbeg and Inishcullion) mudflats, where they often attract a Peregrine and on one occasion attracted a White-tailed Eagle flying south - it caused mayhem!

Though each bay is separate, in many ways they function as one large complex. Where Brent Geese tend to be sedentary within a single bay, flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits, Knots and Dunlins have been observed moving freely between the bays.

This super-site takes a mammoth effort to survey each year, but thanks to our dedicated team of 'citizen scientists' we continue to diligently record the wintering bird populations that underpin the importance of this incredible set of sites.

Species Profile Pochard

Pochard pair courting. Andrew Kelly

Diving duck in worrying decline

By Niamh Fitzgerald (I-WeBS National Organiser)

Fact file

Name

Common Pochard Aythya ferina

Irish name Póiseard

Other names

Red-headed Poker, Red-eyed Poker, Red-headed Wigeon

Distribution in Ireland

On deep lakes, primarily across the west and north midlands. Highest numbers occur between October and November.

Key wintering sites

Lough Corrib, River Shannon (Lower), Loughs Derravaragh, Owel, Ennell and Sheelin.

Irish population

All-Ireland population estimated to be 11,150 of which 4,729 occur in the Republic of Ireland.

Migratory origins

The population that occurs in Ireland breeds across Russia and north-west and north-east Europe, and winters in north-east and north-west Europe.

Status

Large-scale declines both in Ireland and at flyway level.

egrettably, **Common Pochards** are not so 'common' anymore. In fact, they've undergone alarming declines in Ireland and Europe in recent times. Since the beginning of I-WeBS numbers have declined by 77%. Recently (see *Irish Birds* No 41) the all-Ireland 1% threshold was reduced from 380 to 110 but, despite this, only seven sites in the Republic of Ireland were identified as supporting numbers of national importance between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

On the European Red List of Birds, their status escalated from 'Least Concern' to 'Vulnerable' in 2015 on the basis of a 30-49% reduction in the breeding population over just 23 years. Similar declines were also recorded on both northern and central European wintering grounds. For this reason, Pochard is globally 'Vulnerable' on the international IUCN Red List. Other diving ducks, such as **Goldeneye** and **Tufted Duck**, which share a similar niche, have undergone similar declines.

Pochards are often seen in mixed flocks with Tufted Ducks, but the chestnut-brown head makes male Pochards stand out. Once you realise they're there, the iconic sloping forehead and softly peaked crown will help you pick out even the dull grey-brown females at a distance. The pale grey stripe visible on the hind wing when in flight means you're unlikely to mistake them.

In Ireland, Pochards are usually found residing on deep lakes, predominantly distributed across the west and north midlands. Here they maintain a diet of aquatic plants as well as chironomid larvae, aquatic insects, molluscs and small fish.

Pochards are often quite hard to track down earlier in the season, but by January or February floodwaters in the west and the midlands help to 'open up' the landscape, making them a bit easier to find.

In the Republic of Ireland, Lough Corrib is their key site. However, there has been a big reduction in their numbers there and it no longer supports concentrations of international importance, peak counts having dropped from 9,299 (2004-2008) to just 1,261 (2011-2015).

Loughs Neagh and Beg (Co Antrim) still support numbers of international significance but they too have experienced substantial declines in recent years. Although one of the most important inland sites for overwintering wildfowl in Britain and Ireland, numbers of diving ducks at Loughs Neagh and Beg have declined dramatically. In 1990/91, the site held 40,876 Pochards, but just 4,380 were recorded in 2017/18. This has been linked to the eutrophication of the two lakes; the reduction in chironomid larvae as a result is believed to have had a considerable impact on the Pochards (and other diving ducks) that winter there.

On a larger scale, the reasons for declines are not well understood and several factors are most likely at play. Research by the WWT on the sex ratios within the wintering population have revealed a male bias, with a much higher ratio of males to females. As males occupy more favourable wintering sites closer to the breeding grounds, this bias increases with latitude. Hence, females are generally exposed to higher predation, longer migration and higher levels of hunting in southern Europe. The disproportionate survival of males relative to females could be amplifying declines in Pochard abundance, limiting the population's recovery.

Pochard remains on the quarry list in 26 European countries, including Ireland. However, we don't know how many are shot here, so it's not clear to what extent this affects the population.

Another important factor is the large-scale changes in distribution across their range. As you'll read on page 7, diving ducks tend to shift their wintering range closer to the breeding grounds in response to increasing temperatures. Although the protection of their 'winter refuges' in Ireland is just one part of the picture, it highlights the importance of schemes such as I-WeBS for keeping track of these birds.



Pochards in flight. Richard T Mills



Climate driving changes in distribution

Climate-driven shifts in the distributional abundance of wintering European waterbirds and the importance of cold-weather refuges.

By Diego Pavón-Jordán (The Helsinki Lab of Ornithology, Finnish Museum of Natural History, Helsinki, Finland)

ur planet is suffering a rapid increase in global temperature. This increase, however, does not occur at the same speed in all seasons (e.g., winter temperature has increased faster than summer temperature) and it is asymmetrical across the globe. Moreover, climate change does not imply solely an increase in temperature but also an increase, *inter alia*, in the frequency of extreme weather events, such as cold spells or droughts.

Using an impressive citizen science dataset, the **International Waterbird Census** (IWC) – to which January I-WeBS counts feed into – we have investigated the association between the distributional abundance of twenty-five European waterbird species and changes in large-scale winter weather conditions (e.g., the North Atlantic Oscillation; hereafter the NAO) across Europe during the non-breeding season.

Focus species exploiting different habitats were selected: shallow-water (e.g. Wigeon, Shelduck, Grey Heron), deep-water (e.g. Pochard, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe), and farmland (e.g. Greylag Goose, Whooper Swan, Bewick's Swan).

We found that waterbird distributional abundance is linked to the NAO, especially for shallow- and deep-water species. Waterbirds responded to both year-to-year changes and long-term trends in the NAO, especially shallow- and deep-water species.

Northern and eastern regions of Europe have traditionally represented inhospitable habitat for waterbirds in winter. Due to the long-term increase in winter mildness, new ice-free wetlands have become available for wintering waterbirds in these regions. Hence, some waterbirds, such as Pochard and other diving ducks breeding in the boreal zone of Europe and Russia, have responded by progressively wintering closer to their breeding grounds, causing a longterm shift in the population centroid towards the north-east of Europe.

These responses were found to vary somewhat among the different groups; for example, deep-water species were the quickest to shift to the north-east. Shallowwater species also moved closer to the breeding grounds, though they shifted back towards the south-west in response to several consecutive harsh winters in the early 2010s. Conversely, farmland species had a more gradual reaction to fluctuations in winter temperatures.

Such important changes occurring at both edges of species' wintering ranges can create different challenges for the network of protected areas. For countries situated at the southern and western edge of Europe, shifts in waterbird distribution may cause substantial local declines at wetland sites. This is the case in Ireland, which lies on the far western edge of the wintering range. For example, based on recent Irish waterbird population estimates, the deep-water species Pochard, Goldeneye and Scaup were found to have declined by 77%, 68% and 58%, respectively since the beginning of I-WeBS.

However, despite this long-term trend, we have found that waterbirds are very responsive to year-to-year variations in weather conditions, causing large interannual fluctuations in wintering numbers. The increase in the variability of winter weather conditions forecast in most climate-change scenarios suggests that harsh winters and cold spells may be frequent in the future. During cold winters, large numbers of waterbirds are pushed towards wetlands situated at the southern and western part of their wintering range (i.e., away from breeding grounds). Thus, it is critical to create a cohesive network of protected areas throughout the flyway, maintaining 'cold-weather' refuges at traditionally important wetlands, such as those in Ireland.

In an era of evidence-based conservation. monitoring schemes such as the International Waterbird Census are of paramount importance for assessing the effectiveness of conservation interventions. The International Waterbird Census, which started in the 1960s in some countries, is the largest biodiversity monitoring scheme. Thanks to the work of thousands of volunteers and the coordination of Wetlands International in collaboration with national contributors such as I-WeBS. we can understand a bit better the dynamics of wintering waterbird abundances at both local and global scales. Such a contribution from all IWC participants is critical for effective conservation of wetland biodiversity.

Read more on the study at bit.ly/rangeshifts.

 Read more about the International Waterbird Census at www.wetlands.org.
Follow Diego Pavón-Jordán on Twitter: @DPavonJordan.



Count Dates 2019/20

	East Co Inland Co	ast & ounties	South & West Coast Counties	
	Weekend	High Tide (Sunday) Dublin ¹	Weekend	High Tide (Sunday) Cork ²
Sep	14-15 th	13:16	21-22 nd	11:27
Oct	12-13 th	12:14	19-20 th	10:08
Nov	16-17 th *	14:26	23-24 th	15:28
Dec	14-15 th	13:29	21-22 nd	14:09
Jan	11-12 th **	12:33	18-19 th	12:30
Feb	8-9 th	11:33	15-16 th	10:49
Mar	14-15 th	16:00	21-22 nd	16:42

1 Based on high-tide time predicted for the North Wall, Dublin 2 Based on high-tide time predicted for Cork Harbour

Here are the recommended dates for the 2019/20 I-WeBS count season. These dates are chosen based on tidal conditions around Ireland's coastline to allow coastal sites to be counted on a rising or high tide, and to help maximise synchronisation of counts across the country, be they inland or coastal. As always, we try to select dates that suit as many tidal states as possible so that coordination of counts can be achieved. If any dates are unsuitable for whatever reason, please select the next most appropriate date and try to co-ordinate with any nearby sites, where relevant. Please refer to your Counter Manual for how best to cover your site.

Whooper Swan

Icelandic Greylag Goose Census ****International Swan Census** Light-bellied Brent Goose Census



• Don't forget we will need your help to cover extra sites in your area for the International Swan Census in January. This is a 'complete' census - we are trying to account for every single Whooper Swan and Bewick's Swan in the country on the census weekend, so the more sites you can check the better. If you are interested, please see page 2. We'll be getting in touch later in the winter, but please make note of the census dates and spread the word to other birdwatchers who might be willing and able to lend a hand!

Workshops

an Burke

Many thanks to those who attended our EPA-funded CBS and I-WeBS workshops last spring. We had a wide spread of locations in Athlone, Donegal town and Mallow. All three sessions ran very well, with good attendance at each.

This year we will be trialling autumn/winter workshops with more of a focus on I-WeBS and winter surveys. Dates and venues

are yet to be confirmed, but these will be taking place in Waterford, Galway and Dublin. If you would like to be on the mailing list for these let us know via email.



November 16-17th 2019

January 11-12th 2020

Dates to be confirmed

Keep an eye out for ringed birds....

Two new gull-ringing projects started in Ireland this summer, and the project coordinators are appealing for I-WeBS counters to keep an eye out and report any rings they come across.

1. The three large gull species in Ireland - Great Black-backed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Herring Gull - have been ringed by BirdWatch Ireland staff as part of the MarPAMM project. Gulls were fitted with yellow rings, beginning with "B:" and followed by three numbers (e.g., B:123). The study area includes coastal counties from Sligo to Louth and rings can be reported to Kendrew Colhoun at kcolhoun@birdwatchireland.ie.

2. A separate project is hoping to learn more about **Black-headed** Gulls from Lough Ree (Counties Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath). Birds were fitted with white rings, with four digits beginning with the number "2" (e.g., 2144, as pictured). This study is a



collaboration between the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the north midlands region and local ringers, and sightings can be reported to Brian Burke at loughreegulls@gmail.com.

Post-breeding tern survey 2019

Over the last three years you've submitted tern roost records for 45 sites in 12 counties around the coast, some with tens.

hundreds and even thousands of terns. Every tern roost record we can get in August and September each year helps us better



understand their distribution and requirements in the important period before they depart on migration – so please keep the records coming! Records can be sent to iwebs@birdwatchireland.ie or to www.surveymonkey.com/r/TernRoost.

The I-WeBS Office

Lesley Lewis, Niamh Fitzgerald and Brian Burke

For gueries about site coverage, counter co-ordination and general I-WeBS queries, please contact Niamh and Brian at iwebs@birdwatchireland.ie. You can also visit our website (bit.ly/2YLe1oC) for other resources.

For queries about I-WeBS data, please contact Lesley at ljlewis@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 funded by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) and is coordinated by BirdWatch Ireland.



An Roinn Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht



Brian

Burke

Brian Burke