



Grouped Species Action Plan

‘Breeding Waders’



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Living Shetland Biodiversity Action Plan
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Grouped Species Action Plan

BREEDING WADERS

Species profile

Not relevant	UK B/D status
Not relevant	UK lead partners
Common, Scarce and rare	Shetland status
	Relevant HAP's
	AgriBAP, Arable weeds (Grouped Action Plan), Freshwater Habitat plan, Roadside plan, Roadside Action Plan, Community Biodiversity Action Plans (Bigton, Bressay, Fetlar, Sandwick, Yell)
Listed below	Statutory Protection

Current Status

(P – National Priority Species, CC – Species of Conservation Concern (R=red, A=amber, G=green), L – Local Priority Species)

Oystercatcher (Shetland name *shalder*) (CCA, L)

The oystercatcher has a discontinuous distribution across Europe and Asia. The western European population, including most Shetland breeders, winters mainly around the coast of the Irish Sea and North Sea. In 1987, the Shetland population was estimated to be 3,700 pairs, and a further survey in 1993 estimated 5,000 pairs. Subsequent surveys in 1998 and 1999 suggested that there had been a decline of between 26 and 38% to 3,350 pairs, approximately nine percent of the UK breeding population.

Ringed plover (Shetland name *sandy lu*) (CCA)

The ringed plover occurs over much of the northern latitudes of Europe and Asia. It winters along the shores of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa and southwest Asia. A survey in 1984, located 628 pairs in Shetland, with the population estimated to be 800 to 1,000 pairs, approximately 10% of the UK breeding population.

Golden plover (Shetland name *plivver*)

The golden plover breeds in east Greenland and Iceland east through northwest Europe and Arctic Russia. Except in parts of the British Isles, all populations are migratory, wintering to the south of their breeding range. In Shetland, following a series of moorland surveys in the 1980s, the total breeding population was estimated to be 1,450 pairs, approximately six percent of the UK breeding population.

Lapwing (Shetland name *tiev's nacket*) (CCA, L)

Lapwings breed from the British Isles east to China. They winter over much of western and southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. In 1987, the Shetland population was estimated to be 2,200 pairs, and a further survey in 1993 estimated 2,600 pairs. Surveys in 1998 and 1999, suggested there had been a decline of between 23% and 39% to 1,740 pairs, approximately one percent of the UK breeding population.

Dunlin (Shetland name *plivver's page*) (CCA)

The breeding distribution of the dunlin includes Iceland, northern Europe, Asia and North America. European breeders winter mainly along the coasts of Western Europe and the Mediterranean, south to the Middle East and the West African coast. Following a series of moorland surveys in the 1980s, the Shetland breeding population was estimated at 1,700 pairs, approximately 18 percent of the UK breeding population.

Snipe (Shetland name *snippick*) (CCA, L)

Snipe breed over much of northern Europe, Asia, and North America. They also breed in South America and south and east Africa. Northern populations winter mainly south of their breeding range, but in Britain, summer and winter distribution overlap considerably. In 1987, the Shetland population was estimated to be 4,000 pairs, and a further survey in 1993 estimated 3,450 pairs. Surveys in 1998 and 1999, suggested there had been a

decline of between 13 and 68% to 1,800 pairs, just over one percent of the UK breeding population. It is possible, that differing survey methods account, at least in part, for some of the apparently large declines of this species in some areas.

Whimbrel (Shetland name *peerie whaap*) (CCA, L)

The breeding distribution of the whimbrel includes Iceland, northern Scotland, Northern Europe, Asia and Arctic North America. Within the UK, whimbrels also breed in Orkney, with a few in the Western Isles and on the Scottish mainland. A few European breeders winter in southwest Europe, but most reach the coasts of sub-Saharan Africa. The most recent estimate of the Shetland breeding population in 1994, was of 479 pairs, which represents over 90% of the UK breeding population

Curlew (Shetland name *whaap* or *spui*) (CCA, L)

The Curlew breeds over much of northern Europe, and Asia. Curlews winter in the milder regions of Western Europe, but also reach coastal regions of much of the tropics and sub-tropics. In 1987, the Shetland population was estimated to be 2,800 pairs, and a further survey in 1993 estimated 3,975 pairs. Surveys in 1998 and 1999, suggested there had been a decline of between 36 and 53% to 2,300 pairs, six percent of the UK breeding population.

Redshank (Shetland name *ebb-cock*) (CCA, L)

Redshank breed from Iceland and the UK discontinuously eastwards to central Asia. Icelandic and European breeders winter along the coasts of Western Europe, the Mediterranean, and Northwest Africa. In 1987, the Shetland population was estimated to be 500 pairs, and a further survey in 1993 estimated 1,185 pairs. Surveys in 1998 and 1999 suggested that there had been an insignificant decline of approximately one percent to 1,170 pairs, three percent of the UK breeding population.

Greenshank

Greenshank breed from Scotland in the west across northern Asia. A few winter on the coasts of western Europe and the Mediterranean, but most move into sub-tropical and tropical regions along the African and Asian coast. Pairs nest each year in the west and north Mainland. The most recent estimate of the breeding population, in the mid-1980s was two to ten pairs, less than one percent of the UK breeding population.

Common sandpiper

Common Sandpipers breed from the Britain Isles east through much of northern and eastern Europe and Asia. Some winter in the milder parts of Western Europe, including southern Britain, but most winter over much of sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia and Australia. In Shetland, in 1983 a total of 44 pairs was recorded, less than one percent of the UK breeding population.

Culture & Folklore

Ecology & management

Shetland's breeding waders nest on the ground and lay a maximum of four eggs in each clutch. The chicks leave the nest soon after hatching and feed on invertebrates,

Oystercatcher

The Oystercatcher breeds widely in many habitats in Shetland. They nest on cliff tops, coastal grassland, in-bye fields, seashores, gravel roadsides and the moorland edge, but most frequently on heavily-grazed grassland.

Ringed plover

Ringed plovers breed on shingle beaches and ayres and coastal heathland, but in Shetland, they are not exclusively coastal, with many territories on dry heath, and those on Papa Stour mainly on scalped heathland. Nests are also found on roadside hard shoulders, in quarries, on industrial sites, airstrips and agricultural tracks. A pair also regularly nests on the top of Collafirth Hill, at an altitude of 220 metres. Most leave in winter, but some stay on beaches and in inbye fields.

Golden plover

Golden plovers nest on blanket bog and moorland, and on the serpentine heath of Unst and Fetlar, where they require short heather. Although adults often feed on areas of improved grassland, they do not breed in this habitat. Many leave in winter, but flocks remain in in-bye fields during mild weather.

Lapwing

Favoured breeding habitats are moderately grazed in-bye land, and the margins of in-bye and moorland where the water table is fairly high so that there are wet patches and rushes *Juncus effusus*. They tend to avoid the better-drained and most heavily grazed in-bye, which provides little food and cover. Most leave in winter, but flocks remain in in-bye fields during mild weather.

Dunlin

In Shetland, dunlins breed on many areas of blanket bog, particularly in the northern half of the Mainland and the North Isles. On Fetlar and Unst, many breed on the serpentine heathland. Most leave in winter, but a few remain on intertidal areas and in in-bye fields.

Snipe

Snipe are very widespread as a breeding species in Shetland in wetter areas of in-bye land, marginal moorland and blanket bog. Many leave in winter, but flocks remain in in-bye fields and marshy areas especially during mild weather.

Whimbrel

The largest breeding aggregations and the highest breeding densities occur in Unst and Fetlar on the serpentine heathlands. In other areas they frequent blanket bog and even quite heavily grazed acid grassland with very little heather. Whimbrel do not nest on ploughed or harrowed reseeded areas, although pre-breeding, adult whimbrel often feed on tipulid larvae (leatherjackets) on such areas. Densities of 11-21 breeding pairs per 100 hectares have been recorded, which are amongst the highest densities in the world. Unlike curlews, whimbrel do not take their chicks very far from their nest sites, usually remaining on heathland within 400 metres, although some pairs do take their chicks up to 200 metres to feed on re-seeded areas.

Curlew

Most nest on moorland, especially blanket bog, or the moorland edge where patches of *Juncus effusus* (soft rush) provide nesting cover. Some also nest in low-lying mires with relatively long vegetation. Chicks are sometimes moved considerable distances to lower ground, particularly mires but sometimes to reseeded grassland, where the longer vegetation during June provides food and cover for growing chicks. Many leave in winter, but large numbers remain on moorland and in-bye land, often roosting on offshore islands.

Redshank

Many breed on the margins of moorland, in mires with long vegetation, or in wet in-bye fields with sufficient rushes *Juncus effusus* to provide cover for nesting, and rearing chicks. Many leave in winter, but a few remain on intertidal areas and in in-bye fields.

Greenshank

The preferred breeding habitat in Shetland is heather moorland with scattered, fairly richly vegetated lochans and small mires, in the north and west Mainland. All leave in the winter.

Common sandpiper

In Shetland, most breeding territories are along the rocky shores of the larger lochs, or along the larger burns, from the Loch of Asta, north to Unst. All leave in the winter.

Current Factors causing loss or decline

Almost all species of waders are adversely affected by overgrazing and drainage of wet areas. However, light or moderate grazing levels are required to maintain the appropriate sward height and openness for each species. Reseeding of moorland can remove the breeding habitat for species such as golden plover and whimbrel, but can provide additional breeding habitat for oystercatchers and lapwings, so long as the reseeds are not heavily drained and too heavily grazed.

Opportunities & Current Action

Continue to monitor breeding status and distribution. Ongoing (RSPB, SNH, SBC)

Encourage agri-environment schemes that reduce grazing pressure on both moorland and in-bye land and encourage wet areas to be retained, rather than drained. Ongoing. (SCFWAG, RSPB)

Control of introduced ground predators, particularly ferrets, should be encouraged and consideration of the control of feral cats and hedgehogs may be necessary. Scottish Natural Heritage began a research project on the control of feral ferrets in 2003.

Objectives & Targets

Objective 1

To prevent further declines in the breeding populations of waders (including oystercatcher, ringed plover, golden plover, lapwing, dunlin, snipe, whimbrel, curlew, redshank, greenshank and common sandpiper).

Target

No net loss during the period covered by this plan.

Objective 2

Improve the condition and extent of wader breeding habitats.

Target Reduce grazing to more sustainable levels on moorland and in-bye land. Retain wet areas. Encourage control of introduced ground predators, particularly ferrets, and consider control of feral cats and hedgehogs if found to be necessary.

References box

- M.Pennington, K.Osborn, P. Harvey, R.Riddington, D.Okill, P.Ellis, M.Heubeck. 2004. *Birds of Shetland* Christopher Helm Publishers London

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