

WEBS ALERTS: WATERBIRD TRENDS ON PROTECTED AREAS

ILYA MACLEAN AND GRAHAM AUSTIN

*British Trust for Ornithology
The National Centre for Ornithology
The Nunnery, Thetford
Norfolk, IP24 2PU, United Kingdom*

Ilya Maclean and Graham Austin describe how data collected as part of the BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC Wetland Bird Survey are used to help the government monitor protected areas.

ALERTAS DE WEBS: TENDENCIAS DE AVES ACUÁTICAS EN ÁREAS PROTEGIDAS

Ilya Maclean y Graham Austin describen cómo los datos colectados a través del programa de conteo de aves de humedales de BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC son utilizados para ayudar al gobierno a monitorear las áreas protegidas.

The UK hosts internationally important numbers of overwintering waterbirds. In total about 100 sites have been designated as protected areas because of the waterbirds present there. The government has a legal obligation to monitor these sites and ensure they are maintained in a favourable status. If their status becomes unfavourable, the causes of declines must be identified and remedial action taken.

designated, a statistical technique is used to smooth out short-term fluctuations in numbers and produce a trend line. Site trends are then compared to regional and national trends, allowing distinction between declines due to site-specific factors and those driven by large-scale population changes. Species that have undergone major declines can then be flagged by issuing an Alert.

WEBS ALERTS

WeBS Alerts is an online information source that allows users to check how waterbird species are faring in protected areas and is used by government bodies such as JNCC. It is updated annually, and the updated report, which covers the winter of 2004/05 is now available online.

The WeBS Alerts system was developed to provide a standardised method of identifying the direction and magnitude of changes in bird numbers at a variety of spatial and temporal scales for a range of waterbird species. For each protected area monitored by the WeBS and for each waterbird species for which an area is

WATERBIRD TRENDS

Two major conservation issues have been highlighted by this year's Alerts report. The first is that Pintail numbers wintering on the Mersey Estuary have declined precipitously (see Figure 1). Almost 20,000 used to overwinter in the early 1980s, but numbers have declined to about 200. This site, which once hosted almost half the UK population, now no longer hosts even nationally important numbers of Pintail. The other major cause for concern is the continued decline in Pochard at Loughs Neagh and Beg. In the mid 1990s, these Loughs hosted almost 30,000 Pochard, but numbers have subsequently

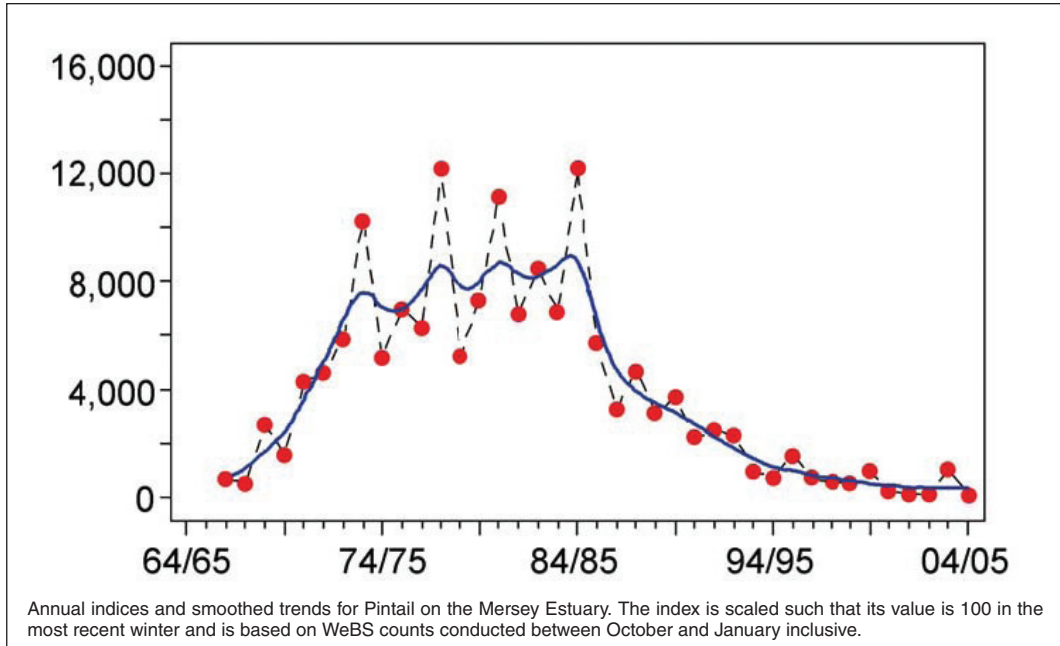


FIGURE 1. Wintering Pintail on the Mersey Estuary.

dropped to fewer than 7,000.

There is some good news though. There is evidence the declines in other diving ducks at this site have ceased. Goldeneye and Tufted Duck numbers are slightly up on the winter of 2003/04 and Scaup numbers on the site are higher than ever before.

The full report can be obtained by going to the following webpage: www.bto.org/webs/alerts/alerts/index.htm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are extremely grateful to all the volunteers who take part in the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). WeBS is a joint scheme of BTO, WWT, RSPB and JNCC. If you would like to take part

in the scheme contact your local WeBS organiser or Andy Musgrove at the BTO Thetford HQ, or email: webs@bto.org.

FURTHER READING

Banks, A N, Collier, M, Austin, G, Hearn, R & Musgrove, A. (2006) *Waterbirds in the UK 2004/05 The Wetland Bird Survey*. BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC, Thetford.

Maclean, I M D & Austin, G E. (2006) *WeBS Alerts 2004/2005: Changes in numbers of wintering waterbirds in the United Kingdom, its Constituent Countries, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)*. BTO Research Report No. 458 to the WeBS partnership. BTO, Thetford.