

West Coast Spring Passage Project

Title

West Coast Spring Passage Project 1984

Description and Summary of the Results

The Wader Study Group's Spring Passage Project in 1979 had shown that there was quite a rapid turnover of birds at most of the sites studied, and hence counts of the number of birds using a site on one date were unlikely to give a true perspective of the importance of that site. The idea behind this new project was to find out how many birds were using each of the main sites along the Atlantic and Irish Sea coasts of Great Britain, both to find out which were the most important sites, and whether individual birds used one or several sites along that route during their spring migration from Africa and southern Europe (or in some cases birds wintering within the UK) and their Arctic breeding grounds. It was targeted at four main species: Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Sanderling *C. alba* and (Ruddy) Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*.

In the event, during the spring of 1984, 955 counts were carried out on 89 roost sites from south Devon to Shetland along the west coast of Britain and with several sites, mainly on the east coast, in Ireland. The majority of birds of all four species seemed to focus on specific staging areas. Ringed Plovers were primarily on the estuaries of the Severn, Ribble, Morecambe Bay and the Solway with fewer although still quite high numbers on another five sites. Sanderling were in large numbers only on the Alt, Ribble, Morecambe Bay and Solway. Turnstone numbers were highest in Devon and south Wales, and Dunlin were mainly on the larger estuaries. Most of the smaller sites showed no observable migration, and there were relatively small numbers of all species in Ireland.

A total of 1826 individuals of the four target species were caught on six sites along the west coast of England, Wales and Scotland with 1342 marked with site-specific plumage dye and temporary leg flags. There were 903 subsequent sightings on the same site but only very few on other sites.

Methods of Data Capture

Counts of waders using estuaries and stretches of the west coast were made whenever possible through the spring period. For many sites this was approximately weekly. Totals of each species were noted and marked birds were specifically looked for. This enabled the proportion marked to be noted, in turn to see if and how this changed through the spring. Catching took place on six sites (Exe, Severn, Menai Straits, Dee/Mersey/Ribble, Morecambe Bay and Solway) and birds were ringed and marked with both a site-specific plumage dye and a temporary leg flag to make them more obvious to observers.

Purpose of Data Capture

The three main aims were: 1) to identify the main spring staging areas of migrating Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Turnstone and Sanderling; 2) to estimate the numbers of birds visiting the

individual staging areas as a measure of population turnover; 3) to determine whether individual migrants visit a single staging area each season or whether they use a network of sites within Britain.

Geographic Coverage

42 estuaries or coastal sites on the west coast of Britain (Devon to Shetland) and in Ireland.

Temporal Coverage

The spring of 1984 with counts requested 1 April to 10 June. It did not specifically carry on as a BTO project after 1984 but the Wader Study Group co-ordinated some work in several subsequent springs (until at least 1988) along the whole East Atlantic Flyway and including some in UK, and published progress reports each year in the Wader Study Group Bulletin.

Other Interested parties

The project was run by the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (of the BTO) jointly with the Wader Study Group. The main funding came from Glaxochem (Annan), ICI (Sevenside), Commonwealth Smelting Ltd, Monsanto, British Cellophane Ltd and Imperial Tobacco Ltd.

Organiser(s)

Mike Moser and Peter Ferns

Current Staff Contact

webs@bto.org

Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Moser, M., Ferns, P. & Baillie, S. 1985. BTO/WSG West Coast Spring Passage Project. A progress report. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 43: 9-13.

The background was described more fully in:

Ferns, P.N. & Moser, M.E. 1983. 1984 West Coast Spring Passage Project. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 39: 35-36.

The survey was noticed in *BTO News* numbers 129, 137 and 157.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

BTO Windows network central area.

Computer data -- outline contents

A file containing the counts, one containing a list of sites.

Computer data -- description of contents

counts:

site number, then a series of lines containing Day, Month and counts of Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Turnstone and Sanderling. The last line of each site contains 00 00 00 00 00 00

counts.revamp:

site number, date (days from 1 March) and counts of the four species.

sites:

a list of site numbers and sites

The data for the captured birds are held with all the ringing and retrap data in the Oracle database.

Information held in BTO Archives

1 Archive Box containing all the specific count data.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis