

WADERS AND WADER-RINGING

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To my mind wader ringing has undergone two changes since the earlier days, when catching birds and ringing was an aim in itself, and mostly done by individuals. The first change occurred when ringers began to take all available information from the bird in the hand and started to process the data. They soon found out that individual wader work is uneconomical and progresses slowly. So study groups were formed at local levels - more by necessity and for convenience than for any other reasons.

The second and more recent step can be traced back to a different motive, i.e. the concern for the bird. Visiting flocks may stay but a short time in one locality. Their fate during the rest of their yearly cycle is of equal concern to us as is the continued existence of the species. For this we need to know what part our visitors play within the total population. To tackle these and similar questions is beyond an individual or even a group. Communication between all interested parties even across borders and continents is necessary and is actually beginning to take place. Assessments of total populations of waders are scarce in the literature. Some are based on breeding density: using this method, Dr Uspenski (1969) estimated the total population of the Curlew Sandpiper to be several hundred thousand. This and similar estimates are courageous attempts to say the least. A recent comprehensive publication (*Handbuch Der Vogel Mitteleuropas*) underlines the difficulty. In most cases it fails to give an outright population number. In Europe a wide ranging stock taking is taking place. The result of a co-ordinated census and counts of other areas is given in the table below. These counts are not without fault as numbers are relative and easily misread. The Knot population visiting Southern Africa looks insignificant

THE WADER POPULATION OF WESTERN EURCPE, NORTH WEST AFRICA
 AND 1126 KM OF OPEN SHORELINE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA.
 (Including 51 coastal wetlands)[@]

Species	Region	I	II	III	IV
European Oystercatcher		644.5	1.5	3.0	
Black Oystercatcher					2.7
Turnstone		17.1	0.4	13.0	16.8
Ringed Plover		14.5	10.0	13.0	1.8
Kentish Plover		0.7	1.5	2.5	
White-fronted Plover					7.9
Kittlitz's Plover					4.5
Three-banded Plover					0.2
Chestnut-banded Plover					4.6
Grey Plover		42.1	29.2	3.5	9.1
Blacksmith Plover					0.6
Curlew Sandpiper			+	37.0	74.7
Dunlin		1329.6	50.0	190.0	
Little Stint		0.5	5.0	5.0	8.5
Knot		293.5	5.0	130.0	7.8
Sanderling		10.9	3.0	13.0	38.4
Ruff		2.1	1.6	+	4.3
Terek Sandpiper					0.2
Common Sandpiper					0.4
Redshank		116.0	10.0	100.0	
Spotted Redshank		0.4	0.1		
Marsh Sandpiper				+	0.1
Greenshank		0.5	0.4	0.5	1.5
Black-tailed Godwit		31.0	30.0	+	
Bar-tailed Godwit		96.2	5.0	210.0	2.3
Curlew		185.1	3.0	3.0	0.4
Whimbrel		+		3.0	1.3
Avocet		25.4	4.0	+	3.9
Stilt		0.2			0.8

For the following species less than 50 birds have been recorded in area IV: Ethiopian Snipe, Painted Snipe, Crowned Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Rednecked Phalarope.

@ = figures given are in thousand.

+ = denotes less than 50 birds.

Area I	: Europe	Mid-winter count 1976
Area II	: Morocco	Mid-winter count, taken from Glutz von Blotzheim <u>et al.</u> (1975)
Area III	: Mauritania	Mid-winter count 1973
Area IV	: South Africa	Dec/Jan 1975/76 (Southwestern Cape) Dec/Jan 1976/77 (Namib Coast)

compared to the rest of the table. But this number may represent a complete breeding population for a certain area. And the Curlew Sandpiper, is it not the most abundant migrant wader in the southern African column? No need for us to worry! But do we realise that one tenth or more of the total population relies on our habitat. To evaluate the most important areas and bring these to the attention of the administrative authority falls within the scope of a study group. To ensure the status quo for these areas should be the concern of every responsible citizen.

References

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Many ringers weigh every bird they handle. How useful is the information? Dale Hanmer takes a heavy look at weights on page 19.