

A6.70b Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa islandica* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding		Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 2 Unfavourable conservation status (vulnerable) and concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 2
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex II/2 Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Rare

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	7,410	70	8,686 (c. 100% of GB total)
Ireland	9,000	90	287 (3% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	65,000	700	8,973 (13% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Cranswick et al. 1999

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Section A6.70a outlines the global distribution and taxonomy of Black-tailed Godwit.

The Icelandic population of Black-tailed Godwit *L. limosa islandica* breeds mainly in Iceland, sporadically in the Faeroes, Britain and Ireland, and may have bred in northern Norway. This sub-species winters mainly in Britain, Ireland and western France, and south to Morocco (Wetlands International 1999). The sub-species *islandica* is comprised of a single population, intermixing throughout the southern part of its non-breeding range with western populations of *L. l. limosa*.

The main concentrations are on the muddy estuaries of the south coasts of Ireland and England, inland in the Shannon valley, on the Stour and Hamford Water in eastern England and on the Ribble and Dee in NW England (Lack 1986). Black-tailed Godwits feed mostly

on worms whilst the tide is out and normally roost on damp pasture, often inland. Peak numbers occur in the period from mid August to mid September (Lack 1986).

4. Population structure and trends

Smit & Piersma (1989) considered all birds wintering on the Atlantic coast of Europe and northern Morocco to be *islandica*. However, it is believed that only a small proportion of Black-tailed Godwits in Portugal, Spain and northern Morocco are *islandica*, reducing the estimate of the biogeographic population of that subspecies considerably. Studies of the proportion of colour ringed birds returning to Iceland to breed suggest a total population more in the order of 35,000-40,000 individuals (J. Gill unpubl.). Thus, an estimate of 65,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997) is probably too high, and as such the importance of Britain and Ireland as non-breeding sites for these birds will have been under-estimated considerably.

The Icelandic breeding population showed an apparent decline during the 1980s from 10,000–30,000 pairs in the early 1980s (Piersma 1986) to 5,000–15,000 pairs in the late 1980s (Koskimies 1993). Tucker & Heath (1994) suggest that the recent trend is approximately stability, but a re-evaluation of international population sizes suggests a 62% increase in numbers since the mid-1980s (Davidson 1998).

In the UK, numbers have steadily increased since the mid-1970s to an all time high in 1996/7 (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). Between 1981–1982 and 1988–1992, numbers increased from 4,700 to 7,410 – a 55% increase (Cayford & Waters 1996). The 1997/98 peak count of Ireland was the highest count ever recorded by the Irish Wetland Bird Survey and index numbers suggest a general increase over recent years (Colhoun 2000).

The recent evidence presented by Cranswick *et al.* (1999) results in an estimate of the British population that is closer to 12,000 than 7,000. The degree of movement of birds within winters, and site fidelity between winters, appear to vary. Recent colour ringing studies show that birds moulting on The Wash use a number of east coast estuaries in Suffolk and Essex within a winter in a pattern that is repeated from year to year (Gill unpublished). In contrast, studies on Langstone Harbour and nearby estuaries show that birds do not move from this location within a winter but show a high degree of site fidelity between winters (Potts unpublished).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Black-tailed Godwit supports, on average, 8,973 individuals (calculated using WeBS January site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97 – see section 4.4.1 and Appendix 2 for further explanation). This total amounts to substantially all of the British population, about 3% of the all-Ireland population (most Godwits in Ireland winter in the Republic), and about 13% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 27 sites where Black-tailed Godwit has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.70b.1).

Other measures

See section A6.70a.

6. Classification criteria

All 12 sites in the UK supporting more than 1% of the international population were considered under Stage 1.2, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further 15 sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Black-tailed Godwit were identified as an important component of non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites include all the main non-breeding areas of Black-tailed Godwits in the UK, from the Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary in eastern Scotland, to the main wintering areas on the west, east and south coasts of England, as well as in Northern Ireland. All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Prater 1981).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives comprehensive coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Black-tailed Godwits in the UK – indeed holding virtually all those birds that winter in Northern Ireland and Britain – it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Black-tailed Godwit SPA suite

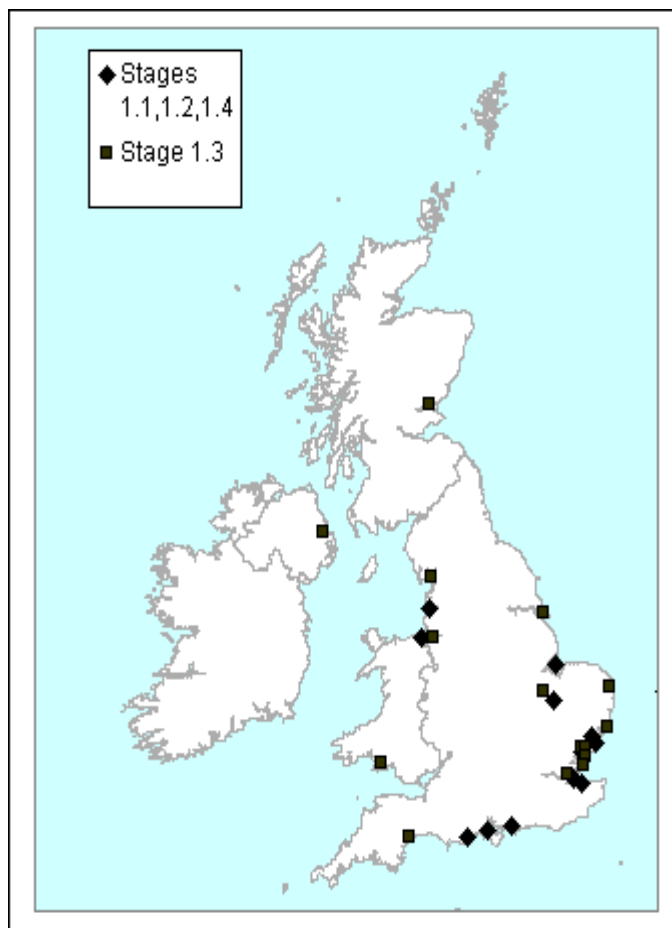


Table 6.70b.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Abberton Reservoir	294	0.5	4.0	1.3
Alde-Ore Estuary	268	0.4	3.6	1.3
Belfast Lough	316	0.5	3.5 (Ire)	1.3
Blackwater Estuary	1,280	2.0	17.3	1.2
Breydon Water	240	0.4	3.2	1.3
Burry Inlet	83	0.1	1.1	1.3
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	1,003	1.5	13.5	1.2
Colne Estuary	235	0.4	3.2	1.3
Dengie	80	0.1	1.1	1.3
Exe Estuary	533	0.8	7.2	1.3
Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary	150	0.2	2.0	1.3
Foulness	79	0.1	1.1	1.3
Hamford Water	1,121	1.7	15.1	1.2
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	71	0.1	1.0	1.3
Medway Estuary and Marshes	957	1.5	12.9	1.2
Mersey Estuary	343	0.5	4.6	1.3
Morecambe Bay	79	0.1	1.1	1.3
Nene Washes	312	0.5	4.2	1.3
Ouse Washes	1,198	1.8	16.2	1.2
Poole Harbour	1,576	2.4	21.3	1.2
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	819	1.3	11.0	1.2
Solent and Southampton Water	1,125	1.7	15.2	1.2
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	2,475	3.8	33.4	1.2
Thames Estuary and Marshes	322	0.5	4.6	1.3
The Dee Estuary	1,739	2.7	23.5	1.2
The Swale	1,755	2.7	23.7	1.2
The Wash	859	1.3	11.6	1.2
TOTALS	8,973 (in January)	12.8%	c. 100% 3.2% (Ire)	