

Black-tailed godwit

Limosa limosa

Status

Red listed: HD, BR, WL, SPEC 2 (V)
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981
Annex II/2 of EC Wild Birds Directive

National monitoring

Rare Breeding Birds Panel.
WeBS.

Population and distribution

Two races of black-tailed godwit breed in the British Isles: *L. l. islandica* breeds in Iceland and northern Scotland and winters in Britain and Ireland; *L. l. limosa* breeds mainly in the Netherlands and at a few localities in England, Wales and southern Scotland but winters in southern Europe and West Africa. The estimated UK breeding population is 29–53 pairs (largely *limosa*). In winter, black-tailed godwits are more widespread in the country but occur mainly in the muddy zones of estuaries in south, east and north-west England and southern Ireland. The UK wintering population has been estimated at 7,800, with up to 12,400 recorded on autumn migration (*Population Estimates*).

Ecology

Breeds in wet meadows, coastal grazing marshes and moorland bogs, and is loosely colonial. A clutch of four eggs is laid, mainly from the beginning of April to late May. In winter, birds feed on wet grasslands inland, as well as on fine sediment inner estuary sites (*Red Data Birds*).

Breeding season survey – population

Information required

- maximum number of displaying males
- maximum number of birds (divided by two).

Number and timing of visits

Three visits, at least one week apart. For southern England: first visit 1–15 April, second visit 16–31 April, third visit 1–15 May. For northern England and Scotland, the survey period will be a week to six weeks later.

Time of day

Between dawn and 1200 BST. Avoid cold, wet and windy conditions (wind speed not exceeding Beaufort force 3).

Sites/areas to visit

Wet meadows, coastal grazing marshes and moorland bogs. Most likely to be found in eastern England (*limosa*) or northern Scotland (*islandica*), but could occur anywhere where there is suitable habitat.

Equipment

- 1:10,000 OS map
- Schedule 1 licence.

Safety reminders

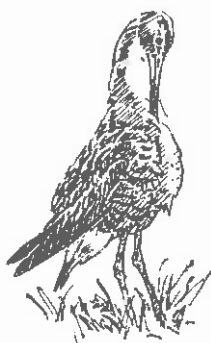
No specific advice. See the *Introduction* for general information.

Disturbance

The method may involve some disturbance to breeding birds, depending on the site (eg sites where parallel transects are used).

Methods

Mark the boundary of the survey area clearly on a map. Where the birds are nesting in fields (eg wet grassland sites), number all the fields. Large sites such as moorland should be treated as a single field. Ensure that this map is kept with the data to allow the same fields to be re-surveyed in subsequent years.



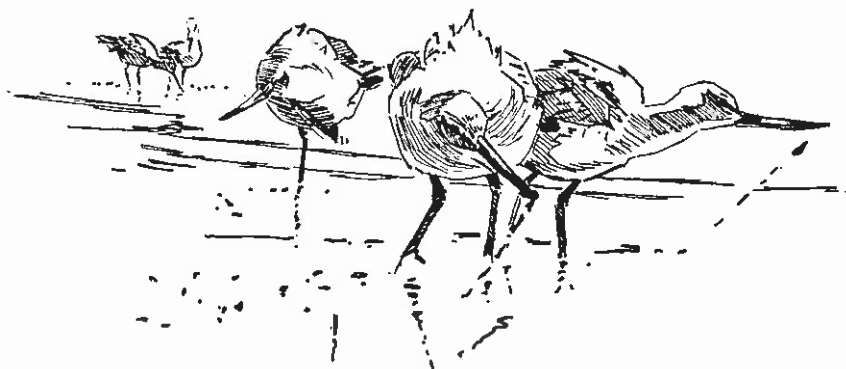
On each visit, slowly walk along a route which takes you just close enough to each field in the study site to allow you to see any birds that are present. Scan each field carefully from a distance and record the location and behaviour of all birds present using standard BTO codes (Appendix 1). Try to identify whether they are males or females wherever possible. Males are smaller and redder on the underparts than females, a difference which is usually quite obvious within pairs. Established pairs are usually not very far from one another except when the male is performing a ceremonial flight or pursuing a rival male.

On large sites where you are unable to scan from a distance, you may need to walk parallel transects about 300 m apart. Record movements between fields but allocate each bird to the field in which it was first recorded. If first observed in display-flight, allocate the bird to the field in the centre of its flight.

Transfer summary information to visit forms at the end of each visit. Calculate the total number of birds (and divide this by two), the total number of displaying males, and (if possible) the total number of males recorded on each visit. Report all three figures and supply copies of your visit maps. There has been little work so far to test which is the best figure for estimating the number of breeding pairs.

Beware of confusing migrant with breeding birds at sites where both occur. Do not include birds occurring in tight flocks of more than two birds (breeding pairs may interact for short periods and males may

follow each other when performing display-flights but this behaviour is usually obviously territorial and accompanied by vigorous calling and/or song).



Winter survey

WeBS.

See *Generic wintering bird monitoring methods* in the generic survey methods section.