

A6.71 Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding		Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 3 (wintering) Unfavourable conservation status (localised in winter) but not concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I Annex II/2 Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	52,500	530	37,168 (70% of GB total)
Ireland	16,000	175	2,218 (13% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	115,000	1,000	39,386 (39% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Way et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The Bar-tailed Godwit breeds in Arctic regions of Eurasia, from northern Scandinavia, through high latitudes of Russia to the west coast of Alaska. Especially in the Russian far east, The Bar-tailed Godwit is a high-Arctic breeder, although it occurs at lower latitudes in European Russia and Scandinavia. The species is polytypic, with two subspecies described. *L. l. lapponica* breeds in Scandinavia and north-western Russia as far east as the central Taimyr. It winters in north-western Europe south to southern Spain and Portugal. *L. l. baueri* breeds in eastern Russia and in western Alaska.

The European winter distribution of Bar-tailed Godwits is centred on the estuaries of Britain and Ireland, as well as the coasts of the southern North Sea – especially the international Wadden Sea (Prokosch 1988; Meltote *et al.* 1994). Much smaller numbers winter further west and south.

In Britain they are mostly distributed along the North Sea coast, and from north-west England to the Outer Hebrides. In Ireland the species can be found on both the Atlantic and Irish Sea coasts (Lack 1986; Hutchinson 1989). Numbers are concentrated in the southern and eastern estuaries with only a few birds regularly occurring in north-west Scotland.

Bar-tailed Godwits are almost entirely coastal in their winter habits, feeding mainly on worms both on sandy and muddy shores.

4. Population structure and trends

Four biogeographical populations of Bar-tailed Godwit have been described (Rose & Scott 1997). Of these, two occur in Europe: the Western Palearctic population of *L. l. lapponica* breeds in Scandinavia and north-western Russia (west of the Yamal Peninsula) and winters in north-western Europe. The south-west African wintering population of *L. l. lapponica* breeds in central Russia and migrates through Europe in spring and autumn en route to western and southern Africa. Both populations occur in the UK, although the latter only during migration periods.

Britain supports 46% and Ireland 14% of the biogeographic wintering population of 115,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997, based on Smit & Piersma 1989).

As a mid- to high-Arctic nesting species, significant between-year population changes might be expected as a consequence of variation in weather and predation pressures on breeding areas. Overall, the biogeographic population has shown a general increase since at least the mid-1980s from 100,000 individuals (Lack 1986) to 115,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997). A decrease has been reported in the number of birds wintering in France (Tucker & Heath 1994), but these birds account for less than 5% of the biogeographic population. Numbers wintering in the UK have been broadly stable since the early 1970s (Pris-Jones *et al.* 1994), although there have been significant year-to-year fluctuations – probably reflecting changes in annual breeding success (as for example in 1997; Pollitt *et al.* 2000). Irish populations also show considerable fluctuation (Colhoun 2000).

In addition to those factors affecting breeding success, between-year fluctuations in wintering numbers in Britain and Ireland are at least in part due to weather conditions, with influxes into east-coast estuaries occurring in severe conditions. Many birds use the east coast estuaries, such as The Wash, as moulting and non-breeding sites, whilst others use them as stopping-off points en route to/from the winter quarters (Atkinson 1996).

Bar-tailed Godwits shows a high degree of fidelity to staging and wintering areas in succeeding years (Tucker & Heath 1994; del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). Ringing recovery data provides evidence of some movement between sites within winters (Wernham *et al.* in press).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

The UK's SPA suite for Bar-tailed Godwit supports, on average, 39,386 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 about 70% of the British wintering population, and about 13% of the all-Ireland population. The suite holds about 39% of the international flyway population and is comprised of 23 sites where Bar-tailed Godwits have been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.71.1).

6. Classification criteria

All sites in the UK that support more than 1% of the international population of Bar-tailed Godwit were considered under Stage 1.1, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites are distributed throughout the range of the non-breeding population in the UK, from sites in Northern Ireland, to East Sanday Coast in the Orkneys, to sites along the south, east and west coasts of England. 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 Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives adequate coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Bar-tailed Godwit in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for Bar-tailed Godwit SPA suite

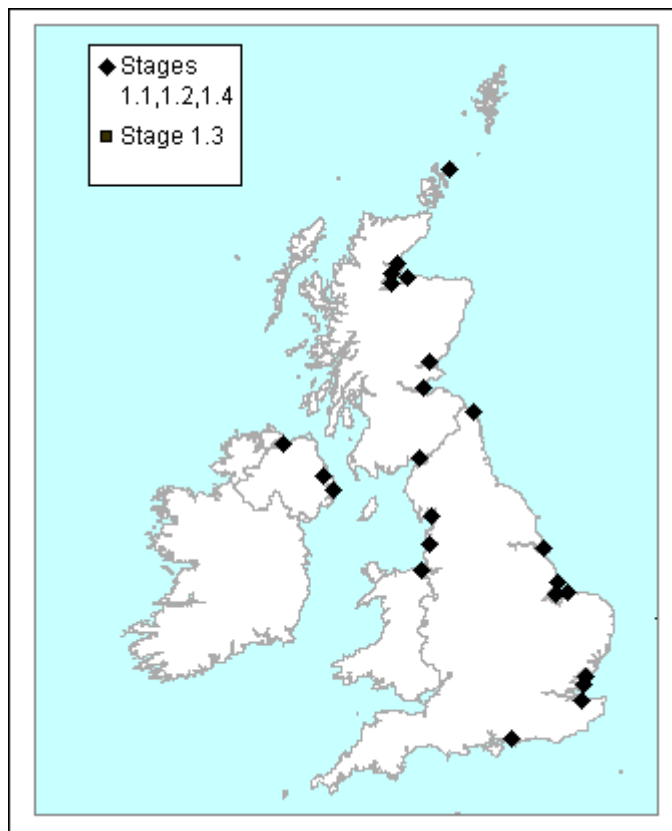


Table 6.71.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Belfast Lough	232	0.2	1.5 (Ire)	1.1
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	1,692	1.5	3.2	1.1
Cromarty Firth	1,420	1.2	2.7	1.1
Dengie	1,156	1.0	2.2	1.1
Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet	1,300	1.1	2.5	1.1
East Sanday Coast	600	0.5	1.1	1.1
Firth of Forth	2,600	2.3	5.0	1.1
Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary	2,400	2.1	4.6	1.1
Foulness	7,639	6.6	14.5	1.1
Gibraltar Point	719	0.6	1.4	1.1
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	1,593	1.4	3.0	1.1
Inner Moray Firth	1,155	1.0	2.2	1.1
Lindisfarne	2,946	2.6	5.6	1.1
Lough Foyle	1,896	1.7	11.9 (Ire)	1.1
Moray and Nairn Coast	1,156	1.0	2.2	1.1
Morecambe Bay	2,611	2.3	5.0	1.1
North Norfolk Coast	1,236	1.1	2.4	1.1
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	18,958	16.5	36.1	1.1
Strangford Lough	882	0.8	5.5 (Ire)	1.1
The Dee Estuary	1,013	0.9	1.9	1.1
The Swale	542	0.5	1.0	1.1
The Wash	11,250	9.8	21.4	1.1
Upper Solway Flats and Marshes	2,367	2.1	4.5	1.1

TOTALS	39,386 (in January)	39.4%	70.1% 12.7% (Ire)
---------------	----------------------------	--------------	------------------------------