

# Current population status of rare and protected waders in south Russia

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This paper reviews the current population status of ten wader species based on an analysis of published data and other information gathered by the author during the period 1967-1994 in various parts of south Russia, but primarily in the Rostov region. South Russia has ten wader species which need special protection. The most critically endangered is Sociable Plover *Chettusia gregaria*, which has practically disappeared from southern Russia and is declining in the rest of its breeding range. The steppe population of the Curlew *Numenius arquata* is also in a critical state, being close to extinction in south Russia, though it is still relatively stable further to the east. The south Russian populations of Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and both Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* and Black-winged Pratincole *G. nordmanni* are all probably destined to decline to extinction if they remain without special, and legally binding, protection. In contrast, certain species already included in the Red Data Book of Russia (Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*) have now established comparatively stable populations in south Russia.

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В настоящей статье на основе анализа опубликованных сведений и материалов собственных исследований, собранных автором в течение 1967-1994 гг. в различных районах Южной России, преимущественно - в Ростовской области, дается обзор современного состояния популяций десяти видов куликов. Эти гнездящиеся на Юге России десять видов нуждаются в особой охране. Наиболее угрожающая ситуация сложилась здесь для кречетки *Chettusia gregaria*, которая почти исчезла в регионе и деградирует в остальной части гнездового ареала. В крайне тяжелом положении находится также степная популяция большого кроншнепа *Numenius arquata*, которая на Юге России близка к исчезновению, хотя в более восточных частях ареала еще относительно устойчива. Южнорусские популяции кулика-сороки *Haematopus ostralegus*, большого веретенника *Limosa limosa* и обоих видов тиркушек *Glareola pratincola* и *G. nordmanni* в будущем тоже, вероятно, будут обречены на сокращение вплоть до исчезновения, если останутся без специальной законодательной охраны. Виды же, включенные в Красную книгу России (авдотка *Burhinus oedicephalus*, ходулочник *Himantopus himantopus*, шилоклювка *Recurvirostra avosetta*), сейчас на Юге России сформировали сравнительно стабильные популяции.

## Introduction

Fieldwork by many observers in recent decades means that the avifauna of south Russia (Figure 1) is now relatively well known, except for certain areas such as the Astrakhan' region and Dagestan. Eighteen wader species have been proved to breed (Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicephalus*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*, Caspian Plover *C. asiaticus*, Lapwing

*Vanellus vanellus*, Sociable Plover. *Chettusia gregaria*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Marsh Sandpiper *T. stagnatilis*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* and Black-winged Pratincole *G.*

During two months' fieldwork on the 1996 expedition to the Volga-Ural interfluvium and adjoining steppelands of European Russia and western Kazakhstan as part of the 'Search for the breeding grounds of the Slender-billed Curlew Project', there were only six sightings of Sociable Plover and only one related to breeding birds. As habitats in many parts of its former breeding range in the West Kazakhstan region are little changed, the reasons for the sharp and continuing decline of Sociable Plover remain unclear (Morozov, V.V. 1997. In: Tomkovich, P.S. (ed.) *Information Materials of the Working Group on Waders* 10: 38-39. Moscow.) During the 1997 expedition to the vast area extending from the west bank of the Volga to the steppes of northern Kazakhstan (Kustanay region), just one pair of Sociable Plovers was seen and the situation is described as catastrophic (Morozov, V.V. 1997. In: Lebedeva, E. (ed.) *Newsletter of Russian Bird Conservation Union* No 2(8): 2). Eds.

*nordmanni*), and two other species, Great Snipe *Gallinago media* in the north of the region and White-tailed Plover *Chettusia leucura* in the east, are possible breeders.

The most important among these species are those listed as specially protected in the Red Data Book of Russia and needing constant monitoring throughout their range: Stone Curlew, Sociable Plover, Black-winged Stilt, and Avocet. In addition, six species of waders which are rare in south Russia (Caspian Plover, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Collared Pratincole and Black-winged Pratincole), were recommended by Belik *et al.* (1991) for inclusion in the second edition of the Red Data Book.

As may be seen from Figure 1, which shows the extent to which the bird fauna has been studied in different parts of South Russia, the most comprehensive information on wader distribution and numbers is available for the Rostov region and the Krasnodar and Stavropol' regions. Less complete data have been collected in Kalmykiya and the mountain republics of the North Caucasus (Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, Kabardino-Balkariya, Severnaya Osetiya, and Checheno-Ingushetiya). Only fragmentary information is presented for the Volgograd region and Dagestan, and population figures (Table 1) for those regions have been calculated in the main by extrapolating from the data for neighbouring regions and from the author's personal knowledge of the areas

concerned. There was practically no up-to-date information for the Astrakhan' region, apart from the Volga delta, and I have had no opportunity to acquaint myself with its habitats and bird fauna.

For areas further west and north (Ukraine, the central black earth lands of Russia), practically all the latest information available to me is shown on the species maps (Figures 2-11). For Kazakhstan to the east, I have had to rely on the handbook *Birds of Kazakhstan* (Dolgushin 1962), articles by Shevchenko *et al.* (1993), and certain other publications.

### Sociable Plover *Chettusia gregaria*

*Red Data Book of Russia:* conservation category I.

*Species of European Conservation Concern:*

conservation category I.

*Range:* Semi-deserts of Transvolga.

*Distribution:* Very rare, sporadic and irregular breeder.

*Habitat:* Dry steppes and semi-deserts with patches of bare soil, sometimes fields and fallow land bare of vegetation.

*Range size trends:* In the 1930s it was apparently still breeding in steppelands adjoining the Don and Sal rivers (S.N. Varshavskiy pers. comm.). Occasionally recorded in Kalmykiya and along the Volga in the 1940s (Dementiev & Gladkov 1951; Varshavskiy 1965). Occurred on the east bank of the Volga until the 1970s, but has now retreated further east well into the semi-desert (V.N. Moseykin pers. comm.).

*Population size trends:* In the 1930s roving flocks of hundreds of birds were not uncommon along the

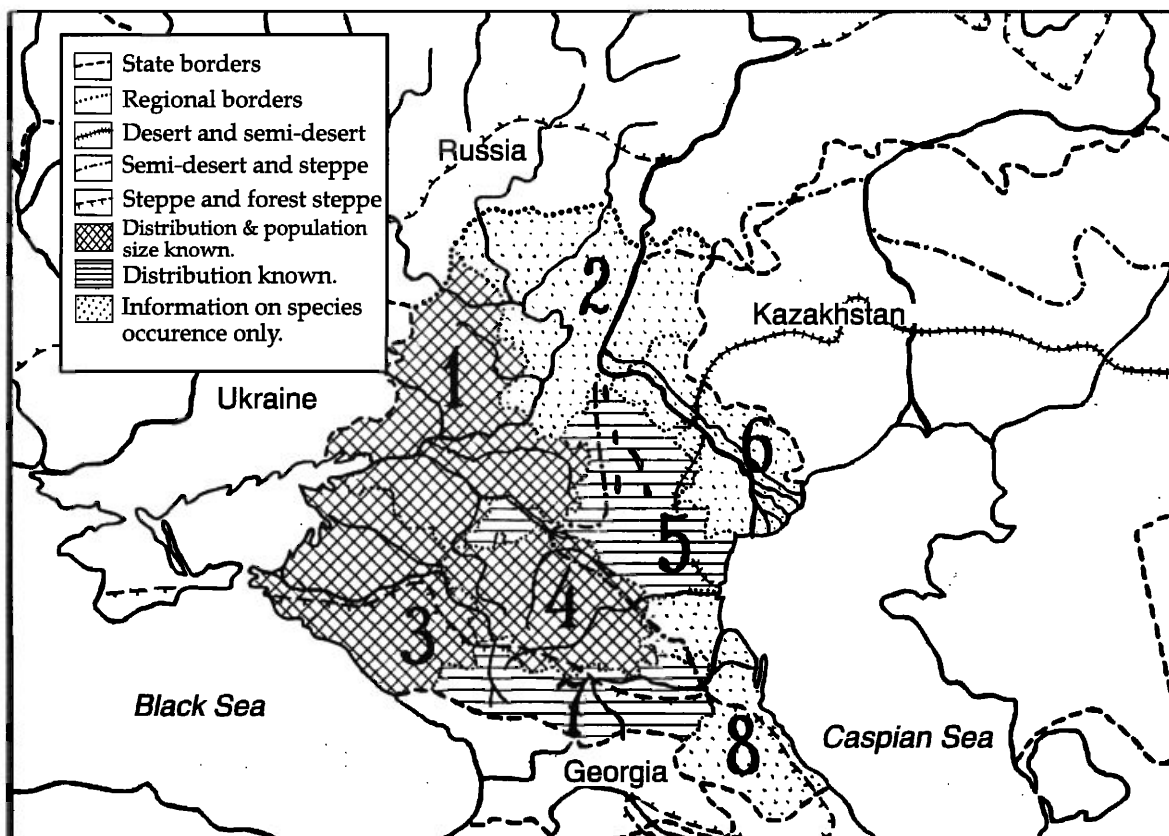


Figure 1. South Russia. 1. Rostov region; 2. Volgograd region; 3. Krasnodar region; 4. Stavropol' region; 5. Kalmykiya; 6. Astrakhan' region; 7. Mountain republics of the Caucasus; 8. Dagestan.

Table 1. Current numbers of protected waders within south Russia.

Species	Number of breeding pairs in Regions										Total numbers
	Rostov	Volgograd	Krasnodar	Stavropol	Kalmikia	Astrakhan	Caucasus Mountain	Dagestan			
<i>Chettusia gregaria</i>	10 - 30*					?					10 - 50
<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	300 - 600*	500 - 1500	5 - 15	200*	500 - 1,000	5,000-10,000*	100 - 150*	200 - 500			7,000 - 14,000
<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	100*	10 - 50*	600 - 800*	100*	200 - 500	+	1-2*	50 - 150			1500 - 2500
<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	1,000 - 3,000*	100 - 500*	800 - 1,200*	700 - 1,300	500 - 1,500	+	50 - 100	200 - 300*			4,000-10,000
<i>Charadrius asiaticus</i>		50 - 100		10 - 30	20 - 50*	+		50 - 100			200 - 500
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	20-50*	50 - 150*	60 - 80*			+	10 - 30*	?			200 - 500
<i>Numenius arquatus</i>	5 - 10*	50 - 150					?				100 - 300
<i>Limosa limosa</i>	10 - 30*	50 - 150			50 - 60*		?				100 - 300
<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	1,000 - 3,000*	100 - 150*	?	300 - 500*	3,000 - 4,000*	+	10 - 50	500 - 1,000			5,000 - 9,000
<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	50 - 100*		100 - 200*	10 - 50	10 - 50	?	50 - 150*	100 - 300			400 - 1,000

+ breeding species

? possible breeding

\* data from regional investigators (other data from expert estimation)

Lower Don in August (S.N. Varshavskiy pers. comm.); later, the species became a rare vagrant there and since 1968 there have been no records at all in the Rostov region (Kazakov *et al.* 1981). In the 1970s a sharp decline in numbers was also noted in Transvolga (V.N. Moseykin pers. comm.).

**Numbers:** A few small colonies are now known in the Volgograd region, with a total population of up to 10-15 pairs (Chernobay 1992). **Sociable Plovers**

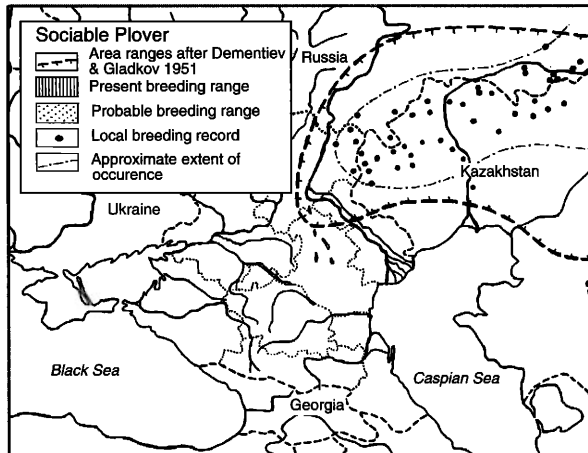


Figure 2. Breeding range of Sociable Plover in south Russia.

are occasionally still recorded in the south-east of the Saratov region (Khrustov & Moseykin 1986), and are more common (up to 2,000 pairs) in the Ural-Ilek interfluvium (Orenburg region), near the border with Kazakhstan (Davygora *et al.* 1989). The total population in the European steppes (including western Kazakhstan) amounts to 1,000-2,000 pairs, while the world population is probably between 5,000 and 15,000 pairs.

### Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

*Red Data Book of Russia:* conservation category II.

*Species of European Conservation Concern:*

conservation category III.

**Range:** All of South Russia.

**Distribution:** Local.

**Habitat:** Mainly sandy expanses on riverine and marine terraces, less commonly salt pans in lake depressions of the semi-desert zone. Small numbers nest in stony steppes with low grassy vegetation in the Donetsk range of hills. In all areas, birds prefer to breed near settlements or farms. A nearby water source is essential.

**Range size trends:** Unknown.

**Population size trends:** Marked decline in recent decades on river terraces in the steppe zone due to afforestation of the sands. A similarly sharp decline also noted on the Taman' peninsula. In other parts of South Russia, populations appear to be relatively stable.

**Numbers:** On the sands of river terraces, the density varies from 0.2 to 1.0 pairs per km<sup>2</sup> in different districts (Belik 1988b), on sands among lakes in the Volga delta, 72-148 pairs per 25 km<sup>2</sup> (Sles' 1977). On sandy expanses in the semi-desert zone, 2-3 pairs along a transect of 10 km (Gizatulin & Tochiev 1990), in saline depressions 1 pair per 40-80 km

(Khokhlov 1987), and in stony steppes <0.1 pairs per km<sup>2</sup> (Belik 1988b). The total population of South Russia may be roughly estimated at 7,000-14,000 pairs, including 300-600 pairs in the Rostov region and 200 pairs in the Stavropol' region (Khokhlov 1987; Belik 1992).

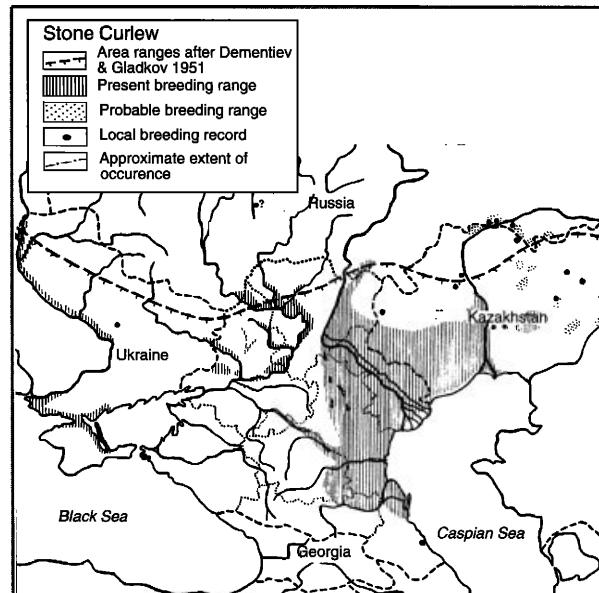


Figure 3. Breeding range of Stone Curlew in south Russia.

### Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

*Red Data Book of Russia:* conservation category III.

*Species of European Conservation Concern:*

conservation category IV.

**Range:** South and south-east of the Region.

**Distribution:** Sporadic; local concentrations.

**Habitat:** Open shores of seas and salt lakes in the arid zone.

**Range size trends:** Formerly occurred only in the Caspian lowlands and Azov Sea area. In the second half of the 20th century, however, coinciding with the irrigation of the steppe zone, there was evidence of a considerable range expansion to the north, as far as Dnepropetrovsk, Lugansk and Volgograd.

**Population size trends:** Since the middle of this century the creation of a large number of artificial water bodies (reservoirs) resulted in a marked increase in Avocet numbers, with the trend apparently continuing to the present day.

**Numbers:** The total population of the region is estimated to be 1,500-2,500 pairs, including 600-800 pairs in the eastern Azov Sea coastal area (Emtyl' *et al.* 1990) and 300-400 pairs in the Manych valley (Khokhlov 1987; Belik 1988b).

### Black-winged Stilt

#### *Himantopus himantopus*

*Red Data Book of Russia:* conservation category III.

**Range:** The whole of South Russia.

**Distribution:** Typically, in local concentrations in the south of the region and in the north a rare, sporadic and irregular breeding bird.

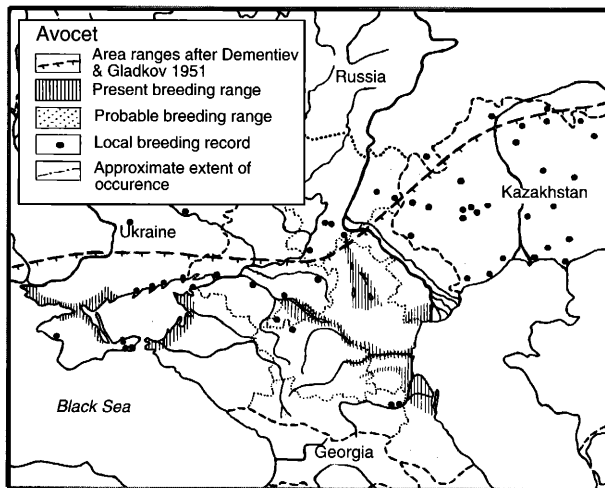


Figure 4. Breeding range of Avocet in south Russia.

**Habitat:** Open, muddy shores of various water bodies, occasionally salt pans in lake depressions and river valleys. Also frequently breeds in ricefields, and at temporary pools formed by run-off from canals and artesian wells, etc.

**Range size trends:** Formerly bred mainly on the shores of salt or brackish water bodies around the north Caspian, in the Manych valley and near the Sea of Azov. With the development of intensive irrigation schemes in the mid-20th century, new habitats suitable for Stilts appeared along the Volga, in Ciscaucasia and in southern Ukraine; this encouraged the species to expand its range north, peaking in the 1980s, when the range extended to Cherkassy, Khar'kov and Saratov. The small, isolated breeding colonies established on the northern limit of the range were probably a result of birds dispersing from the overpopulated centre. In recent years, the trend has been for the majority of these smaller colonies to gradually disappear.

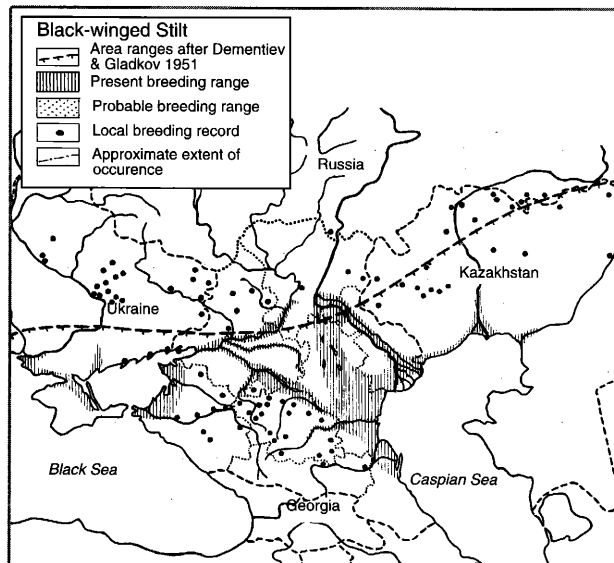


Figure 5. Breeding range of Black-winged Stilt in south Russia.

**Population size trends:** A considerable increase in the South Russian and Ukrainian populations was noted during the second half of the 20th century, but a

marked decline was recorded there in the late 1980s.

**Numbers:** The current breeding population in South Russia is roughly 4,000-10,000 pairs, with 1,000-3,000 pairs in the Rostov region, 800-1,200 in Krasnodar and 700-1,300 pairs in the Stavropol' region (Khokhlov 1987, 1990; Belik 1988b, 1992; Emtyl' 1988; Emtyl' *et al.* 1990, 1992).

### Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*

*Species of European Conservation Concern:* conservation category III.

**Range:** The south-east of the Region.

**Distribution:** Rare and sporadic.

**Habitat:** In semi-deserts near the north-west limit of the range, closely associated with salt pans in lake depressions.

**Range size trends:** In the mid-20th century, the range limit probably shifted slightly north-west, but at present it appears to be stable.

**Population size trends:** Numbers now appear to be relatively stable, or slightly decreasing.

**Numbers:** Unknown. A colony of up to 30 pairs was discovered in the Manych valley in 1950 (Spangenberg 1952). Several tens of pairs may now breed in Kalmykiya (Belik *et al.* 1991), and the total in the whole of South Russia is possibly as many as 200-500 pairs.

### Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

**Range:** The whole of South Russia.

**Distribution:** Rare, sporadic, locally distributed.

**Habitat:** Open seashore and river banks. In recent years it has begun to occupy large sandy expanses on river terraces, nesting far from the water on land trampled by cattle, near farms.

**Range size trends:** Formerly widespread along rivers in the Don and Volga basins. Then, in the second

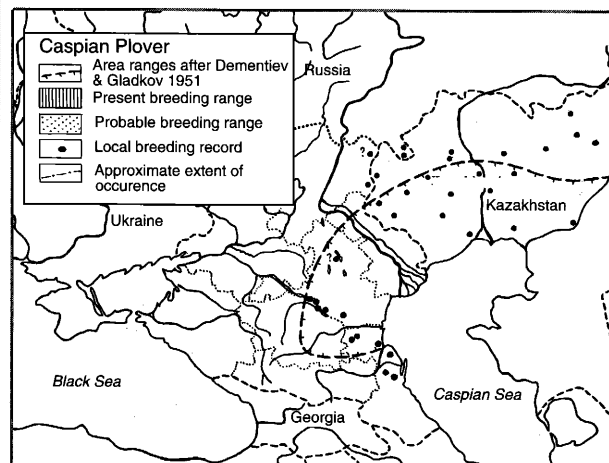


Figure 6. Breeding range of Caspian Plover in south Russia.

half of the 20th century, expansions and contractions occurred in southern parts of the range as a result of hydro-technical construction projects (barrages, *etc.*) and the greatly increased negative impact of human industrial and recreational activity on waterside habitats.

**Population size trends:** There was approximately a four to eightfold decrease in numbers along the Don in the 1970s-1980s (Belik 1988a). More recent trends there are still unclear. The Taman' peninsula population appears to be relatively stable.

**Numbers:** The current breeding population in South Russia is about 200-500 pairs, including 50-100 pairs on the Don and up to 60 pairs on the shores of the Kiziltashskie lagoons on the Taman' peninsula (Belik 1988a; Til'ba *et al.* 1990; Belik *et al.* 1991).

### Curlew *Numenius arquata*

*Species of European Conservation Concern:* conservation category III.

**Range:** The north-east of the Region.

**Distribution:** Very rare, sporadic and locally distributed.

**Habitat:** Mainly dry meadows in lake depressions amidst large sandy expanses.

**Range size trends:** Formerly occurred throughout the

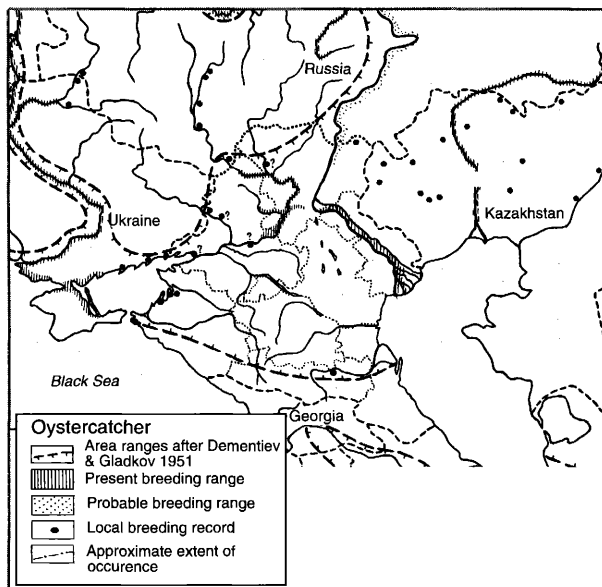


Figure 7. Breeding range of Oystercatcher in south Russia.

steppe zone, but in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, it disappeared from almost all parts of the European steppes, birds being squeezed out by the ploughing of virgin lands, an increase in grazing on the steppes and, probably, because adult Curlews, which are not very shy in the breeding season, were subjected to direct persecution by man, *i.e.* shooting for food during famine years. At present, only one relict population - in the Tsimlyansk sands - is known in South Russia. In addition, Curlews possibly breed in the extensive Archeda sands in Volgograd region where there is also suitable nesting habitat. The large breeding range of the Kazakhstan steppe population begins in Transvolga, but extends into the north-east of Volgograd region and the south-east of Saratov region.

**Population size trends:** In the Tsimlyansk sands, with reduced grazing pressure on nesting habitats, the Curlew population appears to have stabilized slightly in recent years. Numbers in Transvolga

have, however, declined roughly tenfold over the last two decades (V.N. Moseykin pers. comm.). **Numbers:** The Tsimlyansk sands hold 10-30 pairs (Belik 1988a, 1992) and approximately the same number is possibly found in the Archeda sands. In the south-east of Saratov region and north-east of Volgograd region, the current breeding population is up to 500 pairs (V.N. Moseykin pers. comm.).

### Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

*Species of European Conservation Concern:* conservation category II.

**Range:** The north and east of the Region.

**Distribution:** A very rare, sporadic and irregular breeding species.

**Habitat:** Damp meadows in river valleys and lake depressions.

**Range size trends:** Like the Curlew, it appears formerly to have been widespread throughout the steppe zone. A marked range contraction in the European steppes probably took place in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, primarily

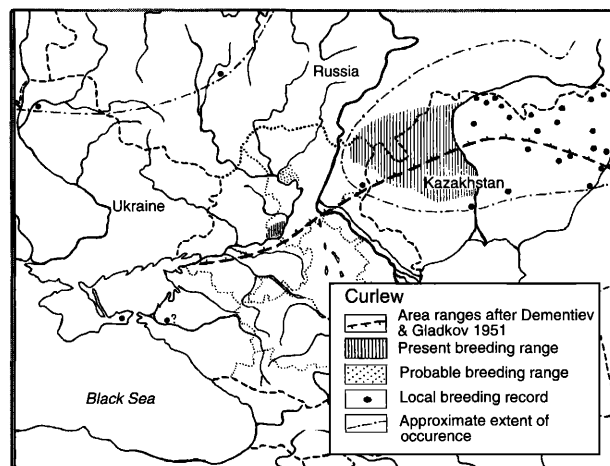


Figure 8. Breeding range of Curlew in south Russia.

because of the drying-out of meadows as a result of intensive grazing (Rayskiy 1955), but perhaps also because the adults were shot, as typically they are not shy when breeding. At present in South Russia only a few nesting records are known, in floodlands of the Rostov region and on salt meadows adjoining lakes in Kalmykiya. The relatively stable range of the steppe population in Kazakhstan extends east from Transvolga, on the eastern border of the Volgograd region.

**Population size trends:** In recent years, there appears to have been a tendency for numbers to recover in the steppe zone, and there are reports of a similar trend for several regions in the forest zone (Zubakin 1988; Klimov 1991).

**Numbers:** Unknown. There are evidently about 10-30 pairs in the Rostov region, while the breeding population of Kalmikia is thought to be about 50-60 pairs (Belik *et al.* 1991).

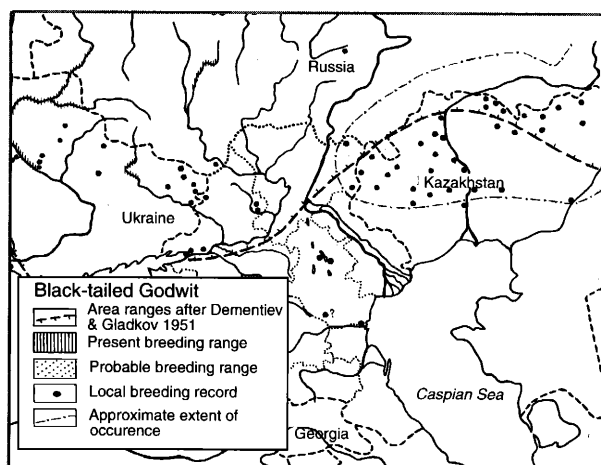


Figure 9. Breeding range of Black-tailed Godwit in south Russia.

## Black-winged Pratincole

### *Glareola nordmanni*

*Species of European Conservation Concern:*  
conservation category III.

*Range:* The south and east of the Region.

*Distribution:* Occurs in local concentrations in the south of the Region; further north, it is a rare, sporadic and irregular breeding bird.

*Habitat:* Mainly alkali flats and salt pans in river valleys and lake depressions, also on fields and fallow land devoid of vegetation.

*Range size trends:* Formerly widespread throughout the steppe zone, but in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, there was a considerable shift of the range limit to the south-east which was associated with the ploughing of the steppes and the increased use of river valleys for grazing. In the 1970s, another marked range contraction was noted and this led to the almost complete disappearance of the species from the west bank of the Volga and the Middle Don basin (V.F. Chernobay pers. comm.). Black-winged Pratincoles are now found mainly on the shores of lakes and other water bodies in the semi-desert zone, also in the valleys of the Manych and Lower Don. In drought years, there are probably episodic extensions of the breeding range by part of the population, when birds move well to the north of the northern limit of the main range.

*Population size trends:* Numbers increased markedly in the North Caspian lowlands and Manych valley in the second half of the 20th century, at a time when steppelands were being irrigated, but further north during the same period, populations were apparently still continuing to decline. In recent years, this negative trend has also been noted in the south.

*Numbers:* At the end of the 1980s, the total South Russian population was about 5,000-9,000 pairs, including 3,000-4,000 pairs in Kalmikia and 1,000-3,000 pairs in the Rostov region (Belik *et al.* 1991), but these figures are now considered to be somewhat exaggerated.

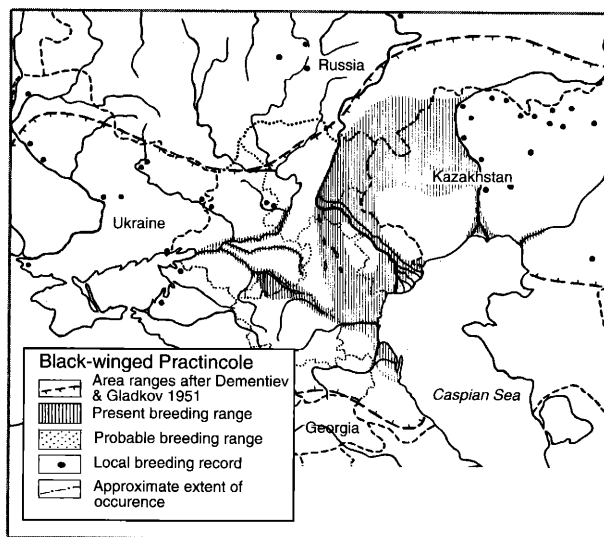


Figure 10. Breeding range of Black-winged Pratincole in south Russia.

## Collared Pratincole

### *Glareola pratincola*

*Species of European Conservation Concern:*  
conservation category III.

*Range:* The south of the Region.

*Distribution:* In small local concentrations.

*Habitat:* Damp salt pans along the shores of various water bodies.

*Range size trends:* The history of the east European Collared Pratincole population has not been well studied, in so far as both this species and Black-winged Pratincole were united under the name *G. pratincola* up to 1842, which means that now it is generally impossible to establish the true situation. In the past, the Collared Pratincole was probably confined in South Russia to eastern Ciscaucasia.

Then, in the mid-20th century, the Danubian population began to expand rapidly and colonized the whole of the Northern Black Sea coastal region east to the lower reaches of the Don; there was a simultaneous expansion by the Crimean population, which extended its range east to the lower Kuban' river. The Terek valley population possibly spread north-west at the same time, reaching the Kuma-Manych valley. Collared Pratincoles now nest in small colonies in the coastal belts of the eastern Azov Sea and the Caspian, and are occasionally also recorded in the valleys of the Don, Kuma and Manych.

*Population size trends:* In the second half of the 20th century, at the same time as the range expansion, numbers of Collared Pratincole increased and it appeared to squeeze out and replace the Black-winged Pratincole *G. nordmanni* (Tomkovich 1992). However, in recent years, a tendency has also been noted for the Collared Pratincole population to decline.

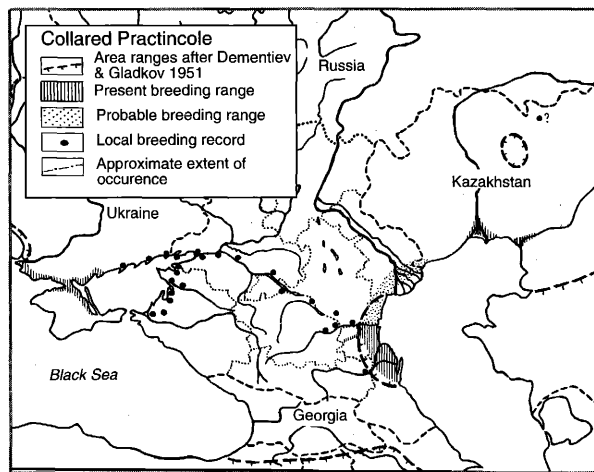


Figure 11. Breeding range of Collared Pratincole in south Russia.

**Numbers:** the total South Russian population is roughly 400-1,000 pairs, including 100-300 pairs in the eastern Azov Sea area and 100-500 pairs around the northern Caspian.

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# Current distribution and population trends of some rare waders in Belarus

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Breeding by Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* has been proved in Belarus only during the last two decades. The first Oystercatcher nests were found in the early 1970s on the Prypiat river and several lakes in north-western Belarus. The population size was estimated in the mid 1980s to be at least 200 breeding pairs in the southern part of the country (the Prypiat, Dnieper, Sozh and lower Berezina rivers) and about 30 pairs in northern Belarus. Some population growth has probably continued into the 1990s. Breeding by Ringed Plovers has been noted only in the middle reaches of the Prypiat river. About 20 pairs were counted here in the mid 1980s and 35-40 pairs in the early 1990s. In 1926, breeding of Terek Sandpipers was proved in the Ukraine near the Belarussian border. Since then the species has colonised Belarus along the Prypiat river from Chernobyl' in the east, and the border of Brest and Gomel regions in the west. No obvious changes in the size of Terek Sandpiper populations have been noted during the last five years. A decrease in the numbers and range of Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus* has been recorded since the late 19th century. In the mid 1930s this species bred in the Mozyrsky, Khoynikskiy, Svetlogorskiy and Bargin districts of Gomel region. There was only one place in Bargin district where birds bred in 1980-91. Three pairs were censused there in 1983 but only one pair in 1991.

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Гнездование кулика-сороки *Haematopus ostralegus*, мородунки *Xenus cinereus* и галстучника *Charadrius hiaticula* впервые было доказано в Беларуси только в течение последних двух десятилетий. Первые гнезда кулика-сороки были найдены в начале 1970-х гг. на р. Припять и на нескольких озерах в северо-западной Беларуси. Численность популяции в середине 1980-х гг. оценивалась не менее, чем в 200 гнездящихся пар в южной части страны (реки Припять, Днепр, Сож и нижняя Березина) и примерно 30 пар на севере Беларуси. Некоторый рост популяции продолжался, наверное, и в 1990-е гг. Гнездование галстучников было отмечено только по среднему течению р. Припять, где около 20 пар было учтено в середине 1980-х и 35-40 пар в начале 1990-х гг. В 1926 г. гнездование мородунки впервые было доказано на Украине, недалеко от границы с Беларусью. С тех пор вид заселил Беларусь по реке Припять, от Чернобыля на востоке и от границы Брестской и Гомельской областей на западе. За последние пять лет ярких изменений численности популяций мородунок не было отмечено. Снижение численности и сокращение ареала авдотки *Burhinus oedichnemus* регистрируются уже с конца 19-ого века. В середине 1930-х гг. этот вид гнезился в Мозырском, Хойникском, Светлогорском и Брагинском районах Гомельской области. В 1980-91 гг. авдотки гнездились только в одном месте в Брагинском районе. Там были учтены три пары в 1983 г., а лишь одна пара в 1991 г.

## Introduction

Twelve wader species are included in the Belarus Red Data Book, published in 1993. All these species are rare, endangered, or under threat of national extinction. Among them are Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedichnemus*, Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*,

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*. A common feature of the distribution of these species is that they can be found locally in Belarus, where they breed at the limit of their range.

Stone Curlew seems to be a relict species which is declining steadily towards extinction, whereas the other three species have only been recorded breeding in Belarus in the last two decades and seem to be expanding their breeding range and increasing in numbers.

**Methods**

Data on the distribution of these species were collected in 1986-1992 over the Poles'e (southern Belarus). Some fragmentary data from earlier observations and publications are also summarised.

**Results and Discussion**

**Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus***

According to published distribution data, the views of local people and records from recent years, the breeding range in Belarus is steadily contracting (Figure 1) and this is confirmed by the numerical data. Data for the end of the 19th century show that breeding was centred on two main areas in the Poles'e (Shnitnikov 1913). In the 1930s, Stone Curlew were still fairly common in the Bargin and Khoynikskiy districts and were also recorded in other parts of Poles'e (Fedyushin & Dolbik 1967). After the 1950s, the negative trend became stronger. A pair of Stone Curlews was recorded for the last time in 1950 in the Kamenetskiy district, and in 1964 in the Svetlogorskiy district. By 1983, the only

Curlews, such as abandoned fields and waste-land, was either recultivated or used for pine plantations during the second half of the last century. Currently, the birds only occupy sand dunes in river valleys, or the edges of former bogs, some of which still remain in Poles'e after drainage. On the majority of sand dunes, measures to prevent sand movement, involving planting of pine and willow trees, have meant that as the trees colonise the dunes, the area of available breeding habitat for Stone Curlews is gradually decreasing.

After the accident at the Chernobyl' nuclear power station in 1986, Stone Curlews were found breeding in the evacuated area. By 1992 there had, however, been no noticeable increase in the population.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

At the Braslavskiye lakes in the northern part of Belarus (Poozerie, or the northern lake region), according to unverified data (Dolbik & Dorofeev 1978) Oystercatchers began breeding in the 1970s, or even a little earlier. The breeding population recently reached about 30 pairs and is still increasing (Kozlov 1988). Since 1977, breeding has taken place on the islands of one of the largest artificial lakes, the Vileyskoye water reservoir, in the north-west of the Minsk region.



Figure 1. Stone Curlew breeding distribution in Belarus.

known Stone Curlew breeding location in Belarus was in the Bargin district, where three pairs were recorded although only one nest was found. In 1992, a possible new breeding site was found in the neighbouring Khoynikskiy district near Krasnosel'ye village where one bird exhibiting breeding behaviour was recorded.

Almost all the potential breeding habitat for Stone

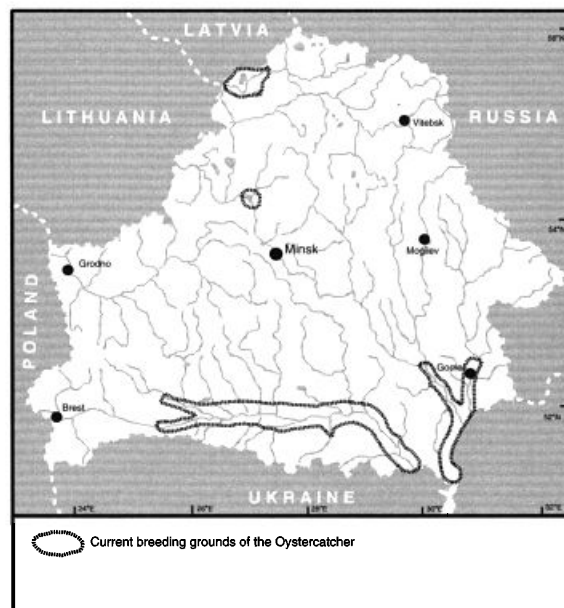


Figure 2. Oystercatcher breeding distribution in Belarus.

Oystercatchers were first recorded breeding at the Pripyat river, southern Belarus in 1971 (Dolbik 1985). Numbers in southern Belarus have increased during the last two decades, with birds occupying new territories along the large rivers (the Dnieper, the Sozh, the Berezina, the Pripyat) further north and east (Figure 2). In 1982, according to counts conducted from a motor boat, the total number of Oystercatchers on 300 km of the Pripyat river banks