

Summary statistics

When presenting a summary of a set of data, what should we give? I believe that one should always give at least three pieces of information - mean, standard deviation, and sample size.

The mean tells the reader the average value. The standard deviation tells him how variable the birds in the population are. The sample size allows him to work out how precise your estimates of the mean and standard deviation are likely to be and to carry out all the statistical calculations he is likely to want to perform on your data.

It is also helpful to the reader to provide him with a measure of precision by giving confidence limits (or standard errors) rather than leaving him to work them out for himself.

t tables: an explanation

You will see that table 2 is headed with two sets of "percentage points", those for confidence limits and those for significance tests. The latter are simply the complements of the former. Most published tables simply have the points for significance tests in their headings: for 95% confidence limits we need the column headed 5% in such tables. If in any doubt about which column to use, remember that the right one for 95% confidence limits is the one in which the values for the higher numbers of degrees of freedom are close to 2.

In some tables, the headings are in terms of probability values rather than percentages: 0.05 = 5%, 0.01 = 1%, etc..

Dr. J.J.D.Greenwood, Department of Biological Sciences, The University, Dundee.

WADER STUDY GROUP PROJECTS - PROGRESS REPORTS

1. Spring passage of Siberian Knot

Following the announcement in the last Bulletin, there has been a good response to the requests for members who were willing to select an area to be counted during the spring passage period, or to look for dyed Knot. It looks as if a good sample of sites will be covered, particularly from France north-eastwards. Plans are proceeding well for the planned marking of Knot in the Vendée in western France and in South Africa, although the number which may be able to be dyed, particularly in South Africa, is not certain.

Members who wish to participate by counting or looking for dyed Knot, preferably on the mainland coastline of Europe or in Africa, and who have not yet contacted the organiser are invited to do so, when they will be sent recording forms and instructions. A form on which to contact the organiser is enclosed with this Bulletin.

William J.A. Dick, 125 Leathwaite Road, London SW11 6RW, England.

2. Spring passage of Dunlins, Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers and Turnstones

The second project, concerning the spring passage of Dunlins, Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers and Turnstones, has met with a very favourable response. Over 30 forms have been returned from a wide variety of sites, including Orkney, Shetlands and Eire as well as nearly all the large estuaries throughout the British Isles. These involve both "counters" and "catchers" in about equal numbers, and some cannon-net licence holders have also expressed a willingness to travel to areas not covered by wader ringing groups but where large scale catching could be valuable.

Field work should be well under way by the time this note appears, and lists of the sites being covered should have been sent to everyone involved. However, it is still not too late to join in and a form is enclosed with this bulletin.

Dr. P.N.Ferns, Zoology Department, University College, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 1XL, Wales.