

A number of explanations are possible.

- 1) The dyed birds may have elicited aggressive reactions from unmarked birds, tending to drive them to peripheral parts of the roost and into the company of other dyed individuals. This was not seen to happen and there was no indication that the proportion of dyed birds was higher on the edge of the flock. Their roosting behaviour did not change over the winter and there was no indication of disproportionate numbers of dyed Redshank leaving the inner Clyde area. But if this does happen it would have important implications for the use of dye-marking to study population turnover and movements.
- 2) The catch may have consisted of a distinct sub-group of the flock which tended to associate throughout the winter. Examination of wing lengths and moult scores showed no sign of this and field observations confirmed that the low proportion of young birds in the catch was representative of the whole flock, but it remains a possibility.
- 3) The flock may consist of many small groups of birds which tend to associate together throughout the winter.
- 4) Particular birds may habitually roost in a particular spot in relation to the physical surroundings or in relation to the flock itself.

We conclude that roosting flocks are not random associations of birds gathered in areas where they can wait undisturbed for the tide to recede, but are structured organisations. The structuring requires investigation. It may go beyond segregation by age and moult conditions and could involve long term subtle associations which cannot be explained at present. Perhaps individual marking of birds in a small population of waders with a distinct roost would provide some answers to this problem.

Acknowledgements

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References

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