

WSG PROJECT ON MOVEMENTS OF WADER POPULATIONS IN WESTERN EUROPE: SECOND PROGRESS REPORT

by M.W. and Ann Pienkowski

The project continues to make rapid progress and the response of wader ringers and watchers in many countries has been excellent. We are being kept more than busy in dealing with details of birds caught and especially with records from observers, both systematic and casual. Also, the period around the end of the year saw the production of various reports - it was probably the despatching of the one to participants in the project that really brought home to us the number of people who are helping in one way or another: we estimate about 500! So that we spend most work on the project rather than on reports, we will keep the present one fairly brief! However, we hope to be able to include a full list of participants in the first year of the project in our report in the August issue of the Bulletin.

Computerization of ringing information

Transfer of data to computer file is now progressing rapidly. Work on a 'production-line' basis was delayed a little while we modified the programs handling the data to allow for some ways of completing the forms that we had not anticipated (see also the following note). On the whole it seemed more sensible to allow ringers to record all the information they wanted, in a way which suited them reasonably well, rather than to enforce too strict an adherence to the instructions we had written initially! We will try to avoid the oft-quoted reply from many firms nowadays that 'we can't do it because we use a computer'. However, now that we have adjusted our programs to fit the data we sincerely hope further changes will not be requested too often!

There is one other form of data coding which we hope to allow for soon. This concerns large catches where many birds were not processed. These can, of course, be coded on the standard green forms but this requires parts of ring numbers to be written out many times. Accordingly we intend to design an abbreviated format for ringing data, where only ring-number(s) and age were recorded (not measurements, etc.). This will probably be of use to only a few groups with data from previous years. Any groups who think this might be of use should contact us.

It might be useful to outline the procedure we use in handling these forms. After a brief preliminary check, the forms are sent to punch operators who transfer the information to computer file via a typewriter-like machine. (Please send your original forms as it is much easier for the operators to work from these than from photocopies. We will return your original forms after punching if you ask us to. If you are sending forms by post, we strongly recommend that you also keep a copy of the data.) We then run the data through a program which checks for certain errors (generated either in coding or in punching) and prints out the data in an easily readable form so that we can check for further errors. The computer file is then corrected by us, working from a terminal connected to the computer. When we have eliminated all the errors we and the program can find or are left only with some which require answers from the ringer, we send a copy of the readable print-out to him or her for checking. When he or she returns the print-out with errors marked (or noted that there are no errors) we correct any remaining errors and send a final version of the print-out to the ringer. We also transfer the data to magnetic tape storage.

New data are now being received routinely from many ringers and the older data are also being transferred rapidly. Those enthusiasts who have dealt with all their data on Sanderling Calidris alba, Knot C. canutus, Ringed Plover Charadrius hiaticula, Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola, Bar-tailed Godwit Limosa lapponica and Dunlin Calidris alpina can now move on to Redshank Tringa totanus, Curlew Numenius arquata and Oystercatcher Haematopus ostralegus.

Marking and observer network

Marking at the Waddenzee, the Wash, Teesmouth and, in the related projects, at the Firth of Forth and the Severn, had continued through the winter and we are grateful to the ringers for their efforts. Marking at some sites will continue in the spring and additionally birds will be dyed and flagged in February and March in Morocco by the Netherlands Morocco Expedition 1981. Therefore, there is plenty to look out for in the spring (and indeed on the breeding grounds for some species).

The observer network has continued to expand and additionally there have been many sightings from other birdwatchers (some of whom we manage to persuade to join the network!). There are now registered 2 sites in Finland, 1 in Sweden, 2 in Poland, 25 in Denmark, 7 in Germany, 15 in the Netherlands, 15 in France, 8 in Spain, 10 in the Republic of Ireland and 238 in the United Kingdom. We would still welcome more observers anywhere - but particularly on the Continental and Irish coasts, Grampian, Tayside and Dumfries & Galloway regions of Scotland and most major estuaries in Britain (where good coverage requires many observers).

Some results

The marking and observer effort have been very successful in showing both the dispersal from some major moulting sites, and some later winter movements in many species, notably Dunlin, of which most individuals were marked. Two examples of provisional maps of sightings are given in Figs. 1 & 2. Figure 1 shows the wide dispersal of adult Dunlins marked on the Wash in autumn. Although the birds shown on this map were not known to be moulting their flight feathers at the time of marking, the low number of sightings elsewhere (in those sites watched systematically) until after the moulting period suggests that most had indeed moulted at the Wash. Many birds moved westwards or southwards: to Ireland, the west and south coasts of Britain and France (several more sightings in France have been reported since this map was prepared in January). Dispersal of juvenile Dunlin was also wide. Other birds (not shown) stayed in the marking sites at the Wash and also at the Waddenzee. Dispersal from the Waddenzee and Wattenmeer was also wide (Fig. 2) with sightings from the E, W and S coasts of Britain and, since this map was prepared, from the Moray Firth in Scotland and along the W coast of France.

Some similar and some different patterns of dispersal for other species are suggested by smaller samples, and more complete analysis on all species will be undertaken later.

Prospects

At the time of writing the EEC Third Environmental Programme has been confirmed and we have just heard that funding from this source will be offered to Durham University for this project for the rest of 1981. (The share of funding from the Nature Conservancy Council has already been assured.) Handling of the data forms and sightings should therefore proceed without serious delay.

As noted above, dye-marking and temporary leg-flagging will continue in the spring and continued watching for these should be rewarding. Marking will again be undertaken in various sites from early autumn 1981. We will be contacting directly the ringers and groups whom we hope will do this. We hope that as many observers as possible will continue to participate for further seasons.

As ever, many thanks to everyone who is taking part.

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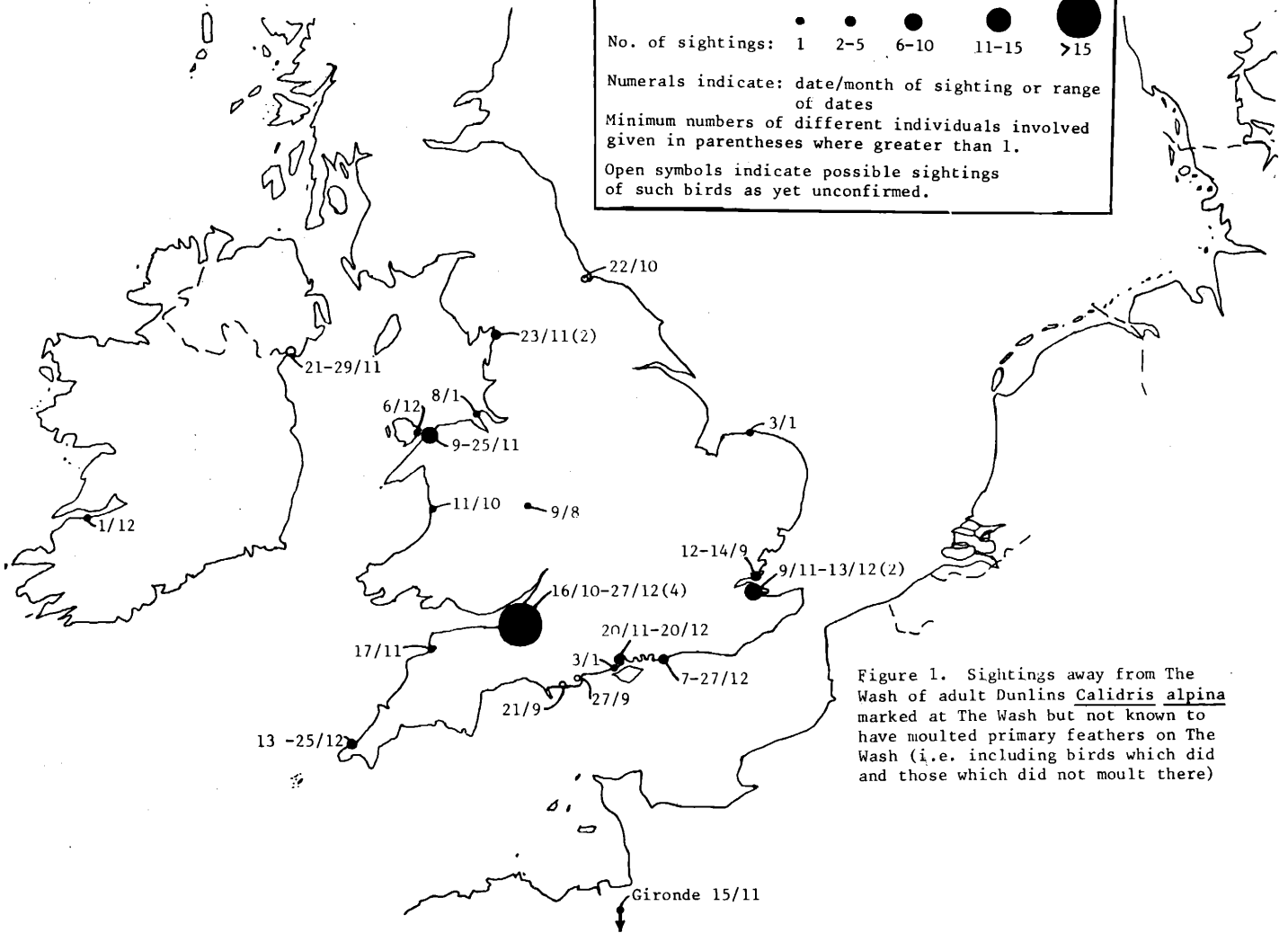
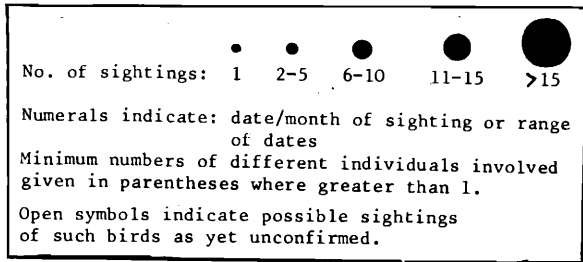


Figure 1. Sightings away from The Wash of adult Dunlins *Calidris alpina* marked at The Wash but not known to have moulted primary feathers on The Wash (i.e. including birds which did and those which did not moult there)

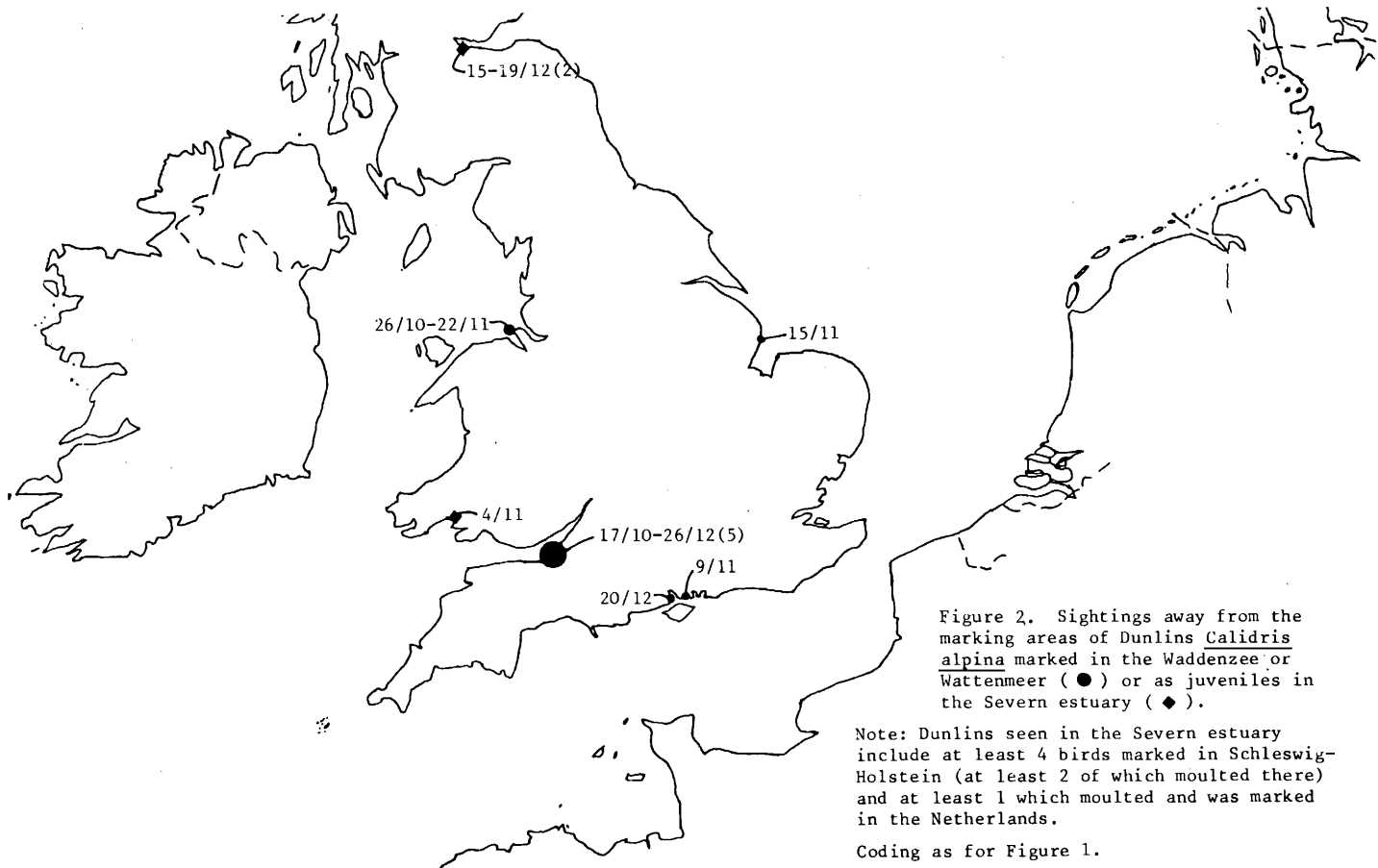


Figure 2. Sightings away from the marking areas of Dunlins *Calidris alpina* marked in the Waddenzee or Wattenmeer (●) or as juveniles in the Severn estuary (◆).

Note: Dunlins seen in the Severn estuary include at least 4 birds marked in Schleswig-Holstein (at least 2 of which moulted there) and at least 1 which moulted and was marked in the Netherlands.

Coding as for Figure 1.