

# 10-YEAR AGRICULTURAL PLAN FOR SHETLAND

by J. D. Okill

Recent announcements indicate that Scotland's outer isles are about to receive massive financial aid for agricultural development. The EEC Integrated Development Programme for the Western Isles was discussed recently in relation to its impact on breeding waders (see W.S.G. Bulletin No. 35:5). Earlier this year, the Shetland Islands Council announced their Ten-year Plan for Shetland Agriculture. The proposals are part of the local authority's plan to safeguard traditional industries in the face of the large oil-related developments in the islands, and the strategy for the agricultural industry aims "to maintain its validity and support its expansion".

Most aspects of the agricultural industry are covered in the plan, and proposals include schemes for stock-improvement, land tenure, rationalisation of milk production, training programmes, and steading grants. However, it is in the central part of the plan, with its proposals for land improvements, that the greatest potential conflicts with conservation interests lie. The plan suggests that a maximum of 38,000 acres could be improved, and that an area of at least 20,000 acres should be achieved in the period of the plan. The improvements will be implemented through a system of grants and cheap loans both to agricultural contractors and to farmers/crofters.

The hill land or scattald of Shetland is used mainly for sheep, with a few herds of Shetland ponies, and is worked by a system of common grazing. The land improvement programme will include the apportionment of the common grazing to the individual crofter, the fencing-in of the hill and the driving of new roads into the scattald so that better access can be achieved. The moorland will be changed into grassland by systems of hill-ploughing, drainage, fertilising, liming and re-seeding.

The funding for the plan will come directly from the Islands Council, the monies to be used coming from revenue collected in various ways from the oil-related industries. The cost of the project is difficult to determine, but it has been suggested that it will cost in excess of £10 million.

Shetland has 13 breeding species of waders. Oystercatchers Haematopus ostralegus, Lapwings Vanellus vanellus, Curlews Numenius arquata, Snipes Gallinago gallinago and Redshanks Tringa totanus nest commonly, Ringed Plovers Charadrius hiaticula nest where the habitat is suitable, a few pairs of Common Sandpipers Actitis hypoleucos breed along burns and around the edges of lochs. On suitable moorland, Golden Plovers Pluvialis apricaria and Dunlins Calidris alpina are regular. The county probably holds about 300 pairs of Whimbrel Numenius phaeopus. These are restricted mainly to moorland heath and become common on the serpentine uplands of the northern isles. Recent surveys have shown that two of the outer isles hold no less than 70 pairs each (M.G. Richardson pers. comm.). These represent, of course, the major proportion of the British population. One or two pairs of Black-tailed Godwits Limosa limosa nest annually - unique in Britain in that they are of the Icelandic sub-species. There is a small but stable population of Red-necked Phalaropes Phalaropus lobatus, most breeding in one restricted area. In at least two of the last three years Greenshanks Tringa nebularia have nested. Whilst it is possible that some species will actually benefit from changes in land use, most of the more important species can only be detrimentally affected.

Shetland's moorland also provides breeding habitats for important populations of Red-throated Divers Gavia stellata, Merlins Falco columbarius, Arctic Terns Sterna paradisaea, Bonxies Stercorarius skua and Arctic Skuas Stercorarius parasiticus.

One of the most worrying features of the Ten-year Plan for Shetland Agriculture is that the conservation bodies have not been consulted. In fact, to date the conservation bodies have shown little interest in the proposed development and as yet the plan has received no publicity in any of the natural history journals. The EEC plan for the Western Isles states that "the measures proposed are compatible with the protection of the environment", but there is not even a protection clause such as this in the Shetlands Island Council's plan. It is the aim of the plan to spread the funding as widely as possible through the agricultural community and no account has so far been taken of any natural history interests. It therefore appears that since the only control on development will be within National Nature Reserves, and possibly on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the plan is a serious threat to the wildlife of Shetland.

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

by M. W. and Ann Pienkowski

Our last progress report gave details of the proposed marking programme for this season, which started in August. At the time of writing (October 1982) the following information on totals marked are to hand. Approximately 1000 Oystercatchers Haematopus ostralegus were marked in the Netherlands Delta in August, together with some Grey Plovers Pluvialis squatarola, Ringed Plovers Charadrius hiaticula, Curlews Numenius arquata, Turnstones Arenaria interpres and Dunlins Calidris alpina.

The Wash Wader Ringing Group had successful catching attempts in mid-August, mid-September and mid-October, resulting in the marking of 182 Oystercatchers, 53 Grey Plovers, 384 Knots Calidris canutus, 821 Dunlins, 124 Redshanks Tringa totanus, 184 Bar-tailed Godwits Limosa lapponica, 67 Curlews and smaller numbers of Turnstones and Sanderlings Calidris alba. SCAN Ringing Group (North Wales) in August and September marked approximately 125 Oystercatchers, 20 Ringed Plovers, 110 Dunlins, 20 Curlews, 170 Redshanks and some others. The German Waddenzee suffered bad weather in August but Beringer-gemeinschaft Nordfrisches Wattenmeer managed to mark over 60 Dunlins and approximately 20 Grey Plovers and 20 Knots. In the Danish Waddenzee about 100 Dunlins were marked in late summer by Vildtbiologisk Station, Kalø. Next week a team from France and Britain will be visiting Mont St Michel in northern France to try and mark waders there, with the help of CRBPO, the University of Rennes, and IWRB France.