

# BREEDING WADERS OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

by A. Martinez Vilalta

This note summarises information, collected mostly since 1980, on breeding waders in part of the Iberian Peninsula. The area covered includes Catalonia, the region of Valencia and Andorre, and covers much of eastern Spain from the Pyrenees in the north, and about two-thirds of the Mediterranean coast. There are few wetlands in the area because of the Mediterranean climate; most are along the coast. The main areas for breeding waders are shown in Figure 1.

The preparation of the Atlas of Breeding Birds in Catalonia and Andorra (Muntaner *et al.* 1984), and that of the Natural History of Paisos Catalans (Ferrer *et al.* in press) have provided much information and have allowed a reassessment of the status of all the wader species breeding in the area.

The status of each breeding species is described below, and numbers are summarised in Table 1.

**Oystercatcher.** Very rare. Only breeds on the beaches of the Ebro Delta. 22 pairs in 1979 and 23 in 1980. Low breeding density of 0.6 pairs/ha. Apart from this, one pair established territory in the wetlands of Alt Emporda, but did not breed.

**Black-winged Stilt.** Quite common, despite its disappearance from several localities, due to the drainage and development of wetlands. The nesting population of the entire area is between 1 000 and 1 300 pairs, with considerable annual fluctuations. In the main breeding area, the Ebro Delta, it forms small colonies of 10 to 20 pairs, the largest being of 80 pairs (average of 16 nests from 41 colonies studied).

**Avocet.** Locally common and increasing. Breeds in salt pans, salt marshes and very occasionally in the reedbeds of lagoons. Total population is about 1 000 pairs. In the Ebro Delta there was an increase of 72% between 1973 and 1980.

**Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus.*** Quite widespread and common in dry, flat country. Total population unknown but estimated to be between 1 000 and 5 000 pairs.

**Collared Pratincole.** Uncommon. Population stable or slightly declining. Breeds in dry meadows and salt marshes, always in places with sparse vegetation. Total population about 200 pairs. In the Ebro Delta it breeds in colonies of 10 to 20 pairs, the largest being 40 pairs (average of 14 nests, from 20 colonies studied). In the Llobregat Delta breeding was suspected between 1975 and 1982, and proved from 1978 to 1980, with 2 to 4 pairs.

**Little Ringed Plover.** Uncommon. Breeds in coastal marshlands, and along rivers and slow moving streams, in much of the area. Total population estimated to be between 100 and 200 pairs.

**Kentish Plover.** Common. Breeds in numerous places on the coast, but very rarely inland. At present suffering greatly from the excessive numbers of holidaymakers visiting the beaches and the associated developments. It is declining and has even disappeared from several localities. Estimated population 2 000-3 000 pairs. In the Ebro Delta it prefers beaches littered with debris from the sea, where it can hide its nests more easily. In such places the breeding density is very high (average 12

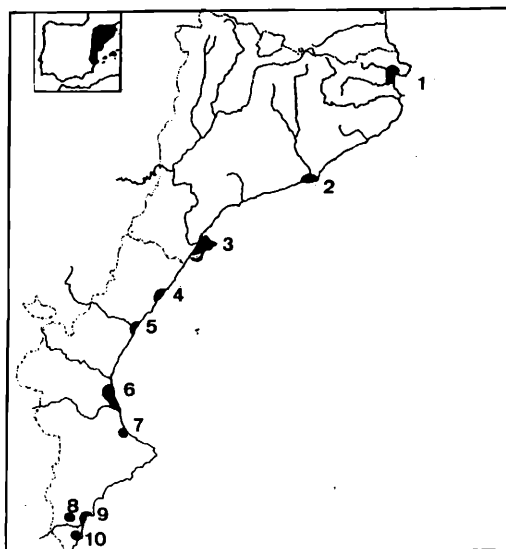


Figure 1. Main sites for breeding waders in eastern Iberia. Numbers refer to sites as follows: 1. Alt Emporda, 2. Llobregat Delta, 3. Ebro Delta, 4. Cabanes, 5. Mouth of river Millars, 6. Albufera of Valencia, 7. Xeresa, 8. Fondo lagoon, 9. Santa Pola salt pans, 10. La Mata salt pans.

pairs/ha), while in others it is lower, for example sandy beaches without debris or vegetation (3.3 pairs/ha) and bare salt marshes (4 pairs/ha). The highest known densities are 14 pairs/ha.

**Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus.*** Recently discovered (1980). It breeds very locally in meadows above the treeline in the Eastern Pyrenees. 1 to 10 pairs.

**Lapwing.** Very rare. Only 1 to 3 pairs, which breed in brackish and salt marshes of the Llobregat Delta, at least since 1977. Exceptionally a pair nested in the Wetlands of Alt Emporda in 1981.

**Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola.*** Rare. Breeds in deciduous forests between 600 and 1200 m, and also in the coniferous forest of the Pyrenees between 1650 and 2050 m. Estimated population 100 to 200 pairs.

**Redshank.** Very rare. Breeds in brackish and salt marshes. Total population 10-50 pairs. Only 4 pairs were found in a suitable area of 115 ha at the Ebro Delta in 1981 (density 0.03 pairs/ha).

**Common Sandpiper.** Rare. Breeds along rivers and fast flowing streams throughout the region, but mainly in mountainous areas (between 1000 and 1500 m) and rarely in coastal marshlands. Estimated total population 50 to 150 pairs.

## REFERENCES

- Muntaner, J., Ferrer, X. & Martinez Vilalta, A. 1984. *Atlas dels ocells nidificants de Catalunya i Andorra*. Ketres Ed. Barcelona.  
 Ferrer, X., Martinez Vilalta, A. & Muntaner, J. in press. *Historia Natural dels Paisos Catalans. vol 12 Ocells*. Ed. Enciclopedia Catalana. Barcelona.

A. Martinez Vilalta, *Catedra Zoologia (Vertebrats), Fac. Biologia. Univ. Barcelona, Barcelona 08028, Spain.*

Table 1. Numbers of breeding birds (pairs) on the main wetland sites on the east coast of the Iberian Peninsula.

Locality	Alt Emporda	Llobregat Delta	Ebro Delta	Cabanes	Mouth of river Millars	Albufera Valencia	Xeresa river	Fondo lagoon	Sta. Pola salt pans	La Mata salt pans
Area (Ha)	4 800		7 500+ 15 200R*	900		3 000+ 18 000 R	307	1 650	2 400	850
Habitat*	D, I, L, M, P, R	D, I, L, M, P	D, I, L, M, P, R, S	M, P	M, P	D, L, M, P, R	D	D, L, M	L, M, P, S	L, M, S
Year of count	1977	1982	1980	1984	1984	1984	1980	1985	1985	1985
Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			23							
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	30	20	505	25-30	30-40	+20	80-84	100	250	60
Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			416					5	510	60
Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>		+	99	50		20		10		
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	+	+	+	+	+	+				
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	+	+	1 000+	+	+	+	+	60	250	60
Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		3								
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>			12			+			6	4
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				+	+	+				

\*D Fresh marshes, I Flooding meadows and fields, L Pools and lagoons, M Brackish and salt marshes, P Sandy beaches, R Paddy fields, S Salt pans.

+ = present but not counted