

## Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* Species Action Plan

### Summary

The European race of the Black-tailed Godwit is declining across its European range. The Icelandic race is stable following a period of recent increase.

In the UK, only 50-60 pairs of the European race breed each year, having recolonised in the 1950's following a period of absence. (2-3 pairs of the Icelandic race also breed in the UK).

Most of the UK population occurs on a handful of sites in the south-east, but a small number occur on one site in Lancashire. The rarity of this species means they are known to be targeted by egg collectors, and their reliance on one site in the county also makes the population vulnerable.

**Action Plan Aim-** To maintain and increase the breeding population of Black-tailed Godwit in Lancashire.

### Species Description

The Black-tailed Godwit is a large, long-billed wading bird. Only slightly smaller than a curlew, in summer they have a mottled black, grey and rusty red plumage on the upperparts, and a reddish flush to the head and underparts. In winter, the plumage becomes a uniform pale grey. In all plumages in flight, it has a striking black and white wing and tail pattern. Birds of the nominate European race are larger than those of the Icelandic race, and have less extensive red on the underparts.

On their wet grassland breeding grounds, they undertake a dramatic spring time aerial display, and due to their size and colouration, they have an impressive presence on the marshes.

### Main Habitats

During the breeding season, Black-Tailed Godwits nest on wet grassland. They select sites that are only lightly grazed, as they prefer longer swards. This helps conceal both the nest and also the young once they have hatched and left the nest, which they do within hours of

hatching. The adults favour wet ground and areas of shallow flooding for probing their insect food, whilst the young pick invertebrates from the sward, again highlighting their preference for longer vegetation.

In the winter, this species occurs in often sizeable flocks on coastal estuaries and grazing marsh. In the north-west, these flocks are largely made up of Icelandic birds.

## **National Status**

Black-tailed Godwits used to breed across England, but their level of abundance is hard to determine. They disappeared from many known sites in the 1800s, becoming virtually extinct as a regular breeder in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as wetlands were drained and their wet grassland habitat was lost.

In 1952, birds returned to the fens of East Anglia, and concerted conservation management on a few key sites has seen a breeding population of typically 50 pairs become reasonably stable on several sites in the south-east of England.

In common with those elsewhere in England, the Lancashire breeding birds are considered to be of the nominate European race, *L.l. limosa*, which has undergone dramatic declines across its European range.

In most years a few pairs of the race *L. l. islandica* breed in Scotland. In Iceland, this race has undergone a population increase, and appears to be stable.

The Black-tailed Godwit is a Red List species, due to its historic decline in the UK, and because it has an unfavourable conservation status in Europe.

## **Regional Status**

The only regular breeding site in the north-west is in Lancashire.

## **Local Status**

Since the early 1990's it appears a small number of pairs have been breeding in Lancashire, mostly using just one site. Since 1995, the population has been between 1-3 pairs, with two pairs typical in recent years.

## **Current factors affecting the Species**

The Lancashire population is small and currently restricted to just one site. Even though this site is a SSSI, this leaves the population very vulnerable to change.

Grazing and water level management are key issues for this species. Sward height and structure are important and require grazing. However nests are at risk of trampling from grazing animals.

The Lancashire population is known to have been targeted by egg collectors in recent years.

On a small and isolated population such as this, predation may be an issue.

### Current Action/Mechanisms

The site currently occupied is a SSSI. Natural England have a Wildlife Enhancement Scheme agreement in place with the owners to support management which favours Black-tailed Godwits.

The RSPB, jointly with Fylde Bird Club and the Lancashire Police, run a Godwit Nestwatch project. This provides 24hr wardening and surveillance to deter egg collectors. The project also liaises with the landowners to ensure the nesting site is protected from cattle trampling through the use of electric fencing.

An assessment of predation risk at this site is currently underway. This is likely to identify actions that will require support from other landowners and partners.

Marshside RSPB reserve, on the Lancashire-Merseyside border is managed for the benefit of breeding waders. Colonisation of this site by Black-tailed Godwits is a realistic possibility.

### Species Targets

Target	Area	Measure	Timescale
To maintain the current population and prevent egg theft	Lancashire	Minimum of 2 pairs hatching young annually	Current and ongoing
To increase the population at the current site to 5 pairs	Lancashire	Minimum of 5 pairs nesting annually	2010
To expand the population to new sites	Lancashire (and Merseyside)	Two new sites occupied, with appropriate management in place. Total Lancs popn increase to c10 pairs.	2015

### Proposed Actions

Action	Area	Milestone/Measure	Partners	Timescale
<b>Research and monitoring</b>				
Monitor the current	-	Data gathered	RSPB, Fylde Bird	Ongoing

population through the breeding season, especially regarding productivity.		each year on numbers of pairs and productivity	Club	
Monitor predation risk at current site.	-	Fox and crow transects undertaken and impact on breeding waders assessed.	RSPB	2007-2008
Ensure likely new sites are surveyed for occupancy.	Lancashire	Sites surveyed	RSPB, Fylde Bird Club	Ongoing
<b>Policy</b>				
Ensure wet grassland management for breeding waders is prioritised by the Environmental Stewardship Scheme in Lancashire.	Lancashire	This objective reflected in relevant JCA target statements.	Natural England, RSPB	Ongoing
<b>Species management and protection</b>				
Continue Godwit Nestwatch project.	-	No confirmed egg thefts	RSPB, Fylde Bird Club	Ongoing
Liaise with Lancashire police over law enforcement.	-	Continued police support for Nestwatch project.	RSPB, Fylde Bird Club, Lancashire police	Ongoing
<b>Site safeguard</b>				
Ensure current site is safeguarded from development etc	-	Site safeguarded	Natural England, RSPB, Fylde Bird Club	Ongoing
<b>Land and habitat management</b>				
Seek to deliver optimum management at current site.	-	Breeding wader populations stable/ increasing.	Natural England, landowners, RSPB	Ongoing
Seek to deliver optimum management at RSPB Marshside.	Marshside RSPB reserve.	Breeding wader populations stable/ increasing.	RSPB	Ongoing
Identify sites to target for wet grassland creation	Ribble Lancashire	New sites bought into appropriate	Natural England, RSPB, LRF, FWAG	By 2010

and management.		management.		
<b>Public relations</b>				
Continue to seek community and volunteer involvement in the Godwit Nestwatch	-	High volunteer involvement, events held etc	RSPB, Fylde Bird Club	Ongoing
Seek media coverage of Godwit Nestwatch	-	Annual coverage of project in local/regional media	RSPB	Ongoing

### Related Action Plans.

Saltmarsh and Estuarine Rivers BAP

<b>Date (Date)</b>	<b>Draft No. (Number)</b>	<b>Author (Name)</b>
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