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# Bird Species Accounts for The Wash

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Overview of the ecology of key bird species on the  
Wash

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# 1. Bird species of importance on The Wash and Greater Wash

The Wash Estuary carries numerous legal designations which recognise and protect the important bird populations that use the site year-round. There are two designations in particular that are of importance to birds.

The first is the Wash Special Protection Area (SPAs). SPAs are part of European-wide legislation that protects the most important sites for birds across the continent. Sites are designated if they hold populations of birds that are either of European or Global significance and thus recognise that the loss of these sites would impact on the long-term survival of the species concerned. The SPA network is designed so that every site forms part of an ecological web to allow healthy ecosystems to continue to function and thrive.

The second relevant designation is as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). SSSIs are selected for their outstanding biological value in a UK context and support important populations of animals and plants as well as containing valuable habitats.

Both the SPA and SSSI designations provide legal protection to The Wash and its habitats. As such, any development proposal that is likely to have an impact on the site, regardless of how big it is, must undergo a rigorous assessment process to ensure that impacts are avoided and/or mitigated for.

The following document provides an overview of the ecology of selected species for which the SPA and SSSI are designated. There is a full list of the species that are listed as part of the designations at the end of the document. All species listed on the SSSI designation are also included on the SPA citation. For more information about the sites, visit:

The Wash SPA: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5747661105790976>

The Wash SSSI:

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002591&SiteName=the%20wash&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&unitId=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>



*The Wash SPA and SSSI boundary map. The two sites overlap and the SSSI underpins the conservation objectives of the SPA.*

For the following species accounts:

- The UK wintering population figure is taken from Woodward et al 2020.
- The UK conservation status is taken from Stanbury et al 2021.
- The latest Wash SPA population figure is taken from Frost et al. 2021.
- The Wash SPA population at designation is taken from the Natural England Conservation Advice package when the site was designated in 1988
- The Wash SPA Conservation status is taken from BTO WeBS Alerts online.
- For the Conservation Status (% Change), the baseline winter is 1982/83. The trends are expressed as percentage change over the short-, medium- and long-terms, corresponding to 5, 10 and 25 year periods.

## 2. Dark-bellied brent goose (*Branta bernicla*)

**Key Information:** Brent geese are small, dark geese – only slightly larger than a mallard. They have a black head and neck and grey-brown back, with either a pale or dark belly, depending on the race. Adults have a small white neck patch. It flies in loose flocks along the coast, rather than in tight skeins like grey geese.

**What they eat:** Vegetation, especially eelgrass on estuaries and crops on adjoining fields

**Population:** The Dark-bellied Brent Geese of The Wash breed in Arctic Russia. They arrive in large flocks on our shores in early October and leave again in April. Elsewhere in the UK, there are wintering birds of the Light-bellied variety, which breed in Canada and Svalbard. The population in Great Britain has declined by 12% over the last 25 years.



**UK Wintering Population:** 135,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

### Main Threats (UK):

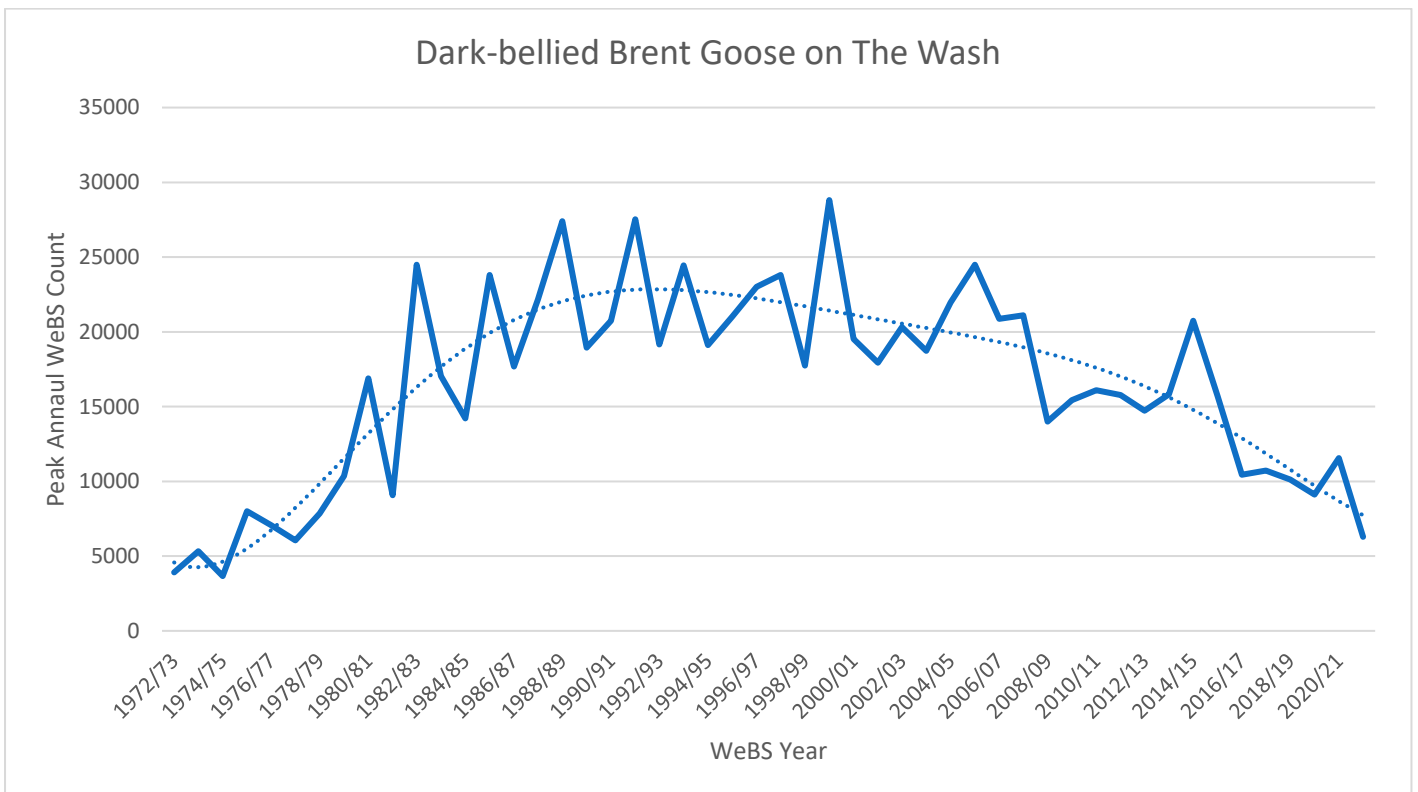
- Conflict with agricultural landowners (when feeding on agricultural crops).
- Disease affecting availability of food (a disease in eelgrass is thought to be the cause of large declines in the population in the 1930s).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 11,221

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 17,000

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-21	-27	-43



### 3. Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

**Key Information:** The Pink-footed Goose is one of the larger goose species that visit the UK in winter, slightly smaller than the Greylag Goose. Noisy skeins of these charismatic birds, giving their ubiquitous ‘wink-wink’ call are a common feature in the skies of England and Scotland thanks to a population increase and range expansion.

**What they eat:** Grain, winter cereals and potatoes from freshly ploughed or harvested fields, as well as grass.

**Population:** Britain hosts the entire breeding population from Iceland and Greenland, making the wintering populations here internationally important. Since 1995, this population has doubled.



**UK Wintering Population:** 510,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

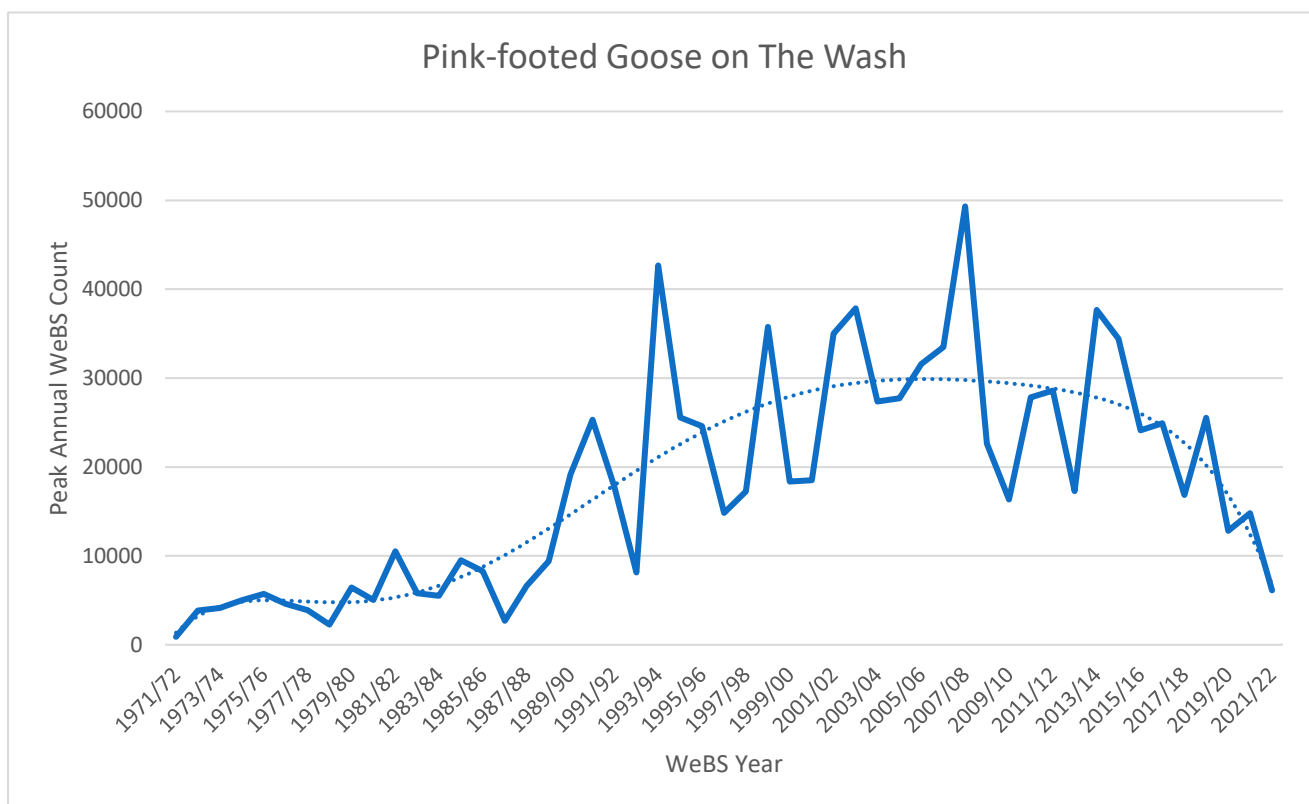
- Conflict issues with agricultural landowners (when feeding on agricultural crops) such as repeated disturbance.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 30,525

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 7,300

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
N/A	N/A	N/A



## 4. Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*)

**Key Information:** When here, Bewick's Swan represents the smallest swan species that naturally occurs in the UK. Southern and Eastern England are the most important areas for Bewick's Swan, with the largest populations now found on the Ouse and Nene Washes.

**What they eat:** In the UK, mainly leftover potatoes and grain in arable farmland.

**Population:** Bewick's Swan are a winter visitor from their breeding grounds in the Russian tundra. Previously, around a third of the world's population of this species visit Britain in the winter, however the numbers visiting our shores have declined by 95% since 1995. This is possibly due to an eastwards shift in the species wintering range, with more birds now 'short-stopping' in continental Europe due to warming climate.



**UK Wintering Population:** 4350

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

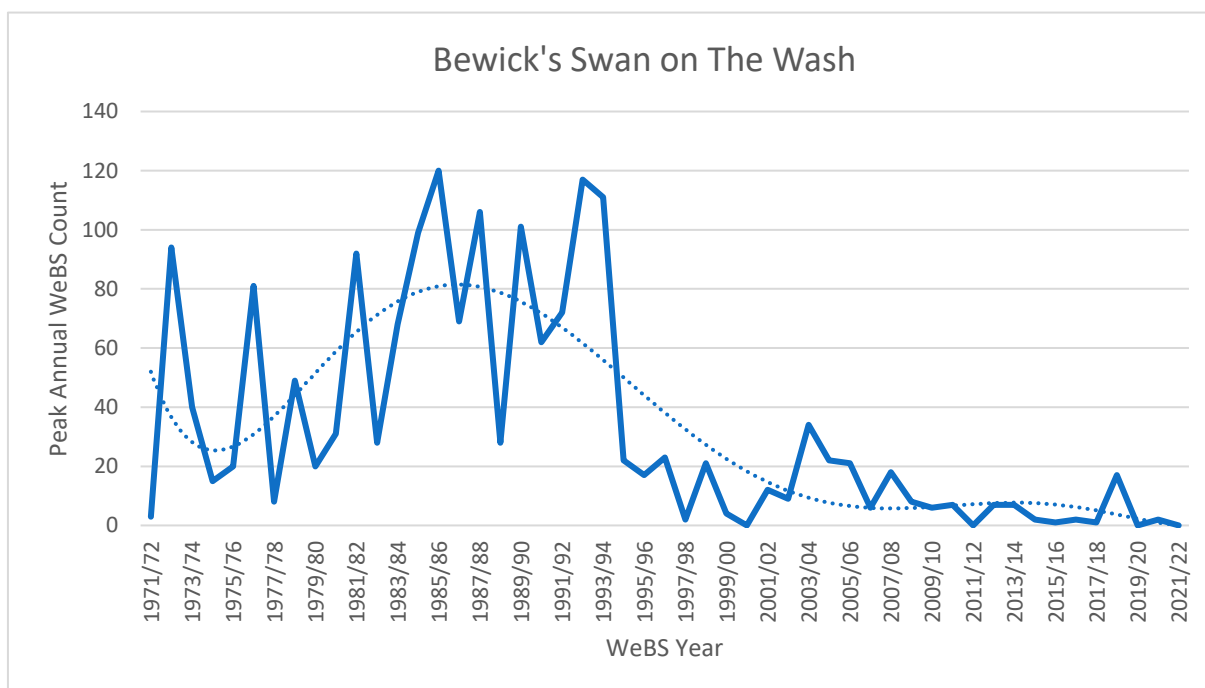
- Shift in range due to climate change, which may reduce number of birds arriving to winter in the UK.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 4

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 130

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-72	-50	-91



## 5. Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

**Key Information:** Shelducks are colourful ducks, bigger than a mallard but smaller than a goose. Both sexes have a dark green head and neck, a chestnut belly stripe and a red bill. Shelducks perform “moult migrations” to and from a small number of traditional moulting sites in the autumn, with the majority of UK birds moulting in the Helgoland Bight (Green *et al.* 2019).

**What they eat:** Invertebrates, small shellfish and aquatic snails

**Population:** Shelducks can be seen at any time of year, but the population is much higher during winter. Numbers of shelduck at the Great Ouse area of The Wash have shown a decrease since classification, possibly due to the hardening of the muddy sediment, making the area unsuitable for foraging, and highlighting the influence sediment has on the distribution of shelduck (Yates *et al.* 2004).



**UK Wintering Population:** 51,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

### Main Threats (UK):

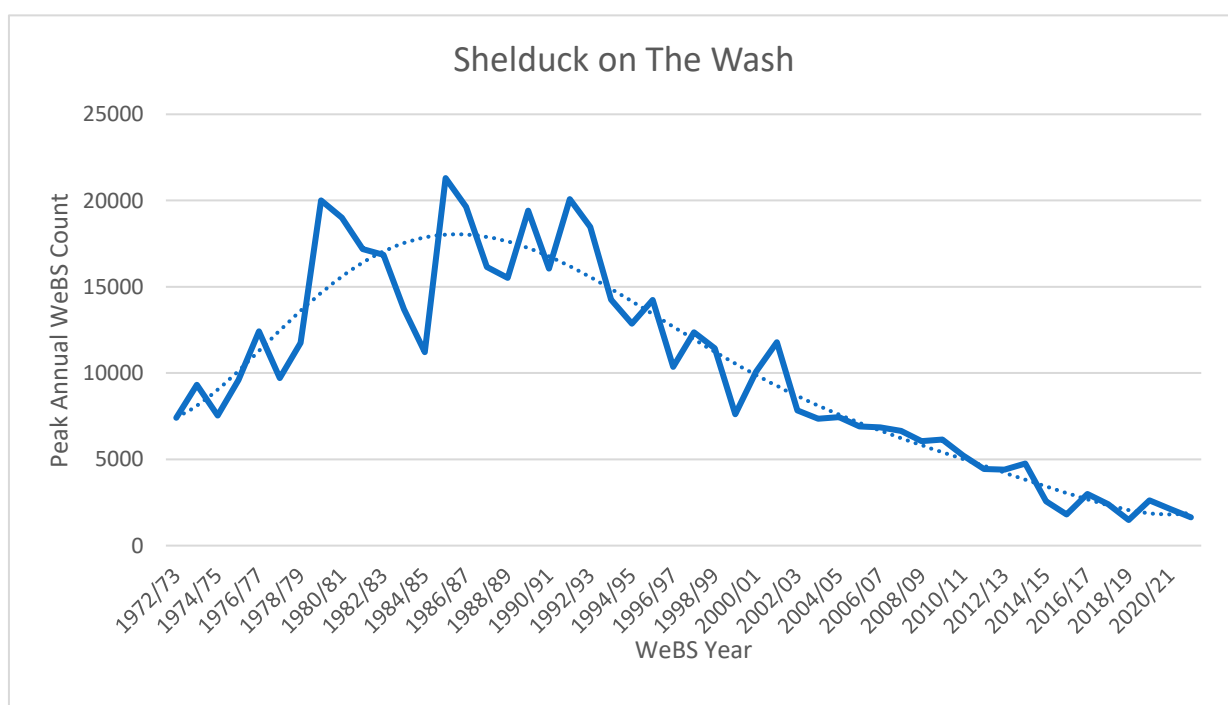
- Habitat loss (numbers of shelduck at the Great Ouse area of The Wash have shown a decrease since classification, possibly due to the hardening of the muddy sediment, making the area unsuitable for foraging, and again highlighting the influence sediment has on the distribution of shelduck (Yates *et al.* 2004).
- There is concern that offshore wind farms may affect migrating Shelduck, particularly if turbines are sited in areas with high concentrations of migrating birds, for example near moulting sites (Green *et al.* 2019).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 2,374

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 16,000

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-33	-56	-81





## 6. Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*)

**Key Information:** Gadwall are a subtly beautiful duck species, with highly cryptic plumage consisting of speckling and fine stripes. They are slightly smaller than a Mallard, with a dark rear-end, orange bill and obvious white wing bar in flight.

**What they eat:** Vegetation, especially stems, leaves and seeds.

**Population:** Gadwall are present in the UK all year, with around 1250 pairs breeding, but their population expands when birds from Iceland and continental Europe and southern Russia arrive for the winter. The UK wintering population has increased by 73% since 1995 (Austin et al 2023) which also reflects a strong increase in the breeding population in the UK.



**UK Wintering Population:** 31000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

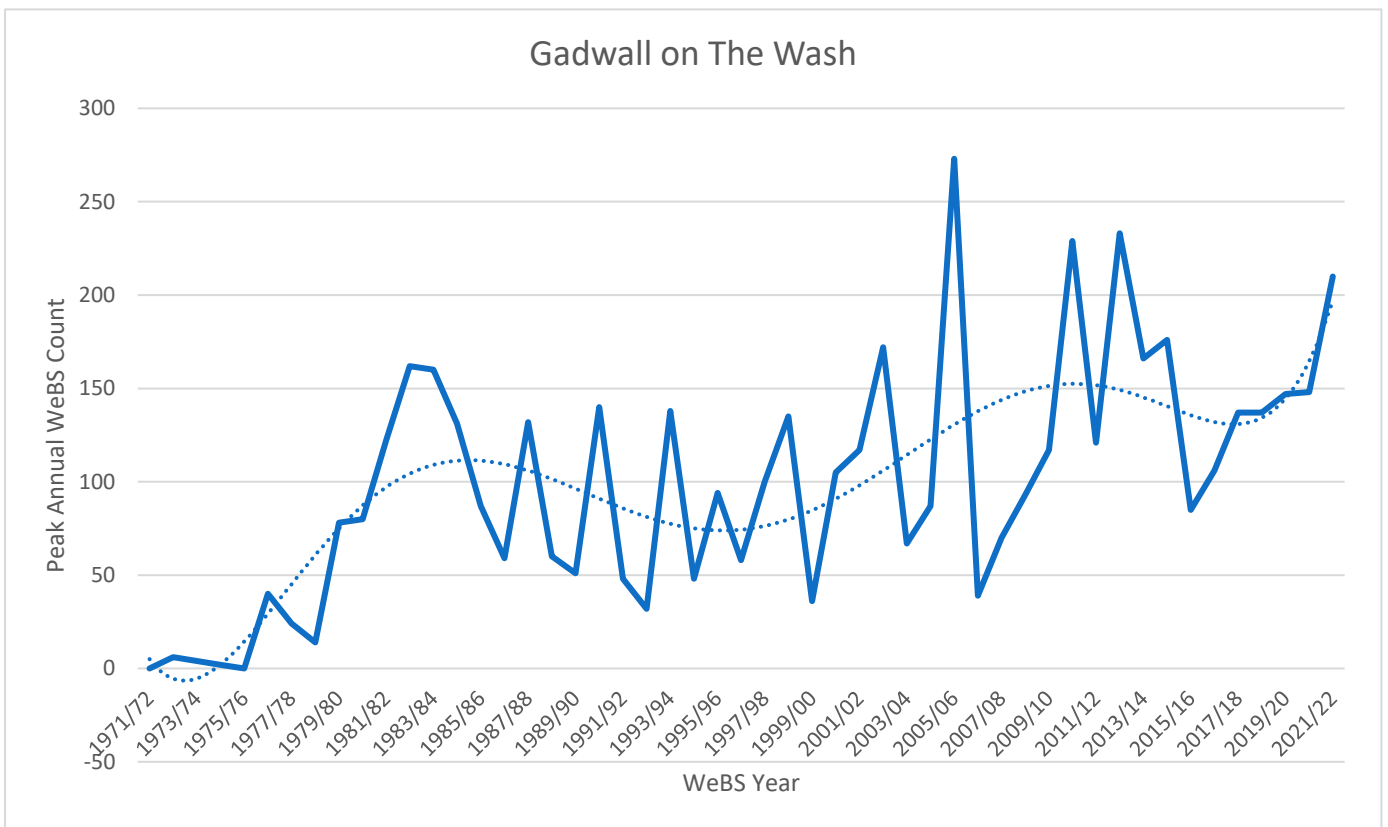
- No known threats, although active conservation measures around the creation, enhancement and protection of existing wetland habitats will help protect this species.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 156

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 130

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-32	-16	3



## 7. Wigeon (*Mareca Penelope*)

**Key Information:** Wigeon are a bulky duck, with the males sporting a distinctive chestnut head, yellow forehead, pink breast and grey body in breeding plumage. The females are recognisable by their shape, blue bill and mottled brown plumage.

**What they eat:** Aquatic plants, grasses and roots.

**Population:** There is a small breeding population of around 200 pairs concentrated in Scotland and Northern England, however in winter they are common across the UK, despite an 11% decline in wintering number since 1995 (Austin et al 2023). The main breeding areas for these wintering birds stretches from Iceland, through western Europe as far as north-western Russia (Delany et al 2006).

**UK Wintering Population:** 450,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

- Climactic changes influencing breeding productivity (Fox et al. 2016).
- Decrease in Equisetum (Horsetail) stands on breeding lakes in Sweden and Finland have been suggested as a driver of decline (Pöysä et al. 2017) which could drive some declines in UK wintering population.

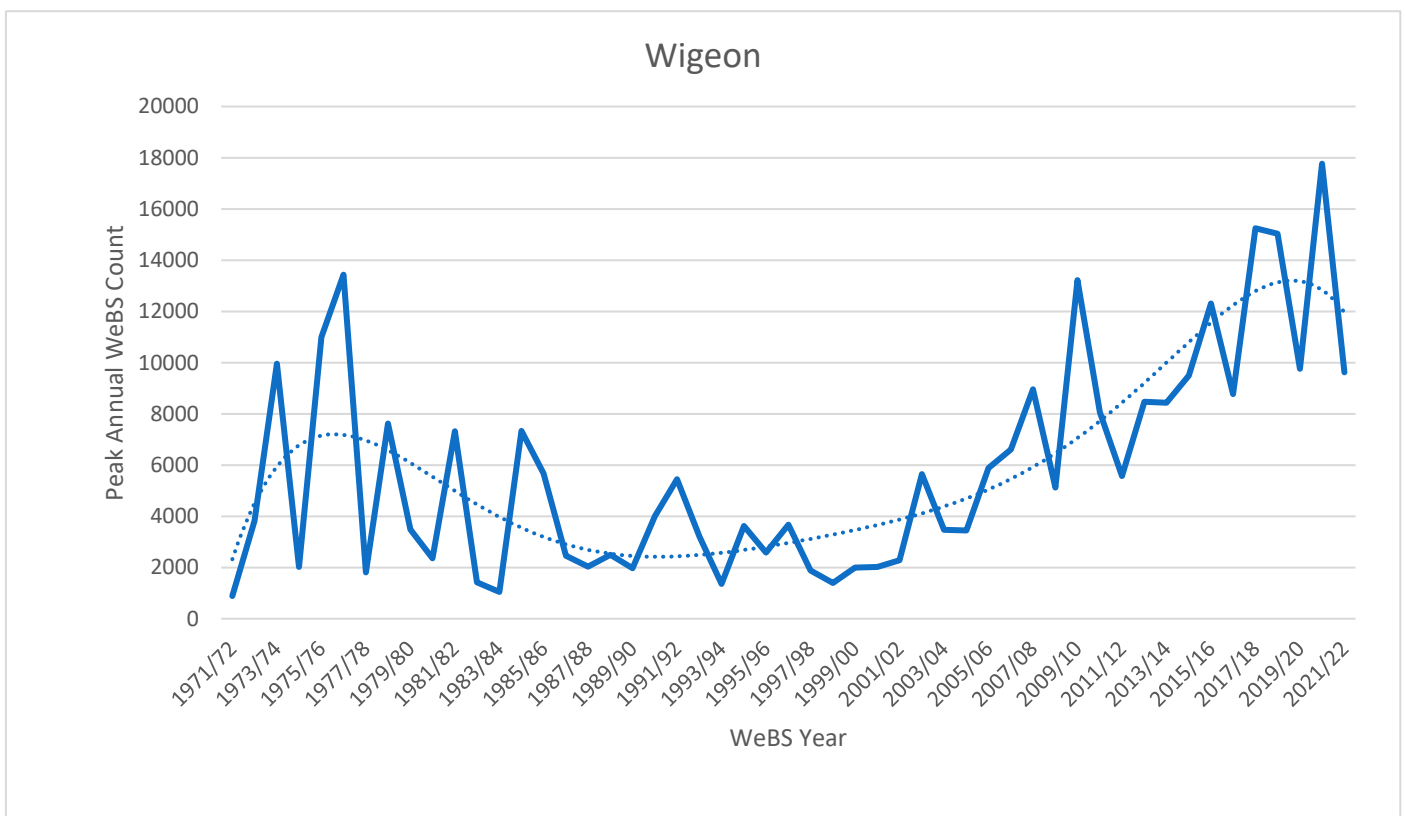
**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 14452

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 3900

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**



Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
29	70	227



## 8. Pintail (*Anas acuta*)

**Key Information:** A large, elegant duck with a long bill and long tail, which is particularly pronounced in males. Males and females share the distinctive shape; long-necked and with a slender blue-grey bill. Males have a dark chestnut head and white belly, whilst females are beautifully speckled brown. Wintering birds arrive in September and usually linger until April.

**What they eat:** A range of plants and invertebrates.

**Population:** A very small number of pairs breed around the UK, whilst in winter local breeders are joined by birds that breed in Iceland, Scandinavia, the Baltics and Northwest Russia (Delany et al 2006). The UK wintering population has declined by 28% since 1995 (Austin et al 2023). Reasons for declines in the UK population are unclear, but they appear to be mirroring range contractions in Fennoscandia and central Europe (Keller et al. 2020).



**UK Wintering Population:** 20,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

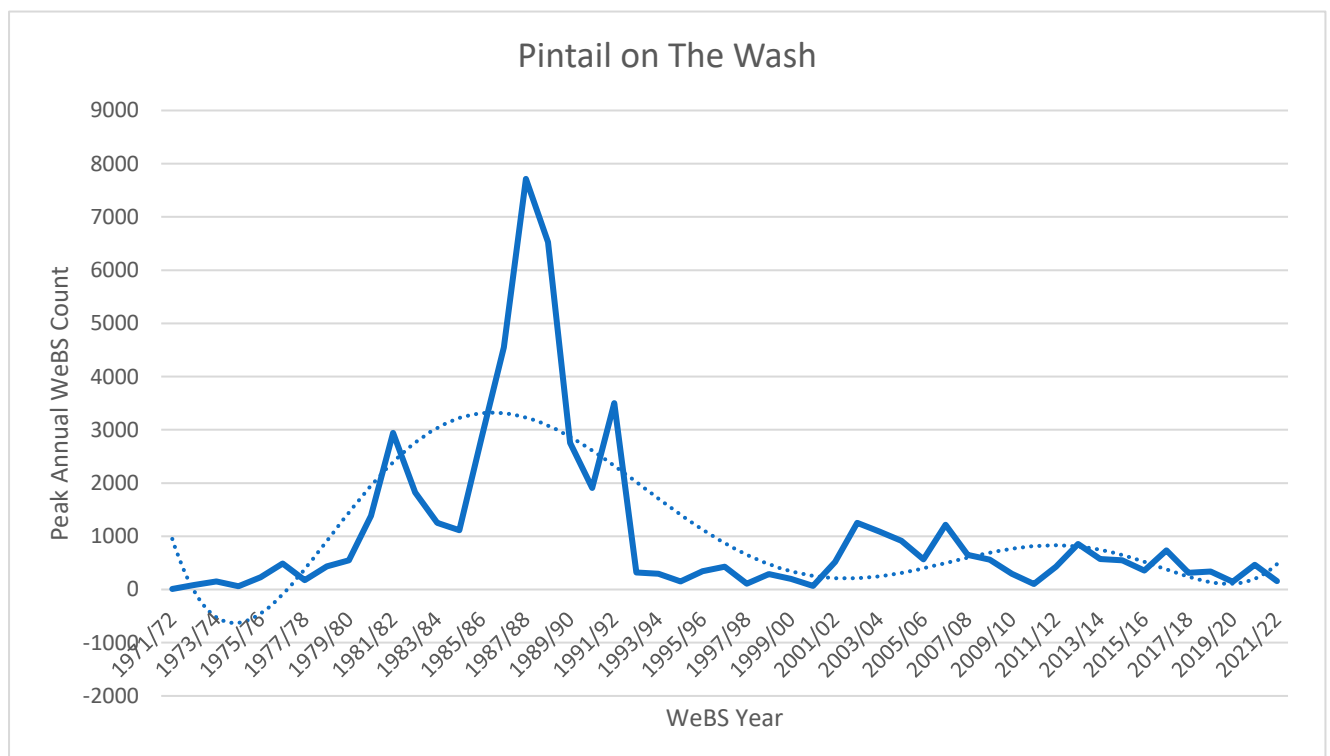
- Reasons for declines in the UK and range contractions in Europe are currently unclear.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 315

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 1700

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
2	-32	-64



## 9. Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

**Key Information:** A hardy duck that spends all their winter at sea, often seen in large rafts off the coast of almost any part of the UK. The males and females are largely dark, with the males sporting a distinctive yellow nasal saddle, and the females a light cheek patch.

**What they eat:** Molluscs such as clams and cockles.

**Population:** There is a very small breeding population in remote areas of Northern Scotland, which is largely stable. The wintering population, which consists of birds breeding in boreal forests and remote tundra in Northern Russia and Siberia has increased by 95% since 1995 (Austin et al 2023).

**UK Wintering Population:** 135,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

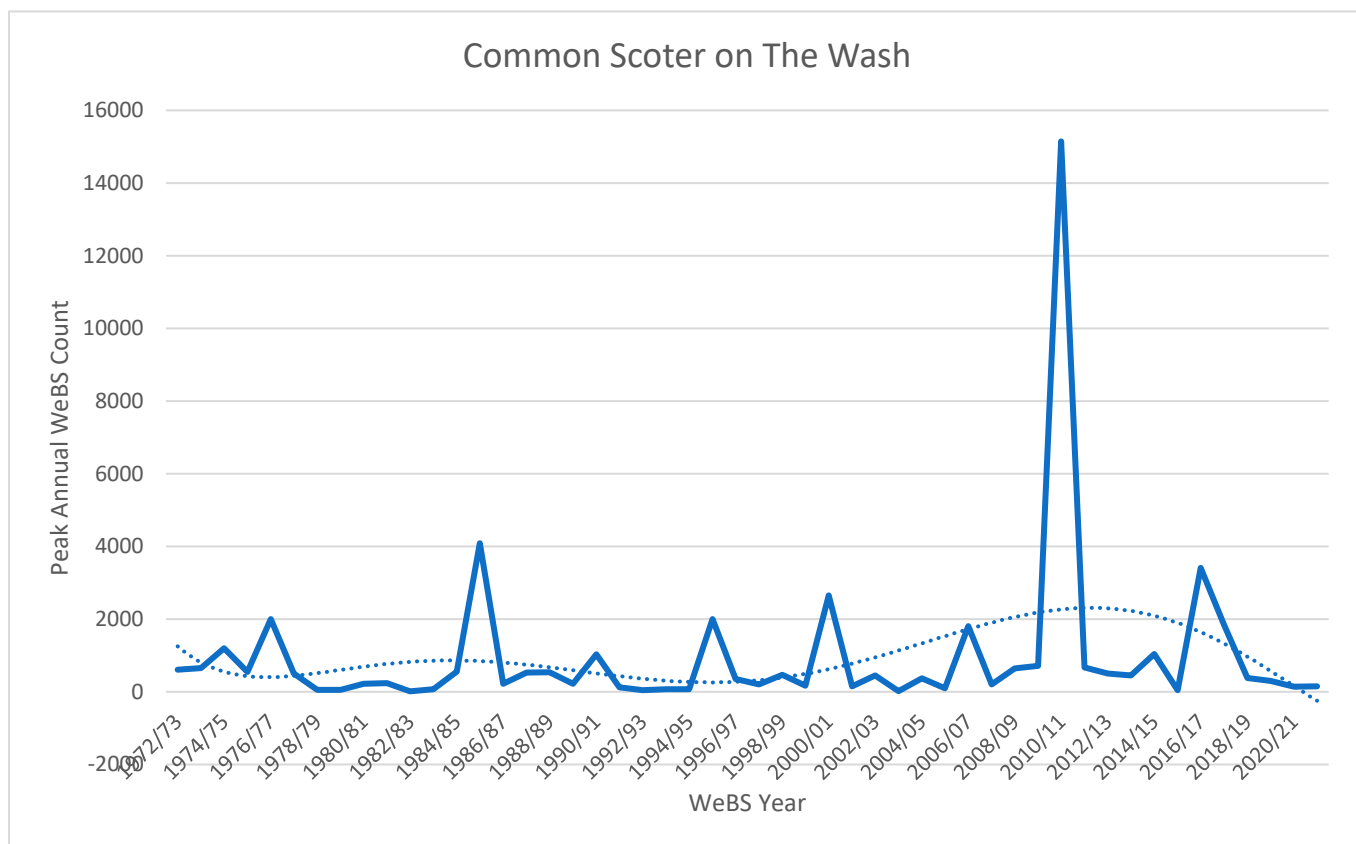
- Displacement through human activity, such as shipping (Kaiser 2006).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 1109

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 830

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-40	103	72



## 10. Goldeneye (*Bucephala Clangula*)

**Key Information:** With a large, bright eye, its easy to see where the Goldeneye get their name from. Females have chestnut heads and grey bodies with white streaks in the wing, whilst males have a striking bottle green head and distinctive black and white markings on the body.

**What they eat:** Molluscs, insect larvae, small fish and plants.

**Population:** The UK wintering population has declined by 55% since 1995. Most birds arrive in September and October, with the largest concentrations of birds in Scotland and Northern England. However, wetland networks and coastal areas like the Wash in southern England are also important wintering grounds.

**UK Wintering Population:** 21,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

- No known threats in the UK.

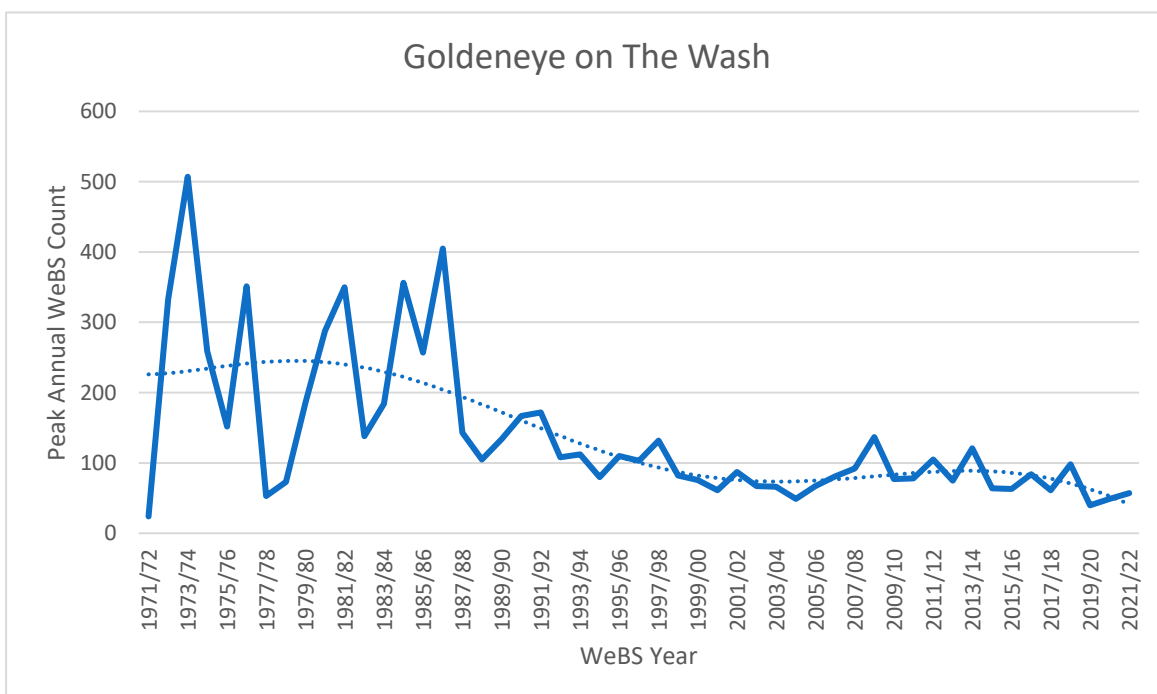
**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 64

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 220

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**



Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-36	-25	-56



## 11. Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

**Key Information:** Oystercatchers are large, stocky, black and white wading birds. They have long, orange-red bills and reddish-pink legs. In flight they show a wide, white wing-stripe, a black tail and a white rump that extends as a 'V' between the wings.

**What they eat:** Muscles, cockles and worms

**Population:** Most of the UK breeding population spend the winter on the coast. The UK population increases in winter when migrating birds from Norway arrive on the east coast. Most Oystercatchers present on The Wash in winter come from Norway and countries bordering the Baltic Sea, where they breed on grass pasture fields. Some birds breed on The Wash and these probably remain all year round. The winter visitors tend to return each winter to the same beach, and often to the same part of the beach. The largest numbers are present in The Wash between October through March. The UK wintering population has declined by 21% since 1995.



**UK Wintering Population:** 305,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

### Main Threats (UK):

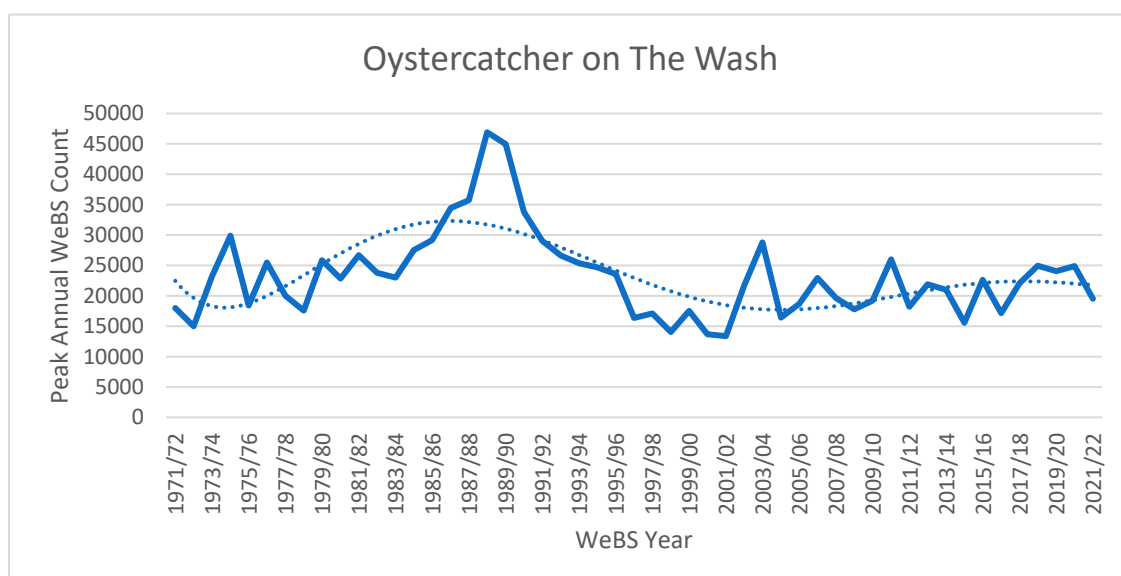
- Disturbance at high tide roosts during winter by commercial or recreational use of shorelines or estuaries.
- Depletion of shellfish stocks (particularly cockles (*Cerastoderma edule*) and mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) were shown to cause reduced survival rates of Oystercatchers on the Wash during the 1970s – 1990s, including three periods of mass mortality, and that maintaining good mussel stocks is vital for Oystercatcher conservation, especially in years when cockle stocks are low (Atkinson *et al.* 2003).
- Deterioration of the habitat and/or shellfish beds to such an extent that the major benthic shellfish kills observed during the 1990s are repeated. Survival models have predicted that in order to maintain Oystercatcher populations, the volume of bivalves available in autumn needs to be 2.5-8 times the amount they will consume during the winter. This is because intraspecific competition increases when food supplies are low and sub-dominant birds are excluded from much of the food supply (Goss-Custard *et al.* 2004). Recent research has demonstrated that depleted shellfish stocks in some areas can be mitigated by birds having a choice of feeding grounds in the area through the protection of secondary habitats leading to resilience in habitat availability (Bowgen *et al. in press*).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 26,586

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 24,000

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-14	-4	-22



## 12. Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*)

**Key Information:** The Ringed Plover is a small, dumpy, short-legged wading bird. It's brownish grey above and whitish below. It has an orange bill, tipped with black, orange legs and a black-and-white pattern on its head and breast. In flight, it shows a broad, white wing-stripe. Coastal habitats such as sand and shingle flats are vitally important to breeding birds.

**What they eat:** Flies, spiders, marine worms, crustaceans and molluscs.

**Population:** Ringed Plover are present on the Wash year-round, with important populations breeding, migrating through and wintering in the area. Populations have crashed in the last 40 years and so in 2008, the threshold for identifying nationally important breeding sites was set at 53 pairs. In 2023, Snettisham and Heacham beaches held 40 pairs, with increases being recorded year-on-year after the commencement of our Plovers in Peril project. The total population nesting on The Wash is unknown.



**UK Wintering Population:** 43,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

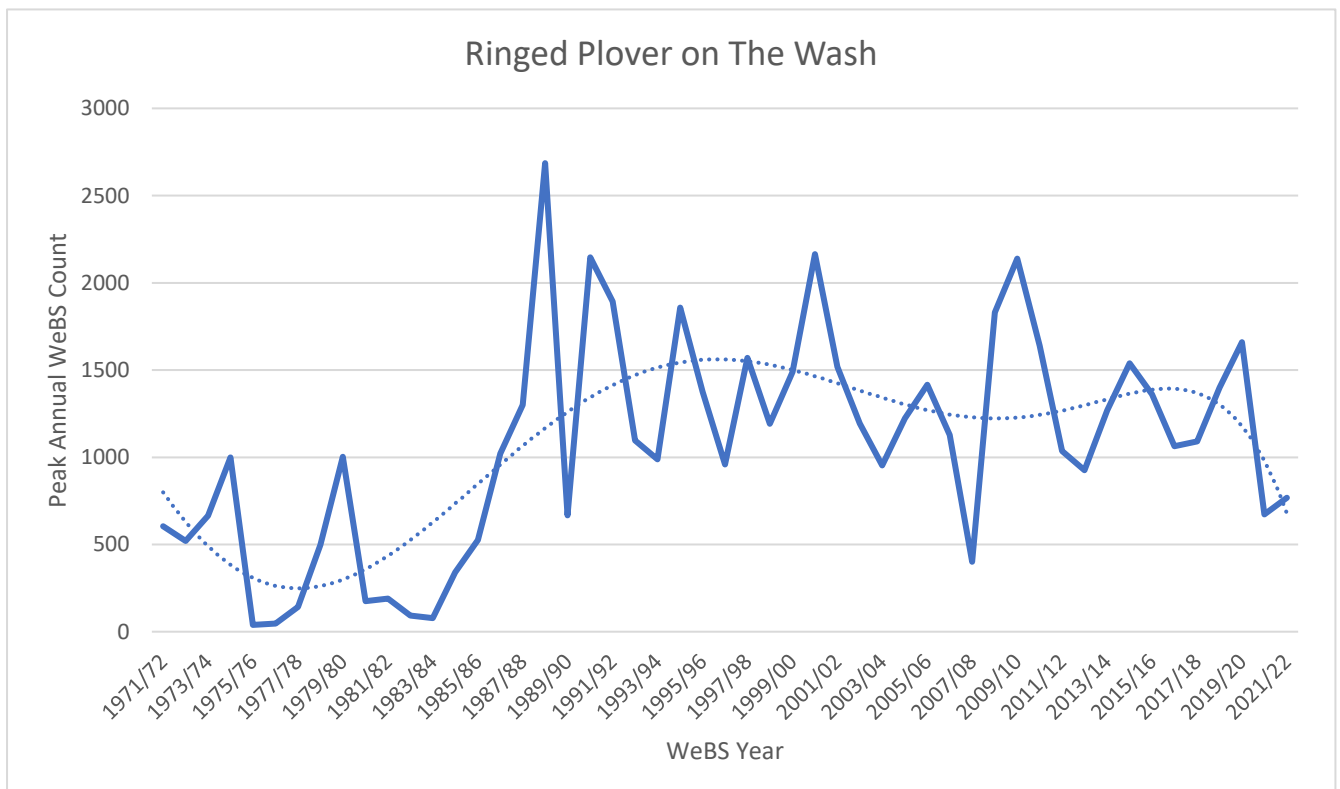
- Disturbance around nesting sites can lead to increased predation and nest abandonment. Improved coastal access could exacerbate this problem.
- Habitat loss through vegetation encroachment.
- Disturbance on beaches during winter is also an issue, with roosting and foraging birds vulnerable to repeated and prolonged human disturbance.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 1229

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** N/A

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
15	-29	-38



### 13. Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**Key Information:** In summer, Grey Plover sport an all-black throat and belly, with a beautiful silver speckled appearance on top. A large wader, they tend to be seen in small numbers around coasts but can come together and form flocks during high tides.



**What they eat:** Shellfish and worms.

**Population:** Wintering populations of Grey Plover have declined by 40% since 1995. Very small numbers remain in the UK through the summer, whilst most return to breed in the high Arctic or Russian and Canada. Some birds that pass through in the autumn continue to West Africa for the winter.

**UK Wintering Population:** 34,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

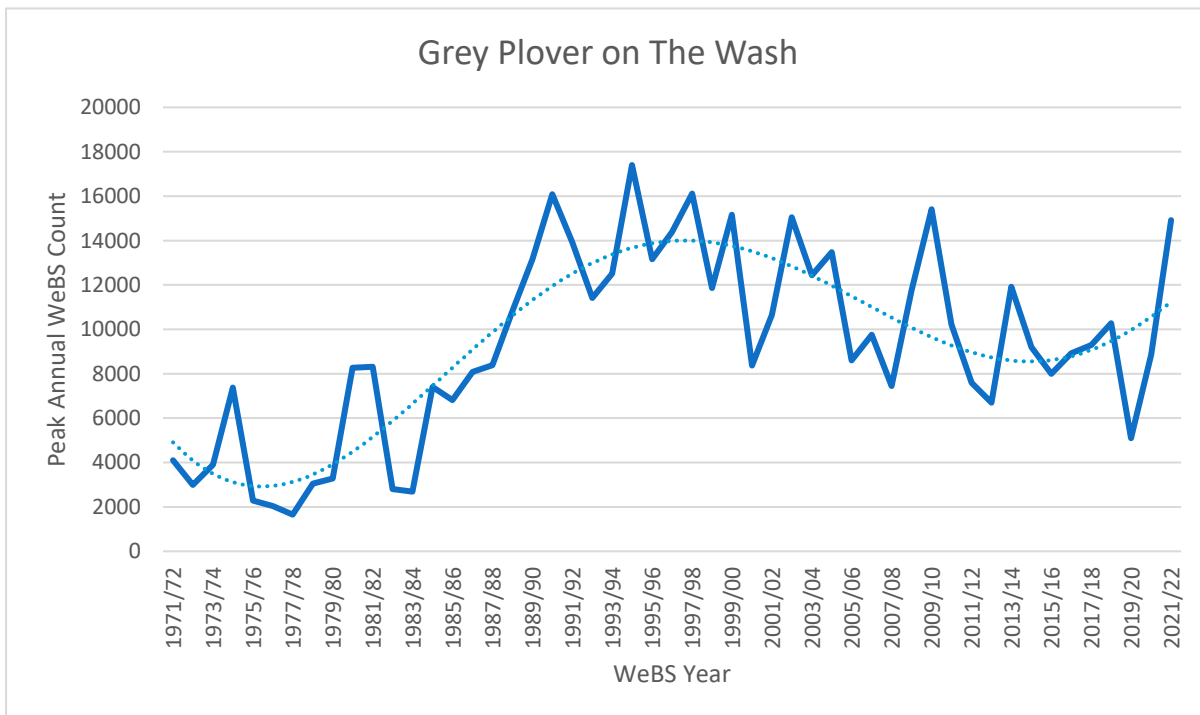
- Disturbance at high tide roosts during winter by commercial or recreational use of shorelines or estuaries.
- Habitat loss through inappropriate development and climate change.
- Management practices that negatively impact on food availability.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 11496

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 5500

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-8	5	-26





## 14. Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

**Key Information:** Golden plovers are medium-sized plovers with distinctive gold and black summer plumage. In winter the black is replaced by buff and white. They typically stand upright and run in short bursts. Very wary on the breeding grounds. In winter they form large flocks which fly in tight formation with rapid, twinkling wingbeats.

**What they eat:** Worms, beetles and insects

**Population:** The UK breeding population, now only found in upland areas of north and west Britain and Ireland, has been declining since the 1980s. In winter the population is swelled by birds arriving from Iceland, Scandinavia, Russia and small numbers from Denmark and Germany. The number of birds wintering on estuaries in eastern Britain have increased significantly in recent decades. They are often one of the first species of waders to leave the mudflats ahead of the high tide and may feed on agricultural fields surrounding the estuary (sometimes forming mixed flocks with lapwings) over the high tide period.



**UK Wintering Population:** 410,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Green

**Main Threats (UK):**

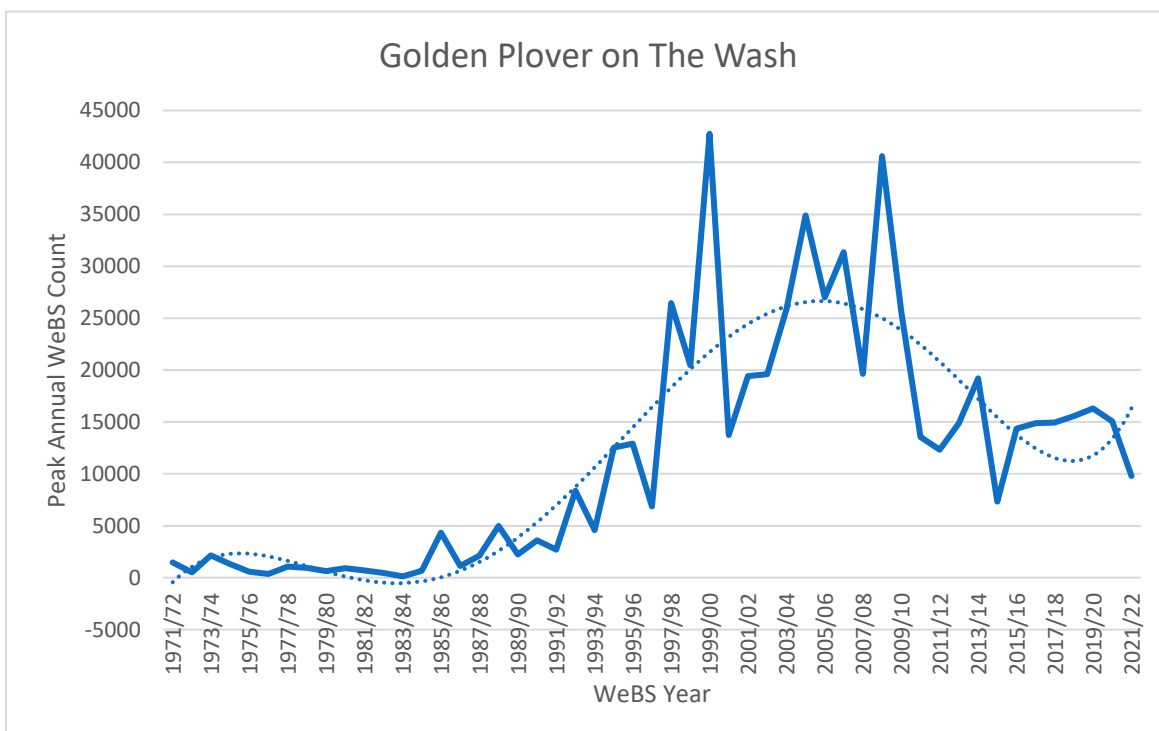
- Climate change (Increasing temperatures are affecting the availability of preferred food during the breeding season, reducing productivity).
- Habitat loss (peatlands damaged by drainage and afforestation).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 15,212

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** Not part of SPA designation

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status:**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-3	-54	34



## 15. Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)

**Key Information:** Lapwings are also known as peewits in imitation of their display calls, their proper name describes their wavering flight. They are black and white appearance and their round-winged shape in flight make them distinctive, even without their splendid crest.

**What they eat:** Worms and insects

**Population:** Lapwings breeding in Britain and Ireland are partial migrants. Many birds breeding in the UK remain close to their breeding grounds during the winter whilst others migrate further south. Severe cold weather in continental Europe can also bring additional birds to the UK in winter.



**UK Wintering Population:** 635,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

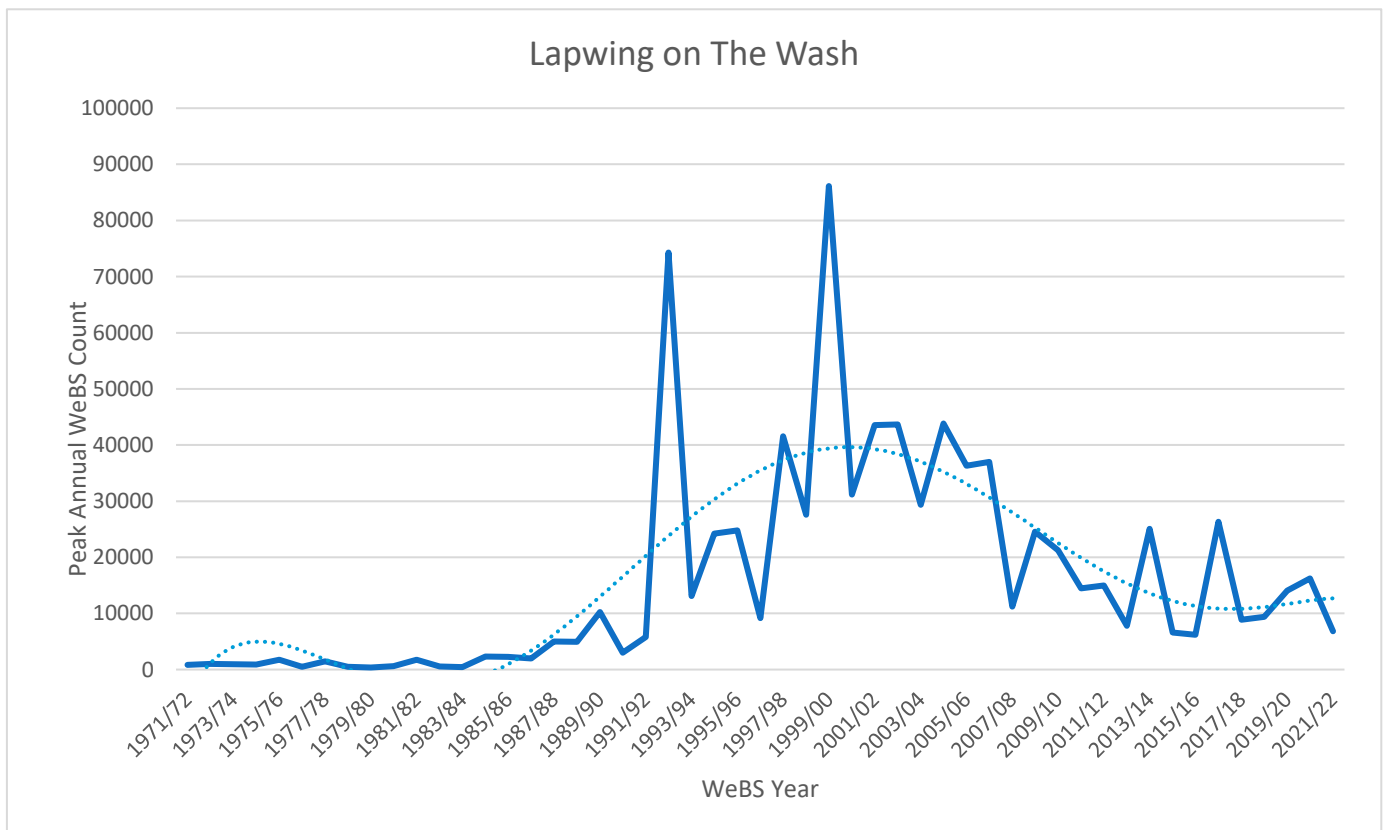
- Intensification of farming practices (which has led to loss of nesting sites, reduced food availability, increased predation and nest destruction).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 12,976

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** Not part of SPA designation

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status:**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-19	-55	-43



## 16. Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

**Key Information:** Curlews are the largest European wading bird, instantly recognisable on winter estuaries or summer moors by their long, downcurved bill, brown upperparts, long legs and evocative call.

**What they eat:** Worms, shellfish and shrimps

**Population:** Within the UK, curlew breed on a range of habitats but are primarily birds of upland grasslands, moorlands and bogs. From July, breeding birds migrate to coastal areas around the UK to spend the winter. The winter population comprises of UK breeders and birds from Scandinavia and western mainland Europe. A large proportion of birds wintering on The Wash come from Finland breeding populations (Grayshon *et al.* 2021). Curlews have been described as the most pressing bird conservation priority in the UK (Brown *et al.* 2015). Whilst research has demonstrated that population declines are caused largely by reduced breeding success, it is vital that high survival rates are maintained (through continued protection of non-breeding areas) whilst conservationists work out how to improve breeding success (Cook *et al.* 2021). The UK wintering population has declined by 30% since 1995.



**UK Wintering Population:** 125,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

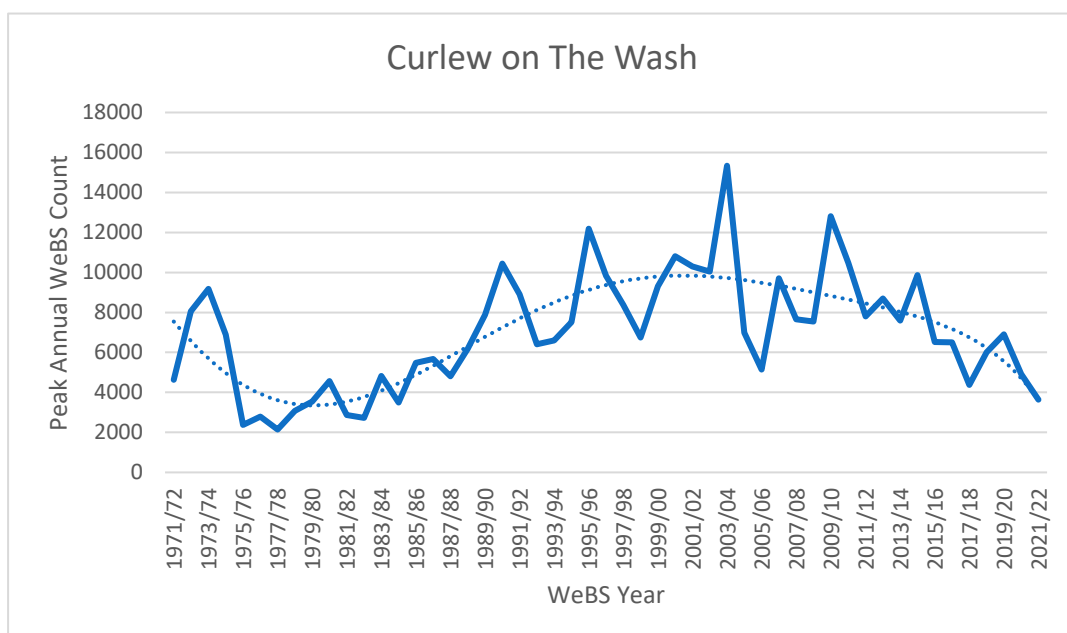
- Disturbance of both roosts and feeding birds during winter by commercial or recreational use of shorelines or estuaries.
- Habitat loss (breeding grounds: peatlands damaged by drainage and afforestation, wintering grounds: loss of intertidal habitat to sea-level rise, disturbance or development, for example flooding of mudflats and saltmarshes for tidal barrage construction).
- Excessive harvesting of shellfish leading to low shellfish stocks (Pearce-Higgins *et al.* 2017).
- Predation of adults/eggs/chicks on the breeding grounds, destruction of nests/chicks by farming practices (Brown *et al.* 2015, Monthouel & Dale 2019).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 6,061

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 3,700

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-29	-8	-8



## 17. Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa laponica*)



**Key Information:** The Bar-tailed Godwit is a long-billed, long-legged wading bird, which visits UK shores for the winter. Most usually seen in its grey-brown winter plumage, birds in spring may show their full rich chestnut breeding plumage. In flight it shows a white patch stretching from the rump up the back, narrowing to a point. In winter, the smaller size, spangled mantle and slightly upturned bill are keen to separating them from the similar Black-tailed Godwit.

In addition, Bar-tailed Godwit are almost exclusively found in marine habitats on the coasts of the UK, rather than on inland wetlands. Since designation, The Wash SPA has become significantly important for them.

**What they eat:** Primarily shellfish, marine snails, worms and shrimps.

**Population:** Bar-tailed Godwit breed in the Arctic of Scandinavia and Siberia and hundreds of thousands of them pass through the UK, on their way further south, or stop off here for the winter. Despite the wintering UK population declining by 38% in the last 20 years, numbers on The Wash have increased significantly.

**UK Wintering Population:** 54,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

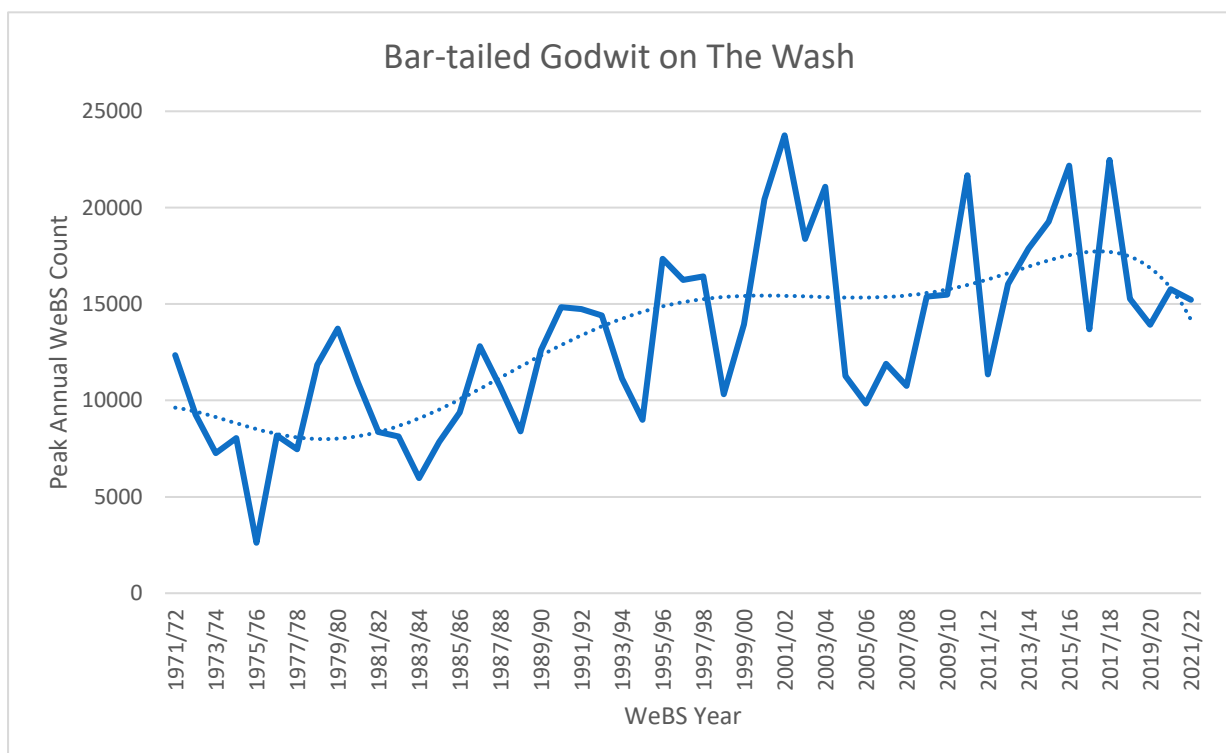
- Loss of coastal habitats on migration and non-breeding sites due to land reclamation, human disturbance, shellfisheries, inappropriate development and pollution.

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 16533

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 7396

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
30	70	58



## 18. Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

**Key Information:** Black-tailed godwits are large wading birds that moult from their breeding plumage of bright orangey-brown chests and bellies, to greyish-brown in winter (pictured).

Their most distinctive features are their long beaks and legs, and the black and white stripes on their wings. Female black-tailed godwits are bigger and heavier than the males, with a noticeably longer beak (which helps the sexes to avoid competing for food with each other).

**What they eat:** Insects, worms and snails

**Population:** Most black-tailed godwits visiting The Wash come from the population that breeds in Iceland (and are of the distinct race *islandica*).

The wintering range of this race extends from Ireland to Portugal and some birds from these areas pass through The Wash on spring and autumn migration. A small number of pairs from the continental population (race *limosa*) breed on the inland washes of the Nene and the Ouse; these birds migrate to southern Europe and western Africa. The largest numbers of black-tailed godwit are present in The Wash during the periods of passage (particularly August and September), but they are present in good numbers throughout the winter.

**UK Wintering Population:** 41,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

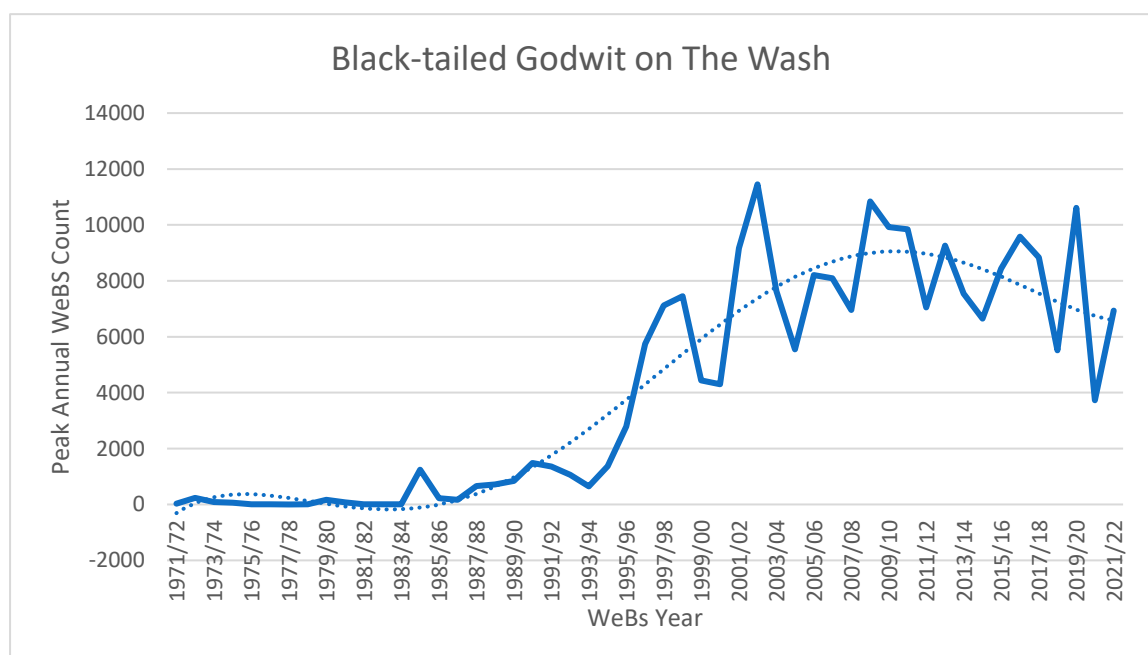
- Habitat loss (to developments and historic land drainage for agriculture).
- Climate change (increased flood events causing breeding attempts to fail).
- Predation (breeding birds are now concentrated into a few small areas making them vulnerable to predation).
- Pollution and disturbance (Birdlife 2021) (subspecies *islandica* has a relatively restricted distribution and is dependent on a relatively restricted number of sites especially during passage (Wernham et al. 2002). May be at risk from improvements to water quality which has been found to cause reductions in benthic invertebrate densities at sites close to sewage outfalls (Burton et al. 2002c).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 7124

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 260

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-31	-34	44



## 19. Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)

**Key Information:** Turnstones are stocky, strongly built waders with orange legs. They have a mottled appearance with brown or chestnut and black underparts and brown and white or black and white head pattern. Their underparts are white. They spend most of their time creeping and fluttering over rocks, picking out their food from under stones.

**What they eat:** Insects, crustaceans and molluscs

**Population:** Turnstones are winter visitors that migrate to the UK from breeding grounds in western Canada, Greenland and eastern Siberia. They depart the UK to return to their breeding grounds in April or May.

**UK Wintering Population<sup>1</sup>:** 43,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

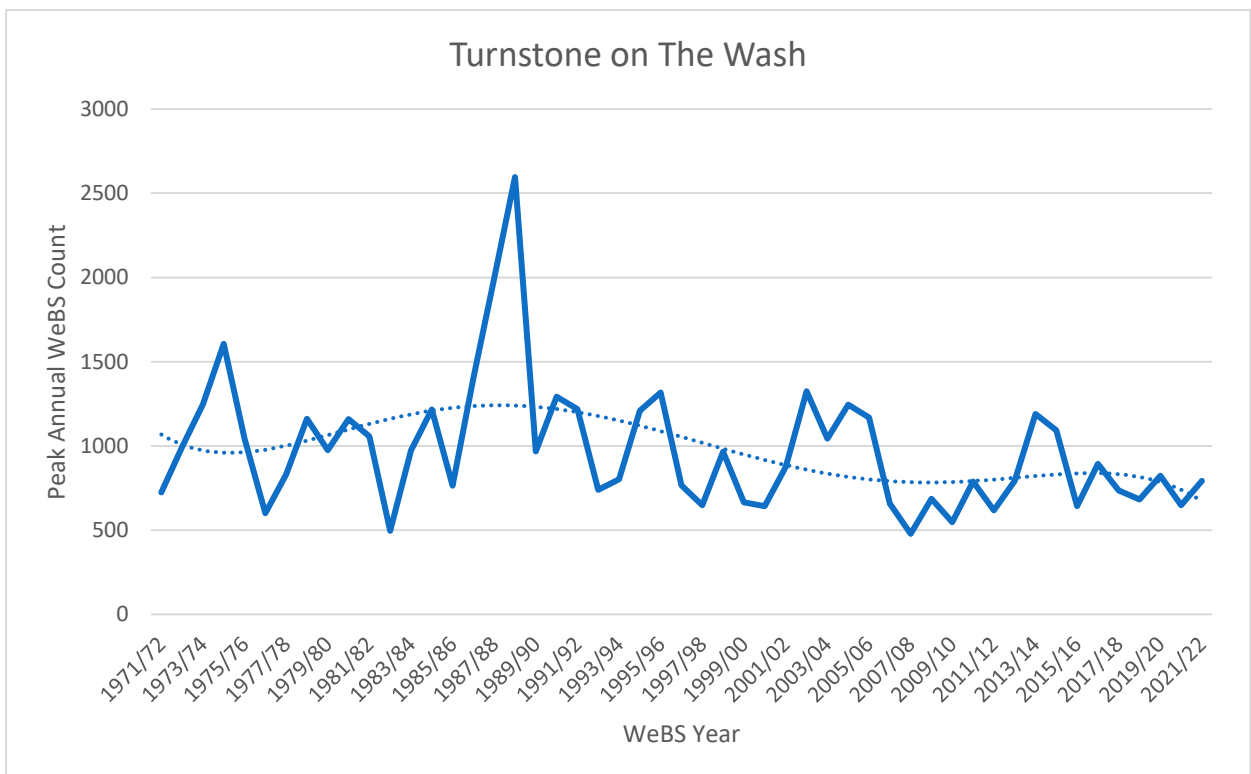
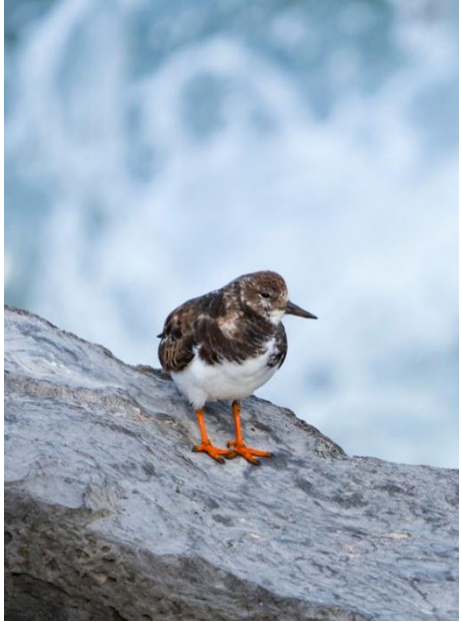
- Water quality improvements (which have been found to cause reductions in benthic invertebrate densities at sites close to sewage outfalls (Burton et al. 2002c).
- Turnstones have been shown to be sensitive to disturbance, particularly at high tide roost sites, including from building work, people and boats (Burton *et al.* 1996). Relatively undisturbed refuges have been shown to be preferred by turnstones and to maintain stable wintering populations of this species over periods disturbed sites showed population declines (Whittingham *et al.* 2020).
- On the Wash, turnstones previously fed on spilt wheat and fishmeal at Port Sutton Bridge and studies suggested that this was likely due to intertidal food supplies being insufficient to support the turnstone population throughout the winter (Smart & Gill 2003).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 755

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 980

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
9	18	-29



## 20. Knot (*Calidris canutus*)

**Key Information:** The Knot is a dumpy, legged, stocky wading bird. In winter, it is grey above and white below. In summer the chest, belly and face are brick-red. In flight, it shows a pale rump and a faint wing-stripe. Birds forms huge flocks in winter, flashing their pale underwings as they twist and turn. Many Knots use UK estuaries as feeding grounds, both on migration and in winter, and therefore the population is vulnerable to any changes such as barrages, sea-level rises and human disturbance.

**What they eat:** Shellfish and worms.

**Population:** Knot breed across the high Arctic with two distinct populations visiting The Wash in the winter. The first are birds that breed in Siberia, which pass through on migration to their wintering grounds in Africa. The second are birds that breed in Greenland, which spend the winter in the UK.

**UK Wintering Population:** 265000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

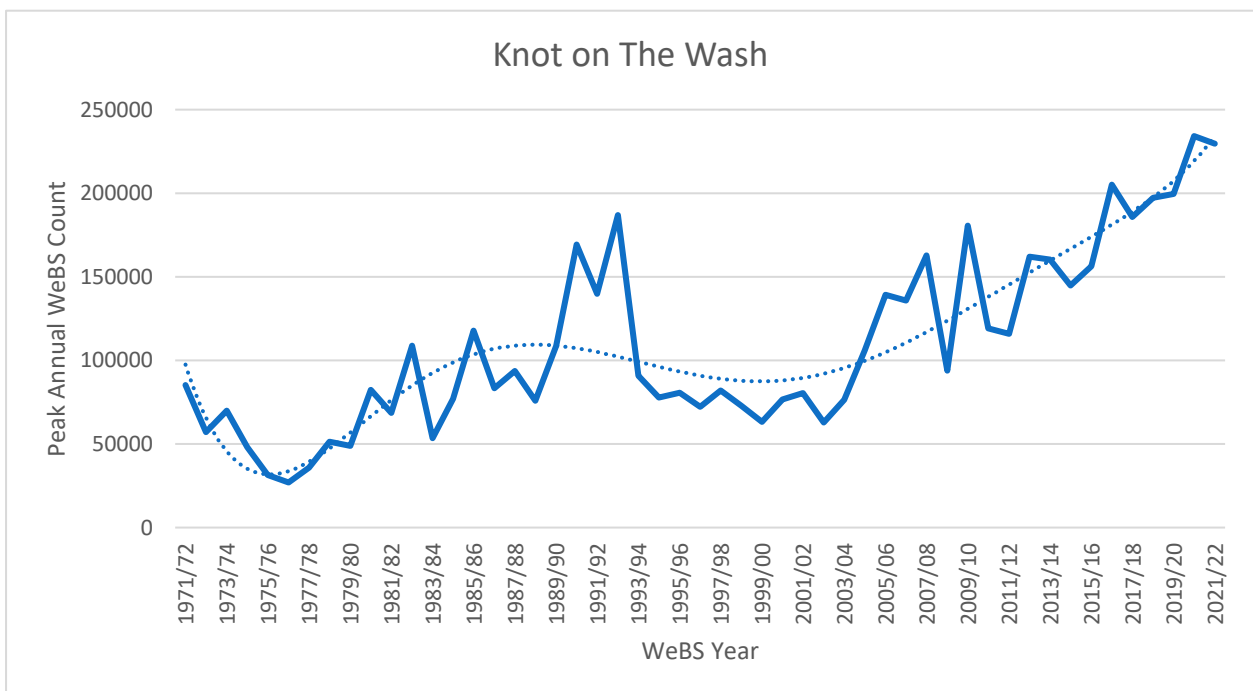
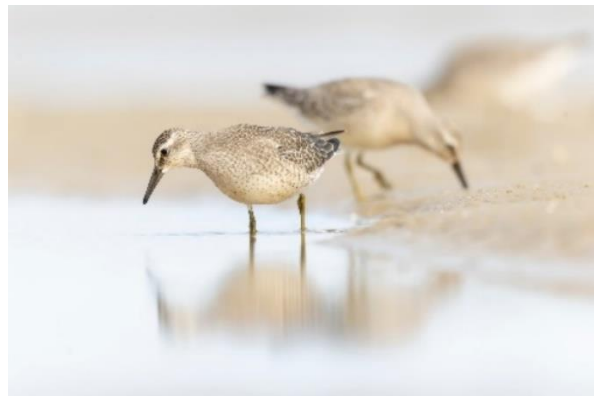
- Loss of coastal habitats due to land reclamation particularly in the Yellow Sea (e.g. Piersma et al. 2016).
- Other threats include dredging, pollution, renewable energy development and river damming (e.g. Melville et al. 2016).
- Disturbance on wintering grounds from human activity, such as disturbance at roost sites by foot traffic on beaches or low-flying aircraft.
- Loss of intertidal areas important on migration, breeding sites and non-breeding sites as a result of climate-induced sea level rise (Leyrer et al. 2014, Wauchope et al. 2016).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 209,300

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 75,000

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-8	-7	46



## 21. Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

**Key Information:** The Sanderling is a small, plump, energetic wading bird. It has a short and straight black bill and medium length black legs. It's pale grey on top and white underneath and has a black mark on its shoulder where the folded wing meets the body. Their characteristic behaviour of running along the edge of the tide feeding is reminiscent of a clockwork toy is because they lack a back toe which is present in other waders.

Their name is a bit of a giveaway as to where they prefer to forage, they are most commonly encountered on The Wash around Heacham and Snettisham.



**What they eat:** Small marine worms, crustaceans and molluscs.

**Population:** Sanderlings are High Arctic breeders with populations from both Greenland and Siberia visiting Europe for the winter. Some birds will spend their whole winter on The Wash, whilst some will continue further south into southern Europe and Africa. As they are High Arctic breeders, birds can remain on The Wash until May and return as early as July, meaning they are nearly present all year round.

**UK Wintering Population:** 21000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

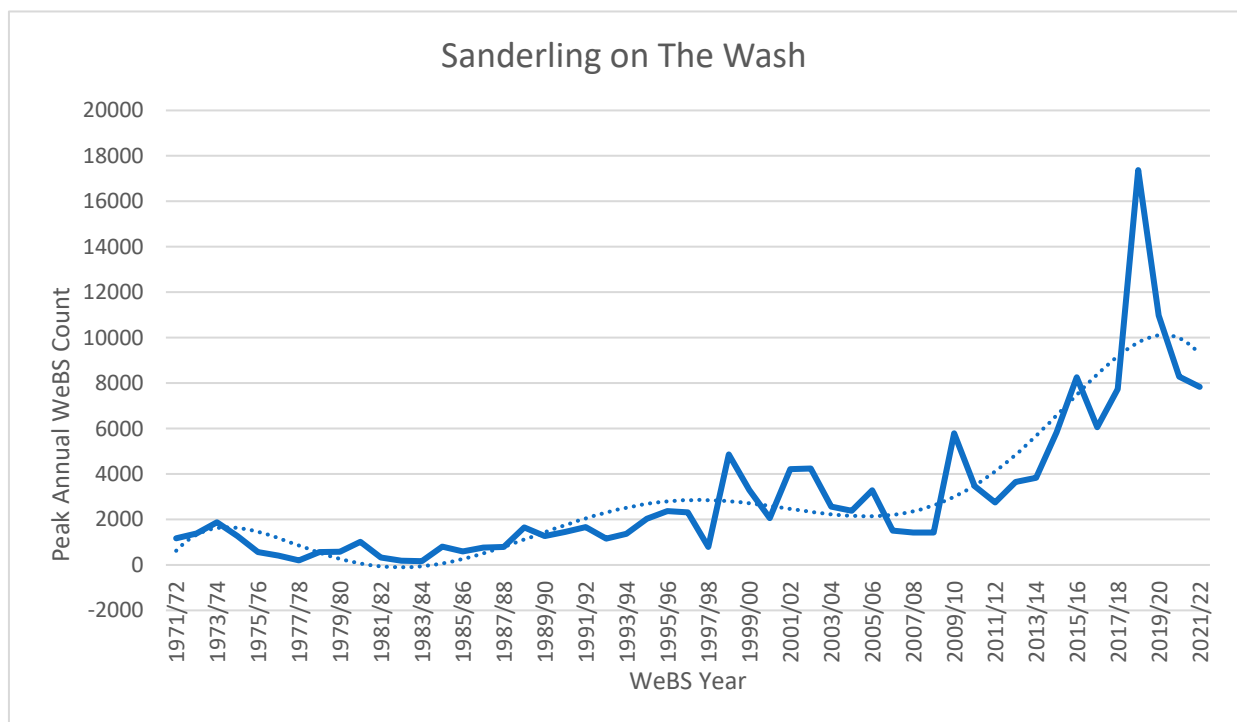
- Sanderling are vulnerable to disturbance on beaches whilst foraging and roosting (del Hoyo et al. 1996, Thomas et al. 2003).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data)<sup>3</sup>:** 10,441

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation)<sup>4</sup>:** 500

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
4	60	150





## 22. Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

**Key Information:** Dunlin are probably the most encountered wader on The Wash. They have a medium-length slightly down-curved bill. In breeding plumage, they show a distinctive black belly patch and beautifully patterned upperparts whilst in the winter months, the plumage is a more muted combination of greys and whites. A moorland breeder in the UK, there are small populations that breed in North and West Scotland, some of which are known to be in severe decline.



**What they eat:** Insects, snails and worms, sometimes plant matter and occasionally small fish.

**Population:** Dunlin have complex population demographics, and there are three races of Dunlin that visit The Wash. Birds that breed in Britain and Scandinavia (*schinzii*) and Greenland (*arctica*) pass through The Wash on their way to Africa, with the latter passing through in much smaller numbers. The third population, *alpina*, spend their winter on The Wash before returning to their breeding grounds in northern Scandinavia and Russia (WWRG). The UK wintering population has declined by 45% since 1995.

**UK Wintering Population:** 350,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Red

**Main Threats (UK):**

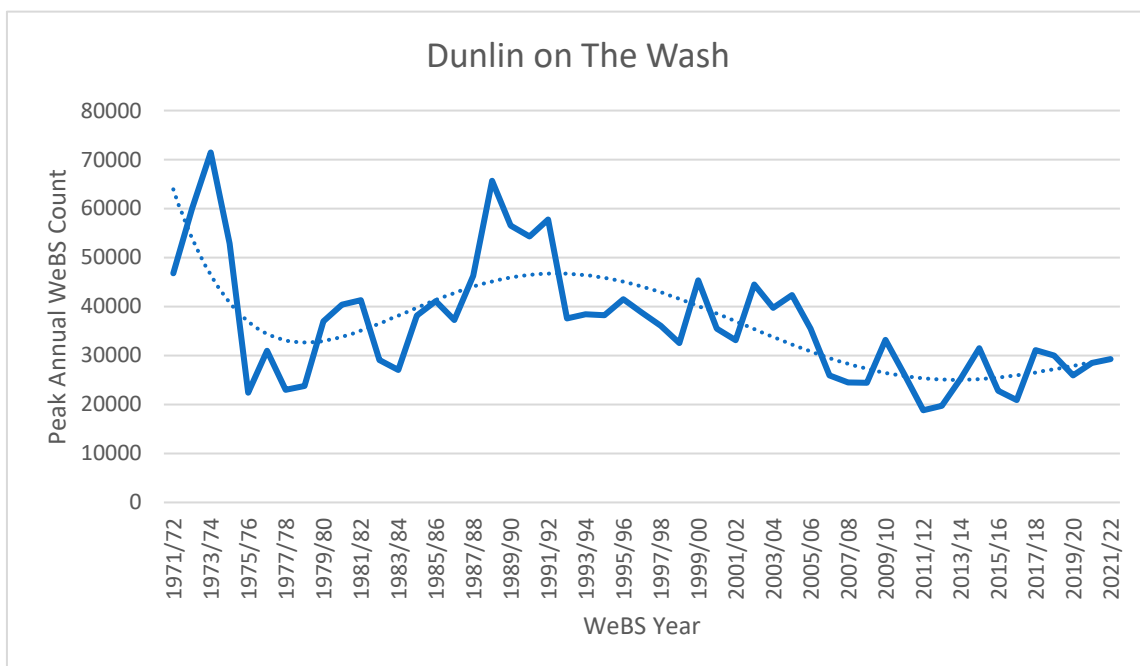
- Loss of breeding habitat through drainage of peatlands and afforestation (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).
- Loss of wintering habitat through coastal squeeze, land reclamation or the invasion of non-native *Spartina anglica* which reduces available feeding areas (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).
- Disturbance from development (Burton *et al.* 2002a) and recreation (Burton *et al.* 2002b).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 28,948

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 29,000

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
13	-10	-35



## 23. Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

**Key Information:** Redshanks' most distinctive features are their bright orange-red legs. They have a medium-length bill with an orange base to match, brown speckled back and wings and paler belly. Studies have shown that overwintering birds remain in the same area throughout winter and return to the same site in subsequent winters (Burton *et al.* 2000; Rehfishch *et al.* 1996), a phenomenon known as 'site-fidelity' or 'site-faithfulness'. Site-faithful birds that are displaced from their usual wintering sites due to habitat lost to development and associated disturbance have been shown to have poorer body condition and reduced survival rates (Burton *et al.* 2006).



**What they eat:** Insects, earthworms, molluscs and crustaceans

**Population:** Following the breeding season, redshanks depart to the coast where numbers build up from July onwards. Birds wintering on the Wash comprise both local breeders and long-distant migrants primarily from Iceland-breeding populations or from elsewhere in the UK, though small numbers of birds from continental Europe may also be present.

**UK Wintering Population:** 100,000

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

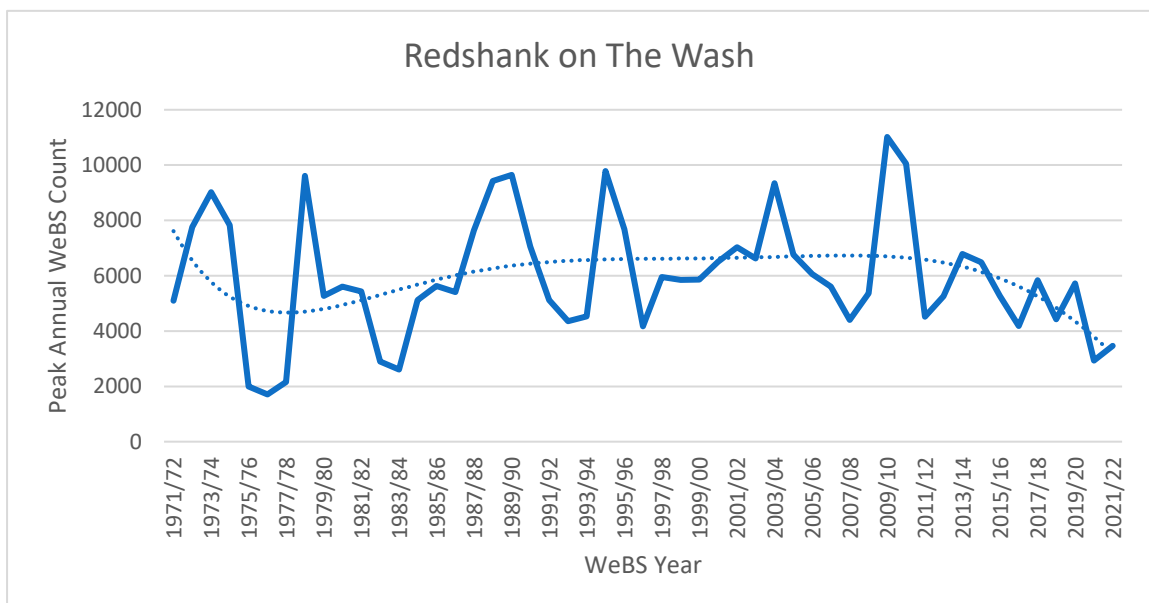
- Climate change (causing loss of and change to habitats).
- Invasive species (*Spartina*, a type of saltmarsh grass) encroaching on feeding habitat.
- Disturbance (causing some areas to be abandoned or birds to spend less time feeding and more energy responding to disturbance, affecting energy budgets and therefore survival rates, ultimately leading to smaller numbers of birds).

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** 5,087

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation):** 4,331

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status (% Change):**

Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
-11	-7	-11



## 24. Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)

**Key Information:** Common terns have silvery-grey wings, a white breast and dark cap on their heads. They have orange-red bills usually with a black tip and can be distinguished from the similar looking arctic and rosette terns by their shorter tail streamers. They have a buoyant, graceful flight and frequently hover out over water before plunging down for a fish. Often noisy in company.

**What they eat:** Small fish

**Population:** Common terns are summer visitors to the UK. They breed along coasts with shingle beaches and rocky islands, on rivers with shingle bars, and at inland gravel pits and reservoirs, feeding along rivers and over fresh water. The breeding population is decreasing in Scotland but increasing in the south and east of England.

**UK Breeding Population:** 11,000 breeding pairs (8,900 – 13,500 pairs)

**UK Conservation Status:** Amber

**Main Threats (UK):**

- Predation (as ground nesting birds they are vulnerable to predation from gulls and mammals)
- Disturbance (from human activity at breeding sites and from watercraft)

**The Wash SPA Population (most recent available data):** NA

**The Wash SPA Population (at site designation)<sup>4</sup>:** 220

**The Wash SPA Conservation Status:**



Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
NA	NA	NA



#### The Wash SPA Wintering features:

1. Dark-bellied Brent Goose
2. Pink-footed Goose
3. Bewick's Swan
4. Shelduck
5. Gadwall
6. Wigeon
7. Pintail
8. Common Scoter
9. Goldeneye
10. Oystercatcher
11. Grey Plover
12. Curlew
13. Bar-tailed godwit
14. Black-tailed Godwit
15. Turnstone
16. Knot
17. Sanderling
18. Dunlin
19. Redshank

#### The Wash SPA Breeding features:

1. Common Tern
2. Little tern

#### The Wash SPA assemblage species

1. Avocet (nationally important)
2. Golden Plover (internationally important)
3. Lapwing (internationally important)
4. Ringed Plover (internationally important)
5. Whimbrel (nationally important)
6. Little Grebe (Locally important)
7. Cormorant (nationally important)
8. Whooper Swan (Locally important)
9. White-fronted Goose (Locally important)
10. Teal (nationally important)
11. Mallard (nationally important)
12. Eider (nationally important)
13. Black-headed Gull (nationally important)
14. Lesser Black-backed Gull (nationally important)
15. Herring Gull (nationally important)
16. Great Black-backed Gull (nationally important)

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