

WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee

Minutes of 15th Meeting: 3rd June 2025

Attendees

Chair: Gill Birtles (GB) (BTO)

Alan Burnham (Northern England), Neil Calbrade (NC) (BTO), Chris Gunn (CG) (Eastern England), Bridget Hiza (BH) (BTO), Dan Jenkins-Jones (DJJ) (Wales), Kerry Mackie (KM) (Northern Ireland), Brian Moore (BM) (Midlands).

1 Apologies for absence

Teresa Frost (BTO).

2 Welcome and introductions

All attendees of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) introduced themselves.

3 Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Members of the LOAC were asked to note that agenda items marked with an asterisk [*] should be regarded as strictly confidential. The LOAC may add or remove asterisks during the meeting. LOAC members are asked to notify the Chair of any conflict of interest for any particular item and to absent themselves from the discussion, decision or vote for this item as appropriate.

4 Action Points from the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

AP/LOAC12/1 Add coverage maps of LTC sites onto the BTO website - not done. NC will look into this in the following year. - Neil will look into the feasibility of this but it is a tricky task. - **With the new website launch, we are not sure at the moment if adding this will be feasible or approved by the website team.**

AP/LOAC14/1 GB to update the LO Role Description document, as it is currently dated, and share this with current LOs once completed. - **Completed**

AP/LOAC14/2 GB to write an article for Waterbird News 2024, detailing the LO role, responsibilities and tasks for those who may be interested in taking on the role. - **Completed**

AP/LOAC14/3 GB to re-establish the role priorities in the 2024 LO meeting. - **Completed**

AP/LOAC14/4 LOAC to create and send a questionnaire to LOs in the mid-late summer, with results to be shared with LOAC and WeBS team before planning of annual LO meeting in the autumn begins. - **Completed**

AP/LOAC14/5 GB to create retiring LO document and share a draft with LOAC for comment. - **Completed**

AP/LOAC14/6 GB to share early drafts of the WeBS Core Counter and Organiser Recruitment and Retention Review and Strategy with LOAC so that they can give comments. - **Completed**

5 WeBS Progress Update

Core and Supplementary Update (GB)

Social Media

At the time that BTO chose to shut down its X accounts, the WeBS partnership decided to keep the WeBS/GSMP X account, so we now have three social media accounts - X, Facebook and Bluesky (as of January 2025)..

We are making a concerted effort to be more active on social media and are regularly highlighting vacant WeBS sectors through 'WeBS Site Insight' posts. GB has been choosing vacant sites from the Vacant Sites map, looking to highlight the different types of sites that WeBS covers across the UK e.g. habitat types, urban and rural.. GB asked LOAC to ask LOs if they have particular sites they would like us to highlight through these posts.

Data Spreadsheet Upload Tool

This week, we have launched a new tool on WeBS Online, which will enable the WeBS team to upload data spreadsheets directly into the app.

Many team sites send their counts across on spreadsheets which NC uploads using a separate program. This program has become old and difficult, so it is hoped that the new tool will make the process easier and more streamlined.

Please note that this isn't a tool that LOs can access and we are not openly inviting counters to email their counts to us on spreadsheets. We are highlighting this to LOAC so that they are aware of this tool and that there is a new spreadsheet template for this data format.

Low Tide update (NC)

LTCs were carried out in 2024/25 at Belfast Lough, Hamford Water, Blackwater Estuary, Crouch/Roach Estuaries, Stour Estuary, Orwell Estuary among other sites.

Sites to be targeted in 2025/26 include Alde Estuary, Firth of Clyde, Medway Estuary, Langstone Harbour, Chichester Harbour, Lavan Sands (Traeth Lafan) and the Ribble Estuary.

GSMP Update (NC)

Icelandic-breeding Goose Census (IGC) counts went ahead in October and November 2024 plus a spring count (which takes place every 3 years) in March 2025.

Working with Icelandic colleagues (funded by NatureScot) to track Greylags to get a better understanding of the number of Icelandic birds wintering in the UK as birds mix with resident

British/Irish Greylags in Scotland. Tracking found that some birds were being found south of the traditional Aberdeen-Bute line, but this is ongoing work.

Waterbird News Update (NC)

A request has been made for articles for the next Waterbird News, due Autumn 2025. So far I have offers of an article on Green Sandpipers, the International Swan Census, NEWS (if it will be happening next year) and the 60th IWC count. If any LOs want to offer an article please get in touch, deadline for articles end of August (for publication in early October).

WeBS Report Online Update (NC)

As mentioned in the *Waterbirds in the UK* report, a few new features have been added to the WeBS Report Online this year:

- Ratios tab shows results from age assessments entered into GSMP Online, but in time will include age assessments and sex ratios of birds entered into WeBS Online. Currently we have only used the last 3 years of data, but historical WWT age assessment data will be added.
- Country totals have been included on the Totals tab alongside the usual site totals.
- WeBS Alerts have been updated to include 2021/22 data on designated sites (SPAs, SSSIs and ASSIs).

NEWS Update (GB)

Funding is still not finalised for NEWS, but we are currently thinking that this could be split between two winters (2025/26 and 2026/27), with WeBS counters participating in one year and professional counters for another. However, nothing has been finalised or confirmed.

LOAC were asked if it would be too much for LOs and counters if we ended up asking them to participate in the upcoming winter (2025/26).

AR, AB and ET all think asking WeBS volunteers to help with NEWS this winter would be too much (especially with Heathland Bird Survey and ISC coming up). Feedback from AR is that the NEWS sites in South and East Scotland are only accessible by foot and so as much time as possible is needed to plan for visiting NEWS sites. DJJ wouldn't mind doing it this year as his coastline is fairly easy, but wouldn't want to speak for all LOs in Wales.

6 Reports from LOAC Regions

- Eve Tigwell:
 - Received a response from an LO who has concerns about younger people taking a WeBS site to end up only counting it a few times and then stop without informing the LO. AB, DJJ and BM have all experienced this too, especially with students and young professionals who it seems are adding it to their CVs despite no longer [participating](#).
 - It was discussed if there was really anything that can be done, as you can't always tell if that will be the case when someone signs up. BM said that while it's time-consuming to allocate, chase, un-allocate, at least they are receiving a count, sometimes for a site not covered in a while. DJJ also said that it is

hoped that it lays the seed for them to participate in WeBS in the future when they are more settled.

- GB asked for clarity about what exactly it is that makes this situation difficult for LOs and the response was that it is time consuming and also clutters the 'Counters' list for a site in Manage My Team/WeBS Online.
 - ET mentioned the LO also wondered if we could change permissions so people only counting once or twice can't view all the data for the site. GB said that it is not possible for LO to remove a counter completely, just downgrade permission to 'View'. The WeBS team can remove someone from a Counter list for a site, however, one of our agreements is that once someone has submitted data, we will always allow them to access their data, which is done on a site basis.
 - GB emphasised that if LOs have counters on a site list who have never submitted data and are not active, do let her know and she can remove them from the list.
 - ET also raised the issues with broken links on the updated BTO website, to make LOs aware of this when sending out links to new counters. GB addressed we are aware of this issue and to please send her any broken links/issues you encounter so we can report these to the website team. GB also highlighted that there is a current issue with survey sign ups through MyBTO, so if you are experiencing problems with allocating counters (e.g. they say they have signed up to WeBS but their UserID doesn't appear in WeBS Online), to also let her know.
- Andy Riches:
 - Sites on the Vacant Sites map e.g. Wigtown Bay and Loch Ryan seem to appear and disappear.
 - A number of sites need tidying up e.g. Mersehead, where there are sites that are split up into many sectors that were once counted by RSPB but now counted all together, so appear like they are vacant but are actually covered.
 - NC mentioned there are dots on the vacant site map where boundaries are unknown, so if anyone knows a boundary please update this or let us know.
 - It is not clear on the Manage My Team Location list, which sites are ancestors, parents and children (and how they are connected), so it looks like there are more sites being uncounted than there actually are, which was supported by others in the meeting. It can be very confusing and potentially put LOs off. GB says they will look to see if work to restructure this page in Manage My Team can be included in future development work.

AP/LOAC15/1 GB to look into adding a re-design of the Manage My Team -> Locations list to make site hierarchies clearer.

7 International Swan Census (ISC)

ISC is now being organised by BTO and is scheduled for January 2026.

App developments in GSMP Online were shared with the group, showing the ISC vacant site map, LO tools to allocate/deallocate counters and review submissions, as well as the data entry form for LOs and counters. These functions will be available for ISC LOs to use in the next week, with the vacant site map being open to counters 1st August 2025.

Development on WeBS Online is being made to allow WeBS counters to enter ISC data without having to sign up to GSMP.

Update on LO recruitment for ISC- previous ISC LOs and WeBS LOs were emailed on 1st June 2025 asking if they wanted to be an ISC LO for 2026, so we are currently in the process of allocating LOs who have responded..

8 Roving WeBS

It has been an idea for some time to introduce a 'roving' feature for WeBS counts, much like the [\[BBS\] Upland Rovers](#). This is something that we have had in the past, which took the form of leaflets with short Core Count forms, which could be left in strategic hides and posted back to the WeBS Office. We have also found that throughout the years, counters have asked for permissions to sites because they are going on holiday and can fill coverage gaps. So it would be the aim of this project to make this option easier for Local Organisers and counters to arrange and execute.

We are hoping to introduce this feature to WeBS Online and our thoughts currently are that there is a pre-determined list of sites which are marked as 'roving sites' and counters can be marked as 'roving counters', which gives them access to this site list. The idea being that counters who pass these roving sites while e.g. on holiday, can submit a Core Count in order to fill in a gap of coverage.

We have not decided yet what would classify a site to be a roving site - could be sites that haven't been counted in X amount of years or where a number of species is low/ doesn't meet a threshold.

Roving counts wouldn't need to be on a Priority Core Count date and data would mainly be used to fill in gaps for sites where it has proven difficult to allocate a counter to carry out monthly counts. This data would feed into e.g. avian influenza work, population estimates, species distribution, future projects and be an engagement tool.

This is all very much at the brainstorming stage and can be shaped into anything that we feel would work best for the project and volunteers.

Thoughts from LOAC:

- AR thinks this is a good idea and works well for BBS. Questions the use of BirdTrack for this as pinpoints are on too large of a scale. Mentioned has a lot of visitors in Dumfries & Galloway that already do this and receive paper forms so would be good to have this online. Good to fill in gaps in data where sites haven't been visited for many years.
- AB suggested all WeBS counters should have the ability to rove without having to sign up as a rover. AB spoke to his LOs and reported most are positive but some

suggested it could skew data and the counter may have little knowledge of a site when visiting. However AB mentioned it's the same as someone counting a site for the first time and good to fill in gaps.

- CG suggested to call it 'one-off counters' as this is more self-explanatory for what it is.
- DJJ thinks it's a good idea and works well with BBS. Promotion is important and should be promoted to current WeBS volunteers in the first instance.
- BM mentioned he tried this within his LO area a few years ago and it didn't take off. People didn't want others to be looking at their sites. GB said that we would not be asking rovers to count sites which already have an allocated counter as this wouldn't fit in with the aim of the project and we also don't want to upset any allocated counters who feel a sense of ownership over their site/s.
- BM also raised a point of many counters using eBird instead of BirdTrack so maybe best not to include BirdTrack in this.
- CG mentioned would be good for the issue of people signing up just once or twice for a survey as mentioned by ET above.

9 Any other business

No other business was raised.