



WADER
GURU



‘Which is the most endangered wader in the UK?’

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Short answers:

Most endangered breeder (rare). Purple Sandpiper

Most endangered breeder (steepest decline) Eurasian Curlew

Most endangered regular non breeder: Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot

Most endangered regular passage species: Curlew Sandpiper

Most endangered accidental - Sociable Lapwing

Long answer:

UK: This is actually a multi faceted question as endangered can have different connotations as far the status of a species in any one country is concerned.

In the UK birds are categorised as Red, Amber or Green.

- Red List is a list of birds in most urgent need of our help. It includes some of our rarest birds, but also familiar birds, which have suffered huge declines.
- Amber is used to highlight birds whose conservation status is of moderate concern.
- Green represents species that are not in danger or declining rapidly

The first aspect is the **most endangered breeding species**. For this category we are considering those that regularly breed, discounting those that have historically bred or do so sporadically. Within this context there are two things to look at. One is the likelihood of the species becoming extinct in the UK in the near future, but which may or may not be threatened elsewhere, the other is the species which is declining most rapidly within the UK. For these answers we refer to the UK Red List and find that there are, alarmingly, 11 species of wader on that list. They are:

- **Eurasian Curlew. Red Listed UK / Near Threatened Europe / Near Threatened Worldwide** - This is the species grabbing all the headlines at the moment and could arguably be the most endangered in terms of the declines being experienced. 50% across England and Scotland, 80% in Wales and a whopping 97% in Ireland. Much conservation work is being carried out to try to reverse the breeding success rate of the species in the UK. It was given Red status in the 2015-2020 assessment and in 2016 the population was thought to be around 59 thousand pairs. The chief concern for this species is the loss of habitat due to changing land use and crop choice on farmland and a growth in predator populations.
- **Northern Lapwing. Red Listed UK / Vulnerable Europe / Near Threatened Worldwide** - This species is on the Red List despite being the UK's most common breeding wader with around 98 thousand pairs in 2016. In 1972 it was estimated at around 200,000 pairs. This decline is continuing and current estimate show an 80% decline of breeding pairs in the last 30 or so years. The Lapwing has had a steady decline since the middle of the 20th century where prior to that it gained ground due to the protection afforded to it by the 1926 Lapwing Act, prohibiting the collection of their eggs on an industrial scale each year. In addition the species is of concern on a wider scale. The species changed from Amber to Red in the 2009-2014 assessment. The main threat is the change in agricultural use of farmland and drainage of wetlands and wet meadows coupled with an increase in predators such as crows and foxes.
- **Black-tailed Godwit. Red Listed UK / Near Threatened Europe / Near Threatened Worldwide** - This species was once extinct in the UK having been common in the east of England before the fens were drained. When it became rare it turned into a trophy for collectors of skins and eggs, accelerating it's decline. The species became extinct as a breeding bird in 1885. In 1937 it became an irregular breeder again and in 1952 it recolonised England. Numbers grew quickly to around 70 pairs by the 1970s, but since that time declined. Protection and a headstarting programme have recently increased the numbers again. Now, mainly in East Anglia, Yorkshire and Kent, there are probably around 50-60 pairs. As such the threat for such a small population is that they could once



Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* © Elis Simpson



Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* © Elis Simpson



Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* © Elis Simpson

again become extinct in the UK. Current risks are flooding and predation, restricted availability of suitable breeding habitat, grazing and mowing. However, the above applies to the race *Limosa limosa limosa*. The race *L. l. islandica* also breeds in the UK in small numbers in Orkney and Shetland. As a recent colonist it is still scarce and climate change may force it to abandon these areas again if they change their environmental characteristics. Estuarine development can also affect the winter populations of Black-tailed Godwit, which comprise almost entirely of the *L. l. islandica* race. The current population in the UK is thought to be between 5 and 10 pairs. The subspecies *L. l. limosa* has been on the Red list since the scheme started, *L. l. islandica* is on the Amber list.

- **Ruff. Red Listed UK / Near Threatened Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - Like the Black-tailed Godwit this is a former regular breeding bird that was extirpated from the UK in 1870 for the same reasons and was declared extinct in 1898. However, it has since returned in small numbers as a breeding bird in some locations. Since the 1960s there have been regular leks in some of its previous range, although breeding is unlikely at some as they do not all have regular breeding females attached to them. There were just 13 females on average during the period. Originally on the Amber list it was moved to Red in the 2002-2007 assessment. Like all the grassland nesting waders the big threats are change of land use, flooding, draining, mowing and over grazing.



Sparring Ruffs *Calidris philomachus* © Elis Simpson

- **Eurasian Dotterel. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - Once a fairly widespread and common breeder in many parts in the north during the 19th century, At that time flocks of 200 were reported. They bred mainly in Scotland, North England and a smattering in North Wales. During the second half of that century they declined. A number of reasons have been mooted but their hunting for food, skin and egg collections and fly fishing fly lure creation have all paid a heavy toll. Their distribution is now restricted to the central Scottish highlands and in Sutherland. In these parts, particularly the highlands their future is by no means secure. The infrastructure for winter sports has meant that a greater number of people can access the peaks all year round causing disturbance to the breeding dotterels. The declining situation in the Scotland may be due in part to birds relocating to Fennoscandia, but the increase in corvids and gulls attracted by the human influence, over grazing and problems on the wintering grounds have almost certainly had an effect too. From a high point in the late 1980s when 840 males were estimated to be in the region, that fell to 747 in 1999 and by the most recent data available that has fallen to about 425 males, representing a 50% decline. The Dotterel moved to the Red list in the 2015-20 assessment having been on Amber previously since the scheme started.



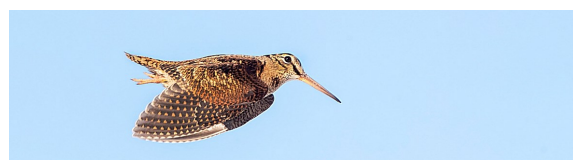
Eurasian Dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* © Elis Simpson

- **Common Ringed Plover. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - Since the 1980s this bird has seen a moderate breeding population decline from around 8,800 pairs to 5,500 pairs (approximately 37% decline), probably due to increased coastal disturbance. Through recreation and development However its reason for being on the red list is that the winter population is considered to be important and that has seen a severe recent decline. In winter there are around 23,000 individuals a number which is down by about 24% in the same period as above. This recent reduction is possibly due to climate induced redistribution to Europe. The species first joined the Red list at the 2015-20 assessment, having been Amber before that since assessments commenced.



Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* © Elis Simpson

- **Eurasian Woodcock. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - The breeding range of the Woodcock in the UK is known to be contracting Since the 1968 - 1972 breeding survey the population is now considered to have declined by over 50%. Although there are no really clear indications as to why this has happened it is likely that increased recreation in woodlands, particularly



Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* © Marc Guyt Agami Photo Agency

off lead dog walking, and a reduction of management of those woodlands has, together with an overall drying of much of the woodland and increased deer numbers been at least partially responsible. In addition, plantations that have been suitable as breeding sites have matured and no longer present ideal breeding conditions. The Woodcock was recategorized as being eligible for the Red List in the 2015-20 assessment, having previously been on the Amber list beforehand since the scheme started.

- Purple Sandpiper. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - This species is a well known winter visitor to the UK being a rock dwelling bird that is entirely coastal. The winter population is declining. Between the 1984-85 and 2006-7 winter surveys the population declined by a little over 25%. The wintering population in the north and west mainly derives from the Canadian breeding population which is in decline. As a breeding bird it was only confirmed in 1978 and since that time up to 5 pairs have bred annually in two main sites in the Scottish Highlands since. During the 2008-11 period breeding was confirmed in two 10 km squares in the Cairngorms National Park. The Purple Sandpiper was only recently placed on the Red list having been on the Amber list even after the 2016-29 assessment.
- Red-necked Phalarope. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - These are a rare breeding species at the southern limit of their breeding range. The main breeding concentration in the UK is in Shetland and to a lesser extent in Orkney. The number of breeding males has fluctuated during the period of assessment from a high of around 50 males to a low point of 15 males. The main causes for such changes are due perhaps to habitat change as vegetation develops, periods of drought or flood affecting water levels and nutrient and mineral build up causes prey items to die off in some pools. Predation may also play a part with a population of Skuas and Gulls as well as introduced mammalian predators being present in the Scottish Islands. This species has been on the Red List since the scheme started.
- Eurasian Whimbrel. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - This species is a passage migrant passing through the UK in spring and autumn. It is also a rare breeder with a few wintering individuals also recorded. The first survey of breeding birds for the BTO in the 1968-72 Atlas showed a population, restricted to Shetland and a few pairs in Orkney with possible breeding on the Western Isles and in Caithness, of around 150 pairs. A steady increase showed the number on the 1988-91 Atlas as being 410 - 470 pairs. By 2009 the number was down again to 290 - 310 pairs following an extensive survey. The Whimbrel passed from Amber to Red during 2002-2007.
- Dunlin. Red Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide** - The breeding stronghold of this species in the UK is in the Scottish Islands, and the uplands of mainland Scotland. Declines have taken place in the northern English uplands and the species still hangs on by a thread in the southern uplands of Wales and Dartmoor. The main reason for these declines is due to habitat loss and, in particular the afforestation of moorland. On islands such as in the Outer Hebrides, the introduction of hedgehogs has caused a decline of around 50% between 1983 and 2008. The Dunlin joined the Red List for the first time in the latest assessment.



Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* © Elis Simpson



Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* © Dave Jackson



Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* © Elis Simpson



Dunlin *Calidris alpina* © Elis Simpson

Amber list breeders:

Eurasian Oystercatcher. Amber Listed UK / Vulnerable Europe / Near Threatened Worldwide - AMBER because European Red List, Localised Non-Breeder, Important Population; Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

Eurasian Snipe. Amber Listed UK / Vulnerable Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because European Red List, Recent Moderate Winter Population Decline, Long-term Moderate Breeding Range Decline; Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

Common Redshank. Amber Listed UK / Vulnerable Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because European Red List, Recent Moderate Breeding Population Decline, Recent Moderate Breeding Range Decline, Important Non-Breeding Population; Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

European Stone Curlew. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because Long-term Moderate Breeding Population Decline, Localised Breeder: Down listed from Red in 2009-14 assessment. The only species of wader to be down listed in this way.

Pied Avocet. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because Localised (Breeding & Non-Breeding); Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

Ruddy Turnstone. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because Recent Moderate Winter Population Decline; Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

Sanderling. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - AMBER because Localised Non-Breeder. Up listed from Green in 2015-2020 assessment.

Common Sandpiper. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - Amber because Recent Moderate Breeding Population Decline, Rare Non-Breeder. Up listed from Green in 2009-2014 assessment.

Green Sandpiper. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - Amber because Recent Moderate Breeding Range Decline, Rare (Breeding & Non-Breeding); Up listed from Green in 2002-2007 assessment.

Wood Sandpiper. Amber Listed UK / Least Concern Europe / Least Concern Worldwide - Amber because Rare (Breeding & Non-Breeding); Amber since 1996-2001 assessment.

Most endangered non-breeding regular:

No non-breeding regulars are Red Listed but both the **Bar-tailed Godwit** and the **Red Knot** are on the Amber list. Both have been there since the categories were instituted in the 1996-2001 assessment. Both birds are also considered to be globally Near Threatened. In addition the Grey Plover is on the Amber List, again since the scheme started but they are elsewhere of Least Concern.

Most endangered passage migrant:

The only species contending for this dubious title is the **Curlew sandpiper**. It is the only purely passage wader that is on the Amber List (none on the Red List) and was up listed from Green in the 2015-22 assessment. Elsewhere it is considered Vulnerable in Europe but Least Concern worldwide.

Most endangered accidental:

Of the many accidental species on the British list only one is Critically Endangered and that is the **Sociable Lapwing** (if you ignore the probably extinct Eskimo Curlew).



Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* © Elis Simpson



Red Knot *Calidris canutus* © Elis Simpson



Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* © Elis Simpson



Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* © Elis Simpson

Sources:

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European Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus* © Dave Jackson