

Avocet

Recurvirostra avosetta

NBA 1999–2007	SUMMER: ALL/BREEDING	WINTER
TETRAIDS OCCUPIED	68 (5%) / 41 (3%)	18 (1%)
SUMMER/WINTER ONLY	55	5
MEAN PER OCCUPIED TETRAD	19 / 25	59
SUMMED MAX COUNTS	1,279 / 1,018	1,066
POPULATION ESTIMATE	300–500 bp	200–350

PREVIOUS ATLASES	SQUARES OCCUPIED	1999–2007	LOSSES	GAINS
1968–72 (10 KM)	1 (2%)	15 (24%)	1	15
1980–85 (TETRAD)	6 (<1%)	41 (3%)	0	35
1980–85 (10 KM)	4 (6%)	15 (24%)	0	11
1981–84 WINTER (10 KM)	4 (6%)	10 (16%)	0	6
1988–91 (10 KM)	9 (15%)	15 (24%)	2	8

THE AVOCET BECAME extinct as a breeding bird in England during the first half of the 19th century, with the last nesting pair in Norfolk being noted at Salthouse in about 1824. As a result of habitat changes and bird protection schemes, England was recolonised in the 1940s, probably from the Netherlands and Denmark. It was not until 1977, however, that the species bred successfully in Norfolk, for the first time in the 20th century – this time at Cley, only a short distance from the



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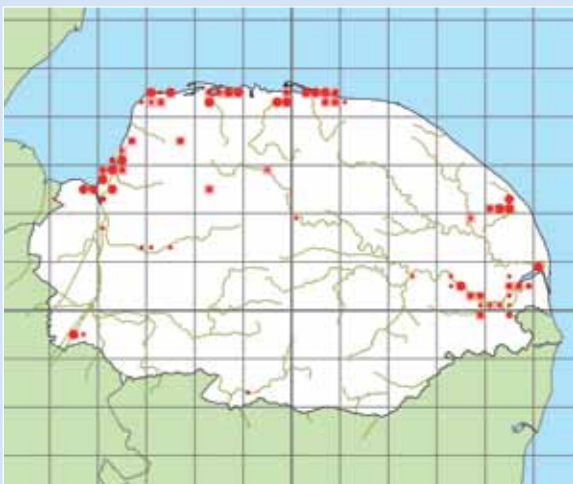
site of the last nesting over 150 years earlier.

During the breeding season they favour brackish lagoons with low, sparsely vegetated islands that have gently sloping banks, generally within a short distance of the coast. In north Norfolk, these conditions are found at many of the managed coastal reserves, where protection, at least from human disturbance, can be provided.

The map shows that Avocets were recorded during the summer in 68 tetrads, compared with just six at the time of the 1980–85 NBBS, such has been the scale of the spread of this species during the two intervening decades. Since the 1988–91 Atlas, the number of 10-km

SUMMER

Small dots 1–2, medium 3–12, large 13–181 ('pairs')
Shading – breeding proved or considered likely



WINTER

Small dots 1–2, medium 3–69, large 70–268 (birds)



squares occupied has doubled, with much of this change representing colonisation of inland sites, mainly those where soft, muddy habitats mimic the coastal conditions.

Data gathered in Suffolk in the 1970s and 1980s showed that, as the number of breeding pairs of Avocets increased, so the number of young reared per pair declined (Hill 1988). The same scenario has been played out in Norfolk and, particularly in the last few years, many pairs have failed to raise even a single youngster. The causes have varied between locations, but have included seasonal flooding, mammalian predation (foxes and stoats) and avian predators, including Coots and Kestrels. But perhaps the most significant has been the predation on eggs and young at Cley by Grey Herons that caused an almost total breeding failure during 2005–07. Unfortunately egg collectors have also taken their toll in north Norfolk. Despite all these problems, most Norfolk colonies have continued to expand and new sites have been colonised. Birds at new colonies generally produce more young than those at longer-established sites, and this may help explain how the county’s breeding population was able to rise from around 300 pairs in 2000 to about 500 pairs in 2005. Passage birds and other non-breeders also swell the summer population.

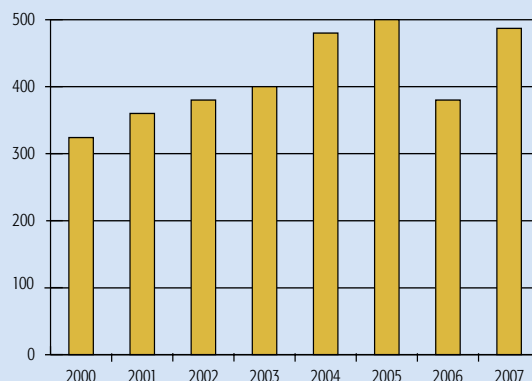
More than 50 pairs each were recorded during the NBA summers at Snettisham, Titchwell, Holkham and Cley, with smaller numbers at many other suitable localities as far east as Kelling WM. In east Norfolk, several smaller colonies have become established in Broadland, as far inland as Cantley BF, while in the Breydon Water area 53 pairs were breeding by 2000. In 2005, 48 pairs were also nesting at Welney in the Fens. Occasional Avocets turn up elsewhere inland during the spring and summer, at other freshwater sites, such as old gravel pits. At Wissington BF, a pair hatched two chicks in 2004, taking advantage of temporary low water levels in the main pit.

The increase in breeding population has been outstripped by the rate of rise in wintering birds in the county. Avocets are migratory in the northern part of their breeding range but the recent spell of mild winters has encouraged more to remain in North Sea countries outside the breeding season. Increasing numbers have overwintered in England since the late 1970s, with the vast majority in the estuaries along the Channel and southern North

Sea coasts and only a few Norfolk records (1981–84 *Winter Atlas*). It was not until 1995/96 that Avocets first wintered in numbers in Norfolk, at Breydon Water, peaking at 76. Since then, and during the NBA winters, the Breydon Water area has remained the wintering stronghold, with a maximum of 268. The only other locations to hold Avocets regularly in December or January were Cley, where a maximum of 34 was reported, and, in the later years of the NBA recording period, Titchwell. However, by late February spring passage has commenced and the winter map shows these passage birds at other sites along the north Norfolk coast and in the Wash, with peak counts of 130 at Snettisham, 87 at Titchwell and 90 at Cley.

BREEDING TOTALS

Breeding pairs in Norfolk for each of the NBA summers (data from *NBR*)



WINTER TOTALS

Winter count totals 1999–2007 (data from *NBR*)

