

REPORTING A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Statistics on Waterbirds in the UK (2018 publication; includes data up to 2017)
Name of statistical producer	Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	James Williams 01733 866868 James.Williams@jncc.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of report	10.05.2018

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant pillar, principle and practice	<p>T3.6 Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday.</p> <p>T3.9 Scheduled revisions or unscheduled corrections to the statistics and data should be released as soon as practicable. The changes should be handled transparently in line with a published policy.</p>
Date of occurrence of breach	03.05.2018
<p>JNCC discovered at about 10am that British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) had not published the Waterbirds summary report at 9:30 as required. On contacting BTO we were notified that the data itself had been published at https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/ (the WeBS Report Online), but the Summary Report – which formed a component of the statistical release was not yet available.</p> <p>Due to unexpected issues causing delays in the analytical process BTO were still rerunning trend analyses (with slightly revised input data) very late in the process, allowing very little time for QA. Whilst BTO believed that the statistics would be finalised in time for the official release time, in retrospect, a decision to delay publication due to statistics not being ready should have been made once it became clear that there would be insufficient time for QA.</p> <p>Re-runs of the trend analysis took longer to run than expected, and not all of the analyses were completed by 9:30 on the 3rd May. However, it should be noted that this final rerun was only expected to result in changes of less than one percent as it addressed a very minor revision to the input data, so BTO decided that it would still be acceptable to publish the statistics at 9:30 as planned and make these very minor revisions as an update later in the day.</p> <p>At 9:10 on the 3rd, BTO unexpectedly noticed a more significant difference in index values from the latest analytical runs of two species, the Coot and Wigeon, and decided the discrepancy was such that it was not appropriate to publish the Summary Report with these values which they suspected were incorrect. Over the next hour BTO identified the issue, rectified it and set up a new re-run of the trend analysis, which resulted in indices in line with expectations. At 11:00 the Summary Report was made available, and the results for Coot and Wigeon updated on the WeBS Report Online.</p> <p>Remaining analytical re-runs for other species were completed later in the day. These had been expected to make changes in population trends of just a fraction of a percent. Unexpectedly these resulted in slightly larger (but generally still small) changes. It was realised that this was because a site had been accidentally omitted from previous analyses.</p>	

In addition the wader trend figures in the summary report were from a much earlier analysis, and these changed by up to 19 percentage points.

The Summary Report and WeBS Report Online were both updated with final correct figures by approximately 17:00 on the 3rd May.

3. Impact of the breach

It is assessed that the breach resulted in minimal impact.

Impact of delay in publication

- Publicity around the statistical release was delayed so it is unlikely that many (if any) members of the general public noticed that the release was approximately 1.5 hours late.
- People who received pre-release access had already seen a version of the report so would not have needed to view the report on the website.

Impact of inaccuracies in statistics

- It is possible that people on the pre-release access list may have prepared briefings to ministers with inaccuracies in the figures used, but this would have been unlikely to have impacted the overall messages conveyed.
- It is possible that members of the general public may have downloaded the Summary Report, or viewed the WeBS Results Online, before 17.00 without realising that there were inaccuracies. This is likely to be a small-scale issue as BTO web analysis shows that there were only nine Summary Report downloads on this day, and a number of them are likely to have been staff members involved in the release checking progress.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Immediately after JNCC became aware of the delay in publication problem, we addressed the breach by requiring BTO to publish an interim version of the report, preferably with a notice alongside it stating that it would be updated with some minor revisions. A version was published at about 11.00 and replaced with a slightly updated version later in the day, although unfortunately in the busyness of fixing the report, an information notice was not included alongside the interim report.

Although the impact of the inaccurate figures was judged to be low, on 14th May JNCC decided to email pre-release recipients warning them that there were some minor inaccuracies on the pre-release version of the summary report they received and made available on BTO's website on the 3rd, and suggesting that if they had a copy of the report saved they should update it with the version currently on BTO's website. An update was emailed on the 18th May with the details of which species trends had changed and by how much.

The breach was discussed in detail on the Wetland Bird Survey Steering Committee on the 15th May. A number of factors were identified of things that could have been done differently in preventing the situation and dealing with it once it had occurred. These will be taken into account in future years to minimise the risk/impact of another breach occurring.

- There should have been earlier and fuller communication between BTO and JNCC to enable better joint decision making over addressing unexpected problems and the implications for the Official Statistics release.
- Once unexpected problems had emerged, there should have been a decision to delay publication rather than taking the higher risk approach in attempting to rectify everything in a very short time scale without sufficient time for quality assurance.

- When publishing the interim summary report and online results database, there should have been an accompanying notice included warning of the inaccuracies and informing that it would be replaced with a revised version later in the day.
- We should have informed pre-release recipients of the revision to the summary report sooner.

BTO put a notice on their website on the 18th May informing of the incorrect trends table, and advising that anyone who downloaded the summary report before 17:10 on the 3rd replace it with the version currently on the website.