

Introduction



The International Wader Study Group (WSG) has always thrived on collaboration and sharing of knowledge to discover more about waders (shorebirds) and how they live, whether it be through cannon-netting at a single site (the origins of the group) or through projects linking members throughout a flyway such as the various studies on the Knot *Calidris canutus*.

The WSG's unique position as a non-governmental network of volunteers and professionals dedicated to wader research has allowed it to feed much vital understanding of wader biology into efforts to manage and conserve these exciting birds. For those working in tropical and temperate parts of the world a major past limitation has been in sharing knowledge about where so many waders go to breed - the arctic and boreal regions of the former Soviet Union. As the USSR began in the late 1980s to implement its glasnost policy of closer contacts with the west, joint projects visiting key arctic breeding areas such as the Taymyr Peninsula started to bring understanding of the huge importance of these places for the breeding and survival of many wader populations. For many years while communications between western and eastern Europe were extremely difficult, the staff of the Ornithological Station at Gdansk, Poland had played an invaluable rôle to wader workers and others in helping contacts between these groups. The ground-breaking WSG Conference in Gdansk, Poland in 1987 for the first time brought wader-workers (or waderologists as they have sometimes been called) from east and west to meet, and whetted many appetites to further contact, but at that time there were still many barriers to a shared understanding of how the same birds live in these different regions.

The idea of a meeting in the then Soviet Union was discussed the evening after the Gdansk conference, while Pavel Tomkovich played disc-jockey, on Jaga Gromadzka record-player, to a small audience including Mike Pienkowski and Nick Davidson. During the IWRBs meeting in 1989 in Astrakhan, Anatoli Korzyukov discussed with Mike Pienkowski the possibility of hosting a WSG conference at Odessa. The Group was unanimous in its view that this would be a wonderful opportunity to bring together east and west at an international meeting to learn more from each other about wader research throughout shared flyways, and we embarked on the complex planning of such an

ambitious meeting. In the event, the changes in politics and economies in the region proved even more dramatic than anticipated, and by the time the conference was held, in April 1992, the USSR had ceased to exist and Odessa was in the newly independent state of the Ukraine.

To plan and deliver such an international conference during a period of such dramatic change in the eastern Europe was, we realised even, hugely ambitious. Indeed, the planning visit of the Group's then Chairman, due to have taken place in autumn 1991, had to be cancelled because of the attempted coup in Moscow. But through the great efforts of the organising committee, working in a time of huge economic and political upheaval, the conference was a major and exciting success. Indeed, by chance we were able to take advantage of a short window of opportunity in which travel in eastern Europe and northern Asia was still cheap and easy, so allowing many key wader workers to attend the conference. This gave those from western Europe and beyond the opportunity to hear about the wealth of long-term wader studies throughout the region. Since then travel in Russia and other states in northern Asia has become much more costly and the financing of research much more constrained - so we heard about much wader research in its heyday.

The conference was itself a remarkable event, held over a week in the Hotel Victoria on the Black Sea coast of Odessa in early April 1992 and attended by around 80 delegates from 13 countries. During the conference we heard many presentations in Russian and English (aided by excellent and sometimes ad hoc simultaneous translation - another first for the WSG) and read many posters describing research and conservation on migratory flyways that cover much of the world. Perhaps even more important was the opportunity for sharing informally our research experiences with so many new colleagues and friends, and for planning collaboration on further studies.

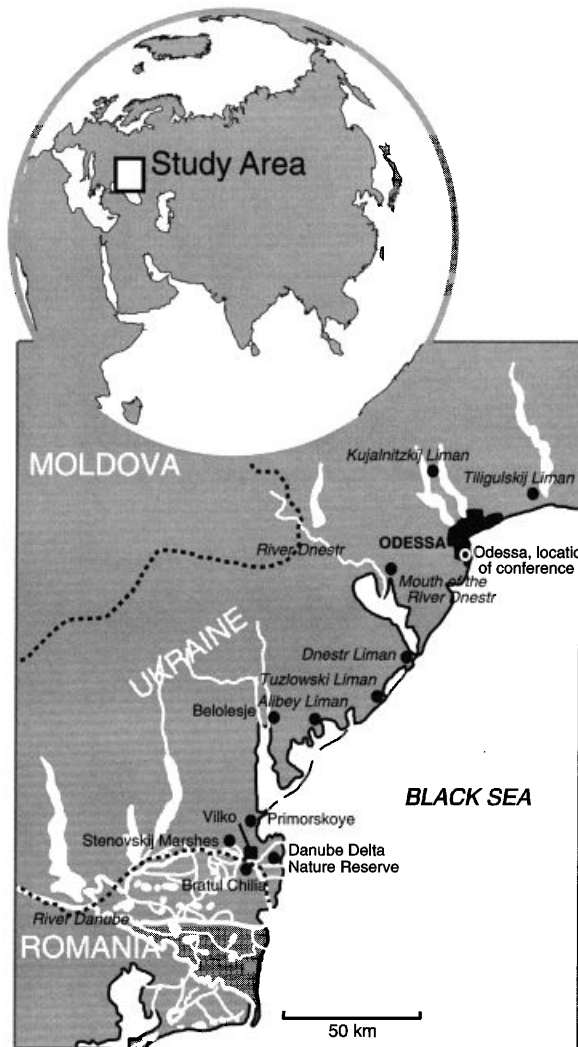


Figure 1. Black Sea coastal wetlands visited during the 1992 WSG Odessa conference.

The theme of the conference, migration and international conservation of waders, was strongly linked to several international conventions, notably the Ramsar Convention on wetlands especially as waterfowl habitat, and the Bonn Convention on the conservation of migratory species - and especially its African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement, which at the time of the conference was the subject of inter-governmental negotiation (see Boere & Lenten, this vol.). The conference was effectively an event supporting these Conventions, with WSG acting in its rôle in encouraging the collation and dissemination of the data and information necessary to inform the policy decisions needed to safeguard waders and their habitats, notably in its rôle as Wetland International/IUCN-SSC Specialist Group on waders. Indeed the nature of this rôle was developed in discussions during the conference.

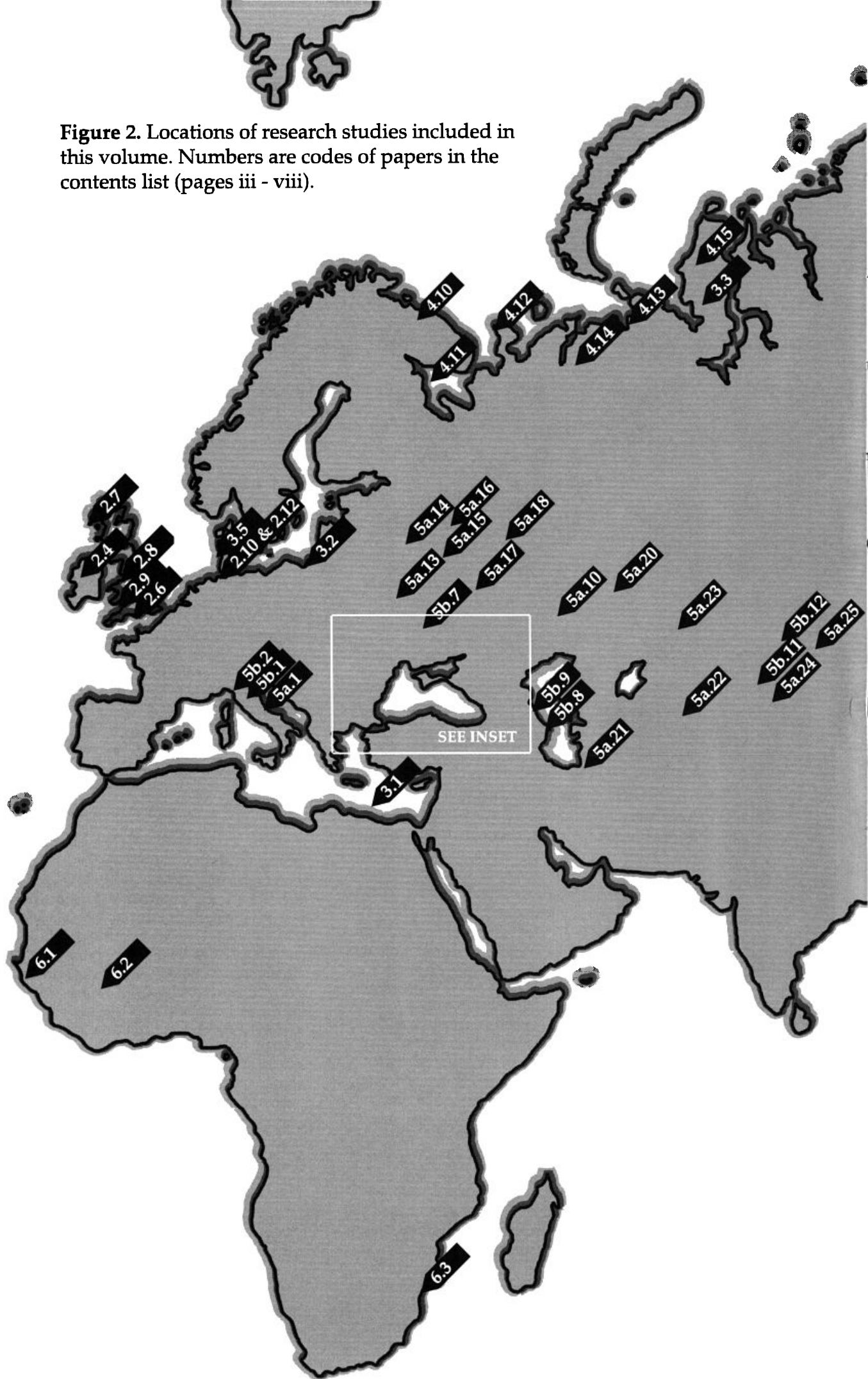
During the conference we developed the *Odessa Protocol on international co-operation on migratory flyway research and conservation*. This focuses on practical ways of helping research collaboration throughout wader (and other waterbird) flyways in ways that can assist the implementation of flyway-scale conservation efforts. This has since provided the guiding framework for much of the activity of the WSG. The implementation of the Odessa Protocol by WSG and others is described in

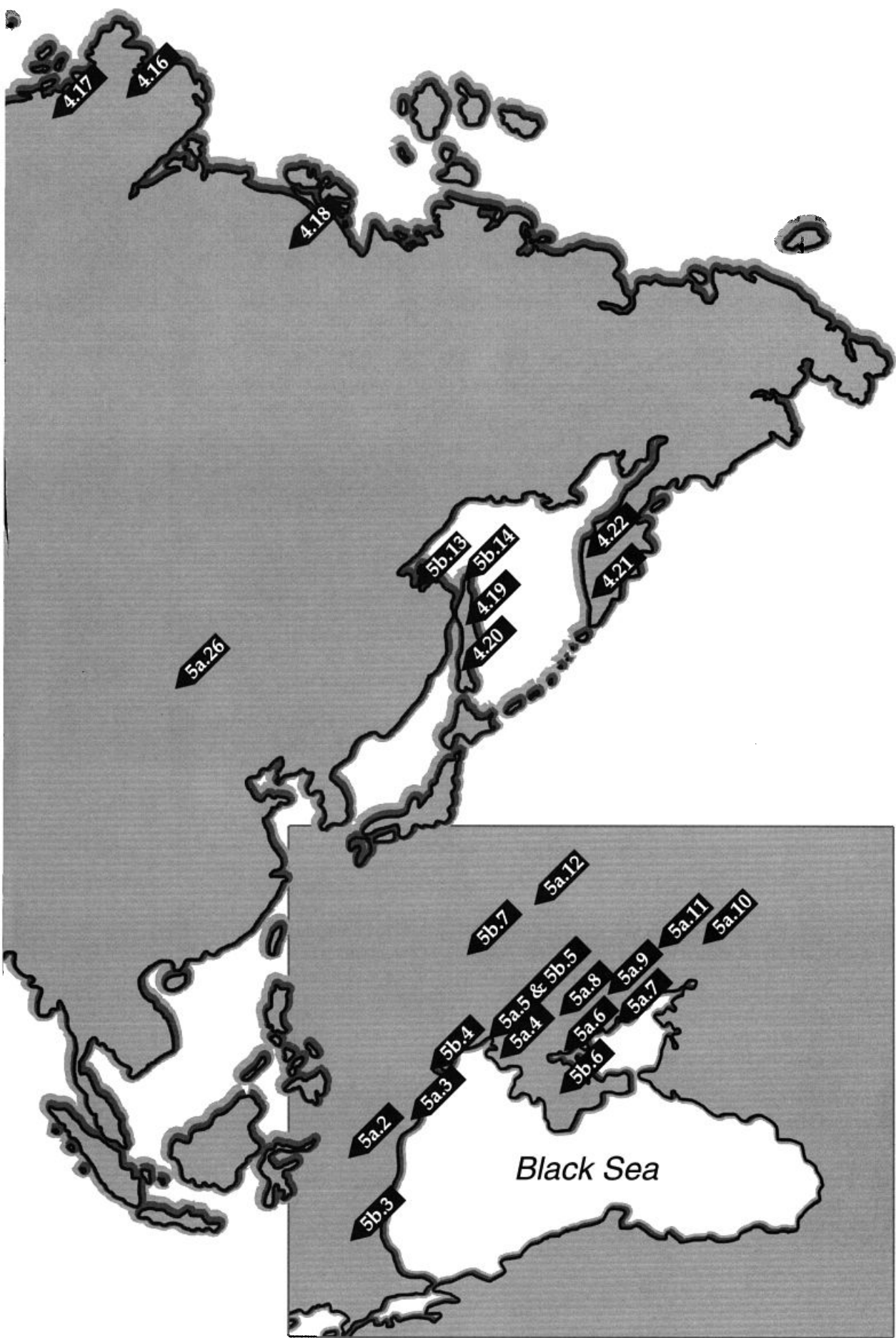
Davidson *et al.* in this volume and translations of the Protocol into several languages are appended. The Black Sea coast of the Ukraine in April is an area of huge importance for migrating waders, compared to the Wadden Sea in its significance by Jan Kube and colleagues in this volume. During and after the conference we were privileged to see some of these wetlands that act as staging areas for great numbers of northwards migrating waders and other waterbirds. During the conference we visited the Tiligulskij and Kujainitzkij Limans close to Odessa and witnessed some of the human pressures faced by these important wetlands. After the conference some were lucky enough to visit the limans (shallow coastal lagoons and silt-filled saline river valleys, seasonally cut off from the Black Sea by sand and shingle ridges) on the coast south of Odessa (Figure 1), teeming with migrant waders, notably large numbers of Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax*, Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and Marsh Sandpipers *T. stagnatilis*. This was en route to the vast freshwater and brackish wetlands of the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta, close to the Romanian border - a region until just previously out of bounds to any visitors. There we saw many waterbirds in impressively extensive reed-swamp areas, species including the scarce and threatened Pygmy Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pygmaeus*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* and White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. We also took time to visit the historic city of Odessa, its docks and markets, to experience opera and ballet at its glittering Opera House, and on one of the excursions met a fortunately friendly military tank road-block during a short-cut through the new state of Moldova. We were treated during the formal conference banquet to many traditional Ukrainian and Russian toasts - many, increasingly surprisingly, with direct relevance to the theme of the conference.

Given the huge wealth of information about waders throughout eastern Europe and northern Asia presented at the conference, the WSG felt that it was vital to bring this knowledge to a global audience so as to maximise its use in developing wader flyway conservation. This has led us to produce this volume based on the material presented at the conference. We believe that never before has such a wealth of information about waders in eastern Europe and northern Asia been made available to an international scientific and conservation audience. Not only has the volume given many Russian-speaking authors opportunity to publish their research in an English-language publication, in a single source rather than dispersed through many journals of more limited circulation, but also for western authors to bring their ideas and information to a Russian-speaking readership.

Whilst this book is based on the conference, it is not a set of proceedings in the usual sense. Rather the conference started the process leading to this publication. This is a unique compilation of long-term and short-term studies on waders in a little known part of the world, set in an international context by descriptions of current flyway-scale research and conservation activity. It is far more

Figure 2. Locations of research studies included in this volume. Numbers are codes of papers in the contents list (pages iii - viii).





than just a proceedings volume. First it includes papers by authors who, for various logistical reasons, could not reach the Odessa conference. Second, many of the papers, especially those describing international conservation efforts, have been substantively updated to reflect current activity and practice. It also includes several papers describing recent research into the same species that breed in this huge area of the world, but from other little researched areas in their southern wintering ranges.

The volume contains 54 papers and 22 abstracts on waders in eastern Europe and northern Asia, and a further eight on these species in more southerly areas. It is prefaced by four papers and abstracts describing current international wader conservation activity, including proposals for ways of developing a global wader flyway conservation strategy (Davidson *et al.*).

Our aim for much of the volume has been to reflect the great diversity of research on waders in eastern Europe and northern Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s. Hence papers range from faunistic surveys in limited study areas, through sophisticated ecological analyses to brief reviews summarising long-term research programmes. Overall we hope that the volume provides a picture of the nature of wader research in the region, and yields a wealth of new data for those studying the ecology and distribution of different species and populations.

To assist use of the volume as a source-book we have divided the papers into broad biogeographical regions, within which papers are in west to east sequence, and have compiled a species index to guide readers to papers of potential interest. The main locations or regions covered by each paper are shown in Figure 2.

Producing a volume of this size and complexity has been a daunting undertaking for a volunteer group such as the WSG, and has at times stretched the group to its limits. Completion of the project has involved a great many dedicated people, and much of the work has been undertaken in a voluntary capacity, although to speed up the later production stages we have, through generous financial support and use of the WSG's own resources, engaged some professional publishing assistance. All involved are identified in the Acknowledgements.

Most papers and abstracts were originally submitted in Russian. The editorial team undertook translation of all these into English. All papers have been fully refereed by at least two scientific editors, and many required extensive correspondence between editors and authors to clarify science and meaning, not least because research methods that were standard in some parts of the world proved novel to researchers in other regions. Our editorial policy has been to include, whenever possible, all papers that present information of value in increasing wider knowledge of waders in these areas, even if in some cases the paper provides only a brief general summary of the research. Such

papers are valuable in indicating who has collected data and information in little studied regions. Much of the editing had to take place in an era before the advent of widely available e-mail communication and compatible computer software. Much of the material at the translation and scientific editing stages had to flow between members of the editorial team in western Europe and Moscow via a wide diversity of routes, including diplomatic bags, that offered more security than normal postal services.

Since over 80 papers and abstracts were from authors with a mother tongue other than English, almost all have then required extensive language editing to clarify meaning, and to achieve consistency in style of presentation. It has also been necessary to introduce uniform transliterations of place names into English - in most cases we have followed the *Times Atlas of the World*, except where standard common usage of a name is now different. After completion of English language editing, all abstracts and paper citations have been translated back into Russian, to increase the accessibility of the papers to readers in eastern Europe and northern Asia. In addition, almost all the original figures have been redrawn to a consistent style, often requiring extensive map work. It is a great credit to the capacity of the WSG that almost all the post-conference work in preparing this volume has come from within the group's membership.

The proof of the volume will be in its use. Our wish is that by bringing all this material into a fully edited international publication series, rather than see it scattered through grey literature in many languages, its value and use will be greatly increased. We hope that it provides a source of information, knowledge and inspiration to many who read and use it. We believe that it provides a major contribution to our understanding of these fascinating birds in a poorly known region, and will contribute substantively to underpinning effective global wader flyway conservation in the future. That way, all our long, dark editorial evenings will have been worthwhile!

The Editors

