

£ 20 MILLIONS FOR THE HEBRIDES?

We have heard reports (not yet fully confirmed) that Britain's Minister of Agriculture has obtained aid from the EEC of £20 millions for agricultural (and fisheries?) development in the Outer Isles. Such a report must make the blood of any conservationist with an interest in waders run cold. The coastal strip of low lying land (called the machair) bordering the Atlantic coasts of North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and some of the smaller isles is one of the richest areas for breeding waders in Europe. Agricultural improvement with its all too familiar pattern of intensive cultivation (often monoculture), drainage, liberal use of artificial fertilizers and herbicides would soon greatly reduce the wader populations. It is an ironic thought that an EEC grant could damage wader breeding grounds of European importance.

Fuller (1981) censused a small part of the area in 1979 (total 861 ha) and found 548 pairs of breeding waders (64 pairs/km²) comprising Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* 21.0%, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* 9.5%, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* 49.6%, Dunlins *Calidris alpina* 7.5%, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* 4% and Redshank *Tringa totanus* 8.4%. He considered these densities to be broadly similar to certain areas in SW Finland and the Netherlands but lower than on some Swedish shore meadows. In 1977 Fuller (1978) estimated a Ringed Plover population of 864 pairs (+ 10%) and a Dunlin population of 342 pairs (+ 10%) for the three main islands and these figures probably represent between 12-16% and 4-9% of the British breeding populations.

We hope conservationists will use these data and the information given in the papers listed below in an endeavour to make sure that conservation is taken into account if agricultural improvement comes to these extremely important areas. The money would be better spent in maintaining the conservation value of the islands rather than in contributing to EEC surpluses.

Fuller, R.J. 1978. Breeding populations of Ringed Plovers and Dunlins in the Uists and Benbecula, Outer Hebrides. *Bird Study* 25: 97-102

Fuller, R.J. 1981. The breeding habitats of waders on North Uist machair. *Scottish Birds* 11: 142-152

Fuller, R.J., Wilson, J.R. and Coxon, P. 1979. The birds of the Outer Hebrides: the waders. *Proc. Roy. Soc. Edinb.* 77B: 419-430

Wilson, R.J. 1978. Agricultural influences on waders nesting on the South Uist machair. *Bird Study* 25: 198-206

NOTICE OF WADER STUDY GROUP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, WEST GERMANY

12 SEPTEMBER 1981

Agenda (Draft)

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the last meeting
3. Matters arising not included in the agenda
4. Election of officer. Since G.F. Appleton's retirement as secretary N. & J. Clark have been co-opted to the post. They are willing to continue as joint secretary. Any alternative nominations should be sent to the Chairman together with written agreement of the nominee as soon as possible and before 30 June 1981.
5. Report from the Chairman
6. Report from the Treasurer
7. Report from the Secretary
8. Report from the Editors
9. Report from the Co-ordinator
10. Date and venue of next meeting
11. Any other business

Reports from the officers will be printed in the August Bulletin. If any member wishes other matters to be included in the agenda please inform the Chairman, preferably by 30 June 1981.

WSG AUTUMN MEETING, 12 - 13 SEPTEMBER 1981

As announced in the last Bulletin, the 1981 WSG Autumn Meeting will be held at Münster, West Germany on the weekend of 12/13 September, by kind invitation of the OAG Münster. It is planned that the formal sessions will be during Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, to allow travel time for those coming from further afield. During the course of the meeting there will be good opportunities to learn at first hand how the rieselfelder have been managed to improve the habitat for waders. It is also hoped that some waders will be caught during the night. The new Biological Station at the rieselfelder will be the base for the meeting.

This is the first time that the WSG has held a meeting outside Britain. WSG now has a substantial membership throughout Europe, and hopefully Münster will be within range of most European countries, allowing a wide geographical spread of participants.

Accommodation on Saturday night will be the Biological Station (sleeping bags should be brought) and with members of the OAG living locally. Food will be arranged at the Biological Station at cost. Thus the main costs for most members attending the meeting will be transport. We are most grateful to the OAG for offering to host the meeting.

During the week following the meeting there will be the opportunity to visit the Wattenmeer in Schleswig Holstein, and to assist in the wader ringing activities of Peter Prokosch and colleagues from Kiel. If you are interested, please indicate on the application slip.

Please complete the application slip if you plan to attend the meeting and send it to the Biological Station (if outside Britain) or to William Dick (if in Britain). William Dick is co-ordinating transport arrangements from Britain by bus or minibus, departing on Friday evening and returning early on Monday morning on the night ferry Harwich-Hook of Holland. Transport will probably be from London and from Durham, or elsewhere if there is demand. About 30 members expressed interest at the January WSG meeting. Transport cost will be in the region of £30 per person London-Münster-London. Similar joint transport arrangements may be possible within Europe. Your application