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WSG QUESTIONNAIRE: YOUR VIEWS AND COMMENTS AND THE OFFICERS' ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

compiled by M. W. Pienkowski

A total of 103 responses to the questionnaire (plus 1 letter without a form) were received by the time of writing. This represents about 20% of the membership; I am informed that a return rate of this size is not atypical of a simple questionnaire without follow-up. As Bulletin 34 was received fairly late in at least some parts of the world, we have delayed analysis until October 1982 to allow as much chance as possible for reply.

Some respondents identified themselves, although this was not requested. Based on this and postage stamps of other replies, 54% of replies came from UK and Ireland, 17% from the rest of Europe, 24% from N. America and 5% from the rest of the world. This matches fairly well with the distribution of membership, except that UK and Ireland are slightly overrepresented in replies and the rest of Europe slightly under-represented. The percentage distribution of membership, in the same order, is: 45%, 27%, 23%, 5%.

Subscription

Preliminary figures on the subscription option favoured by members were given in Bulletin 34. These can now be updated to include the later responses. 11% (11½ replies - one gave equal first choice) favoured a basic annual subscription of more than £10, 70% £10, 15% £8, and 4% less than £8. Thus, a total of 81% favoured a subscription of at least £10. 7% said they would leave the group if the subscription were to be raised to this extent.

Most second and subsequent choices for subscription rate were distributed as one might expect given the first choices, and are not detailed here. We are somewhat puzzled, however, by one return from a member in Ireland whose first choice was £10, second less than £8, third £8 and fourth more than £10!

The Treasurer suggested the possibility of payment of subscription in advance. Half the people replying (51%) indicated that they would be prepared to do this. This 51% was made up of 12% prepared to pay for 2 years in advance, 23% for 3 years, 8% for 4 years (this includes several who indicated "3 to 5"), 7% for 5 years, 1% for 10 years and 1 person who gave the mathematical symbol for infinity. This could solve all our problems, but we suspect that he or she really meant an uncertain period! Following consideration of these results by the Treasurer and the Committee, the AGM approved the option of paying subscriptions for 3 years in advance. Other enquiries and suggestions concerning finance made have also been considered. These include:

1. "For the past 2 years my check has gone uncashed for about 6 months! It is hard to believe that cash is a problem". Steps have now been taken to revise the procedure for payments from N. America - see Bulletin 36.
2. "Would it be possible to arrange a covenant type scheme?" "Have you considered covenanted subscriptions to enable you to take advantage of tax concessions - although this may involve forming a trust?" This might be difficult to arrange this for such a small membership, especially as it could apply only in Britain. Furthermore, it might be undesirable to place the group under the restrictions of a charity.

3. "Is there a special geriatric subscription for Old Age Pensioners?" The Committee considered this but felt unable to recommend such a change. Such an offer would need to include others in low-income groups, notably the unemployed and students. These would represent a significant proportion of the membership. Therefore, and because subscriptions are tied closely to actual costs, any reduction for these would mean a further increase for other categories of members.
4. "Can't you get any benefit by selling WSG badges, car-stickers, etc., as done by other organisations?" Yes, such possibilities are under active consideration. We are likely to go ahead with some, for example the car-sticker advertised in this Bulletin, but none are likely to give large financial benefit. Remember also that back issues of WSG Bulletin are available for sale.
5. One member drew attention to the difficulties which might be caused to the Treasurer (or Secretary) in sending out reminders if members were to pay for different numbers of years. The Secretaries are confident that they can cope with the alternatives put forward for this year's renewals.
6. One member in an African country commented that currency restrictions preclude sending large subscription sums (although he did favour a subscription of £10 and was prepared to pay 2 years in advance).
7. "Need for more cash means more members; circulate membership forms with publications of other societies." In fact the first assumption is not correct. We would have to increase membership by a very large amount to allow a change in Bulletin production methods and consequent economy of scale. Meanwhile, the load on currently unpaid tasks - membership records, distribution - would increase markedly. We welcome new members but our aim is to have as wide a membership as possible amongst people interested in waders, rather than a large membership as an end in itself.
8. "One of the greatest problems I have in choosing is that I don't know why the printing of the Bulletin should be so expensive. Now we shall have to pay £2 to £3 per issue - and that is a lot of money for 50 pages. Isn't there any cheaper way?" The Committee have investigated other possibilities for printing but find no-one in Britain who can guarantee as reliable a service as at present at such a cost. Cheaper printing is possible in some other European countries. At present, use of these would involve extra costs and delays as the (unpaid) editorial and circulation staff live in Britain. The Committee will, however, continue to monitor other possibilities. It must be remembered that WSG costs include more than printing. Production of a topical bulletin involves typing camera-ready copy, editorial expenses in photocopying, postage, telephone, etc. and, of course, the costs of circulation - which are not cheap. Other expenses are incurred in running the group and in initiating and running WSG cooperative projects, unless and until outside grants are received.

Content of the Bulletin

When producing the questionnaire, we knew the results would be difficult to analyse. They were. Different people interpreted the instructions on the questionnaire in various ways (which was probably as much our fault as theirs). I have summarized the results in the fairest way I can devise in Table 1. This shows the cumulative number of respondents who would be prepared to see the loss of each item. For example, 23 people rated Annual Reports of Officers as potential loss 1; 6 more rated this 2, making the cumulative total 29; 6 more rated it 3, giving 35 rating 1 or 2 or 3, etc. Finally 3 people gave it a rank position of more than 5. Not everyone continued ratings to this level but a few rated all items. Therefore, the meaning of this side of the Table is less clear than the left side. Also, of course, the positions of people's scales differed: some would be quite happy to see the end of some items, whereas others make statements like "if you really need to omit some items, I could survive with the loss of the ones numbered, but I would prefer to keep all". However the results do give some sort of basis for the editors and committee to think about future policy. As the number of replies totalled 103, we have not converted the figures in Table 1 to percentages as this would mean a very small change.

Another important problem to watch throughout is that (as in almost any situation) voices wanting change tend, of course, to be more obvious than those happy with the existing situation. Remember, therefore, that a statement that about 40 respondents could tolerate seeing the ending of an item in the Bulletin also implies that about 60 could not!

Indeed, about 12 people replying included vehement comments about the items that they thought must not be lost: to make matters more difficult for the editors, we should note that every single item in the list had at least 4 such comments strongly in favour of its retention! Therefore, in any changes we make, we must be sure of continuing to please all of the people some of the time. Pleasing all of the people all of the time is clearly impossible but, to our surprise, certain replies seem to indicate that we do please some of the people all of the time!

Clearly, Annual Reports of Officers and Minutes of Meetings are two of the most unpopular items. Unfortunately, we have found in the past that it is rather difficult to run the Group without them. However, as already stated in Bulletin 35, we shall try to keep these as short as possible, and we have already discontinued minutes of the informal meetings of the group.

The Recent Recoveries of Birds Ringed in Britain and Ireland also scored fairly highly for deletion. This item is in some ways a historical remnant from the days when the Group was predominantly British (but still seems surprisingly popular in other places, according to some replies). We had, at one stage, planned to invite similar contributions from elsewhere but this seems impracticable. Here are some other comments from the Questionnaire on this item: "'Recent recoveries of waders ringed in Britain and Ireland' should be changed to 'Recent recoveries of birds ringed with BTO rings'. I welcome the listing of recoveries of birds ringed with BTO rings outside the British Isles - and I think you should continue to do this and not to do what your title says!" (from member in Africa). "It should be possible to have this item published once per year (selecting the recoveries more)." "The recent recoveries section is very useful and it would be great to see this expanded to Western Europe." "Americans might have something to say about this! Some do: "Most North Americans I have talked to favour a reduction in the detailed ringing reports by Britishers, but not their elimination." "As a North American member I find totally meaningless the pages of ringing data, recoveries.....". The Editors and Committee will take note of these various views when considering the matter further.

Editors in the past have tried several times to kill the Recent Ringing Totals but each time have met a large outcry. Recently, the item has been found useful by numerous people trying to discover who might have information on particular species. There does not, however, seem to be a very strong reason for publishing this three times per year and, as announced in Bulletin 36, we are making this an annual item, published in April to cover each calendar year. We also hope that more ringers outside Europe and Australia will make use of this. One member asked "If this is retained is it necessary to send out a form to every member just to get 20 or so returned. If people are keen to get their figures in the Bulletin I should think they will write out a list." Past experience shows they forget; also, lists in different sequence and format are very difficult to handle.

Table 1. Numbers of replies to questionnaires (out of a total of 103 replies) prepared to see the loss of each category of contents of WSG Bulletin.

Subject	Number of people allocating this subject to each priority number for deletion or a lower number (see text)					
	1	2	3	4	5	any number
Annual Reports by Officers	23	29	35	43	45	48
Minutes of Meetings	21	35	40	43	49	52
Group announcements	2	4	5	7	7	16
Other announcements & requests	1	4	4	6	7	20
Less formal meeting reports	11	15	26	34	37	46
Abstracts from WSG meetings	5	6	10	16	18	28
Abstracts from other meetings	4	11	16	17	23	31
Progress reports on WSG projects	0	4	8	13	14	23
Analytical reports on WSG projects	1	1	6	9	9	20
Register of colour-marking schemes	14	16	19	22	22	31
Recent recoveries of waders ringed in B & I	20	30	40	47	47	57
Reviews of books	11	31	36	39	43	54
Recent publications on waders	6	8	10	11	13	26
Recent ringing totals	20	34	44	47	52	60
Addresses of members	8	18	24	42	46	58
Short notes	3	7	8	10	13	25
Papers on feeding	3	6	7	10	13	21
mortality	2	7	9	9	11	21
migration	3	5	7	7	8	18
breeding	3	7	8	8	10	20
other behaviour	7	11	12	13	15	25
censusing methods	1	6	6	8	10	21
weight/body composition	2	8	11	12	13	21
moult	2	6	8	10	11	19
waders of infrequently visited areas	8	12	14	14	16	23
catching methods	1	2	6	8	9	19
analytical methods	5	7	11	12	14	24
reviews of research group studies	2	10	10	11	11	21
expedition reports	4	7	10	11	12	23
applied studies & conservation	2	4	5	7	9	20

The items above were clearly least popular with a substantial minority of members. Few members would be prepared to lose announcements and reports on WSG projects. This conforms with the views of the Officers who feel the information network and feedback are essential components in WSG's success. Recent Publications is also thought essential by many. Articles on any subject scored few points against, possibly because items on any one of these are fairly infrequent. A comment added by several people was that retention of a wide range of subjects is important and that selection should be by quality rather than topic. Another commented "I would rather see papers selected on their scientific merit than by an opinion poll of which subjects are most popular."

This leaves an intermediate group of categories which a minority of varying size would be prepared to see lost or reduced in size. This includes less formal reports of group meetings (which were introduced mainly to lighten parts of the 'business' items) and the abstracts of WSG and other meetings. One member commented "I'm not sure how useful abstracts of talks at meetings are - they aren't much use as a reference; all they do is give a flavour of the work. Would it be worth considering printing just the title and the name and address of the author?" On the other hand, many find them informative.

Also in the intermediate category is the list of colour ringing schemes. As explained in the questionnaire, it is already planned to reduce the frequency of the full list to, at most, once per year. The earlier pattern of every other issue became necessary during the phase of rapid expansion of the register, when simply listing additions or changes would have taken nearly as much space but created difficulties both for compilers and users.

We were surprised to see Reviews in the Intermediate section, as this item (together with Recent Publications) is undoubtedly very popular with many readers. Some of those prepared to lose it made comments such as: "most books will (eventually) be reviewed in other journals", "Reviews of books are already catered for in other general ornithological literature - no need to duplicate." These can be countered by those in favour whose remarks included "Reviews of wader books may appear in other publications but it is valuable to have the opinions of people who actually study waders." The Committee felt also that Reviews and the less formal items mentioned above allow some human face to the Bulletin, which might otherwise be absent. The editors have also used the Review section recently to precis some important but inaccessible publications. This will be reflected in future by a title: "Reviews and Abstracts".

Addresses of members also built up an intermediate score. In some ways, this item is included as a self-defence by Officers to reduce the flood of enquiries by members for the addresses of others. It is certainly considered essential by some members. Given that we cannot take up one suggestion: "perhaps you could request members not to change address so that this section can be reduced in size", and that the full list appears very infrequently, the best approach here might be to see how we can save space in the printing of lists of changes. An alternative which has been suggested would be a computer-produced directory of members addresses and interests as a separate item (at additional cost). The Committee approved this idea in principle but felt unable to take further action until a suitably qualified volunteer came forward to organize this.

Some other points were raised in comments and it is convenient to deal with these here.

Several members suggested having certain items (annual reports, minutes, recent publications, addresses) available on request. There are two problems here. First, how does one determine how many to produce: photocopying on request

is very expensive and time consuming? Second, the additional administrative load would be expensive either in time or money. "Separate 'Roneoed' leaflets for notices." This would actually be more expensive and would also cost time and/or money to handle.

"One way of making better use of the space available....would be to reduce the size of some figures drastically. [In some cases the] text could have been down side of figure." The problem here is that production processes involve a complicated trade-off between topicality, time available, economic use of typing facilities, and most efficient use of space. We usually manage fairly well but anything which involves non-standard column widths causes delay and/or cost. However, we continually bear these points in mind, and welcome suggestions.

"Sometimes I wonder if the Bulletin would benefit from a slight reorganisation into sections (e.g. editorial, announcements, papers, notes, recent publications, etc.). However, on looking at the contents of No.34, the diversity of topics would probably preclude this." We do try to keep a fairly standard basic order but, in order to make best use of space (see above) or, where possible, to make sure complicated tables and figures face their explaining text, short items have to be moved around to fit the gaps.

A small number of replies suggested producing separate Old World and New World Bulletins. At the time of establishment of the N. American section, there was much discussion about whether the two groups should be separate. One strong argument against this was that workers in the two areas were already very out of touch and reading of each others activities would be mutually beneficial. We believe the exchange of ideas continues to be beneficial and few papers are solely of local interest.

Very few suggestions that the Bulletin be reduced in size or frequency were received: "Why not produce a similar sized Bulletin to the one we have now, two issues per year." "It would not worry me greatly if there were fewer, thicker issues." This has been considered (and was strongly opposed at several WSG meetings) but would cause enormous difficulties in running the group and promoting co-operative projects, which require frequent announcements. Bulletin production twice per year would mean that some announcements would have to wait 8 or 9 months before being circulated.

Also, very few criticised the contents, but we ought to detail these: "A substantial reduction in the quantity of ill-digested material appearing as 'papers'." "The Bulletin could be considerably reduced in size and made more interesting if people from Durham could refrain from attempting to fill every issue with papers on the same subject over and over again."

Far more took the contrary view. Here are just a few of these: "I do not want to lose any of the papers." "I do feel that the present balance of the Bulletin is excellent. It would be a pity if this balance were disrupted." "I would much prefer to see the Bulletin continue as it is or grow. Any reduction in size is most undesirable." "I...would be very unhappy to see any financial restraints restricting the good work." "Excellent Bulletin - do not reduce coverage!" "I find the present composition just right!" "Keep it as it is - I like it." "I think it would be a sad loss if the Bulletin had to be reduced in size. I find it an extremely useful forum of ideas and it keeps me in touch with what is going on." (from remote British island). "I would prefer to see little or no change and pay the extra." "I find the itemisation exercise most difficult as Bulletin content is fairly well balanced." "I cannot make any choice!!! Sorry." "Sorry unable to decide." "Please continue your difficult task. Your achievements in promoting wader studies are obvious. However, if researchers have no medium through which to display their work, others will remain ignorant." "WSGB has become the most important of all journals that I receive. I would be happy to pay increased dues if necessary to sustain it." "In general, I would not like to see any reduction of the contents of the Bulletin since any selection of the material - which means a rejection of some contributions - might change the Bulletin from a topical and immediate source of information into a more established ornithological journal."

Several other replies queried whether WSGB should be a journal with fully refereed papers or a bulletin with announcements, news, views etc. It has always been the view of the editors that it should be the latter. Papers included tend to be interim, inviting further information or co-operation or suggesting further work (particularly if the author cannot continue to develop the study him- or herself). Papers are not normally sent to outside referees but the Editor tries to maintain reasonable scientific standards. Most correspondents appeared to agree with this approach, although one expressed a preference that the Bulletin should move more towards becoming a journal. The Editor will be preparing soon a summary of policy and advice to those submitting items.

Other comments in the same general area were: "I think that it is essential that the Bulletin continues as an information contact publication. Therefore it is important to continue features, e.g. Ringing Recoveries and Totals Lists. Also important to include chatty articles." "I do not think any papers on work on waders should be dropped. While the running of the group is important, reports on this can be passed on to the membership at conferences." The problem here is that, as with most societies, rather a small proportion of people attend any one conference, for geographical and other reasons. For example: "Group information must be continued in the Bulletin if the Group is to continue to function." (Member in the Far East.) "I would hate to see any of the things covered be cut out. As an academic, I would very much like to see some reports on topics like phylogeny, but realise that this is (and should remain) a minority view. Nevertheless, small, properly packaged items would be useful to the membership at large."

From another viewpoint, (perhaps at one extreme of views): "I feel that the Group, as exemplified by the Bulletin, is becoming orientated too strongly towards the professional ringer. At least in Britain, the majority of wader ringing is conducted by amateurs who are interested to be kept in touch with results of co-operative projects and need to know information vital for their work (e.g. colour-marking schemes, safety of catching methods, etc.) but do not want to have lists of publications, papers on behaviour, feeding etc. in the Bulletin. In short, do not turn the Bulletin into a Journal." But (from another amateur): "The 'Recent Publications on Waders' is a very useful piece." and "Recent publications: essential for amateurs."

Another comment on Recent Publications: "the 'Recent Publications on Waders' section could include a one- or two-line resumé. This section is extremely valuable and should not, in my opinion, be shortened in any way; it is pretty up to date, unlike....". Theunis Piersma has initiated short summaries for some items, particularly where the subject is not fully clear from the title. Fuller abstracts, of course, require longer and more collaborators and lead to the delays complained about in other journals.

Finally on content, an extreme optimist: "What about glossy colour photos!" While this is somewhat outside our financial limits, the printing method used for the Bulletin can (we are assured) reproduce reasonable quality monochrome photographs provided the originals show reasonable contrast. The editors are prepared to include photographs, at least on a trial basis, provided these form a worthwhile part of the article concerned.

Several comments were also received on dates of receipt. Here is a typical one: "is it possible to receive, in the future, the Bulletin on time? For example, the "April" number arrived at the end of May." Members in other continents and using surface mail suffer even greater delays, of course. One difficulty has been concerned with circulation lists, but changes to improve arrangements here are outlined in this Bulletin. The other two main problems are the trade-off between including very topical items and meeting deadlines; and the time available for editors. The former dilemma will always exist with a Bulletin in the evidently popular form it is at present. As to the latter, let's see how the new management fares!

After all this, we suspect that if we ran another questionnaire with the section "Questionnaire results" included, this would be a strong candidate for deletion. However, the results have been - and will continue to be - of great value to the officers, and we thank all those who took the trouble to reply.

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LIST OF MEMBERS - CHANGES SINCE BULLETIN 36

NEW MEMBERS

Britain and Ireland

Brazier, H. c/o The Library, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland.
Dansie, DR.O. Orchard, Tewin, Herts, U.K.
Hinsley, S. 96 Ninian Road, Roath Park, Cardiff, CF2 5EQ, U.K.
Kelly, C.P. 15A Bridewell Road, Cambridge, CB1 4EN, U.K.
Miles, G.A. La Casa, Poplars Estate, Caergeiliog, Holyhead, Gwynedd, U.K.
Redfern, C.P.F. Dept. Biochem, Univ. Liverpool, P.O. Box 147, Liverpool, L69 3BX, U.K.
Siman, H.Y. Dept. of Zoology, Univ. College, P.O. Box 78, Cardiff, CF1 1XL, U.K.

Rest of Europe

Andell, P. Dept. of Anim. Ecol., Univ. of Lund, Ecology Building, S-223 62 Lund, Sweden.
Kiis, A. Universitetsparken 3 119, DK-8000 Aarhus C, Denmark.
Triplet, P. Ecole Rue du Repos, 80550, Le Crotoy, France.
Van Rhijn, J. Dept. Zool., P.O. Box 14, 9750 AA Haren, Netherlands.
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Elsewhere

Ambrose, S.J. 15 Keppell Mews, Richmond Gdns, Rockingham, Western Australia 6168.
Bunni, Dr.M.K. Director, Iraq Natural History Museum, Bab Al Muadham, Baghdad, Iraq.
Duffy, D.C. Fitzpatrick Inst., Univ. of Capetown, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.
Eubanks, T.L.Jr. 5409 Braeburn, Bellaire, Texas 77401, U.S.A.
Orn.Soc. of New Zealand Inc. c/o Auckland Institute and Museum, Private Bag, Auckland, New Zealand.
Prevost, Y. PNUD, BP 260, Nouakchott, Mauritania.
Sallaberry, Lic.M. Seccion Zoologia, Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, Casilla 787, Santiago, Chile.

CHANGES AND CORRECTIONS

Britain and Ireland

Coates, J.T. c/o Green Grove, Capel Ifan, Newcastle Emllyn, Dyfed, U.K.
Etheridge, B. Nimrod Line Squadron, RAF Kinloss, Forres, Moray, IV36 0UH, U.K.
Insley, H. Tigh Na Challtuinn, Castle Grove, Callander, Perthshire, FK17 8AZ, U.K.
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Rest of Europe

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RESIGNATIONS

U.K. Clark, H. Emmett, E.E. Moore, P.C.H. Moran, P.A. Turner, B.
Switzerland Glutz von Blotzheim, U.N.
Australia Swindley, R.
New Zealand Hawkins, J.