

CATCHING WADERS AT THE NEST : BRITISH RINGERS PLEASE NOTE

Ringers operating in Britain should note a change in policy by the Ringing & Migration Committee of the British Trust for Ornithology, which will become apparent when the new Ringers' Manual is circulated early in 1984. Although the catching of breeding waders at the nest has been a fairly widely, and safely, used technique in the past, note that a special endorsement on the ringing permit will be required in the future (in line with the previous policy concerning the mist-netting of other types of bird near the nest). Ringers wishing to use this technique in 1984 and later years should apply for permission when renewing their permits. The change arises from the implementation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and is not, in any way, intended to discourage competent ringers from using these techniques. (Another note to this effect will have been received from the Ringing Office; this present item is intended as a reminder.)

RAMSAR CONVENTION CONFERENCE IN THE NETHERLANDS, MAY 1984

by M. Smart

The Ramsar Convention, so called because the text was adopted at a conference held in 1971 at the Iranian city of Ramsar on the Caspian coast, is the only one of the four modern international conservation treaties dealing with a single habitat type - wetlands. (The other three are: the CITES or Washington Convention on trade in endangered species; the Unesco World Heritage Convention on cultural or natural sites of world status; and the Bonn Convention, not yet in force, on migratory species of animals.) States which become Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention (or, more formally, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat) accept two major obligations: a general one, to make "wise use of wetlands" and a specific one, to designate at least one wetland within their boundaries for the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Designation means that the country concerned has to promote conservation of the listed site(s) and must notify the Convention Bureau of any threat to ecological conditions at designated wetlands; if a listed site is removed from the List, it must be replaced by another of equivalent value. IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), based in Gland, Switzerland provides the Bureau for the Convention, while IWRB (International Waterfowl Research Bureau) provides scientific and technical back-up.

So far 34 states have joined the Convention and between them listed 280 wetlands covering nearly 19 million hectares. The countries which are Contracting Parties are as follows (the figure in brackets indicates the number of wetlands listed): Australia (22), Austria (5), Bulgaria (2), Canada (15), Chile (1), Denmark (26), Finland (11), German Democratic Republic (8), Federal Republic of Germany (17), Greece (11), Hungary (8), Iceland (1), India (2), Iran (18), Italy (36), Japan (1), Jordan (1), Mauritania (1), Morocco (4), Netherlands (12), New Zealand (2), Norway (1), Pakistan (9), Poland (1), Portugal (2), Senegal (2), South Africa (2), Spain (3), Sweden (20), Switzerland (2), Tunisia (1), USSR (12), United Kingdom (19), Yugoslavia (2). In addition, Belgium and Ireland have signed subject to ratification, while France has signed the Protocol of Amendment, and will become a Party as soon as the amendment comes into force. The area of wetland designated naturally varies from country to country: Canada's 15 sites cover over 10 million hectares, USSR's 12 nearly 3 million, and Mauritania, Iran and Australia are all hectare millionaires. On the other hand, Denmark's 26 sites cover 600,000 hectares of land out of that country's total land and sea area of 4½ million hectares, while Italy has continually added to its list of sites bringing it gradually from 18 to 36 sites. Among the wetlands designated are a considerable number of importance to waders, including Mauritania's Banc d'Arguin, Merja Zerga in Morocco, the Tagus estuary in Portugal, Lindisfarne in UK and extensive breeding areas in the Canadian Arctic.

There has so far been one Conference of the Contracting Parties - in Cagliari, Italy in November 1980. This first conference had a major effect in attracting publicity for the Convention, persuading more countries to join, and those which were already Contracting Parties to add further sites to the List. A number of delegations made important statements; thus the Netherlands announced that two tidal areas - the whole Dutch Wadden Sea and the Eastern Scheldt - would soon be added to the List, while the Danish delegation indicated that the Danish part of the Wadden Sea would also be designated. The Recommendations of the Cagliari Conference also pointed out that in the western Palearctic, tidal estuaries were poorly represented, and called for such areas (and peatlands and wet meadows) to be better represented in the List.

The Second Conference of the Parties is to be held, at the invitation of the Government of the Netherlands, at Groningen from 7 - 12 May 1984. The participants will be representatives of governments and of international governmental and non-governmental bodies concerned with conservation. It is intended that the Groningen meeting, like its Cagliari predecessor, should provide a spur for more states to join and for existing ones to list new wetlands. There will be an opportunity to review progress since Cagliari (neither the Netherlands nor Denmark have as yet carried out the intentions announced in Cagliari!), and there will be extensive discussion of a second Protocol of Amendment designed to make the Convention more effective (notably by providing it with a properly funded Secretariat). Above all, there will be a series of keynote papers on wetlands: their ecological value, their interdependence at international level, and their use (and misuse) by man. These will be designed to be of special relevance to developing countries, for the Cagliari conference noted that far too few of these were Contracting Parties. The papers (and the workshop reviewing them) will also provide a major input for the World Wildlife Fund's wetland campaign.

IUCN or IWRB will be happy to provide any further information on the Ramsar Convention or the Groningen Conference. If anyone can persuade their appropriate government ministry to contribute to the Groningen meeting along the lines suggested above, they will be making a positive contribution to wetland and water bird conservation.