

INTERNATIONAL WADER STUDY STUDIES ALONG THE EAST ATLANTIC FLYWAY DURING SPRING 1985

First announcement of a new WSG project

A great deal of information has accumulated in recent years about wader migrations along the East Atlantic Flyway. (This Flyway covers birds migrating to and through western Europe, in some cases onward to western and southern Africa.) Much of this information has come from ringing recoveries and counts of birds. Identification of sites at which waders occur is vital in developing effective conservation strategies, as well as in providing information to help in understanding many basic aspects of wader biology. Many studies, including expeditions to remote areas of great importance to waders (e.g. the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania, and the Archipelago dos Bijagos in Guinee-Bissau), continue to expand and refine our knowledge.

Despite this wealth of knowledge, there is surprisingly little known about how, during a single migration, waders use the network of sites available to them as stopovers. Such information (e.g. whether a bird uses a network of many sites, or whether it uses only a few sites and flies non-stop long distances between them; which sites are used; and whether all members of a species use the same sites) is essential in understanding and conserving migrant birds.

A major reason for the lack of such information for any bird species has been the great difficulty in obtaining it. This results largely from the very fact that many birds do migrate long-distances. To gather such information therefore needs co-ordinated observations spread over a wide geographical area. To add to the difficulty, many important areas used by these birds are inaccessible and seldom visited. Despite these difficulties, waders are useful birds in which to study these problems, as they are relatively easy to observe because of their use of open habitats; and because they are restricted to a limited number of, mainly coastal, sites. This dependence on these sites, which are vulnerable to human activity, also makes work on these birds directly useful for conservation.

The first major wader migration study to be organised internationally was the 'WSG Project on the Spring Migration of Siberian Knot' (Dick, W.J.A. 1979. *WSG Bull.* 27: 9-13). This yielded much important information on the timing of migration, and use of specific sites, by Siberian Knots *Calidris canutus* during their northwards migration from southern and western Africa. Knots use relatively few stopovers, migrating long distances between them. Despite this, there are still gaps in our knowledge of their migration system. There is very little comparable information on other waders (see Davidson, N.C. 1984. *Ringling & Migration* 5: 49-63).

The Siberian Knot project demonstrated that wader migration studies on an international scale could be successful and produce valuable scientific results. Indeed, without such co-operation the pattern of movements of long-distance migrant waders could not be worked out. The project has been the impetus for other co-operative WSG projects, although on a smaller geographical scale, such as the

Movements of Wader Populations in Western Europe (Pienkowski, M.W. & Pienkowski, A.E. 1983. *WSG Bull.* 38: 13-22) and the Spring Migration of Waders through Western Britain in 1984 (Ferns, P.N. & Moser, M.E. 1983. *WSG Bull.* 39: 35-36). These studies have further refined the techniques appropriate for such investigations.

At several sites along the west coasts of Africa and Europe, detailed migration studies are in preparation for the springs of 1985 and 1986. These include several expeditions to important sites (e.g. Banc d'Arguin) which are seldom visited. International co-ordination of the long-distance aspects of these migration studies, particularly in the planning of marking programmes, the methods of collection of measurements, and the exchange of resulting information, is a potentially rewarding and feasible undertaking which can be co-ordinated by the WSG. Such co-ordination is one of the major functions of the WSG. During spring 1985 many groups will be active. Therefore the WSG is launching an international co-operative programme for this spring.

It should be stressed that most of the groups and expeditions planning to work in the various areas have also their own individual research programmes. WSG is concerned here primarily with those aspects which require wider co-ordination, both to exploit the opportunities presented by these simultaneous ventures, and to prevent any confusion between them.

Aims

Detailed description and analysis of the timing and pattern of the return migration of some coastal wader species from their African wintering areas to their arctic breeding grounds during one spring season; to establish the importances of a chain of wetland sites for the survival and successful reproduction of migratory species of waders.

The Current Situation

At the time of writing (July 1984) we are in contact with groups and individual researchers in Portugal, France, U.K., The Netherlands, and West Germany. These people are at various stages of planning work on the spring migration of waders in 1985 at the following sites along the East Atlantic Flyway:

Archipelago dos Bijagos, Guinee-Bissau;
Banc d'Arguin, Mauritania;
Faro and Tejo Estuaries, Portugal;
Atlantic coast between Gironde and Loire, France;
east and west coasts of Britain;
Delta area, The Netherlands;
Wadden Sea, The Netherlands and West Germany;
Finnmark, Norway.

The locations of these sites are shown in Figure 1, and cover many of the major wintering and stopover sites of a number of wader species.

It is important to note here that the function of the WSG is to link up studies which originated more or less independently! WSG

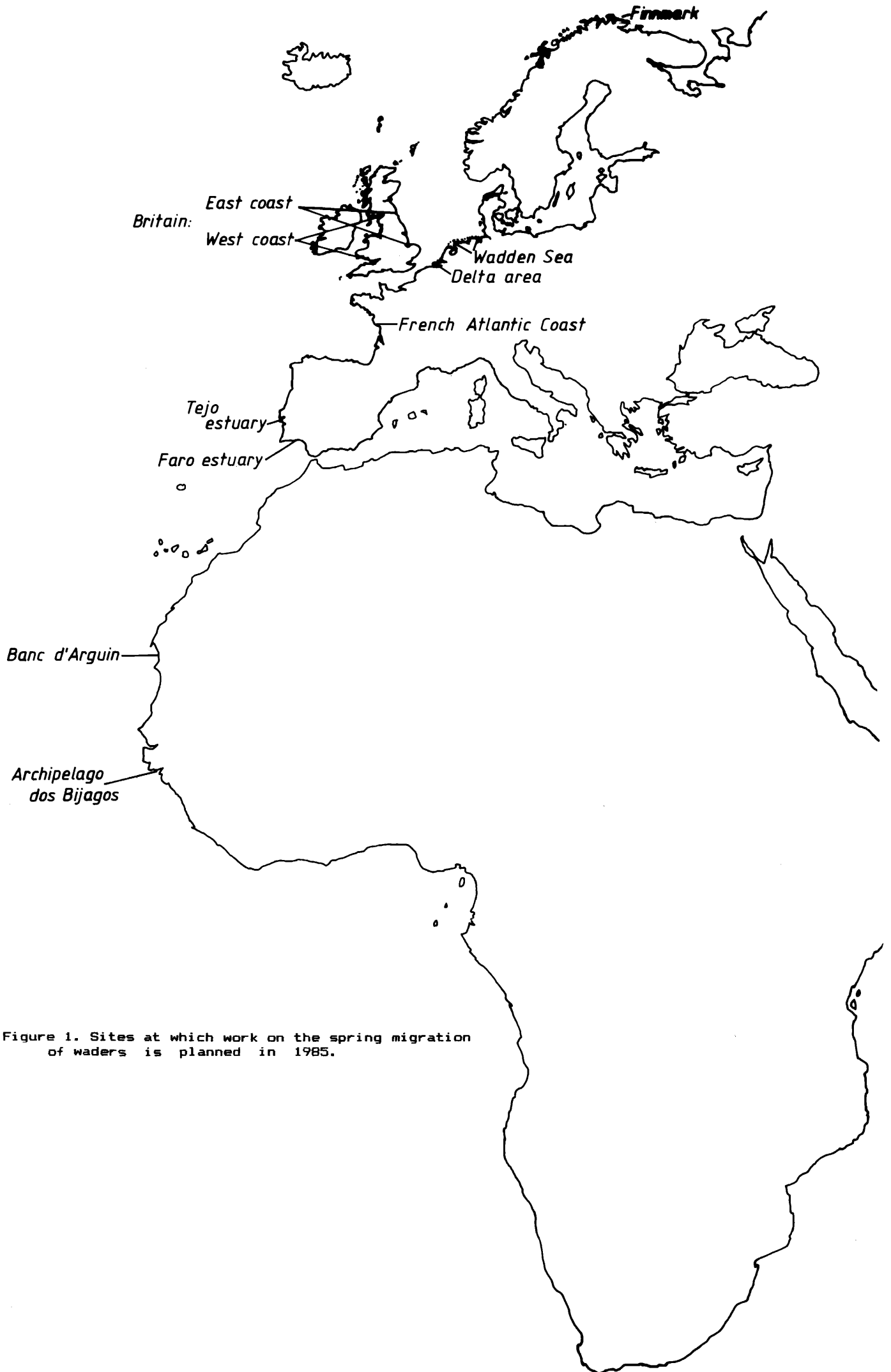


Figure 1. Sites at which work on the spring migration of waders is planned in 1985.

will attempt this by agreeing standardised methods of information collection, by the proposal of a few target species, by helping the exchange of information between the various groups, and finally by producing a summary report covering the international aspects of the migration studies.

It is clear that an unrivalled opportunity has become available to establish a great deal about the complete spring migration phenology of waders using the East Atlantic Flyway. However, to avoid the risk that vital information is missed because teams have concentrated on different species in different areas, one or more target species need to be selected. The information provided so far by the various groups involved suggests that Knot (Siberian population), Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Sanderling *Calidris alba* may be the species which can best be followed during their entire spring migration.

We suggest that each team/research group selects a 'WSG contact-person'. These contacts can then keep in touch with WSG's Co-ordinator before and during the project, and to sort out the relevant information during and after the period of fieldwork (February - June 1985).

The projects listed above are those that we know of so far. We would like to hear also from anyone else who aims to be working on wader migration elsewhere in Europe or Africa during spring 1985.

The numerous aspects of this project will be discussed during the WSG Annual Meeting at Worcester in September 1984. A final proposal will be published in *WSG Bull.* 42 (December 1984).

Obviously, any suggestions will be welcome now!

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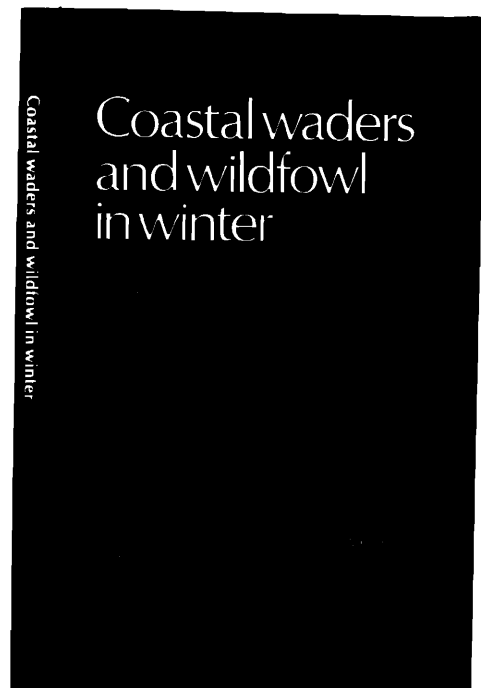
COASTAL WADERS AND WILDFOWL IN WINTER

Discount offer to WSG members

This book arose from the Fifth Meeting on Feeding Ecology and Behaviour of Coastal Birds, held on Texel, The Netherlands, in May 1981, under the joint auspices of the Wader Study Group and the International Waterfowl Research Bureau Feeding Ecology Research Group. The volume has been produced in conjunction with the British Ornithologists' Union, and is edited by Peter Evans, John Goss-Custard and Bill Hale. Although based on the talks given at the Texel meeting, this book is not a volume of proceedings in the usual sense. All the contributions have been revised extensively in the light of discussions during the meeting and subsequent knowledge. The 19 chapters, many of them about waders, review current knowledge of coastal bird numbers and behaviour in relation to their food resources, and examine the importance of the winter quarters to survival and subsequent breeding success of the species concerned.

The book is designed to be of interest both to general ornithologists, particularly where advice to planners about coastal wetlands is needed, and to those interested in the behaviour and ecology of coastal birds.

The publishers, Cambridge University Press, have agreed to make *Coastal Waders and Wildfowl in Winter* available to WSG members at a special discount price of £22. This represents a 20% discount from the usual publishers price of £27.50. An order form for the book at this



discount price is included in this *Bulletin* as a loose insert. Members should note that the offer closes on 30 April 1985. Orders should be sent direct to Cambridge University Press and not to the Wader Study Group.