WADER STUDY GROUP AGM AND AUTUMN MEETING, LA ROCHELLE, FRANCE, 5-6 OCTOBER 1985

As is announced in the Minutes of the 1984 AGM published elsewhere in this *Bulletin*, the Wader Study Group has been pleased to accept the invitation from the Ligue Francaise pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) to hold the 1985 AGM and annual meeting at La Rochelle, on the Atlantic coast of France. The meeting will take place on 5-6 October 1985.

Fuller details of the meeting will appear in *Bulletin* 43, but we are now inviting offers of talks for the meeting. Alert readers will notice that this announcement has been made much further in advance of the meeting than in previous years. The reason is outlined below.

Although the main language used by WSG is English, the group is becoming increasingly international in its membership and views, and we recognise that there are many members whose main language is not English. Accordingly we intend to make the 1985 meeting bilingual (English and French) as far as is possible, although the main language of the group will for practical and administrative reasons remain English.

At the meeting we intend to have available abstracts of each talk in both English and French, so that talks can be followed both by participants from the host country and elsewhere. We are making this call for talks early to give speakers time to prepare a brief abstract soon: we require abstracts well in advance of the meeting. This is to give us time to prepare translations of the abstracts, and to make copies available at the meeting. Speakers will be relieved to hear that they need supply an abstract in only one language - we will arrange translation. We would of course welcome translations from speakers when this is possible.

We hope that speakers will also label all figures and tables in both English and French, so that the talks can be more easily understood by all attending the meeting. Illustrations should therefore be drafted well in advance so that translations can be prepared for inclusion.

We must stress that WSG will make translations of abstracts and captions for those who do not feel up to making the translations themselves. Denis Bredin and Mike Moser have generously agreed to help with translations. Anyone wishing to use their services in the preparation of their talk should contact them: *Denis Bredin, LPO, La Corderie Royale, B.P. 263, 17305 Rochefort-Cedex, France; Mike Moser, BTO, Beech Grove, Tring Herts. HP23 5NR, U.K.*

It is our intention to make future meetings of WSG bilingual, should the 1985 attempt prove successful. We hope that members will help to make this meeting a success by preparing their material for talks early as requested. The 1986 meeting will, provisionally, be in Scotland, but the WSG Committee has yet to decide on a second language for that meeting!

Nick Davidson

SPRING MIGRATION OF RUFFS

AN OAG MUNSTER/WSG INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

Wetlands in western Africa are of great importance as wintering grounds for palaearctic wader species. Since waders spend a great part of the year on these sites, information on what is going on there may add substantially to our understanding of the biology of these wader species. Knowledge of their wintering ecology and migration strategies could become important for their future conservation since many of their wintering and migration sites seem to be threatened.

Much work has been done already on coastal wetlands and the waders that occur there. This spring further major studies of such waders are planned (see elsewhere in this Bulletin). When the contribution of WSG, at least, is considered, inland habitats in Africa have been rather neglected, although they may support even more waders than the coasts of Africa.

One problem all the "inland" wader species wintering in western Africa have to cope with is the crossing of more than a thousand kilometres of the Sahara desert that is totally unsuited for resting. Seen from western Africa, the nearest sites to the north that can provide sufficient food for storing fat as energy for migration are around the Mediterranean Sea, and most are probably on the European continent. This flight over the desert must impose a great stress on the waders involved. Such stress may have become even more severe in recent years because the drought in the Sahel zone (immediately to the south of the desert) affected many of the wetlands there.

The Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* is one of the commonest waders that winters inland in western Africa. It is suitable for a detailed investigation of migration strategies for several reasons. One of them is that the reports of ringed birds have already given some indications about the origins and the migration routes of the birds wintering in the Sahel wetlands, although the pattern seems to be quite complicated. As an example, some preliminary results from our ringing work at a central European site, the sewage farms of Munster, may give an impression of the complexity of the migration patterns of Ruff. Colour-ringing showed that adults flying to Munster to moult in late summer will return at a fairly high rate (at about 30%) during the following summer. However, these late-summer birds appear only occasionally during the home (spring) migration period. Reports of ringed birds (shown in Figure 1) indicate that their

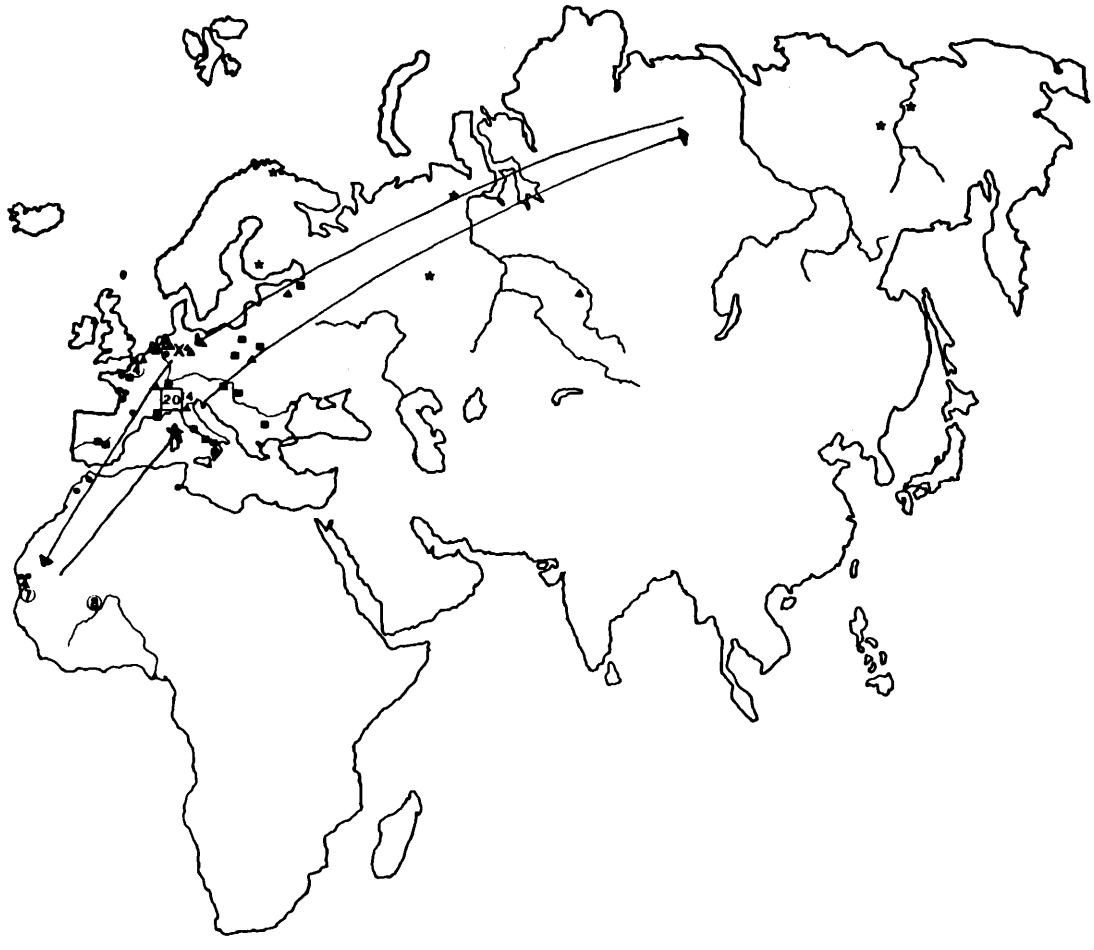

Figure 1. Reports of Ruffs ringed at the sewage farms of Munster. Dots: recoveries in winter; squares: recoveries in spring; stars: recoveries during the breeding season; triangles: recoveries in autumn. The arrows indicate the likely migration routes of birds ringed in summer at Munster.

breeding grounds probably are in eastern Siberia, that they winter in western Africa, and that they use a more easterly migration route (through northern Italy) in spring than in autumn. Birds resting in Munster in spring are probably of Scandinavian origin. Only a few of them return in later migration periods.

Other reasons for the suitability of the Ruff for a study are that it can be caught easily and that on passage it occurs in fairly large numbers on reasonably accessible sites in Europe. Additionally, Ruffs can carry various sorts of colour-markings which, because of the conspicuousness of the bird, are detected readily by observers.

This spring we want to study the home migration of Ruff wintering in western Africa. We want especially to discover how many, and which, resting sites these birds use during the first part of their migration to their breeding grounds. To attempt this, we (that means five members of the Munster ringing group) intend to mist net Ruffs in Senegal, in January and February 1985. Our preparatory trip to Senegal in 1984, and the experiences of others, have shown this approach to be feasible. Ruffs that we catch will be colour-ringed above the intertarsal joint and will be also colour-dyed to make them more visible in the field. We then hope to follow the marked birds on their migration through northern Africa and Europe. This can be done in several ways. The inland wader counts project (see *WSG Bull.* 46:15-17) provides a network of observers looking for waders at about 180 inland sites mainly in western and central Europe. As the counts for this project are made quite regularly (usually once a week) most of the dyed birds occurring at these sites should be detected. Some major sites not involved in that project will we hope be covered by local ornithologists, or by ourselves. It is also planned to mist net Ruffs at some of these sites in Italy and Hungary. There the birds will be dyed a different colour to those in Senegal.

To make coverage as complete as possible, at least in the western part of Europe, we would like to encourage anybody who can look at small or large resting sites for Ruff in spring 1985 to provide us with some help. This help should consist of as many observations as possible at those sites during spring (March to May) 1985. For each visit we would appreciate the following information: numbers of Ruffs present, and if possible the sex and age ratios (2nd year birds retain green legs); numbers of Ruff checked for colour markings; numbers of marked birds, the colour and location of any dye-marks, and (if possible) details of colour-ring combinations. Anyone wishing to participate should get in touch with us very soon for further information. Please write to *OAG Munster, Biologische Station Rieselfelder, Coermuhle 181, 4400 Munster, Federal Republic of Germany.*

All sightings of colour-marks should, of course, be sent as usual through the WSG Colour-markings Register: *Dr. D.J. Townshend, Department of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, U.K.*