

THE WSG AUTUMN MEETING 1985 - AN ENTIRELY PERSONAL VIEW

by Tim Reed

One of the basic credos of the WSG is that meetings are held away from Britain every alternate year. Two years ago it was a wet, cool Dutch Delta meeting, last year the converted barracks of Worcester training College. This year the meeting took place in the modern hall (complete with dry rot), of the ritzy yacht marina at La Rochelle. Coffee and tea breaks taken leaning on a parapet watching wind-surfers and twin-masted racing yachts could become addictive!

The meeting was formally convened on the Friday evening. However, this did not stop several Committee members arriving too late on Thursday and being found asleep in the corridors of the hostel accommodation on the Friday morning. For the early arriving conference members the few free hours of the Friday provided memorable wader watching: rarely have any of us viewed a bay or estuary where the sole count has been 3 waders, these rapidly disappearing when observers emerged from cars. Could it be linked to the Chasse?

Having recently experienced a highly disorganised bird conference it was a pleasure to find one that ran pretty much to schedule, even though starting one session on time was only made possible by extricating a janitor to unlock the room! The notes in the *WSG Bulletin* for contributors made it plain that contributions should be as bilingual as possible. In Theunis Piersma's case this meant trilingual. Something had to go wrong, and in most talks it was the projector. Rarely have I seen a projectionist so proficient at catching slides thrown out randomly by his charge. For a change British contributions were in the minority with more talks in French than English.

As for the talks themselves? Bilingual abstracts aided mutual comprehension, but in

the case of such as Philippe Dubois these were not needed, as the speakers switched languages effortlessly. In a meeting where hunters and non-hunters spoke it was intriguing to note the implications of very large sample sizes for species bagged by the former on the diminishing populations studied by the latter. Any conference opened by a picture of the Prince and Princess of Wales has to be exceptional, and this one was. The attractions of wader work in Africa were very apparent, whereas Nick Davidson's counting knot on sheets of ice seemed less inviting. It was good to see that the WSG work in the Outer Hebrides has stimulated at least 2 research studentships and Michael Wells and Digger Jackson produced a fine double-act in reporting their research to date. The trials of being a Black-winged Stilt in Greece were but nothing compared with the alarming declines in waders reported in both France and Britain. Ron Summers' wry account of his "catching birds that had died" woke up Redshank devotees still suffering from an excess of wine and food that had started with the Town Hall reception on Saturday evening. Jean-Jaques Blanchon rounded off the conference with a clear indication of the Baie de l'Aiguillon's importance for wintering birds. The many talks made a worthwhile weekend. The final session was closed by the Vice-Chairman - the Chairman having departed for his boat connection to Britain - presenting the organisers with 2 large bottles of whisky, which were duly enjoyed by those remaining for the afternoon and subsequent visit to the Isle de Re. If there is to be a moral to the conference, it is that wader work is alive and well in France, and that the weather is far better than Britain at this time of year. Take your waterproofs to Edinburgh for next year.

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A NEW RUSSIAN BOOK ON WADER MIGRATIONS

V.D. Ilyichev (ed.). 1985. [*Migrations of Birds of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. Vol. IV. Gruiformes - Charadriiformes.*] Moskva. "Nauka". 304 pp. In Russian.

The new volume of Russian monograph "Migrations of Birds of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia" has just appeared. It is the fourth volume of the series and contains information on cranes, rails and waders. 26 species of waders are covered.

The main editor of the volumes issued up to now has been Prof. V.D. Ilyichev. Other editors of the fourth volume have been Dr. J.A. Viksne and Dr. H.A. Michelson. Dr. Michelson, a famous Latvian ornithologist, sadly died just before the volume was published. This volume has been written by different people from different countries and the data concern mainly the results of ringing of birds in USSR and other socialist countries.

Some words from the forward by editors: "This monograph shows not only some knowledge about migrations and seasonal distribution of birds, but also indicates the lack of information on many populations and species. Thus this book ought to help to plan the further research work, ought to help to see "white patches" in our knowledge, from the level of which depends intensely successes of bird protection and other kinds of activity of ornithologists."

Unfortunately the book is written in Russian, and so for many people in western Europe it will not be easy to understand it completely. But all figures (mainly maps) and tables, numbering 170, have English translations. Much of the data presented in this book has not been published previously, and this is perhaps the greatest value of the book.

Jaga Gromadzka