

the wide chasm which lies between many North and Latin American shorebird enthusiasts. The meeting was exciting, but unfortunately it was never intended to be an annual event. Personally, I wish it was. But there is a very real alternative.

The planned new Western Hemisphere Section of the *Wader Study Group Bulletin* could become the permanent bridge for communications traffic between the Americas (and our colleagues in Britain and Europe) to develop and grow.

Yes, the meeting in Quito was very interesting. Its legacy of improved contacts between North and South, through the Wader Study Group and the efforts of Theunis Piersma especially, will have a influence on shorebird enthusiasts in the Western Hemisphere for a long time to come.

WSG 1991 Annual Conference - an antipodean view

Phil Battley

(reprinted with modifications from OSNZ News)

The WSG 1991 annual conference was held on Texel, the first of the chain of islands which enclose the vast mudflats of the Wadden sea, home of up to a million birds. A particularly notable feature of this conference was the overwhelming presence of New Zealanders with Alan Baker (known for his Oystercatcher studies in the 1970s and now based in Canada), Ray Pierce (Department of Conservation, Whangarei) giving keynote addresses, and Phil Battley also contributing part of a paper. In addition to the two day standard conference there was a one day symposium of *Shorebirds and the availability of their benthic prey*, a real boon for wader feeding enthusiasts.

The multitude of talks presented during the conference included migration, breeding, energetics, genetics, habitat use, micro-computer controlled telemetry to record activity patterns and physiological variables of waders (!), plus of course lots of shorebird/prey interactions. Some not quite randomly chosen talks were:

Waders and theories of bird migration, by Thomas Alerstam (Sweden), who indicated that despite humanities' belief that we are the most developed verte-

brate, birds still manage to migrate over some pretty wild geomagnetic anomalies and we really don't know how they do it.

Proposals for indexing wader populations, by Les Underhill (South Africa), who made inputting a household word, but pointed out that while his method can be used to determine, as well as we can, missing information from count series, this does not mean that we can all go bird watching from the comfort of our homes while sitting behind our personal computer. Apparently, actually counting birds is better than making up the figures.

Bruno Ens (Netherlands) suggested that the real reason some Oystercatchers wait 14 years before breeding is that the social system in his study colony is such that it is profitable for young non-breeders to join queues for advantageous reproductive positions (good spots). I also got the impression that when the Dutch aren't building dykes they put their excess energy into building elaborate elevated hides.

The shorebird feeding symposium (undoubtedly the highlight of the conference for many) should have taught people that prey availability is a function of several factors - prey depth (prey may be out of reach of the bill), prey may be too large to be swallowed, prey may be too small to be profitable, smaller prey have less chance of being encountered, and prey may occur in too low a density to be fed on. All these factors mean that only a small propor-

tion of the total prey present may be available to birds, so meeting their feeding requirements may be no mean feat.

Not all of the talks were based on tidal mudflats. Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits were shown to be able to deplete totally the chironomid larvae of a Dutch lake in only 4-5 hours of feeding. The birds move around though and rarely revisit areas where they have foraged already.

Ray Pierce introduced the European world to the wonders of alpine riverbeds and three specialist feeders - Black Stilt, Wrybill and Ibisbill. He showed how each species is well adapted to foraging on braided riverbeds, be they in the Southern Alps or Himalayas, while exhibiting very different bill shapes and feeding techniques.

With 36 talks during the conference I have only skimmed the surface here. Another highlight was a Siberian evening, with a range of superb slides and information from various researchers.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the weekend was the phenomenal growth in WSG membership from some countries. New Zealand led the way with a trebling of the membership, which now stands at three (Paul Sagar need not feel lonely anymore). However, to maintain this growth rate requires six new members next year and 18 in 1993. Can we do it?

