



# ODESSA



In 1992 WSG held a special meeting in the Ukraine at the invitation of the Odessa State University. As short accounts in *WSG Bulletins* 65 and 66 indicated, this meeting was a tremendously success in the development of links amongst wader workers from many different countries. With much recent WSG activity having been focused on the East Atlantic Flyway, the Odessa meeting gave a opportunity to compare this activity on this Flyway with information on wader movements and research on the Mediterranean/Black Sea Flyway.

Abstracts of the talks were presented in *Bulletin* 65, and full versions of these papers are being prepared for publication as a *Supplementary Bulletin*, probably in 1994. We here present some rather more personal impressions of the Odessa meeting....

## ***Odessa by rail: a case of migratory stress?***

Western delegates to the Odessa conference in 1992 adopted two main migration strategies: flight at high altitude via Moscow amidst the uncertainties of strikes by air-traffic control, fuel shortages and the peculiar charms of Aeroflot; or land-hopping by rail via Germany, Poland and the Ukraine. The romantics, adventurous and impecunious took the second choice and this is a brief account of how they fared.

## ***Saturday: Berlin to Warsaw, the calm before the storm***

A pre-migratory flock of 11, led by Conference organiser, Herman Hötter, gathered in the afternoon at Berlin and embarked on the uneventful eight hour first leg of the journey to Warsaw. Despite a surprising amount of jostling from other migrants, the significance of which was to become evident later, we successfully disembarked and met up with the indefatigable, Jadwiga Gromadzka.

## ***The first night: Warsaw, the disadvantages of communal roosts***

Unfortunately all the best roost sites were already occupied, so we were forced to form a tight and conspicuous flock on one of the upper levels of the main station concourse. An uneasy and largely sleepless night was spent, whilst we were closely observed by others on passage and a variety of more sinister individuals. After seven hours we were all relieved to make our way to the waiting train.

## ***Sunday: Warsaw to Mostiska, kleptoparasites and border controls***

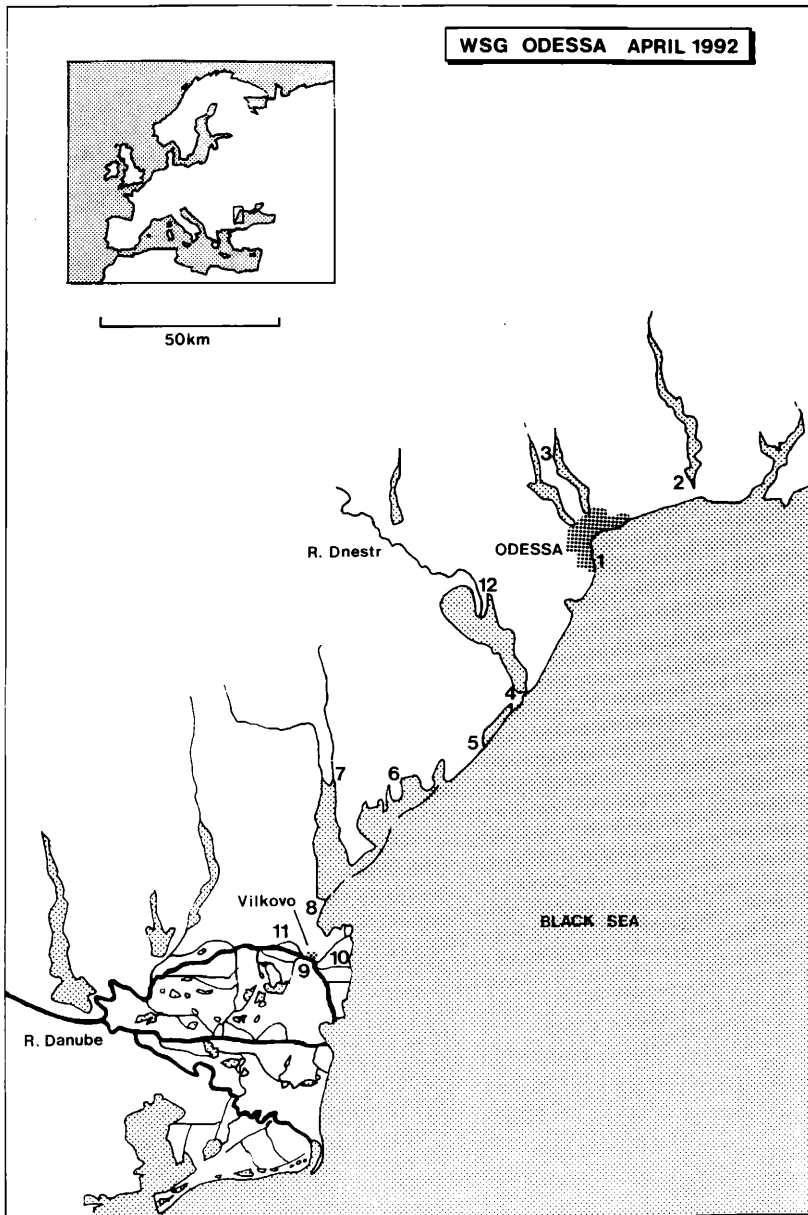
An immediate set-back - the carriage on which we were booked was not attached, but waiting to be joined to the train at the Ukrainian border.

Despite Jadwiga's most fluent and impassioned endeavours, we were forced to watch our train depart and hope that we could catch up with it later. As we joined a local train to the border, the jostling from the previous night turned into open kleptoparasitism, when a group of those who had been watching us at roost took advantage of the restricted space in the corridor to try and relieve us of what we were carrying. Although most of us escaped shaken but unscathed, they did succeed in removing some items of personal equipment and more seriously all the travelling reserves of a well known migrant from Vlieland. The fortunate re-discovery of his passport elsewhere in the train meant that he still had some chance of completing his migration!

We succeeded in catching up with our train at Przemysl, the Polish border town where the whole train is literally jacked up so that the wheels can be changed to fit the wider gauge rails used in the Ukraine. Forcing our way along a narrow platform jammed with hopeful migrants, we eventually found our carriage, where we settled in, optimistic that there would be no further problems.

Thirty minutes later at the Ukrainian border town of Mostiska, our optimism proved to be ill-founded and we began to understand what it must be like to be a Slender-billed Curlew trapped at a Ringing Station! Unaccustomed to western travellers the young and friendly border guards seemed uncertain as to what to do and what paperwork needed to be completed. Despite the well-meaning attentions of at least six of them, it was clear that the train would have to resume its journey long before we had all been processed and for the second time that day, half





**Odessa region and locations visited on WSG excursion**

1. Odessa, location of Conference
2. Tiligulskij Liman
3. Kujalnitzkij Liman
4. Coffee (18 April) !
5. Tuzlowski Liman
6. Alibey Liman
7. Belolesje
8. Primorskoye
9. Bratul Chilia
10. Danube Delta Nature Reserve
11. Reed-swamps (20 April)
12. Mouth of the River Dnestr

Although most of the British contingent had a simple route via Moscow, what ever happened to the German party travelling overland through Romania? Surrounded by civil wars and other ethnic strife, they were last heard of teaming up with Romanian ornithologists to charter a fishing boat and travel to Odessa via the Black Sea. Alas, they never arrived..

The British contingent were well cared for in Moscow by the ever cheerful Pavel Tomkovitch. A highlight of the stay in Moscow was being issued with the world's longest bus ticket for the journey from the airport to the city centre: a combined result of the effect of rapid inflation on bus tickets with pre-printed values. My remnant, now preserved in WSG archives, is 3.6 m long.

We were greeted in Odessa by the Korzyukov family: Anatoli, his son Oleg, Vala and their children Yuri and Kiriell. Our welcome was tremendously warm, and we instantly felt 'at home' Spring time was arriving on the Black Sea coast, and the sun was bright with a chill nip in the air. The weather was fine throughout our stay: a welcome contrast to rain-drenched Britain.

The Conference was opened by the Director of the Odessa State University and the Vice-Mayor of Odessa. Following his acclaimed opening of the 1987 Gdansk WSG Conference in Polish, Mike Pienkowski surpassed himself by addressing the opening session in Russian to the considerable appreciation of all participants.

The abstracts of the talks given over the next four days were published in *Bulletin* 65: 13-25, and these give a flavour of the scientific content meeting. For the 'western' participants the talks of work on waders, past and present, in the former USSR were fascinating and long-overdue... For too long, workers on waders on the same flyway have been isolated by their political systems. The conference gave the opportunity for friends who had long corresponded, and 'exchanged' ringed birds to meet each other - often for the first time.

The mid-conference excursion to the Tiligulskij Liman and Kujalnitzkij Liman were of great interest. These coastal wetlands are of importance not only for wintering waders, but also for breeding waders. They have been studied by a number

the party had to stand and watch whilst the others led by Herman headed onward, uneventfully to arrive in Odessa as planned the following morning.

For the second time that day our fate rested with Jadwiga, who, with amazing resolution, patience, enthusiasm and mastery of the Russian language, managed to arrange for us to catch a further train that left for Kiev at midnight.

### **Monday: safe at Odessa**

An anxious wait followed until the train arrived and it was clear that there was space for us on board. After five hours of exhausted sleep and a rapid further change of trains near Kiev, we found ourselves on the final run to Odessa, which we reached only four hours later than planned, only to discover that we had missed the highlight of the Conference, Mike Pienkowski's opening address in Russian!

Len Campbell

### *A personal view*

For many of the western participants to the 1992 Odessa Conference, the period leading up to the meeting was almost as eventful as the conference itself. As Mike Pienkowski noted in his Chairman's Report (*Bulletin* 65: 1-2), the conference must have been one of the few to have been initially planned for one country and finally held in another without having changing location! This gave its own problems.

There was considerable anxiety over the precise arrangements for Ukrainian visas. This was coupled with the complexities of also obtaining Russian visas for the overnight stops in Moscow en route to Odessa! In the event, Ukrainian bureaucracy proved less complex than we had feared: we arrived without anyone even asking to see visas...

The complexities of travel were also daunting.





of wader workers from the Odessa State University. The opportunity to get into the fresh air and stretch muscles cramped by days of passively sitting was welcome. WSG excursions have a tradition for bizarre picnics

(I recall a massive bonfire barbecue in Poland some years ago!) The organisers surpassed themselves by finding an enormous haystack close to Kujalnitzkij Liman. The ideal 'tower hide', it provided an unparalleled vantage point over the flat landscape. We ate ENORMOUS lunches to the chirruping of frogs. Picnics will never quite be the same again...

Nor were cultural events neglected. Many had the opportunity of a night at the ballet in Odessa's magnificent gilded Opera House. Unfortunately space precludes the publication here of the intriguing report of WSG's Ballet Correspondent, Phil Rothwell.

No account of the Odessa Conference would be complete without mention of the stalwart student interpreters, especially Yuri Zharikov. Their English was humbly comprehensive, and they contributed much to both the social and technical sides of the week.

Perhaps one of the enduring outputs from the meeting will be the Odessa Protocol on international co-operation on migratory flyway research and conservation (*Bulletin* 66: 10-11). The Protocol aimed to encapsulate the themes that run through the conference, and hopefully will serve to guide the work of WSG in a number of areas. One of the strong themes to emerge from the conference emphasised the considerable benefits that emerge when professional and amateur workers collaborate on joint projects. This has long been the philosophy underlying the collaborative international studies of WSG, and the Protocol stressed the benefits of this approach for other countries where this is not yet usual practise.

The organising committee, and especially Anatoli Korzjukov, the indefatigable Oleg (who seemed able to fix any problem!) and his family, the translators were all tireless in ensuring that the conference was a success. Conference organisation at any time is difficult: under the particular circumstances in Ukraine in April 1992, what was achieved was nothing short of outstanding. The organisers cannot be thanked enough for their super-human efforts.

They have set a bench mark for all future WSG meetings. We all look forward to returning.....

David A. Stroud

### An interpreter's impressions

Looking back now, I will try to describe the conference as I saw and felt it in two ways: the point of view of an amateur interpreter and from that of a professional ornithologist.

First, it is important to recall that this was the first WSG Conference on the territory of the former USSR. And it was obvious that it was not easy to arrange, especially in these troubled times. A year ago, almost nobody here could have anticipated such a dramatic course of events. But nevertheless the conference took place. The organising committee, assisted by local services and the participants themselves, undertook much good work.

As to the conference itself, there was a lot of interesting news and important information about waders and waterfowl in general, their habitats and their migrations. It also was a great opportunity for many Russian (CIS) scientists to meet their foreign colleagues whom they had known

only by correspondence and through references, and, of course, to be able to practice their English.

You could hear both good English and poor English at the meeting, as well as "bright, global talks and reports of just regional importance" as one of the participants said [*all the talks were fascinating!* - Ed.]. There were original hypotheses, conclusions and useful recommendations, as well as just brief factual accounts.

It is not news that in order to carry out any extensive research one should have at least three things. In my opinion they are: time, financial support and the possibility to cross political boundaries more or less freely, almost as shore-birds do, to say nothing of equipment, computer data-bases etc. But these things will not be a problem for us if we develop closer co-operation between European ornithologists and the scientists of this country, and especially if other similar workshops take place here. Although the "Iron Curtain" has been withdrawn, we are very often still afraid to go through it. We are still the Soviets - not the "Russians" or "Ukrainians" as politicians declare. However many of us, just as five or ten years ago, still try to do everything by ourselves, forgetting about the whole world which surrounds us. It is wrong. No-one should "invent a bike once again", as Russian people say. There are a great number of important problems and we can study waterfowl together using each others experience. The conference showed this very well. We might be links of a strong, single chain which protects birds, their habitats and migration routes from harmful human activities.

Yuri Zharikov



## Post conference excursion, 18–20 April 1992

After the conference in Odessa, some of the participants took the opportunity to go on a three day excursion to the Ukrainian part of the Danube Delta and nearby Black Sea coast, accompanied by Dr Anatoli and Oleg Korzyukov.....

We started on the Saturday morning, taking a coach directly from the hotel in Odessa. After an hour's drive through the city and the outskirts of Odessa, we headed southwards towards the Danube Delta. During the drive we saw a lot of large colonies of Rooks *Corvus frugilegus* in the trees along the roads. Interrupted only by a short stop at a coastal scenic point we reached our first destination at noon: the Tuzlowski Liman.

This wetland was clearly of considerable international importance, with extensive reedbeds and also more shallow flooding fens, as well as open water areas. The first birds we observed there were seven Demoiselle Cranes *Anthropoides virgo*, several Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* and different species of waders feeding on nearby fields. We decided to have our lunch there and had a picnic whilst watching the birds and accompanied by a concert of hundreds of frogs all around us. Afterwards we walked through part of Tuzlowski Liman carefully looking at the ground in order not to step on birds nests. One of the attractions were the Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, and we also discovered some Spotted Souseliks *Citellus suslicus*. The area was apparently also an important goose roost, and we found parts of the carcass of a Red-breasted





Goose *Branta ruficollis*. We were told that the geese are subject to significant shooting pressure during the months when they are present.

In the afternoon, we visited the nearby Alibey Liman especially searching for White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus*. In the evening we reached the Danube Delta and made a first brief excursion along a lagoon where we observed, amongst others, Great White Egrets *Egretta alba* and Caspian Terns *Sterna caspia*. The next two nights we were to stay in Primorskoye, a village near the Danube Delta. This was obviously quite a 'beach resort' in high summer, and we stayed in a complex of newly completed buildings which were planned as a holiday resort for miners from Siberia. We were lucky to be the first occupants.

The dinner on the first night was memorable and for many one of the highspots of the excursion. It was certainly an alcoholic highspot! The dinner comprised a variety of local dishes, including raw fish, with enormous teapots of local red wine, much vodka and Scotch Whisky. We had a terrific evening with songs from most of the countries represented around the table, but after a certain time in the evening, most people only have vague recollections....

The next morning we had our breakfast (some felt more like eating than others), although only a few particularly tough members of the group took an ice-cold shower to wake up, and then had a short walk along the nearby beach. The coach took us to Vilково, a small and beautiful town in the Danube Delta, known as the "Venice of the Black Sea". Large parts of the town were connected by means of a network of canals, and the house holders travelled around using punts and small

boats. Walking on the narrow wooden paths, in the bright April sunshine, and with the small canals on one side and beautiful gardens full of flowers was really wonderful. It was also striking how much the local economy seemed to centre around products from the Danube wetlands: not only were fish of great importance, but there was much evidence of the use of *Phragmites* reed and wood from *Salix* for a great number of uses.

At Vilково we also were told about the Ukrainian Danube Delta Reserve by Michael Zhmud. The Reserve measures some 15,000 ha, that is about 30% of the Ukrainian part of the Delta. However, only 5% of the total Danube Delta is Ukrainian, the rest lying in Romania where there is another 600,000 ha designated as a Biosphere Reserve. The main branch of the Danube, the Bratul Chilia is the international border.

At noon we started a boat trip in a small motor boat, and travelled on side streams to Bratul Chilia before turning downstream towards the Black Sea coast. For lunch we stayed in the small boat anchored in a small reed bay out of the strong wind. Because of the unusually low water levels, we had to make a considerable detour until we could arrive at the coast, where we disembarked on a sandy barrier island at the river's mouth. There we spent some time walking along the beach with the fresh water of the Danube flowing nearby into the brackish waters of the Black Sea.

On the island was a colony of several thousand pairs of Yellow-legged Gulls *Larus cachinnans*. On our way back, through the falling dusk, we saw White Pelicans, many Red-footed Falcons *Falco verspertinus* and different species of herons

and egrets, especially Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Late in the evening we arrived back to Vilково and our boat picked its way up the dark channels through the quiet town.

The last day we visited the northern part of the Danube Delta with extensive reed beds – quiet staggeringly large in comparison with the remnant reed-swamps of north-western Europe. Nearby a small hunter's camp we had the possibility to take our own rowing boat or punt through the reeds, but others preferred to be towed by a motor boat – a good decision considering the strong wind! The shore party enjoyed the fantastic view across the reed swamps and marshes from the top of a small radio tower at the camp. The reed beds were impressively large in their current state, but when one considered that most of the surrounding agricultural land in this part was also originally wetland, one realised the vast size of these coastal wetlands in their original extent.

The most impressive sighting was probably that of some Ferruginous Ducks *Aythya nyroca* which are rare also in the Ukraine. Another bird for Peter Meininger's list for the group which held 144 species at the end of the excursion (including those seen in Odessa). We took our lunch in the camp, washed down with some delicious home-made red wine. After lunch we had unfortunately to leave the Danube Delta region and head back to Odessa, stopping once at the mouth of the Dnestr, and driving a short distance through Moldavia (and adding another country to our lists!). We reached Odessa in the late afternoon. Hopefully we will come back again!

Vera Knoke

