



# WSG's Liaison Agreement with the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB)

Nick Davidson

WSG members attending the October 1993 WSG annual conference in Ipswich witnessed the formal signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between WSG and the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB). The full text of this Memorandum and the rôle of the WSG/IWRB Liaison Officer responsible for co-ordinating the link between the two organisations was published in *WSG Bulletin* 71: 2-3. In this article WSG/IWRB Liaison Officer Nick Davidson explains this development in WSG's operations and introduces some of the exciting actions already happening through the link.

## OBJECTIVES AND MECHANISMS

It has been clear for some time that much of the way in which the WSG operates, as an international association of wader experts exchanging information through projects and the *WSG Bulletin*, has many similarities with the suite of research groups established by IWRB. These contribute to IWRB's rôle in providing technical advice on waterfowl and wetland research and its application to conservation. Discussions during the 1992 WSG Odessa Conference developed this idea and led to the WSG Executive Committee approving the formal agreement set out in *Bulletin* 71.

The underlying objective of the agreement is to improve the flow of information between the two organisations and to avoid unnecessary confusion and duplication of effort through the operation of several expert groups undertaking similar work.

By joint agreement I have been elected to the rôle of WSG/IWRB Liaison Officer (the equivalent of an IWRB Research Group Co-ordinator) by IWRB at its November 1992 Executive Board Meeting and by WSG at its 1993 AGM. The Liaison Officer is a voting member of IWRB's Executive Board, and an elected officer of the Wader Study Group.

I should stress that the WSG Committee has been quite clear in ensuring that nothing in the

agreement affects in any way the independent status of WSG. Rather the agreement recognises that WSG has long been fulfilling a rôle analogous to that of an IWRB research group, and that formalising the link neatly avoids any duplication of groups covering the same tasks and topics. Indeed the extent and quality of WSG information exchange through its *Bulletins* and *Special Issues* more than adequately meets the rôle required of a research group. IWRB is now also looking at the agreement with WSG as a model for link-ups with other independent groups.

The WSG/IWRB link replaces IWRB's former Wader Research Group, co-ordinated in the Old World by Cor Smit and in the New World by Pablo Canevari. In fact Cor Smit has been fulfilling a dual rôle of Research Group Co-ordinator and Co-ordinator of IWRB's Wader Database that contributes to the International Waterfowl Census. Under the new structure Cor continues as Database Co-ordinator, so bringing the wader system in line with IWRB's current practice of separate co-ordination of Research Groups and Databases.

One advantage of the link will be the publication of more information and articles about the parts of IWRB's work relevant to waders, and of course the operations of the WSG/IWRB link itself, through this fairly regular column in the *Bulletin*. This will include annual reports on the Wader Database. Conversely we will be contributing articles and news

items to IWRB's newsletter, *IWRB News*, so spreading awareness of WSG and its operations to a wide international readership.

## DEVELOPING THE RÔLE

IWRB has recently been developing strong regional links with Wetlands for the Americas (WA) in the New World and is now affiliated with the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB) and is represented by AWB in the Asia/Pacific region. In an analogous way, whilst the WSG is a world-wide international organisation its main membership is in the Eurasian/African part of the wader flyway systems. An early need in developing the liaison is consideration of the most effective ways of developing contacts and information flows outside WSG's main sphere of operations in the Western Palearctic, and in particular with both northern and southern parts of the New World and with AWSG in Australasia. Options are under discussion with the relevant WSG Executive Committee members and others to agree the most effective structures, and I will be reporting on progress on this topic in a future column.

Another need is for WSG to establish a core group of contacts with particular specialisms or regional knowledge that will provide a resource of expertise on which the Liaison Officer can draw. Initially this group will be formed from the WSG Executive Committee, but I am looking at various options for

appropriate expansion of this group.

## IWRB'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR RESEARCH GROUP DEVELOPMENT

IWRB has recently circulated for comment a draft strategic plan for development of the IWRB Research Groups. This plan has the objective of improving the current structure and functioning of the Research Group network. There is much in the proposals that will assist WSG in maintaining the liaison link and I will report in a future issue on how this plan evolves.

## KALØ WORKSHOP ON ESTIMATING WATERFOWL POPULATIONS

As WSG/IWRB Liaison Officer I attended a small international workshop in January 1994, convened by IWRB and the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and hosted by the Danish National Environmental Research Institute at Kalø, Denmark. It had two principal objections: first to consider current mechanisms for the co-ordination of information necessary to assess international population sizes of waterfowl, including waders. Second, the workshop considered comments made on the draft report prepared in summer 1993 that aims to provide, for the first time in one volume, world-wide current estimates of waterfowl populations. The workshop proved highly successful in both finalising the population estimates and in clarifying and devising effective procedures for future updates of current estimates to wader and other waterfowl populations, and a full account of the discussions and outcomes from the workshop are published elsewhere in this *Bulletin*.

The final version of the world-wide population estimates report has now been published (Rose, P.M. & Scott, D.A. 1994. *Waterfowl Population Estimates. IWRB Publication 29*. Pp. 102. Price £10.00 + postage and packing - see insert in this issue for

details). For most wader species the population estimates in this first edition of the publication - which will be updated every three years - have not been altered from those used in recent years, although for several Western Palearctic populations likely changes in the next report are indicated. An exception is the West African/ European population of Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* for which the accepted 1% threshold has been substantially increased to take account of latest breeding ground estimates.

## UPDATING WESTERN PALEARCTIC WADER POPULATION ESTIMATIONS

An important issue for the WSG that emerged from the Kalø workshop was the agreed timescale for the updates to population estimates and 1% population thresholds. It was agreed that a new version of the population estimates report will be produced every three years, with a major review and update of official 1% population levels every nine years. It was proposed that IWRB produce a global summary report, based on prior taxa review papers (see elsewhere in this *Bulletin* for more details).

The last major review of wader populations on the East Atlantic flyway was by Smit & Piersma (1989), prepared for the Ramsar Convention meeting at Regina, Canada, in 1987. So to stick to the nine-year cycle means that a major review is now needed for the next IWRB global summary report which will be prepared in time for the next meeting of the contracting parties to the Ramsar Convention in 1996. This means that WSG needs to complete a wader taxa population review by mid-1995 to provide the basis for the population estimates report.

The scope and mechanisms of this review on such a tight timescale are currently being discussed by a small team comprising Paul Rose (IWRB Waterfowl Monitoring Officer), Cor Smit (IWRB Wader Database Co-ordinator) and myself. Our preliminary view is that we will restrict

this first detailed update to East Atlantic Flyway coastal species, so focusing on an update of a large part of Smit & Piersma. One way of developing a programme for more comprehensive future reviews may be to establish a Working Group on Wader Population Estimates. This would in the first instance need to involve contributors from Africa, Europe and north Asia. The planned updating of Breeding Waders in Europe will also be a vital stage here.

We will be reporting more detail of how this initial work will be done, and on a future programme of analyses, to the 1994 WSG Conference and in the December *Bulletin*.

## THE 1995 JOINT CONFERENCE WITH THE IWRB WATERFOWL ECOLOGY RESEARCH GROUP

As has occurred every three years in recent times, the 1995 WSG conference will be linked with the next in the series of International Waterfowl Ecology Symposia in this case the 10th symposium. The Waterfowl Ecology Symposium series is organised by another IWRB Research Group - the Waterfowl Ecology Research Group, co-ordinated by John Goss-Custard - so the 1995 meeting (in Aveiro, Portugal) will be the first as a link-up between two groups acting in the rôle of IWRB Research Groups. First registration forms for the conferences are enclosed in this *Bulletin*.

## WHO TO CONTACT

If you have any comments or suggestions about the development of this link with IWRB, or want to contact WSG in its rôle as an IWRB Research Group for any other reason, I can be contacted at : Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough PE1 1JY, UK (tel. (0)733-688632; fax (0)733-555948.

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