

Group structure

Group structure and management will continue as present, but planned are:

- Improved links outside Western Palearctic developed through regional co-ordinators;
- Stronger representation in the Western Hemisphere developed in association with the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network;
- Target of 10% increase in membership.

N.C. Davidson, WSG/WI Liaison Officer

NEWS FROM THE IWRB WOODCOCK AND SNIPE RESEARCH GROUP

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Great Snipe *Gallinago media*, Common Snipe *G. gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* differ considerably from all other European wader species in many respects. For this reason, the Woodcock and Snipe Research Group was established as a distinct Research Group of IWRB in 1974.

Due to their cryptic colouring and secretive behaviour, Woodcock and Snipes are rarely seen and may therefore not be counted as most other waders. However, since all of them are huntable species over most of their range, indirect population estimates have been calculated using two parameters, namely bag statistics and the recovery rates of ringed birds.

The most recent population estimates are published in the proceedings of the Fourth European Woodcock and Snipe Workshop (*IWRB Publ. 31*, 114 pp. 1994) [reviewed in *WSG Bulletin 75*: 7].

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NOTES & NEWS & NEWS & NOTES NOTES & NEWS

Compiled by Lys B. Muirhead & Robin M. Ward

HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY RAMSAR CONVENTION!

On 6 February 1996, the Ramsar Convention celebrated its 25th birthday. The Convention has had enormous influence in the conservation of wetlands, and has a current total of 90 Contracting Parties. A total of 765 wetlands of international importance covering over 51 million ha (as of November 1995) are listed by its signatory nations, a total that grows monthly. It is fitting that Australia, the first country to sign the Convention, should be host to this year's Conference of the Contracting Parties (the sixth since the Convention came into force).

The Conference of the Parties is being held in Brisbane between 19 and 27 March and waders are due to feature prominently in a number of the Resolutions and Recommendations proposed.

The Ramsar Conference is being preceded by an international meeting organised by the Australasian Wader Study Group focussing on "Shorebird conservation in the Asia-Pacific region" (see insert in *Bulletin 78*). The aims of this meeting relate especially to means of enhancing international co-operation in shorebird conservation along the East Asian/ Australasian flyway (see below). The Asian Wetlands Bureau's Shorebird Flyway Officer Doug Watkins outlined some of the issues in *Bulletin 77*: 63.

A full report on the outcomes of both the Ramsar and AWSG Conferences will appear in *Bulletin 80*.

David Stroud

EAST ASIA-AUSTALASIAN SHOREBIRD FLYWAY PROJECT

This project has been developed as part of the implementation of the 'Kushiro Initiative' (see *Bulletin 75*: 18-19).

A Shorebird Reserve Network proposal developed by AWB was presented to bilateral migratory-bird meetings involving Japan, China and Australia in June 1995. At the meetings, Australia announced that it proposed to draft a recommendation for the next Ramsar meeting in support of the Shorebird Network Proposal.

In September, the recommendation supporting the development of a network of sites for the conservation of shorebirds was formally presented by the Australian Government to the Ramsar Standing Committee meeting in Brisbane. Japan joined Australia in co-sponsoring the recommendation.

Also in September, the Australian Minister for the Environment wrote to each of the countries that are Parties to the Ramsar Convention in the East Asia-Australasian Flyway to encourage them to support the recommendation and nominate a site for the Shorebird Reserve Network.

Plans are well on track for the launch of the Network at the Ramsar Conference in Brisbane in March 1996. In addition to Australia and Japan, the UK (Hong Kong) and New Zealand have formally indicated support for the recommendation. At Government officer level, the recommendation has strong support in the Philippines, China, Indonesia and the US (Alaska). With all the countries there is a need for follow-up work to discuss the potential sites for nomination to the Network.

In late November and December 1995, AWB plans follow-up discussions in New Zealand, China, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

Reprinted from The Tattler No. 5

BIRDS IN THE CHANNEL CONFERENCE

The Groupe Ornithologique Normand is organising a two day conference at the University of Caen on birds in the Channel. This will be the first ornithological symposium in Normandy. The three sessions cover the seabirds of the Channel, seashore birds (including waders) of the Channel coasts and conservation problems.

The meeting will be held on 5-6 April 1997 although registrations must take place before then. For further information, contact the Local Organising Committee:

Groupe Ornithologique Normand,
Université de Caen, 14032 CAEN
Cedex, France.
Tel.: + 19 (16) 31 43 52 56
Fax: + 19 (16) 31 93 27 07

SOLENT SHOREBIRD STUDY GROUP

In 1994, a small group of keen Solent birdwatchers and fieldworkers organised a meeting of people with an interest in the study and conservation of the shorebirds of the Solent. The aim was to improve communication between organisations, and to co-ordinate different studies taking place within an area between Pagham Harbour and Hurst Spit, including the north shore of the Isle of Wight, on the south coast of England.

This meeting proved so successful that such meetings have continued to take place every three months or so to provide updates on current projects or issues concerning the Solent and to identify and fill any gaps in existing information. During these meetings it was suggested that the set-up should become more formalised and the Solent Shorebird Study Group was created.

At the moment, the group consists of representatives from the British Trust for Ornithology, Chichester Harbour Conservancy, English Nature, Farlington Ringing Group, Hampshire County Council Countryside Service, Hampshire Ornithological Society, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, the Royal Navy Bird Watching Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Sussex Ornithological Society, West Sussex County Council and the WeBS volunteer network. The more organisations represented, the more effective the group will be, so other organisations are encouraged to join.

By having representatives from a range of organisations at the meetings, resources can be targeted more effectively. Through this group, for example, a timetable of WeBS Low Tide Counts has been drawn up which addresses conservation priorities without overloading volunteer fieldworkers. In addition, a colour-dyeing study of waders using Southampton Water has been timed to coincide with the WeBS Low Tide Counts in order to make the best use of the large numbers of observers involved. The information provided by this dye-marking study could prove vital to understanding the potential

effects of proposed developments on the estuary.

Anyone who is interested in finding out more about the group should contact: Peter Potts (Chairman), Solent Court Cottage, Hook Lane, Warsash, Southampton, Hampshire SO31 9HF, UK. Tel. +44 1489 578649.

TURNSTONES KILLED BY TURNING LOG

On 30 August 1994 six Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* were killed in an accident along the Hondsbossche Zeewering, an artificial dyke connecting two protective areas of shoreline dunes in the province of Noord-Holland, The Netherlands. The Turnstones had taken shelter from the strong landward wind behind a piece of wood, one metre long and eight cm high.

When the tongue of a particularly high wave tipped the 3 kg log over, it fell on the line of roosting Turnstones. Five of them died instantly, and a sixth succumbed later according to Arnold Gronert who reported the incident in issue no. 71 (October 1994) of a local nature newspaper, appropriately called "*De Windbreker*" (the wind shield). The body masses of the birds varied between 94 g and 105 g. Arnold also documented the accident and made the accompanying sketch of the fate of these unfortunate waders.

Theunis Piersma



CONGRATULATIONS

In December 1995, Patricia M. Gonzalez, an active WSG member from San Antonio Oeste, Rio Negro, Argentina, received the Vida Award from the SOS Vida Foundation in Buenos Aires in recognition for her work on the conservation of coastal birds in Rio Negro. The award ceremony in Buenos Aires offered a wonderful opportunity to stress again the importance of coastal Argentina for migrating waders.

Hopefully such recognition of Patricia's work will lead to further appreciation of the values of waders and wetlands in this part of the world.

WADER RINGING IN SOUTHERN ITALY

The migratory movements of waders are little known in southern Italy and ringing of these species has always been of an occasional manner. *Gruppo Inanellamento Limicoli* (G.I.L) formed with the aim of studying waders in southern Italy, started in 1991 with a ringing campaign focused in particular within the periods of April-May and July-August. To date over 5,247 waders of 28 species have been ringed with 22 recoveries: Gdansk (5), Helgoland (4), Budapest (3), London (2), Praha (2), Helsinki (2), and single recoveries from the schemes based at Hiddensee, Stavanger, Paris and Bologna.

The disappearance of nearly all wetlands along the Tyrrhenian coastline has very much concentrated waders staging on migration at the few remaining small estuaries and wetlands. During May over a thousand waders, predominately Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint, congregate at some of the wetlands on the plain of Volturmo (Caserta).

G.I.L. and the bird observatory *Roccolo Ganda* are organising as in previous years a camp at Castel Volturna, about 50 km from Naples, principally aimed at ringing the passage waders. The main catching site is a series of muddy lagoons over which mist nets will be set, night time being the most productive period. Provisionally the camp will be from 20

April to 20 May and based it is expected in a house; lodging and food will be free. Interested ornithologists from Italy and elsewhere are requested to book in advance stating their preferred dates; preference if necessary will be given to those holding ringing permits. For more information and to book please write to the camp leader: Dr. Sergio Screbba, via Posillipo 276/2, 80123 Naples, Italy.

SPECIAL WADER STUDY GROUP MEETING IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 1998

The 22nd International Ornithological Congress will take place in Durban, South Africa, from 23-29 August 1998. A two-day symposium of the Wader Study Group will take place a few days earlier, probably on 19 and 20 August in Port Elizabeth. One day of the meeting will be devoted to a workshop on the Curlew Sandpiper.

Anyone interested in attending, or offering a paper, should contact Les Underhill, Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa. Phone +27 21 650 3227, fax +27 21 650 3918, email LGU@maths.uct.ac.za. This meeting in South Africa will be additional to the normal 1998 Annual General Meeting of the Wader Study Group.

SQUALLY SEX RESULTS IN INFERTILITY?

Pavel Tomkovich suggested in a recent paper (*WSG Bull.* 77: 48-49) strong winds made copulation by Curlew Sandpipers impossible and result in infertile eggs.

The assumption made by many such biologists that the lack of a visible embryo in an incubated egg when opened shows infertility, is not necessarily true according to Tim Birkhead (University of Sheffield, U.K.) in a recent letter to *New Scientist* (Vol. 148, No. 2001). Birkhead was responding to a report in *New Scientist* on Tomkovich's paper (*New Scientist* Vol. 147, No. 1997) and explains that it is just as likely that fertilisation has taken place but that the embryo has died at a very

early stage. A method of establishing infertility using a microscope is described by Birkhead, this being reprinted below for members benefit: "An egg that has been fertilised will have one or more holes in the tissue layer (the inner perivitelline layer) which surrounds the ovum (the yolk), where the sperm have penetrated the germinal disc region (the white spot you can see when you crack open an egg). There will also be abundant sperm (best seen using a fluorescent dye) in the outer perivitelline layer.

We have examined a number of allegedly infertile eggs in a range of wild bird species and found that between 80 and 100 per cent were actually fertilised, but simply failed to develop because of early embryo death.

THE LIFE OF BIRDS

David Attenborough's latest series *The Life of Birds* is currently in production. Over the next two years the BBC Natural History Unit team will be aiming to film the most extraordinary bird behaviour throughout the world to build a series which provides a comprehensive view of avian life. Over this period we hope to be in touch with as many scientists and ornithologists as possible to track down the most exciting stories, dramatic locations and the latest scientific developments.

If you know of any stunning locations for filming birds or would like to tell us about extraordinary bird behaviour you are studying or have seen please contact:

Adam White, "The Life of Birds", BBC Natural History Unit, Broadcasting House, Whiteladies Road, Bristol, BS8 2LR, UK.

Tel: +44-117 973 2211

Fax: +44-117 946 7384

e-mail: Adam.White@bbc.co.uk

BIRDLOG

Details have been received of BIRDLOG, a bird-record management system for personal computers; a summary follows. It comprises of a suite of programs running in DOS under Microsoft Qbasic and is designed for easy adaptation to other

operating systems and environments. Birdlog has been developed to encourage the routine gathering, and sharing, of data on all species of birds, common and rare. It is free to users and may be freely copied and distributed.

Birdlog may be fully customized and is suitable for ringing stations, observatories and reserves as well as for individual bird-watchers. It allows sophisticated extraction and analysis of data. Birdlog is being continuously enlarged and improved and will be upgraded each year on 1 January.

For further details send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Mr. J.R. Barnes, The Holt, Newton Valence, near Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3RB, United Kingdom.

E-MAIL YOUR NOTES & NEWS

Material for *Notes & News* can be forwarded through the post to Robin M. Ward, Dept. of Biological Sciences, University of Durham, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, U.K., or by e-mail at the address R.M.Ward@durham.ac.uk .

BUS BAR RUMOURS?

On the last night of the International Waterfowl Ecology Symposium and WSG Conference in Portugal, alcohol in the *Bus Bar* was flowing as fast as news of satellite tags suitable for waders - get real! Surprisingly it wasn't the "beer talking" so subsequent enquires reveal.

The story would appear to run like this: Satellite Imaging Systems (SIS), a private company, has developed a 5.8 g satellite tag. They have hired a Satellite Ground Station (built by the defunct South African satellite programme, and now in mothballs) from 1 March 1996 and bandwidths on Russian satellites.

The costs are US\$ 25,000 for 10 tags for the first year and US\$ 10,000 for the second and third years, the expected life of the batteries in the tags. The tags are very cheap, the costs are in the rental of ground stations and satellite bandwidths; it is understood that if your bird dies after six months, you can put another tag

on a new bird at a relatively small expense.

The key contact person is Mr Ray Smith, PO Box 756, Stellenbosch, 7599, South Africa. Phone +27 24 516 403, Fax +27 21 852 291.

Thank you!

Many thanks to all those who have helped recently with all stages of recent *Bulletin* publication:

EDITORIAL

Nick Davidson, Julianne Evans, Jon Fjeldså, Barbara Ganter (mega-thanks!), Phil Holland, Henk Koffijberg, Lys Muirhead, Callum Rankine, Peter Reay, Rui Rufino, Robin Ward, Sylvia Way, and Derek Yalden.

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Reg Davies and Rodney West.

We thank Wetlands International for generous financial assistance which has enabled us to print all of the talk and poster abstracts resulting from the 1995 WSG/IWRB Feeding Ecology Symposium in Aveiro.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Jim Bishop, Nick Davidson, Jens Gregersen, Arnold Gronert and Achim Strache.

And apologies, as ever, to anyone inadvertently omitted!

RAMSAR VACANCY

Technical Officer for Asia

The principle duties for the holder of this post will be to act as regional coordinator at the Ramsar Bureau in Gland for the Ramsar Asian Region (which includes the Middle East and the central Asian countries of the CIS).

Candidates from the Ramsar Asian region, and women in particular are encouraged to apply for this post.

A complete *curriculum vitae* and names and addresses of at least three referees should reach IUCN by 30 April.

Further details of post duties and requirements can be obtained from:

Ms Christine Buhler, Head of Personnel, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel. + 41 22 999 0001 Fax. + 41 22 999 0169

Stelzenläufer

