

# IWRB BECOMES WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL



During the International Conference on Wetlands and Development in Malaysia in October 1995, a new global alliance for wetland conservation was created. The new organisation is called *Wetlands International* (WI), and is created by the integration of three existing international waterbird and wetland organisations: the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB, with operational headquarters in the UK), the Asian Wetland Bureau (AWB, with operational headquarters in Malaysia) and Wetlands for the Americas (WA, with operational headquarters in North America and Argentina).

This integration has been planned for several years, in recognition of the need for new initiatives and stronger partnerships to address the continuing loss and degradation of wetlands, worldwide. The final decisions to integrate occurred during joint governing body meetings, attended by more than 200 representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as technical experts and observers.

Wetlands International has non-profit/charitable status and is governed by a global Board, comprising representatives of member countries, international organisations and wetland and waterbird specialists.

The regional operations for Asia/Pacific, Africa/Europe/Middle East, and the Americas are governed by separate regional councils. Overall coordination is provided by a small International Coordination Unit, initially co-located with the headquarters for the Africa/Europe/Middle East region.

The catalytic work programme of Wetlands International will build on the combined activities of the founding organisations, which have

14 regional or project offices on five continents and ongoing activities with local partners in more than 100 countries. The programme benefits from the input of National Delegates, Specialist Groups, partner agencies and a network of a great number of experts. Long-standing partnerships with secretariats of international conventions (notably Ramsar and Bonn) and other international organisations (particularly BirdLife International, IUCN and WWF) will be strengthened.

Wetlands International was launched on 1 January 1996 and is now fully operational.

## IWRB RESEARCH GROUPS BECOME WI SPECIALIST GROUPS

The network of Research Groups has always been, and still is, an important and integral component of IWRB. This network is now even more critical in the future to Wetlands International and its regional affiliates. Their network of experts is essential to provide the organisation with the data, technical information and scientific understanding, necessary for the conservation of wetlands and their waterbirds. This global network of scientists around the world provides a primary means by which Wetlands International's programme will be accomplished.

During the XXXVI IWRB Executive Board Meeting in Malaysia, a number of important decisions were taken specifically in relation to the Research Groups. Of most significance were the adoption of a Strategic Plan and the renaming of the groups.

The Board adopted a Strategic Plan for Specialist Group development. The Plan, for the first time, specifies the relationship of the Groups to the

triennial planning process of Wetlands International and institutionalises the co-ordination of the network of Groups within the International Coordination Unit of Wetlands International. The Board stressed the importance of locating funding to provide a full-time professional position for central support and coordination of the network of Groups. The Specialist Groups will also serve and be supported by the regional headquarters, and over the next triennium will be developing strategies to interact with the regional offices. To encourage this mutual interaction, Specialist Group Co-ordinator representatives have been invited to serve on the Regional Councils, as well as on the Executive Committee of Wetlands International.

The most visible decision taken at the recent Board Meeting was to rename the existing "Research Groups" as "*Specialist Groups*". This decision was taken so as to provide conformity with the terminology used by IUCN for their extensive network of groups with similar functions as the IWRB Research Groups. This change in terminology does not, however, entail any change in the functions of the Groups.

## WI'S LINK WITH IUCN AND THE SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

For the purposes of links with IUCN, IWRB's waterbird Research Groups were grouped under the umbrella of one single "IUCN/SSC Waterbird Specialist Group". So as to avoid duplication in reporting *etc.* for the coordinators/chairs of the groups for the various organisations IWRB was responsible for its overall coordination. This mechanism has proved very effective and a close

cooperation between IWRB and IUCN/SSC developed.

Since, however, the Research Groups have now been renamed as Specialist Groups, it would be rather too confusing to then group these in another combined Specialist Group. Therefore, IUCN/SSC and Wetlands International have agreed to replace the name "Waterbird Specialist Group" by "Waterbird Network". This makes everything much clearer, as all groups are now called Specialist Groups, and the waterbird Specialist Groups are grouped under the umbrella of the "Waterbird Network", co-ordinated by Wetlands International, in collaboration with IUCN/SSC and BirdLife International.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIALIST GROUPS

The goal of the Specialist Groups is:

*"To provide international networks of leading technical experts who can assist the accomplishment of Wetlands International's mission by providing strategic guidance through the Board, by providing technical assistance to the organisation and by extending the scope of its programme".*

The objectives of the network of Specialist Groups are to:

- Maintain an international network of experts on thematic or taxonomic bases.

- Provide technical expert input to the working of Wetlands International through the Board.
- Guide the evolution of Wetlands International's programme through input to the Triennial Plan.
- Provide expert input to Wetlands International's programme by collaborating with technical staff and by participating in joint activities.
- Respond to changes in Wetlands International's priorities through regular review and revision of group objectives and activities.
- Extend the scope of Wetlands International's programme by undertaking new activities according to individual groups' priorities.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WADER STUDY GROUP

In practical terms the changes will have little effect on the link between WSG and WI other than WSG will now be acting as "the Wader Specialist Group of Wetlands International". This link will be maintained with WI's International Co-ordination Unit through the WSG/WI Liaison Officer rôle. Indeed it became clear during the Board Meetings and conference in Malaysia that the form

of the WSG/WI link provides an excellent model for the future development of other Specialist Groups.

One area of future development, however, will be in line with moves already being made by WSG and that is the strengthening of links with wader (shorebird) groups in the Western Hemisphere and the Asia/Pacific region. This will be needed to provide a regional structure to ensure effective input of specialist wader advice to the regional WI partners as well as to the International Co-ordination Unit. Initial discussions during the Malaysia conference with Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and AWSG representatives made valuable progress on how this network might develop; there will opportunity for further discussions during the Shorebird Conference and meeting of the Ramsar Convention Contracting Parties in Brisbane, Australia in March 1996.

If you want to know more about the developments of Wetlands International and its Specialist Groups, contact Janine van Vessem at WI-Africa, Europe, Middle East, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire GL2 7BX, UK.

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## NEWS FROM THE IWRB WOODCOCK AND SNIPE RESEARCH GROUP (CONT.)

In order to improve the estimates, several hundred Woodcock are ringed annually by a team of the French Office National de la Chasse, not only in France, but also in the main Russian breeding areas as well as wintering areas. As is usual for gamebirds, recovery rates are relatively high.

Due to the peculiarities of these species, contacts with ONC as well as the other wildlife research institutes are essential for making research progress. Therefore members and correspondent of the WSRG ( a total of 125) are informed annually by the WSRG Newsletter of active projects and preliminary results.

In order to fill a gap in the knowledge of the main breeding range of all four species, namely to countries of the former USSR, scientific publications in Russian will be translated progressively during the next few years and some of them published in the newsletter. This project is primarily financed by the Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC).

There are only loose links so far with colleagues working on the closely related America Woodcock *Scolopax minor*. Since Wetlands International is now a global organisation, it is now intended to seek closer co-operation.

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