

The colour-marking of waders in the CIS

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Tomkovitch, P. 1996. The colour-marking of waders in the CIS. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 80: 23-24.

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Colour-marking implies the use of special marks of various designs, and/or of dyes, to enable the individual or group recognition of birds for the purpose of migration or ecological studies (e.g. Vinokurov & Kistchinski 1976; Summers in prep.). Colour-marking was undertaken in the former USSR from at least the last years of the 1950s when anodised metal rings were distributed by the Moscow Ringing Center. Use of paint to distinguish mates in pairs of Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* in the White Sea area in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Bianki 1967) is the earliest example of colour-marking found in the Soviet literature.

The larger scale dyeing of migratory Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, and Purple Sandpipers *C. maritima* in the USSR goes back to 1963 on Ainovy Islets near the Murmansk Coast (I.P. Tatarinkova in litt.). Later, between the 1960s-1980s, various colour-marks were in use by Soviet ornithologists, mainly in ecological and behavioural studies of waders. These included neckties (Vinokurov & Kistchinski 1976), neck collars (Kondratyev 1982), nasal disks for phalaropes and painting of metal rings (V.K. Ryabitshev pers. comm.), wing tags (G.N. Molodan pers. comm.) and mostly both colour rings and leg flags on legs (Vinokurov & Gavrillov 1989, 1990, 1992).

The extensive use of colour-marks on waders both in the USSR and world-wide in the 1980s, together with the limited number of dyes and possible ring (flag) combinations brought recognition of the necessity to co-ordinate of colour-marking projects at least at the national level (Vinokurov & Gavrillov 1988, 1992). For Soviet citizens it was difficult during that time to join the co-ordinated Colour Mark Register of the international Wader Study Group (WSG) for a number of reasons (politics, traditions, language etc.). An attempt to keep an eye on colour-marking projects running in the USSR and co-ordinate them when possible was undertaken by the Working Group on Waders (WGW) (Vinokurov & Gavrillov 1988). However, the initiative failed after it was found that, in the absence of a source of good plastic for colour rings, researchers were using a wide variety of materials that were easy to obtain (windings of electric wire, films, celluloid from toys etc.). Real co-ordination is hardly possible without the easy accessibility of good plastic of different colours, or without the centralised distribution of such plastic (Vinokurov & Gavrillov 1992).

Political changes since the early 1990s have resulted in new connections between West and East, including more contacts among wader researchers from the former USSR

and the WSG. At the same time the economic situation in the former USSR (currently the CIS), has got worse, and this is reflected in a general decline in research activity, in particular the totals of waders ringed (Anonymous 1995).

The Executive Committee of the WGW have repeatedly stressed to wader researchers the necessity to internationally register their colour-marking projects. However, the current extent of colour-marking activity in the CIS is not well known. To clarify the situation, a questionnaire was distributed in 1995 among 11 known researchers who have used colour-marks on waders in Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine.

Eight replies were received, with no further information concerning other known colour-markers. One of the respondents stopped marking in 1993, the remaining seven had colour-marked waders in 1995 in the Ukraine (one site) and in Russia (six sites scattered from Kolguyev Island, the Barentz Sea, to the Anadyr River, northern Far East). Plastic colour rings or colour flags were the main marks used by all respondents in recent years, in 1995 in particular. Individual dyeing as an additional marking method is applied in the Ukraine. Some waders at two sites were marked in other ways: by two metal rings (Dunlins on Yamal, W. Siberia) and by pieces of soft plastic attached to metal rings (several species at Anadyr).

Only one of ten recent projects was designed to study long-distance migration. Two more projects were aimed at the ecology of migrants, and seven projects investigated either behaviour, ecology and/or biology of breeding waders with the help mainly of individual colour-marks. Between just a few birds to as many as several hundred were marked in each project according to the aims of the studies and the possibility of trapping. The largest numbers (about 4 000) of waders ever colour-marked in the CIS were trapped in Kazakhstan in 1989 and 1990 (Vinokurov & Gavrillov 1990, 1992).

Six of eight respondents expressed satisfaction with the results achieved by colour-marking. At least two of these have resulted additionally in interesting and important long-distance sight records of colour-marked waders.

It turned out that only two current projects were not registered before the start of the 1995 season: not a bad achievement for recent years. However, it should be mentioned that at least three respondents applied to the WSG Register or were refused from colour-marking after

it was discovered that their proposed project overlapped with that of someone else.

Five of the respondents use PVC (Darvic) currently, which was obtained with the help of different personal contacts from foreign colleagues. This means that although the situation with regard to colour-marking in the CIS has improved recently, and there is not the former necessity for national co-ordination of colour-marking, existing researchers lack an easily accessible source of plastic for their studies. Thus centralised distribution of Darvic would be helpful. The small current extent of colour-marking in the CIS makes such distribution neither difficult nor costly. The WGW has applied for funds for the purchase of plastic and hopes to help wader researchers in the CIS to broaden wader studies with the use of colour-marking and at the same time to reduce the number of unknown and unregistered projects.

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News from Wetlands International

Redeveloping the Wetlands International wader database

SOME BACKGROUND

Since 1988 the Institute of Forestry and Nature Research (IBN-DLO) in The Netherlands has been managing the wader database on behalf of Wetlands International (formerly known as IWRB). This is one of the decentralized databases managed for Wetlands International as part of the International Waterfowl Census (IWC). Other such databases are the duck database, located at the headquarters of Wetlands International - Africa, Europe, Middle East (WI-AEME) and the goose and seaduck databases located at the National Environmental Research Institute (NERI) in Kalø, Denmark.

Recently Cor Smit has stepped down after seven years' efforts as wader database co-ordinator. Database management is now co-ordinated by Bart Ebbinge and Barbara Ganter at IBN-DLO.

As part of the change-over of responsibilities we have been assessing current database function and management. This note provides a brief update on progress and future plans for the database and its use for the production of international population estimates for wader species. It explains our need to compile new population estimates for as many wader species and populations as possible to help meet

Wetlands International's global commitments.

As one of our first steps in developing enhanced co-ordination of the wader database we are organising a workshop for all involved. This will be held as part 1996 Wader Study Group Annual Conference, in Belgium on 9-11 November 1996. The workshop, on Monday 11 November, will be in two parts: a morning session on updating population estimates, open to all attending the WSG conference, and an afternoon working group meeting for wader count co-ordinators and others directly involved in the database management.

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