

Four nice days under the pine trees...

After eleven hours of car-drive I arrived at de Hoge Rielen, Belgium - tired but filled with excitement. The car was parked, and a ten minutes walk under the tall pine trees was needed in order to enter the bungalow, a walk accompanied by the calls from woodpeckers - "Welcome to the Wader Study Group Conference!"

It was my first WSG meeting and I had been looking forward to meet other colleagues sharing the same passion: the lovely waders. During the first evening I meet birders from UK, Alaska, Holland, Italy, Ukraine, Germany, and from my own country Denmark. At home wader people are a minority, but here everybody was discussing waders, and during the first night many species of shorebirds came to visit my dreams.

On Friday morning the EXCO members held their meeting, and I was walking the whole afternoon in the woodland area. Of course no waders were around, but the pine forest was inhabited by Black, Green, and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, six species of tits, some squirrels, and by all the small rabbits jumping around. When I returned to the canteen for dinner, many new participants had checked in and the air was filled with cries of reunion and expectations. Afterwards we all walked to the Theatre where Patrick Meire informed us about the Scheldt estuary, the

destination for the Sunday excursion. I don't remember whether the bar was open the first evening, anyway, the Belgian beer was certainly tasteful.

Saturday morning we all meet at the canteen for breakfast before we were welcomed in the Theatre at 9.00. The Annual General Meeting lasted an hour and was run in a good spirit where all the different reports was accepted. In the next nine hours many interesting talks were proposed only interrupted by questions, coffee breaks, and lunch. In the breaks people were either discussing waders, enjoying the coffee and fresh air between the pines, or studying the great variety of posters presented at the conference. We were shown very excellent wader pictures from the new volume of the *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, and heard a talk about genetic markers in populations of Dunlins which resulted in, I think, the highest number of questions during the whole conference. After dinner we had a social evening in the bar where many discussions were continued and new contacts between colleagues established. However, we all knew the program for the following day, so the intake rate of Belgian beer was kept at a minimum. At the end of the day, some people heard a Barn Owl calling near bungalow number eleven!

The Sunday talks were concentrated on three species of waders; Oystercatcher, Avocet, and after the excursion on Slender-billed Curlew. Many smiles were exposed among the participants when the topic "bed loyalty index" showed up in a talk, but it was not bed loyalty after the social evening of last night Humphrey Sitters was talking about, but the loyalty of a

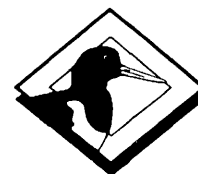
wintering population of Oystercatchers to different mussel beds!

Now we all went on a three hours boat trip on the Scheldt estuary, armed with binoculars and lunch packets. I must admit, that it was a very pleasant way of watching birds sitting in the bar with a cup of hot chocolate. Lapwing was the only species of shorebirds on the trip. The other highlight was a Peregrine Falcon hunting high in the sky. After dinner the three best posters were nominated, and next, two talks about the conservation of Slender-billed Curlews were on the program. These ended up in an interesting discussion between the Belgium and Russian participants, more a talk about politics than waders. I think! Again the beer and the Barn Owl were a part of the social evening but new topics for discussions had of course turned up.

Monday was the last day of the conference, and a workshop on wader population estimates was on the program. On the basis of mid winter counts, totals of the West European wintering populations of waders were estimated and the highscore was the 1 315 000 Dunlins.

Suddenly, the conference was over and we all dispersed to our respective corners of the world. Thank you for four nice days under the pine trees - hope to see you all next year in Denmark!

Mark Desholm, Denmark



An Alaskan View of the 1996 Wader Study Group Conference

My husband, Bob Gill, and I have been members of the Wader Study Group for many years but we had never managed to venture to the other side of the world to attend the Group's annual conference. This winter we found it impossible not to attend, due to the irresistible combination of

unimaginably low airfares, an alluring program devoted strictly to waders, and the offer of good friends to watch our two young children while we were away. So, we stepped on a plane from Anchorage, Alaska, and, after many uncounted hours spent crossing eleven time zones, we arrived in

Belgium. Attending the meeting was well worth the tortuous diurnal adjustment we forced our bodies to endure.

The conference was in a rustic, woodland setting at the Hoge Rielen, a 230 ha park on the outskirts of the