

Obituary

George Underhill

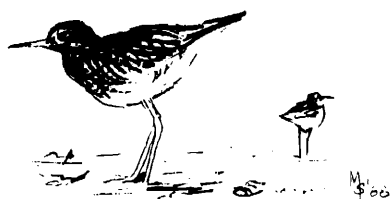
George Underhill, one of the earliest members of the Wader Study Group from outside the United Kingdom, died on 21 January 1997, aged 78. He was an integral part of the Western Cape Wader Study Group from its inception in 1971, and participated in all the activities of the group.

Unlike most of us, whose lives become progressively less productive, George's life was a crescendo. He took on a new lease of life in the early 1970s after an operation for an ulcer that had plagued him for a couple of decades; after his wife died in 1987 his interest in birdringing became a passion. He spent his last active day, 30 December, ringing (mainly Cape Sugarbirds) and checking the 20 active nests he had found of Whitefronted Plovers and African Black Oystercatchers; it was while walking between nests that he fell and fractured vertebrae in his neck.

He was a reluctant traveller - although war service had taken him to North Africa, Madagascar and Europe, he believed that there was so much to see and do in the Western Cape Province of South Africa that there was no need whatsoever to travel beyond it!

We will miss his dry sense of humour, his energetic commitment to the task in hand, and his amazing ability to locate nests.

Les Underhill



NOTES & NEWS & NEWS & NOTES NOTES & NEWS

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&
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AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRD AGREEMENT

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands opened the Agreement for signature on 15 August 1996, having provided the text in all four official languages (English, French, Arabic and Russian). So far the Agreement has been signed by Germany, Guinea, Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW

As of January 1997 15 range states have signed the Memorandum of Understanding outlined in a previous *Bulletin*. The CMS Secretariat is planning to hold a symposium in autumn 1997 of country representatives and experts. Its aim is to co-ordinate monitoring and intensify current protection measures. The European Union, under its LIFE Programme is financing a protection and monitoring project in southern Europe, particularly in Greece.

In 1996 the Russian Conservation Union sent an expedition to the steppes area of southwest Siberia and another was organised to the moor region of the taiga. Although breeding areas have still not been found, good news has been received from Iran, where the Persian Gulf wintering areas of the bird (up to 50 individuals) were discovered.

CMS SECRETARIAT MOVES

As of 9 December 1996:

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RED KNOT TURNS RED IN USA

Sixteen species have recently been listed as being of the greatest conservation concern ('red alert') in North America. Three are waders Mountain Plover *Charadrius montanus*, Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis* and Red Knot *Calidris canutus*. Of these perhaps the most surprising is the Red Knot - identified as vulnerable because the species is dependent of just a few sites.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to our member Prof Dr Yaa Ntiama-Baidu, now head of the Zoology Department at the University of Accra, Ghana, for the honour of receiving the "Medal of the Golden Ark", awarded by HRH Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands for her many achievements in the field of nature conservation in Africa.

The Golden Ark was presented to Yaa on Friday 31 January 1997 during a celebration at the Dutch Embassy in Accra. Yaa can look back on a rewarding year. After becoming Professor and the Head of the Zoology Department in early 1996, she hosted a most successful IX Pan-African Ornithological Congress in December 1996, a conference where many WSG members showed up. Early December also saw the formal opening, by the First Lady of Ghana, of the new Ghana Wildlife Society Headquarters in the centre of Accra. This, again, is a "Yaa initiative" that made it to fruition through her great dedication and persistence.

Additionally, earlier in 1996, she was elected as Chair of the Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical

Review Panel. The STRP has a particularly busy period ahead. The Brisbane Conference in March 1996 charged it with progressing a wide range of work during the three years until the next Conference of Parties in Costa Rica. Under Yaa's guidance we look forward to a series of constructive initiatives that will further assist the cause of global wetland conservation.

MYSTERY RINGER

During January 1996 a Ukranian ringed Dunlin *Calidris alpina* was controlled on an estuary in eastern England. At present we have had no luck in identifying the ringer. Does anyone have any suggestions as to who might be using these rings? From: Rodney West Associates <rodwest@the.net.co.uk>. Reply to: waders-l@uct.as.za

WETLAND DISTURBANCE STUDY AT MAI PO

The fish pond ecosystem surrounding the Mai Po nature reserve and Deep Bay area of the new territories in Hong Kong are being studied. There are huge pressures for development in the area and the study will aim to establish criteria against which to test the sustainability of such developments. Sample areas have been surveyed throughout the year for all birds, but concentrating on egrets and herons. Physical and habitat variables have been measured for over 1 200 fish ponds. Together with environmental data the measurements have been used to construct predictive models of bird use for the different ponds.

The project is the joint work of Ecoscope Applied Ecologists, Wetlands Advisory Service, Aspinalls and Wetlands International and is being funded by the Hong Kong government.

AUSTRALIAN KNOTS

The first evidence of a Great Knot using Broome as a stopover *en route* to Victoria was found in September 1996 when its orange leg flag was

spotted. Previously only three species of Victorian birds had been seen at Broome: Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruddy Turnstone. Banding activities in New Zealand have so far revealed that Red Knot move one way; those caught in Australia as first years have been seen in New Zealand but none have gone back to Victoria.

NEW-LOOK STILT

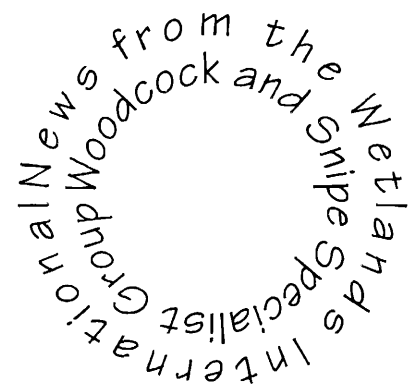
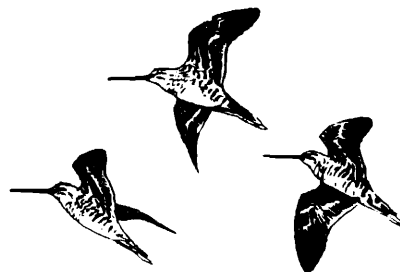
Congratulations to Mike Weston and his editorial team for achieving a considerable enhancement to the appearance of *The Stilt*. With additional funding from the Australian Nature Conservation Agency and Wetlands International, the October 1996 issue was a delight to read.

As noted in its editorial, *The Stilt* is now well on the way to becoming the Bulletin of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, an aspiration that the International Wader Study Group hopes soon will come to full fruition.

This feature largely relies upon YOU the members feeding the Compilers with your notes and news. Please send any noteworthy news, requests or relevant Press Releases from your organisation to:

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In 1996, progress has been made especially in monitoring Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* populations by both ringing and direct observations by a team from the French Office National de la Chasse (ONC) with the following results.

At 404 sites in 61 French departments, a network of 240 ringers organised by the ONC caught and ringed a total of 2 713 Woodcock using nets and spotlights. During 1368 nocturnal outings, a total of 10 225 Woodcock were contacted. This is the most successful ringing period to date.

As previously, most Woodcock were caught in November. The overall age-ratio was 64% juveniles and 36% adults. Towards the Atlantic coast, this ratio was skewed in favour of juveniles. These results are in line with age-ratios derived from wing samples taken from shot birds (67% juveniles assessed from 6 921 wings).

During this period, a total of 502 ringed Woodcock was reported by hunters, being 289 direct recoveries (ringed this season) and 213 indirect recoveries (ringed in previous seasons). The (direct) recovery rate was 10.7%, thus being similar to that of previous years. On average, birds were shot 28 days after ringing at an average of 20 km from the ringing site.

Recently, 26 more recoveries of birds ringed in France have been reported from abroad. Of these, four were shot during autumn and winter in the UK (2), Spain (1) and Turkey (1). A further 19 were shot whilst roding in March to May in Russia (12), Poland (2), Hungary (2), Estonia (1),