

By car

From northern and eastern Europe, follow the motorway to Paris, then on to Rennes and Vannes.

Coming from U.K., you can either sail directly to Île Berder or, if you prefer, land at Saint Malo and travel to Rennes and Vannes by car or train.

For more detailed information on any aspect of the conference, please write or phone Guillaume Gélinaud at the following address: SEPNEB - Réserve Naturelle des Marais de Séné, Brouel-Kerbihan, 56860 Séné, France; Tel: (0033) 297 66 92 76; Fax: (0033) 297 66 02 93; E-mail: sepnb.sene@wanadoo.fr

**WSG CONFERENCE
WORKSHOP 1999**

Understanding population dynamics of Avocets

Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta breeding populations in several west European countries have increased considerably during the past decades. Both the speed and the timing of the population development, however, have differed between regions. Studies of population dynamics of Avocets have so far taken place mainly at a regional level, so the relationship between the dynamics in different parts of the species' range cannot be fully explained. Very obviously, a better understanding of Avocet population dynamics can only be achieved by improving international co-operation. This is the aim of the workshop. More specifically it is intended :

- to compile actual breeding population sizes ;
- to bring together available information on the population development in different regions ;
- to discuss possible reasons for the observed patterns, with the aim of identifying gaps in knowledge ;
- to agree on a joint programme and common methods in order to improve the understanding of large scale population dynamics of Avocets.

The workshop will take place on Monday 27 September 1999 from 0900 to approximately 1600. Although the workshop will focus on population dynamics, short contributions on all other aspects of the species' biology will be welcome. Please send your offers of talks or posters to Guillaume Gélinaud.

**WADER STUDY GROUP ANNUAL
CONFERENCE 16-19 OCTOBER
1998, KESZTHELY, HUNGARY**

A Personal Account

I was standing on the balcony on the ninth floor of a nice hotel, staring at the silver lights of autumn reflecting on the largest freshwater lake in Central Europe. I slowly breathed in a huge dose of crystal-clear air as I moved my eyes to the gently rolling hills on the northern side of the lake thinking "Wow, isn't this place beautiful?". Last year, for the second time in just six years, the Annual Conference of the Wader Study Group was hosted by Hungary. Having spent some time away from my home country, I begin to understand why people love to go back: nice landscape, good weather, warm hospitality, great food and fine wine. Each of these components were present at the venue of the conference: Lake Balaton starting off a few metres from our hotel, nice autumn lights on the lake and colours on the neighbouring hillsides, courteous service by hotel and conference staff members, tasty cuisine and fiery yet delicate wines. But, what else is necessary for such an event to be a highly memorable one?

First, we, wader enthusiasts, learned a lot about, yes, about waders. There seems to be an insatiable desire in us to learn more about our favourite birds, and the WSG meetings, gathering both professional scientists and 'amateur' workers, appear to provide the perfect combination for this. Participants were presented with a uniquely productive mix of hard science and natural history observations, practical ornithology and theoretical background, with

conservation and management issues interwoven among the topics. No doubt the participants benefited entirely from the conference; not only did they learn about interesting new observations, population trends and so on, but also gained insight in the core methodology of their science, for example, estimation of population sizes, use of colour ringing, etc.

Second, probably as important as gaining knowledge, was that the Conference also provided a good opportunity to meet friends and get to know people from all across Europe. The fabulous wines served at the wine-tasting "social event", by no surprise, made the interactions even more lively and direct. Not even driving rain - on the very afternoon of the excursion - could diminish the high spirits or break thoughtful discussions.

Third, good organisation. The Hungarian Wetland Foundation and the Waterbird Protection Group of the Hungarian Ornithological Society, coordinated by György Szimuly in cooperation with Petra de Goeij of the Wader Study Group took good care of technical, scientific and social organisation and also helped delegates from Eastern Europe to attend the meeting. The organisers managed to "camouflage" themselves well at the conference venue - a sign that there were no problems arising on the part of the conference attendees; a sign of no need to search for and ask organisers for help.

Fourth, an effective official agenda. A major purpose of the WSG meetings is to initiate and oversee large-scale international projects on conservation and management of waders. Last year's conference will be memorable for setting up a working group for the Slender-billed Curlew Action Plan and for making an attempt to suggest ways to estimate population sizes of breeding and migrant waders.

Of course, everybody has his/her own impressions of the conference and to list



them all would require way too much space. But let me add just one more thing. For us Hungarian participants, it was an exceptionally great honour to see people familiar from the last WSG Conference held in Hungary. By their presence, these people indicated to us that they had had a good experience and nice memories of the last time they attended a Wader Study Group Conference in Hungary. I believe that the sight of Lake Balaton with the morning light gently sweeping through the mist and the many enjoyable and useful moments of the conference itself will leave similarly pleasing impression of the 1998 Wader Study Group Conference in both first-timers as well as long-time traditional participants.

Szabolcs Lengyel, Department of Evolutionary Zoology and Human Biology, Kossuth University, 4032 Debrecen, Egyetem tér 1., Hungary

1998 WSG MEETING: ABSTRACTS OF TALKS AND POSTERS

Current state of the International Breeding Condition Survey on Arctic Birds

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This report summarises progress achieved in the period from September 1997 - May 1998 in realisation of a joint International Wader Study Group/ Wetlands International project aimed at collating in a database information on environmental conditions on the breeding areas of arctic nesting waterfowl. Main efforts during this phase were aimed at completing the pilot stage and preparing to realise the project's full-scale implementation after the 1998 field season. This involved: 1. developing the database structure (data model); 2. starting entry of existing data; and 3. revising the questionnaires on the basis of comments provided on the pilot

sheet. The database currently includes sections with 1. personal respondents' data; 2. study location data (linked to GIS); 3. general breeding conditions information and weather data; 4. data on abundance and breeding performance of individual bird species and animal groups; and 5. bibliographic data. Revision of the questionnaire most affected the sections describing the survey site and fauna in the study area (including breeding performance), which became more detailed. As few of the environmental factors of interest in the Arctic were discovered to be specific to waterfowl and of little value for other groups of terrestrial birds, to avoid unnecessary narrowing of the project scope its title has been changed to "**ARCTIC BIRDS: an international breeding conditions survey**". Future actions on the project will include collecting forms in autumn 1998 with a view to printing a newsletter early in 1999 and publishing a review of bird breeding conditions in the Arctic in 1998.

Present status of breeding populations of Dunlin *Calidris alpina schinzii* in Poland

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This century, the numbers of breeding sites and the breeding population of Dunlin have been decreasing steadily along the Baltic coast. Twenty years ago, about 80-100 pairs nested on six coastal and two inland breeding sites. In 1997, the Polish population of Dunlin consist of 32-34 breeding pairs, which were found on one inland and four coastal localities. Half of them (12 pairs) nested near the mouth of the Reda river (Puck Bay). Ten pairs were recorded at three sites within the delta of Swina river (Szczecin Lagoon). The rest of the breeding sites were occupied by single pairs.

The evolution of parental care in shorebirds: sex differences in mating opportunities

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Models of parental care predict sex differences in the benefits of offspring desertion arising from remating and re-nesting. We investigated this proposition in the Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* which exhibits highly variable patterns of parental care, as either the male or female parent may desert their brood. Female plovers desert their broods more often than males. We investigated whether sex differences in mating opportunities may explain why females desert their broods more frequently than males. This hypothesis was experimentally tested in the field by randomly removing one of the pair from 30 different pairs, and observing the behaviour of the remaining birds. Both males and females appeared to search for new mates. Single males often stayed in their territory, courted females which landed there, and if their courtship was successful then they bred in their previous territory. Single females often moved to new territories to breed. Single males took more time to find a new mate (median=25.4 days) than single females (median=5.3 days, $p < 0.0001$). In both sexes, remating time tended to increase as the breeding season progressed. Hatching success of new nests did not differ between males and females. These results support the hypothesis that the relative benefit of desertion, i.e. remating, may differ for males and females.

Declines in breeding waders on lowland wet grasslands in Cumbria (NW England) 1982-1995

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