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GROVES, S., 2228 Bowness Road NW, Calgary, Alberta T2N 3L3, Canada.
WALTERS, Dr. J.R., Zool. Dept., N. Carolina State University, P.O. Box 5577, Raleigh NC 27650, U.S.A.

Resignations

HEMMINGS, C.M. HILLS, S. MERSEYSIDE RINGING GROUP STEEVES, J.B.

THE TEXEL MEETING - A TOTALLY BIASED AND PERSONAL VIEW

by Dave Townshend

After the frantic last-minute rewriting of scripts and preparation of yet more slides for the 5th Meeting on Ecology and Behaviour of Coastal Birds, it was with considerable relief that the Durham contingent boarded the aeroplane for Amsterdam and left all the panic (and the late April snow) behind. However our minds were not completely at rest for soon we had to negotiate the Dutch transport system and reach Texel with only Cor Smit's splendidly ambiguous instructions to guide us! Thanks to the very un-British phenomenon of co-ordinated timetables for buses, trains and ferries, combined with the remarkable enthusiasm of the Dutch for speaking English, reaching Texel in fact proved easy.

On reaching our living quarters we had our first encounter with the indomitable 'Mr Potvis', the caretaker, caterer, cleaner and overlord of the Potvis accommodation buildings. He subsequently coped splendidly in providing ample sustenance for all the participants at the conference, but it must be said that he did not subscribe to the generally held view that variety is the spice of life. After my 11th breakfast/lunch I for one was beginning to tire somewhat of sandwiches of salami and the type of cake decorations known to us as "100's and 1000's". The fortunate few that sampled the wares of the harbour restaurant will appreciate that real Dutch cuisine was worth searching out.

And so to the conference itself. The facilities of the NIOZ lecture theatre were splendid (although it was surprising that only one wader scientist in the whole of Western Europe was capable of controlling the carousel slide projector!). The advance programme looked enticing and very full. As it transpired, it was also a quite spurious representation of the actual sequence and content of the talks! Despite the absence of time allocated for discussion, yet more talks were squeezed into the timetable. Fortunately most evenings were free, and, as usual, the most valuable interchanges of information and ideas occurred in the common room - ably assisted by the Genever, Beerenberg, and the triple-strength Heineken beer.

There was time during the week for a field excursion, either to gaze in awe at the teeming hordes of breeding waders and spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*, or by boat to the mudflats. The rather eventful boat excursion, during which most of Europe's shorebird researchers were marooned on a windy and barren mudbank (aground in a ship with a draught of only 90cm!), was cunningly organised to demonstrate the importance of a well-stocked liqueur cupboard in times of stress and danger! If all the boat trips onto the Waddensea mudflats follow a similar pattern, I can see why Cees Swennen has acquired his 5-star residential hide, fitted with kitchen, beds, outboard motor and television!

Back in the lecture theatre several marked trends were emerging from the talks. Most striking was the overwhelming desire to correlate all manner of cycles in shorebird behaviour with the population cycles of Lemmings *Dicrostonyx torquatus*. Presumably this correlation arises because of competition for feeding space on intertidal areas during Lemming migrations!

Considerable appreciation was demonstrated of the possible effects of intraspecific interactions upon distribution, both in terms of populations, on the Waddensea, and individuals, within the Exe Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* population. Bruno Ens showed the advantage of aggressive dominance amongst these Oystercatchers, the dominant individuals thereby gaining a higher rate of food intake. Perhaps the additional possibility of interspecific effects should now be investigated with comparable fervour. These effects may take the form of interspecific interactions or avoidance. Also interspecific competition for food stocks may occur in many areas. For example selection of small sizes of a prey species by one predator will reduce the stocks available in subsequent years for other predators taking only larger sizes of the same prey, as demonstrated by Leo Zwarts, his Oystercatchers, and that invaluable 'research assistant' Curlew *Numenius arquata* '20 yellow'.

Also apparent from the talks was an increase in the use of data on shorebird behaviour to test theoretical models. Here clarity of thinking was apparently not of paramount importance, and I was a little perturbed by the inferences that, when the facts didn't fit the model, it was the bird, rather than Dr. Fretwell, who was wrong!

We were brought down to earth by Cees Swennen's intriguing research into roost composition of Oystercatchers. He began with some apparently inconsequential data on mortality in frosts and ended with a strong warning to all that, although small groups of birds may be easier to catch and watch, they may well contain mainly low quality individuals, atypical of the population as a whole. I expect more than a few of the audience paused for thought after this cautionary tale.

Not everyone attending the conference came to present the latest results of established studies. (Indeed some found difficulty finding time to listen to the talks.) The meeting also gave an opportunity for workers involved in new projects to search out advice and assistance, and in present preliminary reports. We were introduced to major new studies on the Dutch Delta and the Danish Vadehavet, and to preliminary results of the latest expedition to the wader haunts of West Africa. Also the Pienkowski's demonstrated that they have now started to analyse the masses of data on ringing and movements sent to them from all corners of Europe, so the fruits of this monumental European co-operation are beginning to ripen.

A book containing reviews of the subjects discussed at the conference is now in preparation. Let's hope that all the contributors will waste no time in putting pen to paper so that the delay between our meeting and the publication is minimised, and the value of the book thereby maximised.

Meanwhile we must all press on with our research, under Rudi Drent's benevolent direction, in time to present further ideas and achievements, even wild speculations, at Cardiff in 2 years' time.

D.J. Townshend, Dept. of Zoology, University of Durham, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, UK.