

non-Polish participants will need visas for travelling to Gdansk. Visas will be issued only if your passport is valid for at least 9 months after the date of your visa application. If your passport will have less than this period of validity, renew it now, before making your visa application. Once a booking form has been received, the conference participant will receive official information about the conference from Gdansk Ornithological Station. You must have this information to obtain the visa from the Polish consulate in your country. Full details will be sent to all participants in due course. As the processing of a visa application may take up to two months, please send your booking form to us as soon as possible. The absolute latest date for receipt of booking forms is 1 May 1987.

TRAVEL TO GDANSK

Gdansk can be reached by plane, boat, train, car and bicycle. There is a direct plane from Hamburg (FRG) twice a week and there are direct ferries from Helsinki (Finland), Nynashamn (Sweden) and, until the end of September, from Travemunde (FRG). From Ystad (Sweden) and from Copenhagen (Denmark) there are ferries to Swinoujscie (western Poland), which is linked with Gdansk by bus (a whole days trip) or by train. Gdynia (close to Gdansk) is served by a night train from East Berlin (GDR) and there are direct trains to Warsaw from various places in Europe, including Paris and Ostende. Travellers from Warsaw may reach Gdansk by plane or train.

To keep travelling costs to a minimum we are investigating hire of a bus (or mini-buses) which would leave the Hook of Holland on the evening of Thursday 24 September 1987, pick up more conference participants whilst driving through Germany, and arrive in Gdansk on Friday afternoon. The return journey is planned to start on Monday evening (after the excursion), arriving back in Holland on the evening of

THE 1986 WSG ANNUAL MEETING - A PERSONAL VIEW

Jeff Kirby

At last, a burning ambition was fulfilled when I was able to attend the 1986 Wader Study Group conference, and what's more it turned out to be a great success, packed with interesting talks and discussions but with ample opportunity to chat, exchange ideas, renew old friendships and make new. The venue, Oatridge Agricultural College near Edinburgh in south-east Scotland, provided warm, comfortable accommodation and ample quantities of traditional food.

Saturday began with the AGM which threatened to pass without dissent until Peter Evans, referring to the recent content of the *Bulletin*, asked the Editor "Will it soon be published by Blackwells?!" Following the AGM and coffee, the workshop proper began. An immediate problem was posed by the strong sunlight, pouring in through a skylight with no curtain, and making even the brightest slide invisible. However, seats were soon turned and the screen positioned away from the light - "a major turn-round in conservation programmes!", commented Pete Myers. This minor hitch resolved, the first series of talks got underway: an introduction to the wader flyways of the world. It was interesting to hear what was known about each and which questions had yet to be addressed. Some major gaps in our knowledge of flyways were identified emphasising how much there was yet to do! After

Tuesday 29 September. Please note on your booking form if you are interested in using this bus (costs will probably be between £60 and £75 for the return journey, depending on the number of people signing up for "WSG-Tours").

Please indicate on your booking form how you intend to travel to Gdansk. Further travel details will be available in the April *Bulletin*, and will be sent directly to those who have sent in their booking forms.

EXCURSION

Gdansk is situated on the Baltic Sea coast at Gdansk Bay. The main concentrations of waders in this part of the Baltic coast are found here during autumn migration. At the mouths of the Vistula and Reda rivers, waders have been ringed for many years, and a wader-ringing camp in this area will be visited. We also plan to visit an interesting peat-bog c. 80 km NW of Gdansk. Please book for the excursion on the booking form.

For any other questions or information about the meeting, please contact Hermann Hotker, Biologische Station, Coermuhle 181, 4400 Munster, Federal Republic of Germany or Jadwiga Gromadzka, Ornithological Station, 80-680 Gdansk, Poland.

We very much hope that despite the long travelling distance for people from France, Great Britain and even more western countries, nobody will be put off taking part in this conference. This meeting will be a quite unique opportunity to establish a closer and firmer contact between wader enthusiasts in eastern and western countries and, therefore, contribute to the internationality of wader research - an internationality that is essential for the subject and that is enjoyed by everyone working in this field. It would be great to see many WSG members in Gdansk.

lunch, the theme switched to the various threats to breeding and wintering wader populations and the conventions and national safeguards developed to attempt to protect these areas. Cor Smit certainly gave us something to worry about with his forecast of a 40-140 cm rise in sea-level before the year 2050. Patrick Dugan (IUCN) gave the final talk of the day on the 'socio-economic' aspects of conservation. His suggestion that available funds should be concentrated on education and the integration of conservation with traditional resource management, rather than on research, certainly raised a few eyebrows. The Workshop covered a lot of ground and generated plenty of discussion, lasting through dinner and well into the night. It's funny how the best ideas seem to come after a glass of beer, or two!

With the Workshop over, Sunday was allocated to more general talks on waders. Nigel Clark started with an interesting find concerning moult in the Golden Plover, Hector Galbraith talked about his study of breeding Lapwings in Central Scotland, and Nick Davidson and Peter Prokosch gave the latest information on the Spring Passage Project. No, I have not forgotten Robert Rae's description of the life of roof-nesting Oystercatchers in Aberdeen - how much longer will he get away with using

this as an excuse for doing his 'Superman' impressions upon city roof-tops! To finish, due to popular demand, Mike Moser re-opened discussions of the role of the WSG in conservation: research versus education and socio-economic roles. Rest assured, there is still plenty of research to be done, and WSG aims to continue its role of stimulating and coordinating international wader research efforts.

Overall, it was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend.

It was particularly valuable to talk to wader workers worldwide, although I was slightly disappointed by the relatively low numbers of British participants. Perhaps the conference was advertised too late or maybe the workshop idea put some people off. However, it was well worth attending and a credit to the organisers - well done, and see you in Poland!!

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ABSTRACTS OF TALKS AND POSTERS AT THE WSG ANNUAL CONFERENCE, OATRIDGE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, SCOTLAND, 14 SEPTEMBER 1986

As announced elsewhere in this *Bulletin*, the talks and discussions given during the Workshop on the Conservation of International Flyway Populations of Waders are being published early in 1987 jointly by the Wader Study Group and the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) as a Supplement to *WSG Bulletin* 49 and *IWRB Special Publication* No. 7. These papers and their abstracts are currently in preparation and will be published later.

Salinas and their use by waders in the Algarve, southern Portugal

Les Batty, Universidade do Algarve, Centro de Ensino, Bom Joao, 8000 Faro, Portugal.

In March, April and May 1986 a group of undergraduate students from the University of the Algarve undertook preliminary studies of the biotic, chemical and physical characteristics of salinas/salt-pans in relation to their use by passage, wintering and breeding waders.

Regular counts of birds were made, the nests of breeding species were recorded, and information was collected on the depth, salinity, pH, temperature and concentration of the water, the presence of algae and saltmarsh vegetation, and potential prey species.

Three breeding and twelve non-breeding species of wader were recorded, and peak counts for three of the latter occurred as follows: Redshank *Tringa totanus* in March, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* in late March/early April, and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* during the middle of April. Some species, e.g. Dunlin, showed a marked tendency to use the salinas only at high tide, but others, e.g. Kentish Plover *Calidris alexandrinus*, were present throughout the tidal cycle.

Dunlin on the salinas appeared to feed mostly on the gastropod mollusc *Hydrobia*, the Kentish Plover also took sand-hoppers and insects, and the main food item of the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* was the abundant brine-shrimp *Artemia salina*.

The characteristics shared by those salinas having the greatest numbers and species diversity seemed to be:

- Overall depth of less than 15 cm, or an extensive shallow shoreline provided by low banks subdividing the salina,
- Salinity of less than 35‰, i.e. less than that of sea-water, and
- Oxygen level of over 15 ppm.

These conditions were mostly to be found in the type of salina known as a "tejo" - the first stage in the evaporation process.

Oystercatchers breeding in Aberdeen

Robert Rae, Graham Rebecca and Brian Stewart,
13 Red Inch Circle, Newburgh, Aberdeen, U.K.

Since 1966 Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* have been known to breed within Aberdeen city where they have utilised the flat, pebble-covered roofs of modern buildings, but here as elsewhere this behaviour was dismissed as no more than an unusual breeding site.

After a preliminary survey in 1985 we decided to attempt a survey in 1986 to establish the extent of breeding within Aberdeen City. Breeding was found to be widespread throughout the city and was not confined to flat roofs of office blocks. Breeding was also proved on the roofs of houses, schools and hotels, in fact any flat roof covered in small stones appears to be suitable. Here the birds built a 'flamingo-style' mound into which they excavated a 'nest scrape'. Nests were also found on areas of undeveloped ground in what could only be described as 'unconventional' sites.

All these sites showed a close association with areas of mown grass lawns. On these areas of grassland Oystercatchers appear to feed mainly on earthworms where with their long bills they are apparently exploiting a previously little exploited food resource.

A total of 109 pairs were located, of which 97 laid eggs: 74 on roofs and 23 pairs on the ground. Chicks on roofs were fed mainly on earthworms carried up to the roof by both parents, while chicks on the ground appeared to feed themselves. Fledging success was difficult to assess due to the habitat, but from the behaviour of the adults it seemed that most pairs reared at least one chick.

This habit of breeding on roofs is now firmly established within Aberdeen and is showing signs of spreading to other areas, i.e. elsewhere in Scotland, Edinburgh, Inverness, Elgin, Lossiemouth, Stonehaven and Inverurie have all either had nesting proved or strongly suspected. In Tromso, North Norway, in 1985 we saw a bird on a roof giving high alarm and chasing Herring Gulls. It is clear that this habit is here to stay and is no longer to be thought of as a novelty. It remains only to wait and see if this habit will spread into other cities to the extent it has in Aberdeen.