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Compiled by Nick Davidson
& David Stroud

Dejas vu ?

It is unusual to get two chances to correct a mistake. The following extract brought to our attention has a remarkably contemporary feel. The final two decades of the nineteenth century were a period of major agricultural depression in Britain. Because of falling prices, the area under wheat in England declined by over a million acres between 1877 and 1887. Consequently reversion of agricultural habitats to more natural states wrought substantial changes in the English countryside.

Today, agricultural over-production, encouraged by EEC policies, have led to proposals for 'agricultural extensification' and a 'set-aside' policy to encourage land to be yet again taken out of production. It is hoped that these changes will serve to redress the conservation losses caused by agricultural intensification and mindless drainage. Few today could sum up the present situation as well as William Spencer Everitt did in his 1897 book: *Practical Notes on Grasses and Grass Growing in East Anglia*.

"It is so pleasant to the tread, so pleasing to the eye, to walk over a swamp on a fine June morning, that any attempt to convert it to a plain, even pasture marsh, would seem vandalism to the mere lover of simple nature. By so doing, the ever rustling sedges and rushes would be taken away, the waving cotton plants would be destroyed, the yellow irises, the golden marsh mallow, and the carpet of mauve bloomed cuckoo plants would all be obliterated from the landscape. These considerations were not taken into account in years gone by, when owners of swamps were able, with the assistance of capital, to carry their ideas into practice, and the "scaping" of snipe had perforce to give place to the lowing of cattle. Now that the wave of agricultural depression is on us, we find many instances where this order of things is reversed, and instead of swamps becoming marshes, many marshes are becoming swamps, because the pockets of their owners have been so bled by the times that they are powerless to help themselves.

"It is an old English quotation that "hope springs eternal in the human breast", and although many of us may not have the necessary funds at our disposal to carry out our ideas at the present moment, that happy day may not be as far distant as we imagine."

Greenland declares 11 Ramsar sites

Following in the footsteps of the largest National Park in the world, the Greenland Home Rule authorities have recently declared the formal notification of 11 sites under the Ramsar Convention. These sites cover a total area of approximately 10 400 km², almost all of which is land. The sites are geographically spread from the high arctic of north Greenland, to east coast lowlands, to south coast seabird islands, to substantial areas of low arctic west Greenland.

Several of the sites cover areas of major importance for breeding or moulting ducks and geese, however among the species listed as breeding within the new sites are Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*, Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*, Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Knot *C. canutus* and Sanderling *C. alba*.

Protected sites include Hochsetter Forland (1 400 km²) and Heden, Jameson Land (1 250 km²) in East Greenland. In West Greenland there are major sites at Naternaq (or Lersletten) south of Disko Bugt (1 500 km²) and a huge area of inland tundra between Sondre Stromfjord and Nordre Stromfjord (5 000 km²). This latter site includes Egalungmiut Nunaat, the breeding waders of which were described in a recent *Bulletin* (49: 11-13).

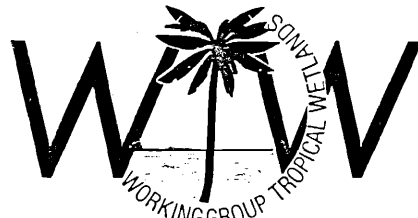
The Greenland Parliament are to be congratulated for acknowledging the international importance of these areas for their breeding populations of migratory birds, and for protecting such substantial areas under the Ramsar Convention. It is to be hoped that further sites will follow.

Sustainable use and management of Tropical Wetlands

A "Working Group on Sustainable Use and Management of Tropical Wetlands" (WTW) has been formed in The Netherlands. WTW was established by a number of environmental scientists belonging to several ministries research institutes and consultancy bureaux in The Netherlands. It has been initiated to provide a platform and focal point for discussion among experts, and to co-ordinate, and where possible combine, their professional activities.

Altogether the group consists of 35 experts of some 22 Dutch institutions in the fields of environmental research and development of tropical wetlands. Among the disciplines represented are: hydrology, geology, geography, botany, zoology and aquatic ecology, thus covering a broad knowledge and wide experience on processes and interactions in wetlands. In addition the group includes expertise in the fields of sociology, economy, livestock-breeding, wildlife management, fisheries, aquaculture and traditional and modern farming.

The aim of the group is to contribute to a more successful and responsible development policy directed at sustainable use, wise management and conservation of tropical wetlands, including the safeguarding of ecological functions and enhancement of economic values of these areas for the local communities. To realise these objectives, WTW undertakes the following activities:



1. stimulation of (interdisciplinary) research applicable to sustainable use and wise development of tropical wetlands. This includes:
 - accumulating knowledge about ecological processes in wetlands and the plant and animal species that they host,
 - studying the activities of human activities in wetlands, and
 - development management options which enable sustainable utilisation of tropical wetlands while maintaining their natural values.
2. collecting, synthesising and publicising environmental information about tropical wetlands.
3. exchange of information between individuals and institutions that are operating in the tropics in the field of land- and water resource development, by means of:
 - direct contacts between experts,
 - joint development of projects,
 - scientific meetings, and
 - joint publications.

The contact address of WTW is:

Centre for Environmental Studies
PO Box 9518
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Quail and Great Snipe extinct in Finland

The recent Finnish Red Data Book (1986) classifies two bird species as extinct in Finland - the Quail *Coturnix coturnix* and the Great Snipe *Gallinago media*. Although excessive hunting pressure is probably to blame in the case of the Quail, the Great Snipe was probably lost because its traditional breeding meadows were turned into fields. In the main breeding area, the area of meadows was reduced to third between 1880 and 1910.

From *Suomen Luonto* 46(3), quoted in *Oryx* 21.

Prairie-Northwest Territories Shorebird Survey Program

In 1987 the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) Western and Northern Region initiated a programme to survey major shorebird staging and nesting areas in the prairie provinces and the Northwest Territories. This project is part of the International Shorebird Surveys Program.

Similar surveys in Atlantic Canada have identified a number of significant staging areas in the Bay of Fundy. Many of these sites are now proposed for protection through the Ramsar Convention, and the shorebird Sister Reserves Programme. However very little data exist on shorebird use in the prairie provinces or the Northwest Territories.

For this programme to accomplish its objectives the Canadian Wildlife Service will have to rely heavily on the efforts of outside individuals, organisations and government agencies. This participation will lead to determination of any potential Sister Reserves in these regions of Canada. If you can help in surveying shorebird staging and/or nesting habitats in the prairie provinces or the Northwest Territories, please

contact: *H. Loney Dickson, Wildlife Biologist, Canadian Wildlife Service, Western and Northern Region, 2nd Floor, 4999 - 98 Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6B 2X3.*

Everyone who takes part in the programme will receive the annual summary of the Canadian survey results.

Nudists vs. Birds in Rhode Island

Threats to shorebirds are many and varied. This extract from the American press illustrates the bare facts about the situation.

Nudist who frequent a "clothes optional" beach in South Kingston, Rhode Island, say they are prepared to go to court to keep their beach being turned over to four rare piping plovers that have nested there.

Officials with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service say they may close Moonstone Beach, a one-and-a-half mile barrier beach that lies within the Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge, to give more space for the plovers, an endangered species. They hope that closing the area to the public will help the birds increase their number by 10 within a decade.

The plovers will have their 4 700 foot nesting area expanded by 1 550 feet along the shore if the proposal to close Moonstone Beach is approved. The beach itself is divided by a 50-foot barrier into areas for people who wear clothes and those who do not.

"We have nothing against the piping plovers, but we're not going to be pushed off beautiful oceanfront property for the sake of four birds", said Joseph Di Pippo who has come regularly to the nudist portion of the beach for 18 years.

Mr. Di Pippo, the founder of the New England Naturists Association, a 1 400-member organisation of nude sunbathers, said there was no other beach nearby for nudists. "It would upset me to have to go to the beach with my trunks on", he said.

Charlie Blair, manager of the wildlife refuge, favours closing the beach, which is only a small portion of the refuge. "Our primary concern is for the birds", he said. "People are second here."

Even clothed beach users are angry about the possible closing, according to Lesley Gardner, who takes money at the beach's gate. She said, "There's only four little birds - how much space do they need?"

From *The New York Times*, Sunday 5 July 1987.
(Contributed by Les Underhill)

