

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WADER STUDY GROUP HELD ON 6 JANUARY 1979
DURING THE B.T.O. RINGING AND MIGRATION CONFERENCE AT SWANWICK, DERBYSHIRE, ENGLAND

Acting Chairman's Remarks

During the past year there have been considerable changes in the organisation and running of the Wader Study Group. These changes followed decisions made at the last AGM to involve more members, to develop a semi-committee structure, and to give a better sense of purpose and direction to current wader studies following on the exciting years during which the mass ringing of waders became possible, largely through the development of cannon-nets. Following last year's meeting I became joint Editor of the Bulletin with Mike Pienkowski and we have gradually taken over the duties hitherto carried out by Tony Prater. Following Ron Birch's resignation Bryan Murray was elected Treasurer and William Dick has filled the new job of 'Co-ordinator' of the advisory panel. During the year Graham Appleton was co-opted as Administrative Secretary to help with the chores of service related to the membership list and the tedious tasks of collating and posting the Bulletin. Finally, as we reported in Bulletin 23, Clive Minton, the Group's Chairman, left to work for three years in Australia and I was asked to act as Chairman until this AGM.

Our main aims in the past year have been:

- 1) To improve the appearance and contents of the Bulletin and to get back to a regular date of issue;
- 2) To sort out the confusion into which the membership and subscription lists had drifted; and
- 3) To propose several projects in which Group members could become involved.

I am pleased to report that we have made considerable progress in all these things thanks to a lot of hard work by several people. In particular the Group owes thanks to Mike Pienkowski for his industry and enthusiasm: it is mainly because of his work that we have achieved so much. Graham Appleton's service in taking over the administrative drudgery involved in getting the Bulletin out on time has also been of great value to us. Bryan Murray, who really was thrown in at the deep end, has done his best to keep an eye on our finances and to prevent us being over-enthusiastic with your money! Tony Prater continues to be our link at the BTO and he organises the lists of ringing recoveries which appear in this Bulletin.

Having handed out the bouquets what exactly have we done? First, the Bulletin: I hope you like what we have done with it. An international group must care for its image and the Bulletin probably represents our most important function - a rapid worldwide pathway through which to pass up-to-date news and information about current wader studies. We think the Bulletin should look good and we - the editors - hope to ensure that it is well written and contains matters of interest and importance to Group members. To produce the Bulletin costs money! The Group has had it on the cheap for years - make no mistake about that. We have been greatly subsidised by the BTO for both production and postage of the earlier Bulletins and by time given to the job by their staff. As the WSG is now an international group with many non-BTO members it would be unreasonable to expect this to continue. We have also been extremely lucky with regard to access to printing facilities and our printer. Following a good deal of experiment we plan to produce a Bulletin every four months of similar format to number 24 and of between 35 and 40 sides. Postage is extremely expensive and this size represents a reasonable upper weight limit. To meet costs we have to raise the WSG subscription to £2.50 a year (or £3.00 for overseas airmail postage) and it can only remain at that level if we are able to retain cheap printing facilities. We have had to go ahead with this recommendation and we announced the increased subscription in the last Bulletin. Without the increase we could not afford production of the next (April) Bulletin in which we hope to announce that this AGM confirms the proposal!

It must have been obvious to many members that our records of members and the subscriptions they had paid had become somewhat muddled - the main reason for this is that too few people were trying to do too much and simply could not cope. Hopefully we have now sorted things out so that we shall very soon have an accurate list of paid-up members. In future lapsed members will, after suitable reminder, cease to receive the Bulletin - we cannot afford to do otherwise.

Last year many of us felt that WSG had lost its sense of direction and some people were beginning to wonder why it existed at all. Obviously it is an important communications network but we also feel the Group should have some function as a co-ordinating body in wader research. Hence the formation of the advisory panel. Because of the worldwide geographical spread of Panel members we feel this should be a mainly corresponding group co-ordinated by William Dick. In this way we can obtain the advice and guidance of members unable to come to meetings. This system is working well and we have received a lot of help from the Panel whose members are listed in Bulletin 24. From them and other discussions two projects on spring migration have been proposed - details in Bulletin 24.

Finally I should like to thank all those people who have helped the Group sort itself out during the last year so that we can now see our rôle in future wader studies.

G.H.Green.

Administrative Secretary's Report

The post of administrative secretary was created during the summer of 1978; I became its incumbent whilst I was banding shorebirds in James Bay, Canada. In my absence Matthew Cooke and Mike Pienkowski sorted out the membership list to include the copies held by both the Secretary and Treasurer. Much of the autumn has been spent in finalising this list whilst collecting back-subscriptions owed to the Group.

At present membership is about 470 (220 G.B. and Ireland, 60 European, 160 North American and 30 "other" members). I hope that the address file is now correct but suspect there are still some errors. If there are, please let me know so that I can have a correct set of data ready for despatch to a computerised label printing company if it is decided that the WSG can afford this labour-saving measure.

Whilst on the subject of work I should like to thank Matthew Cooke, Philip Ireland and Hugh Jones for the large amount of help which they have given me in the collation and distribution of the last three bulletins. Other members have also provided assistance when they have happened to be in Birmingham at the wrong time! So have non-members such as my parents and land-lady. (One can con all of the people some of the time'.)

Graham F. Appleton.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts given below have been prepared on the basis of income received up to 31 December 1978 and do not take into account the subscriptions outstanding at that date, whereas provision has been made for all known expenses incurred for the Group up to the end of the year. The reason for this conservative method of reporting stems from the uncertain position the Group finds itself in regarding the outstanding subscriptions for 1978 and before; there is no point in taking credit for subscriptions we may never receive.

Inspection of the Receipts and Expenditure Account illustrates the need for the increase in the annual subscriptions. The main item of expense is the production costs of the Bulletin which include the production of the first 'new-style' Bulletin at higher cost in paper and postage than for the old-style. Subsequently photo-reduction has reduced the cost but we are now paying costs not previously paid by the Group in Bulletin production (see Chairman's report). Unfortunately the development of the new-style Bulletin and the return to regular schedule had, of necessity, to precede an increase in subscriptions. This produced a serious cash flow crisis which could not have been overcome without the willingness of the officers to fund the Group until the back subscriptions could be collected. The Group was also indebted to the BTO for posting Bulletin 23 thus giving us a short term loan.

The Balance Sheet illustrates the plight of the Group, liabilities far outweighing assets. It is my intention to settle all the outstanding amounts due to officers as early in 1979 as possible. This will leave us desperately short of cash to fulfill our obligations to those members who have paid for back issues of the Bulletin. We will also need to purchase more paper, and to pay for the postage of Bulletin No. 25 in April 1979. It is therefore imperative that members 'dig deep' and pay their 1979 subscriptions (and any outstanding for 1978) as early as possible.

Bryan E. Murray.

Wader Study Group Receipts and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 December 1978.

Receipts

Subscriptions (Including back subs to date)	711
Interest	2
	<hr/>
	713

Deduct: Expenditure

Bulletin costs:			
Paper, envelopes etc.	361		
Typing	87		
Postage	439		
Editor's & Secretary's expenses	111	998	
Sundry costs	<hr/>	31	
		<hr/>	1029
Excess of Expenditure over Receipts			<hr/> <hr/> £(316)

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 1978

Accumulated Fund

Balance at 1/1/78	198
<u>Deduct Excess of Expenditure for the year</u>	<u>(316)</u>
	<u>£(118)</u>

Assets

Cash at bank	393
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Deduct: Liabilities

Bulletin back issue orders	232		
<u>Amounts due to/(from) officers:</u>			
G.Appleton	96		
R.Birch	(5)		
G.H.Green	21		
M.Pienkowski	142		
P.Pratley	25	279	511
			<u>£(118)</u>

Following the Treasurer's Report much concern was expressed about the Group's financial position. I.P.Bainbridge and others suggested that £2.50 was insufficient but were re-assured by the Acting Chairman that the Officers considered that the Group could be run on this subscription at present and there were obvious arguments against an even larger increase at one time. If, however, the present free printing arrangement had to stop, then the matter would have to be reconsidered and the officers were well aware of this problem. At the suggestion of Dr. J.J.D. Greenwood, the meeting directed the Officers to prepare for the next general meeting estimates to establish the Group's longer term future.

R.Swinfen suggested the publication of two bulletins per year instead of three to reduce costs but the meeting agreed with the Officers' opinion that the rapid news and communication achieved by the Bulletin would suffer. After further discussion, at the suggestion of J.D. Okill the meeting instructed the Treasurer to repay the debts to the Officers as soon as possible. Acceptance of the Report and the increase in subscriptions was proposed by Dr. C. Clapham, seconded by J.M.McMeeking and carried unanimously.

Editors' Report

After two years in which the number of bulletins appearing had dropped from three to two, in 1978 four bulletins were published and we have returned to a regular schedule. In future bulletins will appear in April, August and December. The numbers of pages per issue were 25, 32, 72 and 38; in the case of the last issue the reduced size of type means that the 38 pages are equivalent to about 80 of the former size. Over the same time we have increased the numbers of issues printed from 400 to 600 because of increasing membership, much of which can be attributed to the improved bulletin as well as the widening geographical spread.

To achieve the return to schedule, the increased size and the larger print run has involved much time, effort and money, the last to pay for stationery, telephone calls, typing, paper and postage. Indeed, at times it felt as if we were producing a bulletin a month and the Treasurer was also becoming rather harassed. All of us owe particular thanks to Paul Pratley who continues to print the Bulletins in his lunch breaks at no cost to the Group. At times he must, presumably, have been going very hungry! If we had to pay for printing, the subscription would probably have to be doubled.

While we are on votes of thanks, we ought to pay tribute to Tony Prater who, aided by the BTO secretarial staff, produced the bulletin up to the start of this year. Additionally, Tony edited the Bulletin from its initiation in 1970, jointly with Peter Stanley until 1973 and with myself since then. Harry Green has now taken over as joint editor and it is an appropriate time to thank Tony for his hard work.

The year has seen changes in the appearance and content of the Bulletin, the card covers and smaller print being obvious examples. We are grateful to Ray Bishop for our cover design. We have also started a North American section of the Bulletin, thanks

to the efforts of Guy Morrison as editor, and the first part appeared in number 23. We hope that this will gradually become a regular part. We have also been able to include other contributions from overseas, both in the regular features such as ringing totals where those from Sweden, East and West Germany, Poland and Portugal were welcome additions, and in articles reviewing wader studies in particular countries or regions; the article by Hans Meltofte on Denmark in number 23 was notable here, and we would greatly welcome further articles of this type.

Other innovations during the year have been a bibliography of articles in numbers 1-20 which appeared in number 21 and a full list of members in Bull 23. Two items have appeared by popular request of members and we are indebted to Jeremy Greenwood for providing both. The first, in Bull. 22, was a format for transferring wader data between computers to provide a standard to help the several groups now making use of various sorts of automated data processing, and the second, aimed perhaps at the less experienced analysts (but we are sure others will also benefit from its reading) is the series on elementary statistics begun in number 24 and continuing.

I have outlined some of the trends we plan to continue in the future. We also hope to bring in more non-ringing material such as the results of counts and, of course, develop a forum for co-operative projects started in Bull. 24. As to format, we hope that this will stay much as in Bull. 24 and at about that size, because of production and printing effort and paper and postage costs. We plan that deadlines for notices will be the first day of the month before publication of each issue and the latest date for longer items, including articles, the first day of the month before that. (These dates have since had to be changed slightly - see front cover).

In this connection, there is a problem on which we would welcome comments after this report. In the past we have gathered ringing totals for the periods November to February, March to June and July to October to cover winter, spring and autumn, respectively. This, of course, does not fit those studying waders in summer particularly well but, on the practical side, it is also proving difficult for ringers to get their totals to us in time for publication. Accordingly, we propose to change the periods to October to January, February to May and June to September. These fit non-breeding season studies slightly less well and breeding season studies slightly better but the main point is that they should be more practicable, and avoid the numerous postscripts, addenda and stop-presses which have been occurring lately.

Finally, we need to request the help of members in the English Midlands. At present, three times a year Graham Appleton, virtually single-handedly, collects a van-load of printed sheets from Paul Pratley, collates them into about 600 bulletins, staples them, addresses and loads envelopes, licks a large number of stamps and posts the bulletins. Who can help?

Michael W. Pienkowski.

After the report by the senior editor, W.T.Thrower proposed a vote of thanks to A.J.Prater who had retired from the post of co-editor during 1978. This proposal was seconded by G.H.Green and carried unanimously. I.P.Bainbridge proposed that P.Pratley should receive a token of appreciation for the vast amount of work which he had done in the production of the bulletin; this will be acquired and delivered by the Administrative Secretary.

After the meeting several comments were received, these being generally in favour of the rearrangement of catch totals reporting dates. Some offers of help in collation, etc. were received but more are always welcome.

Co-ordinator's Report

The advisory panel of the WSG was set up at the 1978 A.G.M. to provide ideas and support for the executive committee. The size of the panel has increased to give a wide geographical and interest spread amongst its members. Four circulars have gone out to the panel requesting comments on policy and research. Two of the projects discussed within this context are the spring programmes to study Siberian Knot migration and movements of dunlin, turnstone, ringed plover and sanderling. Any further ideas on topics of study would be welcomed by the Co-ordinator from inside or outside the panel.

William J.A. Dick.

Secretary's Report

The Secretary, A.J.Prater, expressed thanks to all those who had removed responsibility from his shoulders. He went on to outline the international rôle of the WSG especially the potential for participation in national and international studies in co-operation with bodies such as the B.T.O. within Britain and the International Waterfowl Research Bureau overseas.

Elections

The whole executive committee, being available for election or re-election as appropriate (see Bull. 24), was elected unanimously after a proposal from J.M.McMeeking, seconded by I.Forsyth. Those officers, including the Chairman, previously co-opted were thus confirmed in their posts.

Other business

There was some discussion about the venue of the AGM, occurring as it does within the Ringing and Migration Conference of the BTO. W.T.Thrower and others criticized the timing of the meeting (22.00) to which the Chairman replied that there was a possibility of holding the AGM at the proposed October meeting. Nottingham was mentioned as the venue for this meeting, this engendering several comments from further-flung British WSG members including J.Rochford, P.W.J.Findlay and J.Hardy.

The Officers pointed out that, if autumn meetings continued, there was no need to continue to use Nottingham and a varying location might be preferred. Nottingham had been suggested as the first location because it would be possible to keep the cost very low here, an important aspect as the numbers of people attending was difficult to predict and the state of Group funds would not allow the meeting to be subsidised from general revenue. The meeting decided that the Officers should continue to plan a meeting and test support for such a gathering as a regular feature.

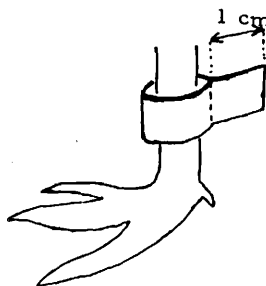
The Chairman reported on a meeting of the WSG Officers with the Director of the British Trust for Ornithology, Dr. Raymond O'Connor. It seems likely that good liaison with the BTO on analysis of British wader data will be developed. The first job to be tackled is an analysis of wader moult. An appeal was made for those groups and individuals who have not submitted data to the Group on WSG data forms to do so as soon as possible - including the backlog. A number of possible wader projects in which the BTO could play a useful part were outlined to Dr. O'Connor by the WSG Officers.

The AGM ended at 23.25 and was followed by short talks by W.J.A.Dick and G.H.Green on the spring migration projects.

LEG 'FLAGS': TEMPORARY COLOUR RINGS

by L.R. Goodyer, F.Symonds and P.R. Evans

During recent feeding studies on Dunlins Calidris alpina on the Tees estuary, north-east England, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) tape was attached as a leg flag around the metal ring, to enable us to identify adults and juveniles in the field.



The tape is available in several colours from any hardware shop. It was cut into strips the width of the ring and applied as shown in the diagram. Flags were easily visible in the field even when the birds were feeding in very soft substrate and did not appear to hinder feeding. On average the flags lasted about 8 weeks but we know from retraps that some were lost in a shorter time. However, one individual was observed with its flag as long as 12 weeks after marking.

We have found this to be a very useful and successful method of colour marking birds. It appears to be an ideal technique for short term studies where the use of more permanent markings is both undesirable and unnecessary. It must be stressed, however, that in common with other colour-marking methods, this technique should not be used indiscriminately or results of all projects may be jeopardized. Prospective users should contact the Editors of WSG Bulletin and their national ringing schemes before embarking on a project using this method.

Although, as noted above, the main purpose of this marking at Teesmouth concerns the detailed studies there, we would, of course, welcome any sightings of these birds elsewhere. The method has been used, to date, on Dunlins and Knots Calidris canutus.