

## WSG MEETING, MÜNSTER, 12-13 SEPTEMBER 1981, AND WADER CATCHING IN NORTH FRIESLAND

### A personal view by David Melville

For those of us used to the masochistic delights of wader catching - roughing it in cold rat-infested barns or, in my case, mosquito-ridden mangrove swamps - the one million Mark Biologische Station Reiselfelder Münster came as something of a surprise. Not only were there showers, hot and cold running water, a kitchen, comfortable beds and a purpose-built ringing laboratory, but also an excavator and a tractor for habitat management and an in-house computer for handling the large volumes of data which OAG Münster have accumulated over the years. This was wader-ringing with a difference - all the more remarkable in that OAG Münster is not a university or Government research establishment, but an amateur group (WSG Bull 28: 17-21) which has managed to obtain some government grants.

Those of us arriving from England had only a short time on Saturday morning to look around the sewage farm, 233 ha of which is now a nature reserve, before going to Münster University for the first series of talks of the meeting. Then back to the research station for supper and netting, which was curtailed by rain but resulted in a small and typically mixed catch. The two ringing/processing teams worked apparently unperturbed by the 30+ onlookers and allowed an opportunity to compare techniques (WSG Bull 30:11) and, for some, to see new species in the hand. After an all too short sleep it was back to the University for the final round of talks and the WSG AGM.

The talks included updates and progress reports for three WSG projects: Wader movements in Western Europe (M.Pienkowski), Inland wader enquiry (OAG Münster), and Breeding waders of Scottish agricultural land (R.Furness + H.Galbraith). Other talks concerned Dunlin in Poland (J.Gromadzka), Ruff in Münster (OAG Münster) and Knot in Schleswig-Holstein (P.Prokosch). R.Summers, following up his earlier thoughts on moult scores (WSG Bull 28:24), demonstrated some alternative methods of moult analysis for a sample of 1500 Redshank. The importance to 'European' waders of wetlands elsewhere was highlighted by reports on Morocco (M.Kersten), Guinea-Bissau (W.Dick), and Senegal (O.Fournier) where international aid projects are threatening the waterfowl populations of the Senegal River floodplain. There is clearly a need for increased work in Africa and the announcements that it is hoped to mount expeditions to Tunisia and Guinea-Bissau were received with enthusiasm, as was the news that WSG is now a Contributor to IWRB.

Having been away from Europe for seven years I found the scope and contents of the talks interesting and useful but several European residents expressed some disappointment - certainly a fair amount of the information presented had been published in the WSG Bulletin prior to the meeting. Informal discussions at meetings frequently result in more useful exchange than during the formal sessions and the splendid linguistic abilities of the non-native English-speakers (which put us Brits to shame) allowed free dialogue.

Following a hasty lunch on Sunday a small group headed northwards for Schleswig-Holstein where we joined Beringergemeinschaft Nordfriesisches Wattenmeer for a week of cannon netting. We were based in old lighthouse buildings on an artificial island on saltings at Westerhaver, and the only thing detracting from this idyllic setting was the unsettled weather. The wader roost next door, which included 100,000+ Knot, remained a tantalising sight through the driving rain. However a useful catch of Curlew was made with a scattering of smaller species - the latter included a colour-ringed Grey Plover from Teesmouth in wing moult, much to the delight of MWP. And so the week drew to a wet and windy close.

As I returned home, grateful to our hosts for their hospitality, I reflected on the 'Limikolen-freaks' of Western Europe and the comparative wealth of knowledge of waders in the region. In East Asia wader studies are still in their infancy and it will be a long time before we can begin to plot the life histories and changing fortunes of our birds on anything near the level of detail currently found in Europe.

David Melville, 44 The Ridgeway, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4NJ.

## ESTIMATING PRE-FLEDGING MORTALITY FROM RINGING DATA: A PROPOSAL

by Barry J. Yates

Despite several detailed, long-term studies of breeding waders, there are large gaps in our knowledge of their population dynamics. The greatest ignorance concerns the period from hatching until the first winter, which is probably the period of greatest mortality. It is with this in mind that I propose a method, for discussion, that might lead to a better understanding of population dynamics in waders.

The data exist for a crude ageing of wader pulli into several age groups. If all pulli ringed were assigned to an age group, their post fledging recovery rates would reflect the timing of the mortality in that a higher rate of recovery would be expected from those individuals ringed near fledging.

Habitat differences could be investigated by recording where pulli were ringed. Recovery rates of pulli, ringed when very small, are sometimes affected by the ring slipping from their leg. All individuals should be checked for this and even if any are found to be loose, the ring should be left in place but the fact noted.

In addition to investigating pre-fledging mortality this method will allow the estimation of mortality up to the first winter, by comparison with the recovery rates of individuals ringed as first year in, say, October-November.

This method requires a space on the ringing schedules for recording the information. I suggest that the 'brood details' of the B.T.O. schedules could be replaced, for waders, by x/y, where x = age group code, and y = habitat code.

The co-operation of all ringers would be required and it would be some time before this method could yield results, but this proposal is in line with the recent policy of the Nature Conservation Council to increase the effort in studying waders. Comments on this proposal would be welcome.

B.J.Yates, Liverpool Polytechnic, Department of Biology, Byrom Street, Liverpool, L3 3AH, U.K.