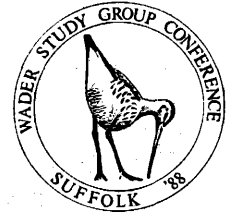


THE WADER STUDY GROUP AT IPSWICH: A PERSONAL VIEW BY AN ORNITHOPHOBE

Clare Pienkowski



To give members who are unable to attend WSG annual meetings a clearer impression of what the meetings were really like, in recent years we have asked a different member each year to give us their personal account of the meeting. This year we departed from that tradition and asked a non-member to give us her impressions of the antics of the other 93 wader enthusiasts who attended the Ipswich meeting. Not only is Clare Pienkowski the first non-member to report on a WSG meeting for the *Bulletin*, but we think that she is also the youngest ever contributor to the *Bulletin*. Despite her youth Clare has, however, probably longer experience of wader research than many WSG members: she has helped her father on fieldwork cannon-netting waders and rounding up Shelducklings in eastern Britain since she was about two years old. Even

after such an early warning of what wader workers are like, she was brave enough to attend the Ipswich meeting.

It is customary for editors to issue a disclaimer for controversial or potentially litigious items that they publish, to the effect that the views expressed in the article are the author's own, and are not necessarily those of the Editor. In making such a disclaimer here, the Editor should add that he actually asked Clare to write the article for him rather than about him. The Editor wishes to say also that he has little recollection of most of the events recounted below. Resisting the urge for another *Bulletin* first, that of editorial censorship, here is Clare's account.

Another WSG meeting has come and gone, and I have been given the honour (although that could be a questionable word to use) of being chosen for the position of rapporteur of the weekend's triumphs, failures and more importantly the happenings in the bar afterwards, so here goes.

Most of our journey from Peterborough on Friday morning was uneventful. The only bird we saw was a rather dilapidated pigeon (was this an omen, I asked myself?).

The map supplied to direct the members of the WSG to the conference was extremely useful, if you had a PhD in advanced Geography, which unfortunately Nick Davidson had not. The real difficulty came when the map directed us up an Ipswich cul-de-sac. Undeterred, however, we finally arrived at St Joseph's College, where the conference was to be held. Nick headed for the coffee machine (the bar not yet being open) to drown his sorrows. Unfortunately the task of pressing four consecutive buttons one after the other proved almost too much for him, and quantities of hot liquid splashed freely over his hand.

The introductory talks given that evening after dinner were very relaxed and informative. All delegates attending the conference had been supplied with a very helpful booklet, a name tag, and a free badge and pen, compliments of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the WSG.

As soon as the introductory talks were over everyone headed en masse for Chris and Chris Johnson's bookshop, or, as expected, the bar. This in itself proved tricky as it was a fair distance between the main building and the building where the bar was housed. To help matters even further, there was only one lamp-post. However, sheer grit and determination got most people there and the rest of the evening passed for many in a slightly inebriated blur. It was probably quite fortunate that the sleeping quarters were situated fairly nearby. Although embarrassing incidents were only just averted when it was discovered that a door in the ladies washroom led to the men's urinal!

The conference proper started the next morning

with the AGM, which was very brief. Jeff Kirby gave his report in 2 instalments due to temporary amnesia and Nick Davidson informed us that summaries of talks not provided in time for publishing in the next *WSG Bulletin* would be marked as such. A quick glance in the abstracts section of the helpful booklet showed: "NCC Estuaries Review by N.C. Davidson - not provided".

After discussing with Derek Moore the previous evening (in the bar, naturally) the problems the Suffolk Wildlife Trust had with their name being continuously wrongly announced before they recently changed it (from Suffolk Trust for Nature Conservation), Mike Pienkowski introduced them twice as the Suffolk Wildfowl Trust. But I'm sure nobody noticed.

The first chairperson of the Saturday morning was Jaga Gromadzka who informed the meeting in general that she had difficulty understanding English, especially in England. I now know just how she felt!

The first talk of the morning was given by Theunis Piersma and from his slides of migration patterns I concluded that Dunlin perform aerial gymnastics and Greenshank have no sense of direction.

Jim Wilson spoke next. As well as the theories that he had formed from much hard research work on Knots in Iceland, he announced a theory new to science. This was the Lapponia Theory which he and Nick Davidson devised while in an intoxicated condition. (*Lapponia is a fine Finnish Cloudberry liqueur - Ed.*) Unfortunately neither of them can now quite remember its full details. Undaunted, however, they have since devoted much of their valuable time to reconstructing the original conditions under which the theory was formed. (Strangely enough this does not seem to have yet jogged their memories). More seriously, Jim Wilson's talk was very good. I was told afterwards that it was extremely good - I probably would have formed this opinion myself if I had not had several people behind me who insisted on exchanging whispered comments continuously throughout.

Nick Davidson followed with an interesting talk

about waders in arctic Canada. His talk was also easy to understand - that is to say that even I understood it, so it must have been good! Many of the slides illustrating his talk featured arctic animals investigating beer bottles: obviously the Lapponia Theory coming into play again!

During the coffee break while writing up my notes, I found a theme common to all the preceding talks: wind, in the most polite sense possible! We had been shown by Theunis Piersma how wind affects birds' migration patterns, and by Jim Wilson how birds find it difficult to fly into oncoming winds. Nick Davidson further elucidated the matter by featuring a slide showing the effect of knots (wind speed) on Knots (waders).

Another common aspect of talks throughout the weekend was the inclusion in almost every talk of an arty shot of the surrounding landscape or sunset. Derek Moore ended his introductory talk about Suffolk with a slide of a very pretty sunset. Theunis showed us a slide of the clouds, Nick included a shot of the sun at midnight and Charles Beardall ended the conference on Sunday with a slide of a sunrise in Suffolk.

After an excellent lunch (as were all the meals during the conference), the talks continued. Peter Reay's talk on the Tamar Avocets was also interesting, although I got slightly confused by the Avocets swallowing swallows in the shallows, or was it swallows in the shallows swallowing Avocets?!

The tea-break which followed was much needed as preparation for a marathon session before supper - not very well timed as it left over 2 hours afterwards for the last 2 sessions. Pat Thompson provided some light relief during this session when he glanced up at the slide that was on the screen and announced "I'm talking absolute rubbish". Who am I to comment! His next remark of "nice to know you're all awake" seemed to stir several chairpersons of the WSG into action as they all pretended to be alert and attentive, but nobody was fooled for a minute.

Ron Summers' talk about waders and lemmings on cycles was fascinating, but I was surprised at the amount of controversy it provoked in the discussion afterwards. Theunis was not exactly sure which point he was arguing for, but was determined to fight it to the end regardless! The discussion continued almost until dinner time, but food finally appeared to be the greater incentive. Its nice to know everyone had their priorities right.

During dinner I discovered a great money-making scheme. This involved selling the same raffle-tickets twice, but I was found out and made to give them back!

The rest of the evening passed in the expected way - in the bar, or in some cases under it. The talks on Sunday were, like those over the whole weekend, of a very high standard, although I couldn't understand everything that was being said! Whilst chairing the final session of the conference, Mike Pienkowski used a dramatic way of informing speakers of their remaining time. Instead of the discreet cough or whisper employed by the other chairpersons, he held up a piece of paper with "5 minutes" written on it in large letters!

The conference was closed by a trip out to see some of the important sights of Suffolk estuaries. We all spent a pleasant couple of hours in this way on Sunday afternoon, even though there were no waders in sight. However the weather made up for it.

It was all almost enough to make me rush out to the Wash, binoculars in hand.... almost!

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