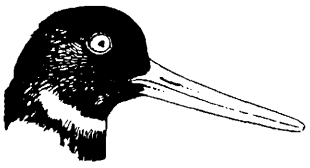
WADER NOTES AND NEWS



compiled by Nick Davidson

FURTHER APOLOGIES FOR BULLETIN DELAYS

Editorial and production delays continue to bedevil the hard-pressed editorial team, and this issue of *WSG Bulletin* again appears very late. We apologise for these continuing delays, which we had hoped to solve before now, and thank members for their patience in waiting for their Bulletins.

Despite the delays, we should reassure members that they will continue to receive the usual three *Bulletins* per year. We are taking some major steps to resolve the editorial problems during the rest of 1990.

WSG 1990 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The next WSG Annual Conference will take place between 5-8 October 1990 at Comaccio in Italy, hosted by the Istituto Nazionale di Biologia della Selvaggina. This is the first WSG meeting to be held in a Mediterranean country and the meeting, which follows the usual long-weekend format, has a particular theme of Mediterranean waders.

Further details of the arrangements for the conference are printed elsewhere in this *Bulletin*, and a booking form and talk/poster offer form are enclosed.

If you intend to go to the meeting please return these forms to the organisers as soon as possible, preferably by 31 July 1990.

CHANGE OF WSG MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

Pressures of other committments have forced Jeff Kirby to withdraw from his role as Membership Secretary of WSG. We thank Jeff for all his very hard work in maintaining the WSG membership records since his election to the post in 1987.

The WSG Committee are pleased to announce that Rodney West has agreed to take over the role of Membership Secretary and has been co-opted to this post.

From now on all correspondence concerning membership matters should be addressed to Rodney West, using the WSG address (PO Box 247, Tring, Herts. HP23 5SN, U.K.). Rodney's telephone number is (UK) 0473-52555.

IWRB

SYMPOSIUM: MANAGING MEDITERRANEAN WETLANDS AND THEIR BIRDS FOR THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

This one-week symposium, convened by the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB) at the invitation of the Regione Autonoma Friuli-Venezia Guilia, Italy, will take place in Grado, Italy between 3-10 February 1991. Grado is 125 km north-east of Venice and the meeting will be held very close to the shore of the Adriatic Sea.

The symposium is the first to be organised by IWRB's Wetland Management Group and will provide an assessment of the consequences of wetland loss and degredation in the Mediterranean region. It aims to produce detailed strategies for the future management of Mediterranean wetlands.

The meeting is specifically aimed at several groups of people: fisheries managers and researchers; government conservation and environmental management agencies; non-governmental conservation organisations; wetland managers and researchers; and waterfowl managers and researchers.

The programme will provisionally consist of invited and contributed papers and posters addressing the following topics:

- how many wetlands and waterbirds will there be by the year 2000?;

- the effects of wetland loss and degredation on colonial waterbirds;

- the effects of wetland loss and degredation on wintering waterfowl;

- water quality problems associated with wetland loss and degredation;

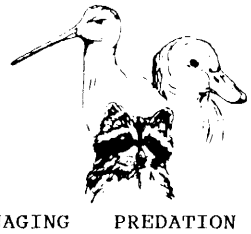
- the relationship of fisheries and aquaculture management to wetland loss and degredation;

- the reasons for wetland loss and degredation; and

- arresting wetland loss and degredation.

There will also be workshop sessions supplemented by case study field excursions focusing on the above topics.

Further details of the programme and registration forms can be obtained from: *Simon Nash, IWRB Grado Conference, IWRB, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BX, UK.*



SYMPOSIUM: MANAGING PREDATION TO INCREASE PRODUCTION OF WETLAND BIRDS

A 3-day symposium on 'Managing predation to increase production of wetland birds' will be held between 15-17 August 1990 in Jamestown, North Dakota, USA. It is hosted by the Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center and sponsored by a variety of wildlife and game organisations.

The intended audience is wildlife and wetland managers and researchers and the symposium is designed for the exchange of current information concerning the reduction of predation on breeding populations of waterfowl and other wetland birds. The symposium will have over 35 talks and 25 posters, along with discussions, displays and social events. Preceding the symposium are two days of prairie tours.

For further information, contact: *Alan B. Sargeant, Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center, Box 2096, Jamestown, ND 58402, USA (tel. (701) 252-5363.*

SYMPOSIUM: AQUATIC BIRDS IN THE TROPHIC WEB OF LAKES

A symposium on addressing questions of the contribution of aquatic birds to the trophic state of water bodies and how their role in the energy flow in lakes can be defined, is planned for 20-22 August 1991 at Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, in eastern Canada.

Amongst the topics to be considered are:

- quantitative and qualitative responses of aquatic birds to nutrient levels and acidification in water bodies;

- food requirements in relation to food availability, for the maintenance of adult birds and to raise young to fledging;

- nutrient import and export from lakes by birds;

- interactions with fish as both predators and competitors;

- how to express bird abundance in meaningful ways;

- ocurrence or absence of birds for reasons other than availability of food; and

- the importance of the relationship between a water body and its surroundings.

The proceedings will be published as a special volume of *Hydrobiologia*.

For further information contact: *Aquatic Birds Symposium '91, Canadian Wildlife Service, Bedford Institute of Oceanography, PO Box 1006, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada B2Y 4A2.*

MOVEMENT PATTERNS OF PIED STILTS

To celebrate its 50th anniversary in an appropriate way, members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) are undertaking a colour-ringing study of Pied (Black-winged) Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* to determine movement patterns.

Results from the OSNZ national wader counts show that in winter there is an influx of stilts into areas which have only a small breeding population. There is no evidence to indicate the origin of these birds so a project very similar to the very successful Double-banded Plover movement study has begun.

Pied Stilts are being individually colour-ringed at breeding colonies and during 1989 and 1990 checks of non-breeding birds are being made throughout the country.

The recent sighting of a hybrid Black/Pied Stilt in Tasmania (see *The Stilt* 15: 37) gives this new project the potential to produce a major surprise in the form of more movements across the Tasman Sea.

Source: Paul Sagar & Brian Gill, in *RAOU Newsletter* No. 81, September 1989.

WATER LEVELS AND MIGRANT SHOREBIRDS IN THE USA

News of conditions at two key sites for the autumn migration of shorebirds through the USA comes from an article in the November 1989 issue of the newsletter of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). At both sites there have been serious concerns in recent years because of low water levels largely induced by excessive abstraction by man of water that would normally flow into the wetlands.

Cheyenne Bottoms

At Cheyenne Bottoms, a key prairie wetland system in Kansas, Gonzalo Castro reports that heavy rains in the central plains during the summer resulted in enough water to provide shorebird habitat during autumn migration. The total number of shorebirds using Cheyenne Bottoms at any time was about 5,000 birds. This is, however, still much lower than has been previously reported from the area. The birds present were mostly Avocets *Recurvirostra americana*, Stilt Sandpipers *Micropalama himantopus* and Long-billed Dowitchers *Limnodromus scolopaceus*.

Although conditions appeared suitable for stop-over fattening, preliminary results showed that most species did not gain fat during their stay. They either arrived and departed very fat or very lean. This suggests that birds were migrating short distances at a time and were spread across the central plains instead of concentrating at only one location. Similar numbers of birds (c. 2,000-7,000) were observed at other wetland complexes in Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma.

Long-term concerns remain, however, for the conservation of Cheyenne Bottoms. The Arkansas River which provides most of the water under normal circumstances, remains dry because of over-appropriation of water upstream and over-exploitation of the aquifer. Unless the river flows again Cheyenne Bottoms will be dependent on the uncertainty of heavy rains in the plains. During period of low rainfall this important shorebird area will certainly dry out completely again, so jeopardising the shorebirds using the area.

Mono Lake

The struggle over water at California's Mono Lake has gone on for more than a decade. Since 1941 most of the Mono Basin's water has been piped down to Los Angeles to satisfy the city's growing need for water. Protest, litigation and negotiation over water rights have kept Mono Lake at the centre of controversy since the mid 1970s.

Mono Lake is a saline lake famous for its splendid tufa towers. It supports more than 100,000 Wilson's Phalaropes *Phalaropus tricolor* and 750,000 Eared Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* during migration. The lake level has, however, dropped steadily over the years, endangering the wildlife by altering the salinity of the lake and enabling easier access to predators.

At last there is good news concerning Mono Lake's water supply. Rush Creek, one of the main tributaries, now has water flowing down it to the lake. A court injunction ordered that the lake level be raised two feet (0.6 m) from the current level of 6375 feet above sea-level. In addition a new law was passed in autumn 1989 that creates a $60 million Environmental Water Fund which has as a priority the funding of water and energy conservation in Los Angeles to help the city replace its Mono Basin water diversions. This will allow the city to save energy as well as in the long term helping protect Mono Lake.

Source: *WHRSN Network News* 2(3), November 1989.

EAST CHINA WADER STUDY GROUP

The East China Wader Study Group has recently published their first Newsletter, which describes the results of a counting and ringing training course last April and May in the Yangtze River/Hangzhou Bay area, near Shanghai.

The major aims of the course were to train ECWSG members and National Banding Centre of China staff in banding techniques and morphometric data collection, to stimulate internal co-operation between China and other flyway countries. The course also aimed to lay the foundation for wader survey work along the East China coastline. Doug Watkins and Shapelle McNee of the Australian Wader Studies Group took part as trainers.

Count data for 32 species provides some interesting passage information. Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris* pass through in early to mid April whilst Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis* stage relatively later, towards the end of April. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* move through in late April and early May, yet they are the earliest of all waders to leave Australia, departing from south-east Australia in February. Where do they stop *en route* to China?

A total of 283 waders of 14 species were caught including three Australian-banded birds, with a further four being obtained later from hunters. Very interesting arrival weight data was collected. This confirms that for a number of species non-stop migration occurs between Australia and China.

Source: Mark Barter in *The Stilt* No. 15, October 1989.

INFORMATION WANTED: SERIOUS DECLINES IN PHALAROPE POPULATIONS?

Red-necked Phalaropes *Phalaropus lobatus* used to stage during their southwards migration in July and August in the waters around Eastport, Maine, and Campobello island, New Brunswick, on the eastern seaboard of North America. Flocks have bee estimated in the low millions. For each of the past 4 years, however, th flock sizes have declined by at least an order of magnitude. Red-necked Phalaropes were entirely absent on most days of the 1989 season. Similar trends have been observed elsewhere off the coast of Maine. The possibility of a major population crash cannot be eliminated.

Information is being sought from anyone with population estimates from anywhere in the range of Red-necked Phalaropes. Similar information on the distribution and/or abundance of Atlantic shearwaters, Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius*, and Bonaparte's Gulls *Larus philadelphia* which share these waters in early autumn would also be helpful.

Contact: *Charles D. Duncan, Institute for Field Ornithology, University of Maine at Machias, 9 O'Brien Ave., Machias, ME 04654, USA.*

Source: *Orn. Soc. North America Newsletter, January 1990.*

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: COLOUR-RINGED MEDITERRANEAN GULLS

Beginning in 1990 adults and chicks of the small but growing breeding population of Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* in The Netherlands will be colour-ringed. In addition to an aluminium ring around the tibia, a white engraved Darvic (PVC) ring will be fitted on the tarsus. This white ring will be engraved with a combination of three figures or letters so as to identify individual birds.

Details of any sightings of these birds will be welcomed by: *Peter L. Meininger, RWS DGW, PO Box 8039, 4330 EA Middelburg, The Netherlands.*

1989 ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS

The third Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) was carried out in January 1989. The development of this project has been phenomenal: in 1989 there were 20 participating countries, 1,319 sites were covered, and 6.9 million waterfowl of 222 species were counted by over 500 counters. Counts were received for the first time from Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan.

Highlights of the 1989 census are too numerous to list but a few seem particulary worthy of mention. Of the 1,319 sites counted, 114 held over 10,000 waterfowl, 57 held over 20,000 waterfowl and 8 held over 100,000 watefowl. The 1989 census also discovered previously unknown locations for wintering populations of Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus* in Oman. A flock of 257 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchos pygmaeus* in Bangladesh was the largest concentration ever recorded. Remarkably, two of these Spoon-billed Sandpipers carried Russian leg-flags.

IWRB has recently entered a co-operative agreement for the organisation of the Asian Waterfowl Census with the Asian Wetland Bureau who will co-ordinate the project in South East Asia. This, plus the recent publication of *A Directory of Asian Wetlands,* should stimulate further development of the Census. If expansion continues at its present rate, population estimates and trend indices for wintering waterfowl in Asia are real possibilities for the future.

Source: Paul Rose in *IWRB News* No. 3, January 1990

A 95-page report on the 1989 census has been published (Scott, D.A. & Rose, P.M. 1989. *Asian Waterfowl Census 1989.* IWRB, Slimbridge). Copies are available from IWRB, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BX, UK, price £5 including postage and packing.

WHAT IS A DUNBAR SANDPIPER?

The discovery of a new species of wader is an unusual occurrence, and one that causes much excitment: witness the discussions concerning Cox's Sandpiper *Calidris paramelanotos.*

I was recently given two postcard-sized prints of waders that were found in a London street-market. One of these hand-coloured lithographs, dating

probably from about 1840, illustrates what is unmistakably an Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*. The other, reproduced below, shows two Dunbar Sandpipers.

The birds appear to most closely resemble Dunlins *Calidris alpina* in summer and winter plumage, perhaps with a touch of the Redshank *Tringa totanus* about their posture. The plot thickens, however, on the reverse side of the print where there is a brief description of the behaviour of the Dunbar Sandpiper, reproduced below. The species suggestions in the following text are my own:

"THE DUNBAR SANDPIPER (*Tringa*)

"These are interesting little birds, which appear in great numbers on the sea-shore in various parts of Great Britain. They feed on insects, sea-worms, and the small shell-fish that are found in such numbers on our beaches. They run very nimbly close to the edges of the flowing or retreating wave (?Sanderling), incessantly wagging their tails (?Common Sandpiper), and busily engaged all the time in picking up the food which their instinct tells them they shall find so fresh at the margin of the waves; and while thus employed, it is easy to watch the habits of these active and fearless little birds.

"On taking flight, which they always do in flocks, they give a kind of scream (?Dunlin), and skim along the surface of the water with great rapidity, never making their flights directly forward, but in large semi-circles, sometimes looking quite silvery, at other times black, according as their backs or breasts are seen.

"The female lays four eggs on the bare sand, just above the high-water mark, without any nest (?Ringed Plover), but places them all close together, wth the pointed ends meeting. At night, or in bad weather, she never leaves them; but in fine weather she is frequently off them while feeding."

At first sight this delightful description of a decidedly polyglot wader reads as if it was the victim of over-enthusiastic sub-editing of several different texts. Dunbar is a small town on the southern shore of the Firth of Forth in Scotland, but searches of contemporary and more recent literature has so far failed to find "Dunbar Sandpiper" reported as a regional synonym for any wader species.

But then perhaps Dunbar Sandpipers are actually those small brown waders which are only ever seen at least 2 km away on huge mudflats, and always with strong sunlight reflecting off the mudflats behind them. In such cases it would appear that the presence of Dunbar Sandpipers as a new wader species has been entirely missed. Perusal of papers reporting wader population counts suggests that Dunbar Sandpipers are usually reported as "*Calidris* spp.", or in the New World as "unidentified peeps".

Can anyone throw a clearer light on the identity of these birds?

My thanks to Deborah Procter for finding the prints.

Nick Davidson

RINGING TOTALS FOR 1989

Enclosed with this *Bulletin* is a form for the submission of ringing totals for January to December 1989. Please note that this form has been amended and updated so as to include as many wader species ringed worldwide as possible. As Robin Ward comments in his introduction to the listings of ringing totals for 1988 there is pleasing increase in the submission of totals from around the world, but that we will be delighted to receive more such listings. That way the listings can become more truly international and less 'Euro-centric'.