

Review Panel. The STRP has a particularly busy period ahead. The Brisbane Conference in March 1996 charged it with progressing a wide range of work during the three years until the next Conference of Parties in Costa Rica. Under Yaa's guidance we look forward to a series of constructive initiatives that will further assist the cause of global wetland conservation.

MYSTERY RINGER

During January 1996 a Ukrainian ringed Dunlin *Calidris alpina* was controlled on an estuary in eastern England. At present we have had no luck in identifying the ringer. Does anyone have any suggestions as to who might be using these rings? From: Rodney West Associates <rodwest@the.net.co.uk>. Reply to: waders-l@uct.as.za

WETLAND DISTURBANCE STUDY AT MAI PO

The fish pond ecosystem surrounding the Mai Po nature reserve and Deep Bay area of the new territories in Hong Kong are being studied. There are huge pressures for development in the area and the study will aim to establish criteria against which to test the sustainability of such developments. Sample areas have been surveyed throughout the year for all birds, but concentrating on egrets and herons. Physical and habitat variables have been measured for over 1 200 fish ponds. Together with environmental data the measurements have been used to construct predictive models of bird use for the different ponds.

The project is the joint work of Ecoscope Applied Ecologists, Wetlands Advisory Service, Aspinalls and Wetlands International and is being funded by the Hong Kong government.

AUSTRALIAN KNOTS

The first evidence of a Great Knot using Broome as a stopover *en route* to Victoria was found in September 1996 when its orange leg flag was

spotted. Previously only three species of Victorian birds had been seen at Broome: Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruddy Turnstone. Banding activities in New Zealand have so far revealed that Red Knot move one way; those caught in Australia as first years have been seen in New Zealand but none have gone back to Victoria.

NEW-LOOK STILT

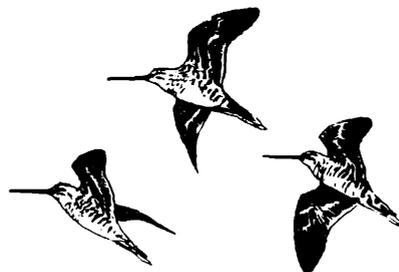
Congratulations to Mike Weston and his editorial team for achieving a considerable enhancement to the appearance of *The Stilt*. With additional funding from the Australian Nature Conservation Agency and Wetlands International, the October 1996 issue was a delight to read.

As noted in its editorial, *The Stilt* is now well on the way to becoming the Bulletin of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, an aspiration that the International Wader Study Group hopes soon will come to full fruition.

This feature largely relies upon YOU the members feeding the Compilers with your notes and news. Please send any noteworthy news, requests or relevant Press Releases from your organisation to:

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Wetlands International
Specialist Group
News from the
Woodcock and
Grouse

In 1996, progress has been made especially in monitoring Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* populations by both ringing and direct observations by a team from the French Office National de la Chasse (ONC) with the following results.

At 404 sites in 61 French departments, a network of 240 ringers organised by the ONC caught and ringed a total of 2 713 Woodcock using nets and spotlights. During 1368 nocturnal outings, a total of 10 225 Woodcock were contacted. This is the most successful ringing period to date.

As previously, most Woodcock were caught in November. The overall age-ratio was 64% juveniles and 36% adults. Towards the Atlantic coast, this ratio was skewed in favour of juveniles. These results are in line with age-ratios derived from wing samples taken from shot birds (67% juveniles assessed from 6 921 wings).

During this period, a total of 502 ringed Woodcock was reported by hunters, being 289 direct recoveries (ringed this season) and 213 indirect recoveries (ringed in previous seasons). The (direct) recovery rate was 10.7%, thus being similar to that of previous years. On average, birds were shot 28 days after ringing at an average of 20 km from the ringing site.

Recently, 26 more recoveries of birds ringed in France have been reported from abroad. Of these, four were shot during autumn and winter in the UK (2), Spain (1) and Turkey (1). A further 19 were shot whilst roding in March to May in Russia (12), Poland (2), Hungary (2), Estonia (1),

Belorussia (1) and Austria (1). A further three were victims of accidents in May and June in Finland.

During 1996, the ONC co-operated with scientific institutes in Russia (Moscow and St. Petersburg) which resulted in the ringing of almost 300 Woodcocks before their migration. Owing to a drought, however, the numbers of juveniles in this area was lower than in previous years.

In order to obtain quantitative data on the Woodcock breeding population in France, roding birds have been surveyed systematically since 1988. In 1996, 63 departments were included in this work, which covered almost all suitable habitats (at 1078 observation points). On average, at 24% of the sites at least one roding Woodcock was observed. These

results do not differ significantly from those of previous years, indicating a more or less stable occupation of French forests by breeding Woodcock. The same holds for an analysis of trends in 45 departments. The number of sites with high and low Woodcock abundance did not differ significantly over the six years analysed. The regions of Lorraine and Alsace exhibited the highest Woodcock abundance. Fifteen records of breeding Woodcock (nests or chicks) were reported in 1996.

The steady decline of the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* in the UK, revealed by Game Conservancy surveys has resulted in a commission to the British Trust for Ornithology to analyse European ring recoveries for this species, with particular emphasis on harvest rates. From this study, it

has become obvious that harvest rates had declined in most countries since 1950 to a level well below 10%. Shooting had therefore certainly not been the cause of the decline, but rather a deterioration of habitats the most likely cause.

In order to improve the situation, the Game Conservancy commenced studies in Cornwall and Somerset during the winter of 1994/5 to compare the benefits of different forms of habitat management for feeding and resting Snipe. The aim is to provide advice to landowners on how to restore habitats and thus secure the Snipe's future.

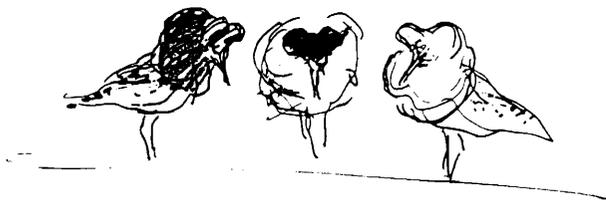
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WSG International Ruff Census

1997/1998



Call for help and information



In spring, from early March to mid-May, large numbers of Ruffs *Philomachus pugnax* are migrating through Europe. They are moving from their (West-) African winter quarters to their breeding haunts in the north. Most of these birds breed in Scandinavia, western Russia and areas further east. At present the size of breeding populations in the countries around the North Sea (e.g. the Netherlands, British Isles, Denmark) are very low in comparison with the breeding numbers further north. In contrast, however, to the marginal importance as a breeding area, these regions do hold large numbers of migrating Ruff. For example, a census of roosts in the south-western and central parts of the province of

Friesland (the Netherlands) in spring 1995 revealed over 40 000 birds, whilst a total of 70 000 to 80 000 birds was estimated when turn-over and incomplete coverage were taken into account (Wymenga 1995). Other important staging areas for Ruffs in spring can be found e.g. in Italy, France, Denmark, Germany and Hungary. There are however wide differences between the sizes of the estimated breeding population in the northern breeding areas (gestimated at several hundred thousands Reeves), the wintering population in western Africa, and numbers encountered on the known staging sites in spring (see also Beintema *et al.* 1995). Therefore new information and co-ordinated counts are more than welcome.

Hence, to get a better picture of Ruff migration in western and central Europe an international census of roosting places is being organised in spring 1997 and 1998. Given the special interest the WSG has paid lately to the Ruff (e.g. Ruff-net), this international census has been adopted as a WSG Project.

The Ruff census will be carried out in spring 1997 and 1998. The organisation for 1997 started too late to reach all waderologists in Europe in time. Therefore the goals for 1997 are to count major staging areas in Europe and to prepare for 1998. Nevertheless, in spring 1997 sites will be counted in Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary,