

**NOTES & NEWS
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**WADDEN SEA RESORT COULD BE
BETTER**

One of the ecological targets set by the Ministerial Declaration of the 7th Trilateral Governmental Wadden Sea Conference is to establish "favourable conditions for migrating and breeding birds in tidal areas, beaches and dunes". A new report from Vogelbescherming Nederland evaluates current conditions and shows that the target has not been met for several species between 1975 and 1994. The reasons suggested are increased recreation creating disturbance, predation, and habitat loss and shell fisheries which deplete the food supply. The report is to be used to lobby for the safeguarding of Important Bird Areas in the Wadden Sea.

MANAGING WETLANDS

The 5th International Course on Wetland Management will take place at Lelystad, the Netherlands, 14th May - 24th June 1998. It is intended for all those who are involved in wetland management. They may be: national park and reserve officers, government environment officers, employees of local planning authorities, water resource managers and staff of non-governmental organisations. Previously participants have come from 40 different countries. Applicants should have at least three years of professional experience in the wetland management sector, or in the

environment conservation sector and be planning to specialize on wetlands; competence in the English language; B.Sc. or equivalent academic degree, or work experience equal to such a level.

The overall objective is to provide the knowledge and skills to enable participants to draw up a concise wetland management plan. The following blocks of topics can be distinguished: 1: Inventory and classification (3 weeks), 2: Importance and problems of wetlands (1 week), 2: Management goals and measures (2 weeks).

The cost of tuition is 8,500 Dutch guilders and full board and lodging is approximately 90 Dutch guilders a day. More details and application forms for the course can be obtained from: Wetland Advisory and Training Centre, attn. secretariat International Course on Wetland Management, P.O. Box 17, 8200 AA Lelystad, The Netherlands. Telephone: +31-320-298346, Telefax: +31-320-298339, e-mail: watc@riza.rws.min venw.nl

**NEWS FROM THE WETLANDS
INTERNATIONAL WOODCOCK AND
SNIPE SPECIALIST GROUP**

Wing sampling in Denmark indicated that the 1995/96 season was rather average (2 juveniles per adult) for woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and below average (2.1 juveniles per adult) for common snipe *Gallinago gallinago*.

Bag records of woodcock in a hunting district in northern Germany (1971-96) show an increasing trend since the mid 1970s. This is in line with other observations in northern Germany and Denmark.

In Russia a total of 234 woodcock were caught on autumn migration during 1991-93. Young birds made up 74.8% of all ringed woodcock. The high ratio of 3 or 4.4 young birds per adult may result from a bias in the catching method, but the ratio varied considerably and was lowest in 1992 when the summer and autumn were very dry. Adult birds were caught more frequently at the beginning and end of migration, while young birds were most common during the peaks. The recoveries show that woodcock nesting in or migrating through north western regions of Russia winter in western

Europe from Scotland to Portugal; few birds reached southern Europe.

**FIFTH WOODCOCK AND SNIPE
WORKSHOP**

This will take place on 3-5 May 1998 in Poland. It is a joint venture of the Woodcock and Snipe Specialist Group of Wetlands International and the Migratory Bird Commission of CIC. It will be hosted by the European Wildlife Research Institute, Agricultural University of Poznan and the Polish Hunters Association, at the Research Station Czempin (near Poznan, western Poland). Applications to attend (by 30.11.97) and further details from: H Kalchreuter, D-79848 Bonndorf-Glashutte, Germany. Tel: 0049(0)7653-1891, Fax: 0049(0)7653-9269.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Proceedings of the conference 'Shorebird Conservation on the Asia-Pacific Region' are now available. Previously unpublished information from much of the Flyway and the first comprehensive assessment of wader distribution of coastal Queensland is included. The publication is 167 pages and is in Five Parts; Part 1 Biology of Migratory Waders, Part 2 Status of Shorebirds and Important Sites, Part 3 Threats and Impacts on Shorebirds, Part 4 Frameworks for Flyway Conservation, Part 5 Asia-Pacific Shorebird Action Plan. Copies are available from Phil Straw (Editor) 15 Kings Road, Brighton-Le-Sands, NSW 2215 for \$25.00 plus \$7.00 postage and packing within Australia or \$15 surface mail overseas (airmail rates available on request). Cheques should be made out to AWSG in Australian dollars. Payments may be made by Bankcard, MasterCard or Visa

ARCTIC BIRD LIBRARY

The Arctic Bird Library (<http://www.wcmc.org.uk/arctic/data/birds/>) is a new Web (Internet) site from the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC). The site, currently at the initial stages of creation, aims to provide

comprehensive information on Arctic birds. At present, the site focuses upon 137 species, mainly waterbirds and waders, which breed in the Arctic as defined by CAFF (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna).

General information is provided on the habitat, conservation status and population size. For 16 species, range maps (from the WCMC Biodiversity Map Library) are also available, together with photos and sound recordings from field expeditions. In addition, links are made to other WCMC species databases including the Integrated Species Information database, which contains information on taxonomy, distribution, conservation status and legal status of threatened animals.

The Arctic Bird Library and the Integrated Species Information database are two initiatives which illustrate WCMC's aim to provide integrated information by providing access to a variety of information in one place. For further information please write to: Christoph Zöckler, Arctic Programme, 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, U.K.. Email: chrisz@wcmc.org.uk

TOFINO MUDFLATS RECEIVE PROTECTION

In April 1997, the mudflats near the town of Tofino on the west coast of British Columbia were declared a Wildlife Management Area by the Provincial Government. Tofino Mudflats support several hundred thousand waders, the most numerous being the Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Whimbrel, and Short-billed Dowitcher. The declaration provides legislative protection of the mudflats and the birds. Further details can be obtained from Rob Butler (e-mail: rob.butler@ec.gc.ca).

BAY OF FUNDY BANDING PROJECT

A field team of volunteers and staff led by Brian Harrington, shorebird biologist from Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in Massachusetts, USA, assessed the condition of Semipalmated

Sandpipers on the Bay of Fundy, Canada in August. The Bay of Fundy is a Hemispheric WHSRN Site hosting hundreds of thousands of staging shorebirds en route to Surinam, South America for the non-breeding season. During the early 1990's, biologists began to recognize major declines of the Semipalmated Sandpipers' primary food source at the Bay of Fundy - at the same time that substantial hemispheric declines in this bird were documented. It has been proposed that lighter birds may not survive the southern flight due to lack of sufficient fat reserves to power their long flight off the Atlantic coast of Canada. Manomet's studies of the species found that far more birds which gain a threshold weight return the next year. Recent Canadian Wildlife Service studies by biologist Peter Hicklin have shown that sandpipers' foraging behaviour differs from a decade before, indicating they may not be finding good foraging conditions. Preliminary results of the most recent work indicate that the vital food supply seems to have recovered and that the birds were well-fed before departing. Funding was provided from CWS, WHSRN and the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, a component of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Jim Corven [reproduced from WADERS-L:296]

NW AUSTRALIA WADER & TERN EXPEDITION 1998

North-west Australia was discovered to be one of the prime locations in the world for wading birds during the first RAOU (Birds Australia) "Expedition" there in August/September 1981. It is now known to have a peak population of nearly 750,000 waders, with a huge variety of species (50, nearly a quarter of the 214 species of waders worldwide). It has also proved to be an ideal place for wader studies with a warm, sunny, dry climate for 10 months of the year (usually!). Furthermore there is easy accessibility to the three principal wader areas of Roebuck bay, Broome (150,000 birds), 80 Mile Beach (550,000 birds) and Port Hedland Saltworks (60,000 birds).

A series of special expeditions have taken place over the years to undertake comprehensive long term studies of the waders and terns in N.W. Australia, the last being in March/April 1996 - 8,135 waders of 29 species and 357 terns of 7 species were caught (see the report in an earlier Bulletin). The next N.W. Australia Wader Expedition will take place from 1st August to 31st October 1998 and expedition members are now being sought for periods of two or more weeks preferably.

The fieldwork program will, as usual, principally consist of regular banding and appropriate counting of waders and terns at three locations (Broome, 80 Mile Beach and Port Hedland Saltworks). This will be the first ever expedition to N.W. Australia to cover, in one season, the whole period during which waders arrive back from their northern hemisphere breeding grounds.

Previous wader banding or expedition experience is not essential for expedition members. What is important is the readiness to work hard (when required) and be a contributor to the team. It is a wonderful opportunity to mix with, and learn from, others with different backgrounds and experience. In 1996, 83 people from 16 different countries participated - and this was one of the most enjoyable and productive elements of that expedition. It's hoped this can be equalled in 1998, with 50% of participants again being from overseas. If you are interested, further information can be obtained from: Clive Minton, 165 Dalgetty Road, Beaumaris, VIC. 3193. Australia. Email: mintons@ozemail.com.au

NEW EDITOR STANDS HER GROUND!

During the latest annual WSG Conference in Ribe, Denmark, our new Bulletin editor, Julianne Evans, was to be seen skillfully controlling any "ball" directed towards her from the opposition. Julianne led her multi-national football team from the goal, to an "unconfirmed" draw. The BTO and RSPB kindly provided on

the sideline Ken Smith, Stephen Browne & Steve Holloway, as the obligatory English hooligans. A re-match in Hungary, is under discussion.

BREEDING CALIDRIS THESIS

In August, Brett Sandercock defended his Ph.D. thesis at Simon Fraser University, entitled: "Factors affecting the breeding demography of Western Sandpipers *Calidris mauri* and Semipalmated Sandpipers *C. pusilla* at Nome, Alaska." Copies may be obtained from Dr. Sandercock at his new address: Brett Sandercock, Division of Ecosystem Science 151 Hilgard Hall, Univ. of California, Berkely, CA 94720-3038 USA.

NEW COORDINATOR FOR THE NATIONAL SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION PLAN

Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences is very pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Stephen Brown as the new Coordinator for the National Shorebird Conservation Plan.

Dr. Brown, in addition to being an avian ecologist with very strong capabilities in both wetlands and shorebird ecology, has demonstrated a strong understanding of the interactions of biology and policy issues and has impressive experience at working with diverse public agencies and communities in reaching solutions to complex management issues. Dr. Brown has been instrumental in developing innovative applied conservation programs with a consortium of environmental organizations in the Great Lakes region of the U.S. and Canada, a highly successful approach to wetland restoration now being applied by the USFWS in several regions, and in designing and coordinating the collaboration of government agencies with private organizations and businesses in a wetlands mitigation program in Massachusetts. He will also contribute to the Plan with valuable scientific knowledge in applied ornithology, behavioral ecology, habitat quality assessment, census

techniques, and a strong background in statistical analysis.

Dr. Brown received his Ph.D in wetlands ecology from Cornell University where he completed his thesis on "Wetland Restoration: Factors Controlling Plant Community Response and Avifaunal Habitat Value". He also received his M.S. from the University of Michigan where his thesis was "A Comparative Approach to the Ecology of the Piping Plover and the Spotted Sandpiper".

U.S. National Shorebird Conservation Plan

The National Plan project is designed to address three objectives: a) develop a standardized, scientifically-sound system for monitoring and studying shorebird populations that will provide practical information to researchers and land managers for shorebird habitat conservation; b) identify the principles and practices upon which local, regional and national management plans can effectively integrate shorebird habitat conservation with multiple species strategies; c) design an integrated strategy for increasing public awareness and information concerning wetlands and shorebirds.

Shorebirds are hemispheric globetrotters whose migrations include long-distance, non-stop flights, often exceeding a thousand miles. To complete these extraordinary flights, shorebirds must lay on enormous fuel reserves. In many of the 41 species common to North America, this depends on migration stopover areas, principally wetlands and associated habitats, which have high densities of food available at the critical times. Further, the critical wetland habitats upon which shorebirds depend also provide essential shelter and food for other species, including waterfowl, neotropical avian migrants, commercial and recreationally valuable fish, and endangered and threatened species.

This project was designed to incorporate a broad-based team of stakeholders/collaborators that includes local, state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, business-related

sectors, researcher, educators, and policy makers. The Plan will be very closely coordinated with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and Joint Venture professionals as well as Partners in Flight (PIF) regional working groups as they concurrently develop their revised national management plans. These partners will have a vital role in contributing to specific working groups organized by technical specialty (research, management, public outreach) and by geographic/ecosystem focus.

The recommendations of research, management, and education working groups will be incorporated into a draft national shorebird plan by the middle of the second year of Federal Aid support. WHSRN will then convene a national workshop, including representatives of NAWMP and PIF, to review and refine the strategy, solicit other comments and produce a final plan for publication by the end of year 2.

Complementary to ongoing planning activities of NAWMP and PIF, and to the WHSRN strategy, the National Shorebird Conservation Plan will make a major contribution to promoting the conservation of wildlife diversity. The development of a scientific, habitat-based national plan for the conservation of shorebirds and their habitats will provide land and wildlife managers in all 50 States with a detailed guide for integrating shorebird management with conservation activities for other species.

SHELLFISHERY INDUSTRY THREATENS DUTCH WADDEN SEA

In spite of a plethora of national and international environmental protection laws, the commercial fisheries for blue mussels *Mytilus edulis* and edible cockles *Cerastoderma edule* in the Dutch Wadden Sea have been allowed to increase immensely over the last 20 years. The power of the dredges and the suction-dredges with which the two kinds of shellfish are harvested have dramatically increased, and so has the number and the area covered by this fishing gear. The disastrous effects for the more fragile elements of the intertidal

benthic communities, notably different kinds of molluscs and some of the shorebirds that feed on these such as european oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* and red knots *Calidris canutus*, are now becoming widely appreciated. Oystercatchers have shown unprecedented winter mortality of the last few winters and the Dutch breeding populations have plummeted to levels less than half of those of only 3 years ago. An interesting case study was carried out over a nine-year period (1988-1996) on the intertidal flats around Griend, an uninhabited islet in the western Dutch Wadden Sea that is famous for its huge shorebird roosts and breeding tern colonies. Here, stocks of mussels and cockles were depleted as early as 1988-1990 during intense bouts of fishery.

The numbers of red knots staging at the intertidal flats around Griend showed dramatic declines from 1988 to 1992 in concert with increases in the coarseness of the sediments and serious declines in the stocks of their preferred food, the baltic tellin *Macoma balthica*. By 1996, cockles and tellins had still not returned in densities comparable to the pre-fishing era. The permanent losses of bivalves were most pronounced in the sectors of intertidal flat that were most affected by the shellfisheries in 1988-1990, and foraging red knots have yet to return to these areas. Mechanical shellfisheries not only remove biomass, but have consequences for the structure of the benthic environment due to extensive sediment reworking (industrial cockle dredging), a large reduction in the production of silty (pseudo-)faeces with sediment binding properties (disappearance of mussels and cockles), an increase of tidal prism and a decrease of the lee from storms (disappearance of mussel banks). Depending on the geographic position of intertidal flats in terms of exposure to winds and tides, modern dredging techniques and the removal of mussel banks can have very long-lasting effects on the whole intertidal ecosystem. It is quite possible that the removal of intertidal mussel banks in combination with the sediment reworking by cockle-dredging has changed the ecosystem of the Wadden Sea permanently and on a very large scale into a more

dynamic system, one in which densities and availability of buried bivalves, and hence the availability of prey for some of the high-arctic migrant shorebirds, have been permanently decreased. In view of the fact that mechanical shellfisheries have increased (or are likely to increase) in most estuarine areas in western Europe, the disastrous effects on intertidal benthic communities and consequently on shorebirds that rely on these, could be widespread. There is much cause for concern.

Theunis Piersma

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