

Project "Tringa glareola 2000" - spring and autumn migration of Wood Sandpipers through Europe - a new Wader Study Group project

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INTRODUCTION

With the exception of the western population of the species, which breeds in Sweden, the migration of the Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* in Europe is not very well understood, particularly the spring and autumn passage along the south-eastern flyway heading to the Black Sea. The pattern of migration of populations breeding in Finland and in Siberia also needs further study. Research on the species is difficult as it migrates over land and is dispersed over many wetland areas. The lack in knowledge about this species is probably also due to the fact that most wader catching takes place at coastal sites and few inland stations ring them. The recent increase in ringing activity, the continuing growth of interest in waders and the increasing intensity of observations provides an opportunity to start studying this species.

AIMS

In spring 1997, a project studying the migration of the Wood Sandpiper was started by the Waterbird Research Group KULING from Poland. The aim of this research programme is to work on the pattern of spring and autumn migration, particularly the flyways and wintering areas of different migrating groups, migration dynamics and phenology in different parts of Europe, migration speed, length of stopover period at different sites and repeated occurrence in the same places from year to year. The work will be concentrate on the migration route heading to the Black Sea, but other flyways will be included in the project. Fieldwork will finish in autumn 2000. After that, an analysis of the material collected and publication of results is planned. The most desirable form would be an issue of International Wader Studies dedicated to the migration of the species with contributions from

participants in the project. However, whether this can be achieved will depend on the funding.

As with every research programme studying bird migration, this project depends on the cooperation of bird observers from different countries. The study will only succeed if there is widespread and coordinated work by many ringing stations and bird observers. In spring 1997, ringing and counts were conducted in two stations in Poland and one in Hungary. Since then, interest in the programme has continued to grow and, in August 1997, 16 ringing stations from Finland, Poland, Germany Ukraine, Hungary and Italy have joined the project (Figure 1)).

METHODS

The fieldwork will use a combination of three methods: colour ringing, dyeing and observations. In addition to a metal ring, birds caught at regular ringing sites, and possibly in the future during short expeditions to sites where the species gathers during migration, will have four colour rings fitted, two on each leg, above the tarsal joint. The combination of colours on the left leg indicates the site, season and year and on the right leg the five-day period when the bird was ringed. At Raasio Wader Ringing Station, which is particularly interested in research into the differences between juveniles and adults, the combination on the right leg indicates the birds' age at ringing. The records of colour-ringed birds should increase considerably the material available from ringing recoveries.

Birds caught in autumn in Finland are also dyed on the underparts. Adults are dyed red (with rodamine b) and juveniles yellow (with picric acid). All birds marked on this way are also colour-ringed. Untypically colourful individuals are easy to pick out in a flock of birds meaning the observer can put more effort into reading the colour ring combination. Therefore, it should be possible to

follow the passage of dyed groups of birds from records provided by birdwatchers and also to increase the number of records of colour ring combinations. In spring, Wood Sandpipers will be dyed in Italy and this should allow observations to be made of them during their flight through Europe to the breeding grounds.

The success of the programme depends on counts and intensive observations of Wood Sandpipers on the migration route being made. Regular counts at sites where concentrations occur should be conducted at least twice in every five day period to keep up with the sometimes very rapid changes in birds numbers especially during their fast spring migration. However, less frequent but regular counts can also provide valuable information for defining the dynamics of migration of the species in different regions of Europe. Comparison of the changes in numbers at many different sites should make it possible to define the flyways and patterns of occurrence of different groups of birds in some regions. Special effort can be put into spotting marked birds to provide information on the occurrence or absence of such individuals at the area. In addition, irregular observations made by birdwatchers can be a good source of records of colour-marked birds. These records combined with the results of comparisons of migration patterns can lead to definitive statements about the migration routes of the species. Even at sites which are important for the species but where catching cannot be organised, anyone who wishes to take part can conduct counts and observations.

PARTICIPANTS REQUIRED

At the moment the programme is in the first phase of organisation. Birds are colour-marked at some stations but the participation of others is needed. The programme is being widely publicised among bird observers all over the Europe to make them interested in counts and draw their attention to the need to make careful observations of migrating Wood Sandpipers. The interest in the programme is growing and it is hoped that many individuals and groups will take part. However, there are some difficulties. A source of funds to cover fieldwork expenses is needed, as not all stations, especially those on the south-eastern flyway cannot afford colour rings. Also the catching equipment at many stations could be improved. All this might be possible with some source of funds. Any support in this respect or ideas on how to provide funding for the project would be greatly appreciated!

The success of the programme depends on the scale of interest of bird observers and ringers taking part. Only the participation of ringing stations from many European countries and the activity of numerous birdwatchers concentrating on observations of Wood Sandpiper will make it possible to obtain a complete picture of the migration of this species. Anyone who would like to join this research programme are warmly welcome! The contact person is:

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Figure 1 Stations taking part in the project (till August 1997). Station symbols: AW - Akcja Wisza, BR - Rieselfelder Braunschweig, CH - Cholgynii, CV - Castel di Volturno, DW - Drewnica, GS - Gülper See, JE - Jeziorsko, KL - Kaliszany, ME - Melitopol, MU - Rieselfelder Münster, RM - Reda mouth, RO - Raasio, SP - Säppi, SR - Sarrod, SL - Malza Mänder, YY- Yyteri.

