

current flyway-scale research and conservation activity. It contains nearly 90 papers on waders in eastern Europe and northern Asia and is prefaced by descriptions of current international wader conservation activity, including proposals for ways of developing a global wader flyway conservation strategy.

The idea for the volume originated at a WSG meeting in Odessa in 1992 and WSG's aim has been to reflect the great diversity of research on waders in eastern Europe and northern Asia in the 1980s and early 1990s. Hence papers range from faunistic surveys in limited study areas, through sophisticated ecological analyses to brief reviews summarising long-term research programmes. Overall, the volume provides a picture of the nature of wader research in the region, and yields a

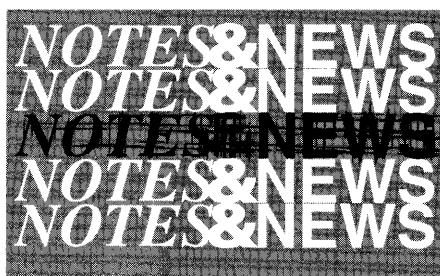
wealth of new data for those studying the ecology and distribution of different species and populations.

David Stroud noted that whilst generous financial support from Wetlands International and the British Ornithologists' Union had been instrumental in allowing the printing of the volume, it could not have been produced without the estimated three person-years of voluntary time expended by the WSG in bringing this publication to fruition. He outlined the wide range of activity that been undertaken in European and Asian flyways since the Odessa Conference, with the finalisation and imminent entry into force of AEWA being of major significance. He concluded by suggesting that a follow-up meeting in Odessa in 2002 might be appropriate in

the context of reviewing a range of wader conservation problems. If such a meeting might be co-sponsored by the Ukrainian government, it might also be an appropriate regional co-ordination meeting for programmes under AEWA.

The presentations sparked lively debate from the representatives of national media who attended.

¹Hötter, H., Lebedeva, E., Tomkovich, Gromadzka, J., Davidson, N.C., Evans, J., Stroud, D.A. & West, R.B. (eds.) 1998. Migration and international conservation of waders: Research and conservation on north Asian, African and European flyways. *International Wader Studies* 10. 526 pp. £35.00 (incl. postage) from International Wader Study Group, c/o National Centre for Ornithology, Nunnery Place, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, UK



WATERBIRDS IN THE ZOUTE DELTA

Watervogels in de Zoute Delta 1996/97 is the latest publication reporting on the monthly counts of waterbirds in the salt waters of the Delta area, south-west Netherlands. The counts presented are part of a biological monitoring programme of the large waters in the Netherlands that involves close collaboration between Governmental bodies and volunteers. The first half of the report summarises the trends in the waterfowl populations of the Zoute Delta since 1987 and identifies populations of international importance. In winter, more than 450,000 waterbirds are present in the Zoute Delta when the 1% level (1% of a population regularly present, a criterion for international significance) is exceeded more than 100 times. The area is in fact of major international significance for waterbirds throughout the year. The report then focuses upon the waterbird populations censused within the period July 1996 - June 1997 in comparison with the

previous two years for the different components of the Delta complex.

Throughout the report's first half, the influence upon waterbird population levels of severe winter weather is made evident. A subsequent chapter discusses the consequences of the severe winter 1996/7. In addition to changes in numbers and distribution, there was a considerable mortality among birds. A total of 11,873 dead waterbirds were registered, of which 7,168 were Oystercatchers, 1,509 were Dunlin and 714 were Redshank.

The report concludes by discussing the occurrence of six species in the Zoute Delta area in more detail: Cormorant, Shelduck, Red-breasted Merganser, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Dunlin.

Watervogels in de Zoute Delta 1996/97 is written in Dutch with the figure legends and summary also provided in English. The publication details are: Meininger, P.L., Berrevoets, C.M. & Strucker, R.C.W. 1998. *Watervogels in de Zoute Delta 1996/97*. Rapport RIKZ-98.001. Rijksinstituut voor Kust en Zee, Middelburg. ISBN 90-369-3402-8.

THE USA'S 17TH RAMSAR SITE

The United States has designated the 445 ha Bolinas Lagoon in Marin

County, California, less than 20 kilometres up the coast from San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. Managed by the Marin County Open Space District, this tidal embayment provides an important coastal environment that is unparalleled along the northern California coast. Open water, mudflat, and marsh provide productive and diverse habitats for marine fishes, waterbirds, and marine mammals, and it is also part of a much larger protected natural habitat complex in the region. The geographical location along the Pacific Flyway makes the Lagoon an ideal staging ground and stopover site for migratory birds, and the temperate climate provides wintering habitat for a wide array of waterfowl and shorebirds. Bolinas Lagoon is listed under Criteria 1b on representativeness, 3a on waterfowl, and 4b on importance for fish. The area supports a number of recreational uses, including the use of manually-powered watercraft.

With the addition to the List a few days ago of Sand Lake in South Dakota, the total area covered by the USA's 17 Ramsar sites comes to 1,172,835 hectares.

Dwight Peck, Executive Assistant for Communications Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland
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REQUEST FOR WATERBIRD COUNT DATA IN AFRICA

Rodney West would like to hear from anyone who has made counts or done census work on waterbirds anywhere in Africa during the period 1990-1998. The time of year is not important although counts between December and February are of most relevance for this particular project.

This data will help supplement information already held in the IWC database at Wetlands International in the Netherlands. The sum of all this data will be used by Wetlands International who have a commitment to the Ramsar Convention to provide updated estimates and trends in waterbird (including waders/shorebirds) population sizes on a three-yearly cycle. This information is presented to Ramsar CoPs, published in *Waterfowl Population Estimates* and used to revise 1% population thresholds for a selection of internationally important wetlands. To deliver revised estimates to the next Ramsar CoP (Costa Rica, June 1999), Wetlands International needs to compile revised estimates by the end of 1998.

If you think you have data which could be used, Rodney would be very pleased to here from you. All that is required is; species names, totals, dates and co-ordinates. Please contact Rodney West at: rodwest@thenet.co.uk or by fax on 00 44 1728 688044.

ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 1994 - 1996

Some of the most recent findings of the Asian Waterfowl Census has recently been published by Wetlands International, Kuala Lumpur, in the document *Asian Waterfowl Census 1994 - 1996, Results of the co-ordinated waterbird census and an overview of the status of wetlands in Asia*.

The report summarises information collected as part of the Asian Waterfowl Census for three years, 1994 to 1996, and includes data from countries in Asia, from Pakistan eastwards and Australia. The information was gathered by a large network of nationally co-ordinated volunteer birdwatchers under a Wetlands

International programme. Waterfowl defined here include all species of divers, grebes, pelicans, cormorants & darters, herons, egrets & bitterns, storks, ibises & spoonbills, flamingoes, swans, geese & ducks, cranes, jacanas, shorebirds, gulls, terns & skimmers and birds of prey (consistent with species recognised as waterbirds by the Ramsar Convention). Data is reported from a total of 1,994 sites covered at least once. Of these, 75 wetlands were reported to support at least 20,000 waterbirds during one or more counts, thus meeting one criterion of the Ramsar Convention; to date only six sites are on the Ramsar list. Forty-four percent of the sites are reported to be owned by government, but this proportion increases to about 80% for the sites holding over 20,000 waterbirds. Ownership/protection of sites by a government does not appear to guarantee their conservation, as is evident from information reported on the state of wetlands. The inclusion of sub-regional site maps serves to identify internationally important wetlands and others covered by the census. The publication includes numerous annexes. These include site-by-site counts that are useful to view annual differences in numbers and species of birds reported, changes to uses and threats to the wetlands; species totals by country per year, information on the Ramsar and Bonn Convention criteria and activities, etc. Information on thirty-one species of globally threatened birds reported during the census is included (categories follow Birds to Watch II of BirdLife International).

Financial support for the production and distribution of the report was kindly received from the Ramsar Convention, Bonn Convention and British Airways.

Copies of *Asian Waterfowl Census 1994 - 1996* by A. Lopez and T. Mundkur. (118pp, ISBN 983-9663-27-5) are available at US\$15 (including postage and handling) from Ms. Monica Yoong, Wetlands International - Asia Pacific. For those ordering this publication, you can also purchase *The Asian Waterfowl Census 1987 - 1991. Distribution and Status of Asian Waterfowl* for US\$10.00 (including postage and handling). Perennou, C., Mundkur, T. and Scott, D.A. 1994. AWB, Kuala Lumpur and

IWRB, Slimbridge. Pp 372. ISBN 983-9663-13-5. Normal price: US\$30.00

NO RINGING RECOVERIES? - THIS MAY BE WHY!!!

According to the Knight-Ridder News Service, the inscription on the metal bands used by the U.S. Department of the Interior to tag migratory birds has been changed. The bands used to bear the address of the Washington Biological Survey, abbreviated "Wash. Biol. Surv.", until the agency received the following letter from an Arkansas camper:

"Dear Sirs: While camping last week I shot one of your birds. I think it was a crow. I followed the cooking instructions on the leg tag and I want to tell you it was horrible." The bands are now marked "Fish and Wildlife Service."

[Reproduced from the PITTA 88, August 1998]

YELLOW WADER WATCH

Have you recently been puzzled as to whether that yellow bird seen out on the mudflat is a canary, rubber duck or yellow-breasted Stint? Well read on.

The AWSG's 1998 North-west Australia Wader & Tern expedition, the biggest ever, recently drew to a close after three months intensive fieldwork. From 1 August to 31 October, approximately 127 people from 18 countries participated in the catching and counting of waders over the whole arrival period of the migratory waders that breed in northern Asia and Alaska and spend the non-breeding season in Australia. The main catch areas were Roebuck Bay, Eighty Mile Beach and Port Hedland. By the end of September, the expedition had already caught over 8,500 birds, the majority comprising of waders (31 species) with small numbers of five tern species.

In order to find out more about some wader species that pass through north-western Australia on their way to southern Australia, Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* and Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea* were marked with yellow dye (picric

acid) on their breast, underwings and for the latter species, their rump. The dye should be visible for at least 2-4 months, becoming more orange with age prior to these feather tracts being moulted out. As well as being metal ringed, these birds and all other wader species and terns caught were given a permanent yellow leg flag on one leg.

The expedition's other objectives included, through the use of biometric, moult and count data, to:

- monitor the arrival and passage of adult and juvenile waders,
- assess the success of the 1998 breeding season
- gain a greater understanding of the age composition and condition of the large populations of non-breeding immatures that remain in north-west Australia during May - July.

A summary of the outcome of these and other objectives as well as the expedition as a whole will, it's hoped, be published in a later edition of this Bulletin. Meanwhile, many marked birds will continue on down to southern Australia and possibly even New Zealand to spend the 1998/99 non-breeding season.

If you have information on sightings of any of these yellow dyed or flagged waders within the East Asian - Australasian Flyway, please forward details of species, date and location to *Clive Minton, 165 Dalgetty Road, Beaumaris, Victoria 3193, Australia. Tel/Fax (03) 9589 4901. Email: mintonsoz@ozemail.com.au*

TROUBLED TIMES FOR THREE THREATENED WATERBIRDS IN KAZAKSTAN

A Glasgow University expedition to Kazakstan has recently returned to the UK after three months searching the steppe lakes of northern Kazakstan for three of the world's most endangered waterbirds: slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, and sociable plover *Chettusia gregaria*. In collaboration with Professor Anatolyi Kovshar and Doctor Sergei Yerokov of the Institute of Zoology in Almaty, a ten man team travelled over 13,000 km and visited over 70 wetland sites between 18

July and 25 September 1998. Part of the team have only just returned from the Kazakstan/Chinese border and the full results of the expedition will be presented shortly.

The slender-billed curlew is Europe's rarest and least known bird. The species is critically endangered with a world population estimated at only 50 to 270 birds. The species is so rare that the location of its breeding grounds are almost completely unknown, while few passage and wintering sites have ever been identified. No slender-billed curlew nest has been found for over 70 years, and recent surveys of former breeding areas have failed to locate any birds. Recent records of birds summering in northern Kazakstan have, however, fuelled speculation that slender-billed curlews may breed in the remote steppe habitat in the north of the country. Unfortunately the team was unable to locate any slender-billed curlews in Kazakstan, although in a country as large as Kazakstan this is perhaps not entirely surprising for such a rare bird.

Northern Kazakstan and southern Russia are thought to contain the majority of the world's breeding population of white-headed duck, although comprehensive surveys have never been conducted. Recent declines in wintering numbers of white-headed ducks have been severe and worrying. The International Waterfowl Counts, co-ordinated by Wetlands International, have located no more than 5,000 birds since 1992 and in the main wintering grounds in Turkey, numbers have plummeted from 5-11,000 birds in the 1970s and 1980s to only 3,000 birds subsequently. This has prompted speculation that white-headed ducks may be suffering from problems on their breeding grounds. The Glasgow University expedition therefore planned to investigate whether land use or climate change in Kazakstan could account for this decline.

The survey found white-headed ducks in two areas, although only 17 birds plus a female with young were found. The most important site in Kazakstan for white-headed duck is probably Lake Tengiz, where most birds were seen by the expedition. Dr. Yerokov reported a pre-breeding count of 800 white-headed ducks there this spring.

The world population of sociable plover has declined drastically this century, primarily through habitat loss, and the entire population (some 10,000 birds), is thought to breed within Kazakstan. Birds usually gather in large flocks before migrating to their wintering quarters providing an ideal opportunity for surveys. The survey found sociable plovers in two areas in very small numbers. Local scientists and local people reported that the breeding success of sociable plovers had declined drastically in recent years because of trampling of nests by cattle (the plovers favour very heavily grazed pasture for nesting). It is also possible that a recent great increase in rooks (a crow species) may also have contributed to their low breeding success. It seems likely that sociable plovers are becoming increasingly endangered and the results from the expedition should help to focus attention on this conservation problem.

As well as these three globally endangered species, Kazakstan supports huge numbers of waders and wildfowl in late summer as they pass through the country from their breeding grounds in Siberia to winter in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Whilst on migration, waterbirds often rely on a small number of sites at which they can replenish food reserves. Such migratory 'bottlenecks' are therefore vitally important for the conservation of these species. The Glasgow University expedition therefore collected information on all waterbirds encountered. During the survey up to a million waterbirds were encountered confirming the importance of northern Kazakstan as a migratory flyway.

Thankfully, there appears to be little current threat to waterbirds in northern Kazakstan from habitat destruction/modification, partly because the human population there has halved over the past five years, as Russian nationals have returned to Russia and the remaining populations have become fragmented as they return to subsistence agriculture to survive. Over-hunting also does not seem to be a major problem, as local people abide by Kazakh hunting laws which prohibit hunting during the breeding season. Indeed, the Glasgow University expedition did not observe any hunting whatsoever, despite the huge

numbers of waterbirds we encountered. It therefore appears that the main factor affecting numbers of white-headed ducks, and other waterbird species in Kazakstan is climate and the natural availability of breeding habitat. Three dry summers in a row have resulted in many wetlands drying out, and with the onset of global warming, this situation can only get worse.

The worsening economic climate in Kazakstan does not bode well for further expeditions. Vehicle costs had doubled between the final planning stages of the expedition and their arrival in Kazakstan. The expedition members were even asked for \$65 per head for entry into a nature reserve! With such economic difficulties, it is clear that in the near future it will be difficult to pursue conservation initiatives in Kazakstan. Paradoxically, now is the time when such initiatives are most in need!

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LATE BREEDING KILLDEER

On 5 October, a female Killdeer was discovered in central Arkansas (USA) incubating four eggs. As of today (26th October), she is still sitting on the eggs. Incubation is usually about four weeks, so they may hatch soon...or maybe they won't...This record is approximately three months beyond the known breeding time for Killdeers in Arkansas. If the eggs do hatch, then there was a male that was also sexual active in the autumn. If they don't hatch, then maybe the female produced four infertile eggs for some unknown reason. Our question is: are there other records of autumn-breeding by Killdeers (or any other plover for that matter)? Thanks in advance for your help.

Kimberly G. Smith, Department of Biological Sciences, Univ. of Arkansas, Fayetteville 72701, USA.
Phone: 501-575-3251. Fax: 501-575-4010. Email: kgsmith@comp.uark.edu

THE TATTLER

I am working on the next issue of The

Tattler (the newsletter for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway) produced by the AWSG. Do you have any news relating to waders (shorebirds)? I would appreciate contributions of news, conservation issues, research issues about waders in the Flyway (any research papers will be referred to the editor of The Stilt). Also, if you know of anyone who is not on the address list of this e-mail who could contribute useful information please let me know. Thank you for your help.

Phil Straw. Email: pstraw@mpx.com.au

SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW WORKING GROUP

The globally threatened Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* is one of the world's rarest birds, with the global population estimated at 50-270 birds. Under the auspices of The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), a Working Group on the Slender-billed Curlew has been established and is being co-ordinated by BirdLife International. The primary objective of the working group is to maintain and enhance the conservation status of the Slender-billed Curlew through co-ordinating the implementation of the action plans established under the CMS and by BirdLife International/Council of Europe. The working group will provide a forum for the exchange of views and information between scientists and policy-makers, working to conserve this species. BirdLife International will collate and distribute new information on the Slender-billed Curlew. In particular, BirdLife is currently updating its database of Slender-billed Curlew records and would appreciate being informed of any new records.

*For further information please contact:
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BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court,
Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, tel
44 1223 277318, fax 44 1223 277200,
email nic.peet@birdlife.org.uk*

COLOR-MARKED SURFBIRDS AND WANDERING TATTLERS

To those of you so fortunate as to visit Oceania or be along the coast of the

western Pacific Ocean the next several months, do we have an opportunity for you!

As if our recently completed studies of Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Bristle-thighed Curlew *Numenius tahitiensis* did not tax our mental and physical abilities to the extreme, we have now take on studies of breeding Surfbirds *Aphriza virgata* and Wandering Tattlers *Heteroscelus incanus*. Somebody has to do it, don't they? Nevertheless, to this end we have individually color-marked several dozen adult and juvenile Surfbirds and Wandering Tattlers at our study site at Lake Clark National Park in southwestern Alaska.

The chance that you might see one of these birds is greater than you think. For example, a female Surfbird captured on the breeding grounds in June 1997 was seen near San Pedro Bay, southern California, on 1 April 1998. The very same bird was seen by us 28 days later at its terminal staging site in Prince William Sound, Alaska, and by us again 10 days later on its breeding territory. Each adult carries a green leg-flag and usually one or more color bands; several dozen chicks of each species were also marked and they carry a single color band. If you see a marked Surfbird or Wandering Tattler please note the placement of each band, including the metal band, and send the information to:

*Robert E Gill, Biol. Resources Division,
Alaska Science Center, USGS, 1011 East
Tudor Rd., Anchorage, Alaska 99503-
6199. E-mail: robert_gill@usgs.gov OR
Pavel S. Tomkovich, Zoological Museum,
Moscow State University, B. Nikitskaya
Street, 6, 103009 Moscow, Russia. E-
mail: tomkovic@1.zoomus.bio.msu.ru*

P.S. For any bird seen we promise to provide the observer a history of the birds' stay at the northern end of its range, including such things as how it avoids predators, how it keeps caribou from eating its nest (eggs and all), and how it manages to produce young in an environment subjected to frequent snow storms. Pavel might even share with you why *Aphriza* is really *Calidris*!!

OIL SPILL IN THE WADDEN SEA

The following report is prompted by a WWF press release which we received in the Ramsar Bureau earlier today. The

Bureau is contacting the Administrative Authority responsible for implementation of the Convention in Germany and requesting further information.

There has been a serious spillage of fuel oil from a cargo ship which ran aground, after an on-board fire which killed one person, in the German sector of the Wadden Sea (a vast intertidal wetland complex shared by Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands, covering some 10,000 sq. kms). Most of the Wadden Sea is included in eight Ramsar sites designated by the three Contracting Parties concerned. The Bahamas-registered transporter ran aground on the edge of a National Park and the Ramsar

site known as Schleswig-Holsteinisches Wattenmeer (*i.e.* the part of the Wadden Sea which is within the German Land, or province, of Schleswig-Holstein).

Due to difficult weather conditions, which hampered salvage operations, fuel oil leaked from the ship for a couple of weeks and has been spread within the Ramsar site by wind and tidal action. Although it appears not all of the 600 tons of oil on board was spilt, and that the leak has now been contained, the effects have already been disastrous. 20,000 oiled birds (mostly seaducks and shorebirds) have been reported so far in what is Europe's most important wetland for migrating and wintering water birds. The Wadden Sea is also a major fishery

and fish nursery, and an important centre for recreation and tourism. It will clearly take longer to see what impact the spill may have on these values and uses.

The following contacts have been provided by WWF: Stephan Lutter, WWF North-East Atlantic Programme, lutter@wwf.de or Hans-Ulrich Roesner, WWF Germany, Wadden Sea Project Office, roesner@wwf.de

Tim Jones, Regional Coordinator for Europe, Ramsar Bureau, Gland, Switzerland. Email: taj@hq.iucn.org

