WADER STUDY GROUP
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# INTERNATIONAL WADER STUDY GROUP CONFERENCE, 24–27 SEPTEMBER 1999, ILE DE BERDER, GOLFE DE MORBIHAN, FRANCE

## *A personal account*

This was the first Wader Study Group Conference and Annual General Meeting in which I have been able to participate since I went (at the request of my employer) to live in Australia in 1978. It gave my wife, Pat, and I enormous pleasure, especially to return and to find that the Group still has the same happy, friendly, welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere that has been one of its characteristics since its inception in 1970. It has also been fantastic to observe over the years how the Group's technical knowledge and expertise has grown so enormously, and how the membership has become so international, with a particularly strong representation from a wide range of European countries. The 1999 Conference was a wonderful opportunity to observe all these characteristics at close range again.

The monastery building on the Ile de Berder must be one of the best settings ever for the annual WSG get–together. It is a far cry from the lounge of our house in central England where the initial meeting took place. Not only was the beauty of the surroundings and the seclusion of the island perfect but having the accommodation, eating and meeting locations all in one building was ideal in maximizing the opportunity for informal discussions – the most valuable attraction of such meetings. The next (30th) WSG Conference in 2000 in Norwich, England, will have great difficulty matching both this and the excellent food and wine with which we were plied.

And now to the main purpose of the meeting – the formal programme. Twenty–six illustrated lectures were presented in the main programme, with a further 11 at the special Avocet Workshop which followed. There were also 27 poster exhibits on display throughout the weekend and adequate time for these to be studied. The content of the talks was highly varied, but did not suffer from the lack of an overall theme. The standard of presentation was uniformly excellent and it was great to see that some people could mix humour with serious presentation, thereby adding to understanding and acceptability. On the negative side there were occasionally a few small hitches with the slide projection equipment; the text on some of the overheads and projected illustrations (particularly some of those in Power Point) was too small to be read by those at the back of the audience; and the amount of extraneous light entering the room made some of the detail of the colour slides difficult to see.

I will not seek to comment upon individual presentations, abstracts of which are included elsewhere in this *Bulletin*. Suffice it to say that I enjoyed them all and, as always, learned many new things, which have relevance to, and can be applied in my own areas of wader research. The 139 participants, from 17 countries, will all have returned home with added knowledge and increased enthusiasm.

The good balance between the time allocated to formal presentations and that available for informal contact was a feature of the Conference and I think the concept of having a specialist workshop at the end is an ideal arrangement. It is important to ensure that the meeting content and format is attractive and valuable both to the ever–growing number of professional wader specialists and the continuing band of enthusiastic wader 'amateurs', who provided the initial foundation for the Group and on whom the Group continues to rely for extensive long term population and ringing fieldwork.

On behalf of those participating in the 1999 Conference can I thank the organisers, especially Guillaume Gelinaud, for choosing such an excellent venue. Can I also congratulate the officers of the WSG for the successful

ongoing direction and management of this energetic and technically expert Group which continues to provide such valuable research data for the management and conservation of waders and wader habitats.

It would be nice to see the WSG's role continue to widen geographically in the future and to more effectively integrate the wader studies taking place throughout the world, especially the activities in the Americas and the Asia Pacific region. In due course, following the recent formal change of the Group's name to that of the International Wader Study Group, better regional co-ordination arrangements could and should be established with regional semi-autonomous WSGs in other parts of the world. This would further assist the establishment of effective networks of wader enthusiasts.

***Clive Minton***

# *1999 WSG MEETING*

## ABSTRACTS OF TALKS

### The impact of Sea Empress oil spill on estuarine birds

*Michael Armitage*

Over 72,000 tonnes of oil were released when the Sea Empress ran aground at the entrance to Milford Haven, Wales. Some of the oil stranded on parts of the Cleddau Estuary, which hosts nationally important numbers of wintering waterbirds. Assessment was made of the number of birds using two polluted sites and two relatively clean sites on the estuary. Preliminary results suggest that the oil may have adversely affected five out of seven waterbird species investigated in detail. These were Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Redshank *Tringa totanus* and two wildfowl species: Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* and Wigeon *Anas penelope*. The effects were mostly confined to the remaining winter period immediately after the spill and the following winter and there was evidence of recoveries of all species by the second winter after the spill. The fluctuations in these populations are discussed with reference to the availability of important prey organisms.

### Habitat choice of coastal breeding birds in the changing Delta of the SW-Netherlands: lessons for the future?

*Floor A. Arts[1], J. Graveland[2] & P.L. Meininger[2]*

Coastal breeding birds (e.g. Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Avocet, terns) are a characteristic component of the coastal ecosystem and are considered to have a significant value from a conservation point of view. The Dutch coastal zone is of international importance for the NW-European population(s) of these birds. In the Delta area of the southwest Netherlands, the population sizes have changed dramatically since the 1950s. Terns and plovers have declined and are threatened. The populations of a few species, like some gulls, have increased exponentially. The Delta area is strongly influenced by humans. Human activities such as land reclamation, the Delta Project (construction of dams and/ or storm-surge-barriers in sea-arms and estuaries), industrial development and recreation all had, or may have had, negative effects on the populations. On the other hand, nature restoration projects and industrial development may create new breeding sites, at least temporarily.

At present, the main problem seems to be the lack of suitable breeding sites. Dynamic conditions, caused by tide, salt, wind and flooding, have largely disappeared, resulting in vegetation succession and colonisation by ground predators. This problem can be expected to increase in the future.

We determined the habitat requirements of coastal breeding birds and have started to analyse 20 years of monitoring data. Our goals are to identify the chief causes of changes in numbers, and the importance of dynamic conditions, vegetation succession, predation and recreation for breeding. The results of the study will be used to advise managers and policy makers, in particular on the importance of dynamic conditions for these birds and on the optimal strategy for creation and restoration of new breeding sites. The first results of this study will be presented.

### Winter site-fidelity and survival of Redshank at Cardiff, South Wales

*Niall Burton*

The site-fidelity of adult Redshank was investigated using colour-ringing and radio-tracking at Cardiff Bay, a wintering site in South Wales, in 1996/ 97 and 1997/98. Between 7 and 20% of colour-ringed adults were seen away from the bay in winter, although only at a distance of 4 km. Radio-tracking also suggested that adults were largely faithful either to the bay or to this neighbouring site. Return rates of 89% and 83% were estimated over two successive summers, indicating site-fidelity between winters. Survival rates of 91% and 100% were estimated over the two preceding (four month) winter periods. Annual survival rates, calculated as the product of the winter survival and over-summer return rates, were therefore 81% and 83%. These estimates are comparable to those previously obtained for Redshank, in studies on both breeding and wintering grounds.

### Cost of reproduction in the Ringed Plover: The role for parasites?

*Przemek Chylarecki*

Ringed Plover is facultatively double-brooded in Central & Western Europe. In the study population in E Poland, 55% of females lay a replacement clutch following failure of the first clutch, but 36% of birds lay a genuine second clutch after a successful hatching of the first clutch. The probability of laying a replacement/ second clutch is negatively influenced by investment in the first clutch as measured by egg length. Also the size of the replacement/second clutch is negatively related to breadth of eggs in the first clutch. Furthermore, controlling for interclutch interval and date, hatching of first clutch negatively influences egg size in a subsequent clutch. Among females that hatched a first clutch, the probability of laying a second one is negatively related to their ectoparasite burden. Female survival to the next breeding season is negatively related to first clutch egg length, particularly if coupled with the production of two clutches.

Overall, producing large eggs imposes fecundity costs in terms of reduced probability of laying a subsequent clutch