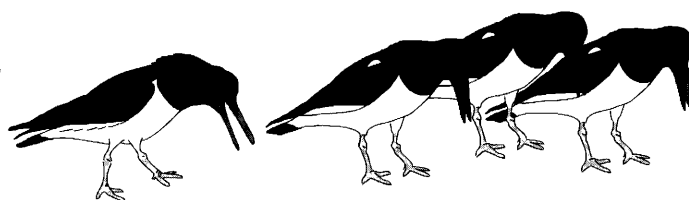


NOTES & NEWS



A new wetland and waterbird monitoring scheme for eastern Africa

Earlier this year, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) was awarded £174k by the UK Government's Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) as part of the government's *Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species*. WWT's Darwin project, *Monitoring Biodiversity for Site Management Planning in Eastern African Wetlands*, will establish a new wetland and waterbird monitoring scheme for the entire eastern African region and a database to hold the information it generates. The project will also provide training within key organisations on how to use data from the monitoring scheme for biodiversity conservation and the development of site management plans.

A partnership between WWT, Wetlands International and organisations from nine East African countries (Kenya, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda) has been established to deliver the project.

The three-year programme is now under way, and Oliver Nasirwa, a Kenyan citizen with considerable experience and expertise in monitoring African wetlands, has been appointed as WWT's Darwin Project Officer. Since July 2002, he has been based at the Research Department at WWT, Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, where he is developing the database for the new scheme. Oliver will also produce material for a series of training courses that he and other WWT staff will deliver at the Naivasha Training Institute in Kenya during 2003.

The focus of conservation efforts within this African region has so far been on rangeland and mammal conservation. It is now recognised internationally and by African governments that there is an urgent need to develop similar conservation programmes to protect their wetlands and associated biodiversity. WWT's Darwin project will enable these countries to monitor biodiversity over long periods of time using an established monitoring scheme. This will lead to more effective wetland site management and better use of natural resources, enhancing quality of life for local communities. For further information please contact: Dr Mark O'Connell, Head of Research, WWT, Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BT, UK; e-mail: Mark.Oconnell@wwt.org.uk phone: (0)1453 891900.

Molecular phylogeny of African plovers

A new project has recently started at the University of Bath on the conservation genetics of the endemic Madagascar Plover *Charadrius thoracicus*. Part of this study is to evaluate the phylogenetic relationship between the Madagascar Plover and other African plovers. We are in need of blood (or body tissue) samples from any European, Asian and African species of *Charadrius*, *Pluvialis* and *Vanellus*. If anyone is able to supply any sample, we will be glad to provide buffer for storage and transportation.

If you can help, please get in touch with Fiona Sharpe, c/o Tamas Szekely, Department of Biology and Biochemistry, South Building, University of Bath, Bath BA2 7AY, UK, or e-mail: bspfes@bath.ac.uk.

East to west translations

Translations from Estonian, Belarussian, Russian and Ukrainian into English of materials on all wader species as well as reviews and bibliographies published in the territory of the former Soviet Union can be provided for a modest fee for foreign national and international wildlife organizations and private persons by: Jevgeni Shergalin, Soprusse pst. 175-58, Tallinn, 13413 Estonia; phone: (3725) 090684; fax (3726) 599351; e-mail: zoolit@hotmail.com, website: <http://my.tele2.ee/birds/>

Wetlands International launches Strategy 2002–2005

Wetlands International has launched its new Strategy, a document that represents the culmination of two years of collaborative effort by staff, members and partners to re-organize Wetlands International's programme of activities into a coherent and integrated global plan – it re-defines and clarifies the organization's focus and presents a clear vision for the future, articulating its major aims for the next four years. The Strategy portrays the organization as "a science-based international provider of information and advice for the wise use of wetlands worldwide". The launch letter from Dr Max Finlayson, President of Wetlands International, is available at http://ramsar.org/w.n.wi_strategy_letter.htm, and the document itself can either be downloaded in PDF format from the Wetlands International Web site at <http://www.wetlands.org>, or is available as a glossy booklet on request from Wetlands International.

A Year on the Wing

A Year on the Wing is an online documentary to be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/wing>, which follows the journey of migrating shorebirds from Siberia to Aotearoa in New Zealand and back. The story is being unfolded in 8 stages, Siberia, Japan, NE Australia and more recently Aotearoa has been the focus of attention. In 2003, this will move on to SE Australia, NW Australia and then China by late April. Among the documentary's many contributors are several WSG members from the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, led by Clive Minton who graces the homepage.

Launched on 5 June, World Environment Day, *A Year on the Wing* supports many fantastic education resources in the sciences and the arts. Whether as viewers or participants, children will learn about the culture and environment of the countries visited by the shorebirds on their journey. One aspect of the project has been the creation of a 'Chain of



Schools' that stretches the whole length of the East-Asian Australasian Flyway with at least one school in nearly every country.

A Year on the Wing has been funded by the Australian Film Commission, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Environment Australia, and is a strictly non-commercial site.

Oldest known wader in the British Isles

Members of the Wash Wader Ringing Group (WWRG) recently caught the oldest known wader in the British Isles. On 7 September 2002, a catch of 26 Oystercatchers was made at Wainfleet, on The Wash, which included one bird that had been ringed at Snettisham, also on The Wash, on 13 August 1967. At 35 years old, this bird sets a new Oystercatcher longevity record for Britain and Ireland. A group photo was taken of the Oystercatcher along with all the team members present at the catch who were younger than the bird! This can be viewed at http://www.bto.org/news/news_2002/sep-oct/oystercatcher.htm. It is said that WWRG's founder, Clive Minton, can vividly recall the original catch!

The bird was previously recaptured on 1 August 2000 at Friskney, just a few kilometres from Wainfleet.

Further longevity records held by waders ringed in the British Isles are tabulated in the Wash Wader Ringing Group's latest report. As well as documenting fieldwork for 1999–2001, the report includes papers on non-intertidal habitat use by Turnstone and the Group's Monitoring Strategy on the Wash. For the eleven species targeted by the Group a general review is provided of the recovery data for the Wash as well as lists of all recoveries reported during 1999–2001. This shows that most Oystercatchers that spend the autumn and winter on the Wash breed in Norway, probably including the old bird mentioned above. For further information about WWRG and its fieldwork activities, contact Phil Ireland, the Group Leader, at 27 Hainfield Drive, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 2PL, UK; e-mail: Phil_Ireland@Bigfoot.com

Les Underhill awarded Gilchrist Medal for services to marine science

On 5 July 2002, the South African Network for Coastal and Oceanic Research awarded the Gilchrist Memorial Medal to Professor Les Underhill. This medal is awarded every few years to distinguished people who have made significant contributions to marine science in southern Africa. Les, an Ex-co member of the WSG, has been the Director of the Avian Demography Unit (ADU) in the Department of Statistical Sciences at the University of Cape Town since 1991. Under Les's direction, seabird and wader research constitutes an important part of the ADU's work. This is very much reflected in contributions to recent WSG Bulletins and Conferences. The citation that accompanied the medal presentation (see ADU newsletter *Bird Numbers* 11: 5–6) provides us with an account of the achievements of this worthy recipient. It aptly describes Les as "a large man: large hands, large mind, large heart". Congratulations, Les!

Predator control: its effect on upland waders

A large-scale investigation into the effect of predator control on upland birds is to be undertaken in Britain across 48 km² of heather moorland at Otterburn, Northumberland, England.

The Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) is undertaking an eight-year investigation called the Otterburn Wader Experiment. This aims to measure the impact of predators on declining ground-nesting birds including Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Golden Plover, Common Snipe and Eurasian Curlew.

Controlled grazing and heather burning is thought to have a beneficial effect in conserving the heather-clad uplands, but active control of predators such as foxes, crows and stoats is more contentious. The GCT plans to isolate the effects of predator control by gamekeepers from other factors, such as variations in habitat, in order to measure the effect on ground nesting bird populations.

For the initial two years, a research team led by Dr Andrew Hoodless will undertake detailed bird counts to establish baseline data on four moorland plots totalling 48 km². Each plot covers 10 to 12 km² of very similar topography, at about the same altitude and subject to similar weather, and has a mixture of unenclosed heather, grass and rough grazing typical of the average grouse moor. In the following six years, experiments will measure how predator control affects a variety of moorland birds.

The plots are at least 6 km apart to prevent gamekeeping activities in one from affecting another. Each will be subject to similar heather management regimes, with the aim of keeping the habitat in each constant over the study period. Annual surveys and aerial photography will be used to monitor habitat changes.

During the experiment, the only major variable will be the extent of predator control carried out by two experienced gamekeepers. Control will be carried out for three years and then cease for three years on one plot, while another plot will undergo the same regime in reverse order. In the two remaining plots, one will be subject to predator control for all six years, while the other will remain completely without control. The two six-year management regimes are designed to measure population changes in some of the more long-lived species, such as Curlew.

The Game Conservancy Trust hopes the results from the Otterburn Wader Experiment will help in the conservation of Britain's unique heather moorlands. The experiment comes at a time when there is widespread recognition of the need to reform the way upland agriculture and land management are funded and practised.

For further information about the project and GCT, see the Web site: <http://www.gct.org.uk>

Population status in the UK: Birds of Conservation Concern

The Population status of birds in the UK – Birds of Conservation Concern: 2002–2007 is an assessment of the population status of the UK's bird species. It is a list agreed by a group of the UK's statutory and leading non-governmental bird conservation organisations in 2002, chaired by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

The group reviewed the status of the 247 species which occur regularly in the UK and divided them into three lists: Red, Amber and Green.

The Red List comprises 40 species whose populations or range are rapidly declining, recently or historically, and those of global conservation concern. The three wader species in this list are Stone Curlew, on account of the rapid contraction of its UK breeding range over the last 25 years, and Black-tailed Godwit and Red-necked Phalarope because of



population declines during 1800–1995.

The Amber List comprises 121 species whose populations are in moderate decline, rare breeders, internationally important, restricted to a small number of sites, or those with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe. The Amber List contains 21 wader species, eight identified as having a less favourable conservation status. This is consequent upon a decline of 25% or more in non-breeding population (Ringed Plover) or breeding population (Lapwing, Dunlin, Common Snipe, Woodcock, Redshank) or, a localised/rare status (Spotted Redshank and Green Sandpiper).

All other species occurring in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man, are on the Green List. These are increasing, stable or have decreased only slightly though they should be monitored to enable any future changes to be detected.

The review confirmed the international importance of many species in the UK, particularly wildfowl, waders and seabirds. In winter, the UK supports more than 25% of the East Atlantic flyway population of nine waders and 35% of the population of Purple Sandpipers. The UK therefore has a particular obligation to ensure that these populations are conserved.

Given that the conservation status of birds does not remain static, there is a commitment to review the list every five years. The next is planned for 2007.

For more information about how the Red, Amber and Green Lists were developed, see *British Birds* (95: 410–448), or download the summary document from <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

European Ornithologist Union conference

The 4th conference of the European Ornithologist Union (EOU) will be held at the invitation of the Verein Saechsischer Ornithologen (VSO) and the Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft (DO-G) during 16–21 August 2003 in Chemnitz, Germany. The new campus of the Technical University, which offers four lecture rooms, will be a pleasant background for this international conference. The committee of the VSO welcomes all participants of the EOU conference 2003 to Saxony.

The EOU was founded in August 2000 to support ornithological studies all over Europe. Biannual conferences are organised, each hosted by a different European country. After preliminary conferences in Italy and Poland, the first formal conference of the EOU took place last year in Groningen, The Netherlands. The EOU publishes the journal *Avian Science* (in English).

For more information about the next conference (in German, English and Russian) and current EOU activities see <http://www.vso-internet.de> or <http://www.eou.at>

The footsteps of Jerdon's Courser

Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* is globally threatened and listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List, one of seven such species in India where it is endemic.

It is a nocturnal bird known historically from a handful of records in the Pennar and Godavari valleys (in the Eastern Ghats) of Andhra Pradesh, east-central India. It was thought to be extinct, and was not sighted between 1900 and 1986, when it was rediscovered in the Pennar valley. The population size is unknown but thought to be small and decreasing.

Although Jerdon's Courser is now seen fairly regularly at

a few sites, little is known of its ecology, habitat, numbers or distribution. The Bombay Natural History Society is now undertaking a research project, with help from the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department, funded by the Darwin Initiative, and supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the University of Reading (UK).

This project aims to address the main conservation requirements of the species through:

1. identification of habitats selected seasonally,
2. estimation of current population size and distribution, and development of survey methods,
3. production of a management plan with recommendations for conservation measures, and
4. training personnel to build up individual and organisational capacity to facilitate sustainable management and conservation of Jerdon's Courser and its habitat.

What is perhaps a novel approach to wader research is the use of "soil tracking strips" to record bird footprints in Jerdon's Courser habitat. These consist of 5m bands of smoothed, fine soil in which any walking bird will leave footprints. A special infrared camera, triggered by anything walking over the strips, allows every bird to be photographed as it leaves its tracks. As well as those from Jerdon's Coursers, footprints from Stone-curlew, Red-wattled Lapwing, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Barred Buttonquail, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Indian Courser have also been found. Yellow-wattled Lapwing and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse footprints are quite similar to Jerdon's Courser, but photographs have enabled them to be distinguished.

By searching for footprints in suitable habitat, Jerdon's Coursers have been found in three new areas.

The soil strip method for tracking and photographing Jerdon's Courser is described in *Oryx*, the journal of Fauna and Flora International.

In November 2001, a recording was made of the courser's call. This may be useful in future for finding coursers in new areas through the use of playback. Experiments are currently taking place to determine whether this is a suitable survey method.

Source: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>

UK Ramsar Report

This summarises the UK Government's experience in implementing the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat between July 1998 and February 2002 and has been submitted to the Ramsar Bureau in advance of the 8th Conference of the parties to the Convention to be held in Valencia, Spain, in November 2002.

Further information on the Conference of the Parties and a download facility for the report can be found at the Ramsar Bureau website: <http://www.ramsar.org>

Source: Ramsar Bureau

Leg flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Just as we go to press, an amazing report has been received via Clive Minton of a sighting of a leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This is an endangered species, with a small and declining population whose breeding range is limited to the Chukotsk Peninsula, northeast Siberia. The main non-breed-



ing area is thought to be in Bangladesh and very small numbers are seen on migration along the Asian coast, including Hong Kong and Korea. On 8 September 2002, a juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpiper (probably the first Japanese record for over 10 years) was seen near Tokyo. It carried a pale blue leg flag and a Russian metal band, the number of which was read in the field. This bird had been banded in July in the Chukotsk Peninsula during a special expedition to monitor the status of the breeding population. An adult leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper was also seen in Korea on the same date. If this record is confirmed, this bird would also have been banded in the same area of NE Siberia in July.

The Asian Wetland Inventory Regional Workshop

The Asian Wetland Inventory (AWI) aims to develop a broadly supported standardised inventory protocol that can provide information for the assessment, evaluation and monitoring of wetlands. Initiated in 1999, the AWI is an initiative by Wetlands International, the National Centre for Tropical Wetland Research (NCTWR), the Wetland Inventory Monitoring Specialist Group (WIMSG), the Japanese National Institute for the Environment Studies (NIES), the Hokkaido Institute of Environment Studies (HIES) and a range of other partners.

The most recent positive development on the Asian Wetland Inventory was the success of the Regional Workshop in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (8–9 April 2002). The workshop received active participation from 35 representatives from 10 countries. Governments of a total of 8 Asian countries were represented.

The aims of the workshop included:

1. introducing the need for inventory and the AWI to a wider range of stakeholders and to identify stakeholder interest, and
2. to demonstrate the AWI technical tools and present case studies.

The workshop did indeed identify stakeholder interest together with the next plan of action at the country level to progress this initiative. Other key outputs of the workshop included the Phnom Penh Statement on Wetland Inventory.

In brief, the workshop recognised:

- ☐ the importance of wetland inventory,
- ☐ the need for standardized methodology and reporting process,

- ☐ the identification of multiple stakeholders,
- ☐ the need to build national/sub-national capacity,
- ☐ the importance of improving networking amongst government agencies, institutions and other organizations,
- ☐ the importance of developing national inventories in national languages,
- ☐ the need to fine tune the AWI manual based on input from the workshop,
- ☐ the need for financial assistance from international aid agencies and other donors to support the development of this initiative.

For further information visit the AWI Web site at: <http://www.wetlands.org/awi>

Managed Realignment (or managed retreat) at the Wash Estuary in the UK

The last land to be reclaimed from the Wash Estuary for agriculture is being returned to the sea as part of the £1.2 million Wash Banks flood defence scheme in eastern England. Sea level rise, probably as a result of climate change, is leading to coastal erosion and loss of intertidal habitats as they cannot migrate inland to compensate for more frequent tidal inundation owing to sea defences preventing landward migration. The problem is accentuated around the Wash following centuries of reclamation of low-lying land for agriculture and the consequent truncation of saltmarsh habitat.

Three breaches (cuts of approximately 50 m wide) have been made in the outer seawall, no longer considered to be sustainable, to enable managed realignment of an area of 78 ha. With the aid of aerial photographs, the former creek system has been excavated, enabling tidal incursion, and land drains have been blocked. As saltmarsh accretes, it will dissipate the wave energy and so reduce the erosion of the inner, strengthened and realigned sea defences, thereby combining recreation of valuable intertidal habitat and cost effective flood defence. The scheme at Freiston foreshore has been managed by the UK's Environment Agency in partnership with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, HM Prison North Sea Camp (open prison for resettlement of offenders) and English Nature (statutory nature conservation agency). This is the largest managed realignment scheme to date in the UK and is the subject of a wide-ranging monitoring programme, part-funded by the UK government (DEFRA), the results of which will assist with the design of further, similar schemes.

For further information, e-mail john.badley@rspb.org.uk



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