



Bulletin 105

The Papenburg conference: a big step forward or a workshop too many?

Covering four days with four workshops and attended by 150 people from 19 countries, the recent International Wader Study Group annual conference at Papenburg, Germany, was the biggest ever. It was well-organised. The standard of the presentations was excellent. The workshops were focussed and are leading to valuable and positive outcomes. Practically everybody who attended was enthusiastic about what had been achieved. But some expressed concern that it was all too much.

Papenburg became a big conference because four groups within the IWSG wanted to run workshops focussing on important and topical issues. It may have been a coincidence that four workshops were proposed for the same conference and that may not happen again. But the IWSG is an active and enthusiastic organisation and I suspect it will. Is this to be welcomed or should it be restrained?

What are the problems?

First, the people who organise our conferences are volunteers. They have limited time and it may not be fair to overburden them. Moreover, if conference organisation becomes too much, volunteers may be difficult to find. At Papenburg, if our hosts were overburdened, they did not show it. They appeared to have everything well under control and looked happy and relaxed. Nevertheless this needs to be considered, especially where organisers do not have a large team of helpers.

Second, the IWSG's Executive Committee normally has its main annual meeting on the day before the conference. This year, this was impossible because of the workshops. Instead, a short Exco meeting was held one evening.

Personally, I was delighted that we missed a full day's Exco at Papenburg! I find committee meetings extremely tedious. They tend to expand to fill the time available and can be so boring. But of course Exco needs to meet so perhaps it could do so during a workshop or the excursion. Therefore I do not see the Exco meeting as a good reason not to hold several workshops. But that is my view and it may not be shared.

The third issue that has been raised in relation to Papen-

burg is that the conference has become too "professional" and that the interests of the IWSG's many amateur members are being ignored. I do not accept this for a moment! Our amateur members are not just nature lovers with a passing interest, they are enthusiasts. They, like all of us, want the IWSG to be at the leading edge of wader research and conservation. They want their contributions to count – to really count. The only way to achieve this is to address the issues with every bit of scientific expertise we can muster. Keen amateurs (as I was for 30 years) understand that and do their best to keep up – and probably understand more than might be supposed. Anyway, even if IWSG workshops do get a bit technical, they are only optional extras. The main conference, as always, takes place over a weekend and includes something for everyone.

As an international organisation, travel costs are high for many attending IWSG conferences; all the more reason therefore to make our meetings as meaty and worthwhile as possible.

Papenburg demonstrated the vitality and importance of the IWSG. I look forward to many more conferences like it, but that's just my opinion. Do other members agree?

Thanks – and welcome!

Robin Ward has just stepped down after compiling *Notes & News* for the *Wader Study Group Bulletin* for no less than fifteen years. The IWSG has many committed enthusiastic members, but fifteen years dedicated work is surely something of a record. Robin is moving on to work for the group in other ways, but we must not let this occasion pass without expressing our grateful thanks to him for all he has done.

I am very pleased to welcome Silke Nebel as the new compiler of *Notes & News*. She is particularly well qualified to fulfil this role as she has studied waders and knows wader people across a good proportion of the world: in Germany, Scotland and the Netherlands (for her bachelor's and master's degrees) in Canada (for her PhD) and now in Australia. Also, she was recommended for the role by one of her former supervisors because of her "particularly inquisitive nature"!

Humphrey Sitters

