



The Jindřichův Hradec statement

Conclusions from the 3rd Pan-European Duck Symposium and meeting of the IUCN-SSC /
Wetlands International Duck Specialist Group

In April 2012, 83 experts in duck research and conservation from the IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Duck Specialist Group, representing 21 countries, met in Jindřichův Hradec, Czech Republic, for the 3rd Pan-European Duck Symposium, a workshop on European seaduck conservation and a meeting of the Nordic Waterbirds and Climate Network.

Four days of workshops and conference presentations were held, and a range of issues discussed, many of fundamental importance to duck conservation and management in Europe. Participants examined the current population status of European ducks, knowledge of their ecology, the monitoring systems used to inform conservation and management activities, and the suitability of existing legislation and policy.

The conference and workshop participants recognised:

1. The importance to conservation of accurate population status assessments and the invaluable contribution made to this process by the International Waterbird Census (IWC);
2. That the recent reinvigoration of the IWC is very welcome, and that this foundation now needs a sustainable base upon which it can grow and deliver the information needed for effective duck conservation and management;
3. That many of these important migratory waterbird populations are experiencing rapid changes in abundance and distribution, and that our best data suggest many are in decline;
4. That the serious declines noted among several European seaduck populations, most notably the Velvet Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) and Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), are of particular concern and urgently require the development of coordinated monitoring, research and conservation action;
5. That eastern Europe is increasingly important for wintering ducks, and that the availability of count and other data from this region is currently inadequate for population status assessments;
6. That knowledge of breeding ducks in Europe remains inadequate, with little information available on the location of key breeding areas, nor trends in pair densities and measures of breeding success;
7. The importance of monitoring other demographic measures, particularly individual-based (i.e. from marked birds) effort over the long term, is increasingly important in this period of rapid environmental change, as such data can provide valuable added certainty for population status assessments, as well as information that is essential for the effective management of huntable duck populations;

8. That the importance of these data was highlighted in the mid 2000s when concerns regarding highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 arose, which meant that detailed information on the migration routes of ducks was required to understand the potential of wild birds to transmit disease; since then, investment in duck ringing has decreased considerably despite the fact that distributions and migration timing and routes of many ducks remain poorly known and are also rapidly changing, and that the risk of future outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 has not significantly diminished as the disease continues to affect several parts of the world;
9. That our monitoring, management and site protection systems are increasingly unsuitable in this period of rapid environmental change, as they lack adequate resources and the flexibility to respond to change;
10. That requirements for the management of huntable populations of ducks, such as the collection of bag statistics and the development of systems to ensure harvests are sustainable, as set out in the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), have in most cases not been implemented by AEWA Parties;
11. The concern expressed regarding the continued spring hunting of ducks, which remains legal in eastern European countries such as Russia and Belarus;
12. That the habitat requirements of ducks need to be adequately taken into account when planning land use policy and local habitat management;
13. That there is a need for improved communication between scientists and other experts, and decision makers within the EU and other policy frameworks.

The conference and workshop participants therefore recognised the urgent need for:

1. A coordinated programme of monitoring, research and conservation action for European seaducks, particularly Long-tailed Duck, Velvet Scoter, Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*), Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*), Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) and Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*);
2. Continued strengthening of the IWC, and the network of field ornithologists upon which it relies, in order to ensure continued provision of accurate estimates of population size and trend in this period of rapid environmental change;
3. The development of integrated monitoring of demographic parameters for breeding ducks to give added confidence to population status assessments;
4. The collation of existing demographic datasets in order for their utility to be maximised;
5. A more adaptable and flexible legislative system that responds to changes in conservation status, and which delivers sustainable management of huntable ducks, taking account of best practice from existing schemes across Europe and North America;
6. Improved, more flexible, site protection networks that can better adapt to changes in distribution.

To support these priority requirements, Duck Specialist Group members set out to:

1. Establish working groups for the six priority seaduck species in order to drive forward monitoring, research and conservation priorities, including an AEWA Single Species Action Plan for Long-tailed Duck;

2. Compile a thorough review of existing knowledge of Western Palearctic duck populations in order to inform decisions about future management and conservation activities;
3. Organise and hold the 4th Pan-European Duck Symposium in 2015.

Further, the Duck Specialist Group calls for:

1. AEWA Parties to adopt the draft resolution 22 on Establishing a Long-Term Basic Structural Funding Regime for the International Waterbird Census in the African-Eurasian Region when they meet for the 5th Meeting of Parties in La Rochelle in May 2012;
2. AEWA Parties, and others with interest in duck management, to support other projects that provide training opportunities and resources for ornithologists in eastern Europe and other priority areas, through professional exchanges and greater support for collaborative projects;
3. The EU to develop a more flexible system for managing hunting of ducks under the Birds Directive, following the approach taken by the proposed AEWA management plan for Svalbard Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*);
4. Greater engagement and collaboration with the duck hunting community in order to develop a shared approach to duck management;
5. Better dialogue with policy makers, particularly through an improved science policy interface at the national and international level, via structures such as the ORNIS committee;
6. All remaining range states that have not already done so to join AEWA and address unsustainable hunting practices;
7. Support for enhanced monitoring of other demographic measures, including the computerisation of valuable historical datasets.

For further information contact the IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Duck Specialist Group
<http://www.wetlands.org/Aboutus/Networkpartnersanddonors/Networkofspecialists/DuckSpecialistGroup/tabid/189/Default.aspx>

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