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News from the International Waterbird Census Western Palearctic and southwest Asia - December 1999

Newsletter for Co-ordinators of national waterbird monitoring schemes

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Introduction

This newsletter evolved from an end-of-year letter to all national waterbird count co-ordinators in the Western Palearctic and southwest Asia. Now that we produce an IWC Report only every three years, we will produce a detailed IWC newsletter in years when no report is printed. The latest IWC report was printed last August, so this issue of the newsletter is a bonus. The first of the official, interim newsletters will appear in about a year's time in December 2000. Future newsletters will include reports from the African Waterbird Census, the Asian Waterbird Census and the Neotropical Waterbird Census, and status reports on the decentralised goose, seaduck and wader databases. We would welcome contributions to future Newsletters from national waterbird count co-ordinators, counters, and anybody with an interest in waterbird monitoring.

IWC Report 1995 - 1996

We hope that you found the report *Results from the International Waterbird Census in the Western Palearctic and Southwest Asia 1995 and 1996*, sent to you in September, useful and interesting. Please let us know if the report contains any errors relating to your country or if you have any other comments. Please also let us know if you would like additional copies of the report, or if you can recommend anybody else in your country who should receive a copy.

New team member: Jantien van Oord

Congratulations are due to Edith Hubert who gave birth to a baby boy in November. To cover for her maternity leave we have taken on Jantien van Oord as Data Management Assistant.

Data management upgrade

We are at present in the middle of upgrading our data management system. The old IWC database in dBase IV has been moved into MS Access and we have taken the opportunity to restructure the data model and modernise its management. Next year we will be more flexible in our analyses of the IWC data, and it will be easier to link the IWC data to other environmental datasets. The new system will be more user-friendly and so accessible to more potential users. We expect to spend some time debugging the new system and will run old and new systems in parallel for several months. The new system will necessitate some changes to recording forms for counts and sites, and there will also be changes to some of the site codes. We will keep you informed of these developments.

IWC on the web

Anybody who visits the Wetlands International website, <http://www.wetlands.agro.nl/> will have noticed impressive recent additions from the Ramsar database. In 2000 we will compile a web entry about IWC. We intend to present a list of all national waterbird count co-ordinators as part of this web entry. The list will comprise the name and contact details (e-mail address, postal address, telephone numbers) of each national co-ordinator.

Please let us know before the end of January 2000 if you do NOT want your name and contact details to be listed in this way on the Wetlands International website.

Count dates: January 2000

Please note that the recommended dates for IWC counts in 2000 are:
15-16 January 2000

Request for data – January 1997, 1998 and 1999

We are starting work on the next IWC report, covering January 1997, 1998 and 1999. The first step of this process is to compile the data from each country. Many thanks to those national co-ordinators who are up-to-date with data submission. We will be very grateful if you would kindly send January waterbird count data from your country for these three years if you have not already done so. The data needed to prepare this report are as follows:

(a) For countries which submit data on forms
IWC count forms from the month of January for all sites counted in the years 1997, 1998 and 1999. Please check the forms before you send them to ensure that all the data are correct, and in particular, that the names of all sites where counts were undertaken are the same as the names used in previous years. We would be grateful if, for any sites covered for the first time in these three years, you could also submit green Site Details forms. If you need more recording forms or if you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact the IWC office.

(b) For countries which submit data electronically

Please send details of all waterbird counts in the month of January for all sites counted in the years 1997, 1998 and 1999. Please check that all the data are correct, and in particular, that the names of all sites where counts were undertaken are the same as the names used in previous years. We would be grateful if, for any sites covered for the first time in these three years, you could also submit green Site Details forms, or at least submit details of their geographical co-ordinates. If you need details of preferred electronic formats or if you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact the IWC office.

(c) All countries

There are gaps in our data holdings from most countries. Six countries have, however, submitted Waterbird count data in every season since the counts began in 1967. We are interested in receiving data from past seasons when they may not have been sent from your country. This will improve the quality of any population trend analyses which we undertake in the future. Next year we will send individual letters to national waterbird count co-ordinators in countries for which there are missing data, with details of the gaps relating to their country.

Waterbird Population Estimates 3rd edition

Waterbird Population Estimates is one of the most important publications produced by Wetlands International. It provides the basis for the 1% population thresholds used to identify Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Published every three years, this book is heavily dependent on counts organised by national waterbird monitoring schemes. Production of the 3rd edition of this publication will be one of the principal activities of the IWC office in the first half of 2000. A First Consultation Draft was produced for the 7th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention in May 1999, but we have only this month found the time to resume work on the final draft.

We will put the tables on the Wetlands International website for comment in January 2000 and aim to have "WPE3" published early in the summer. We would welcome your comments. We have so far received comments from over 60 experts and there will be improvements to a large number of population estimates. Enhancement of the 3rd edition will include the presentation of breeding and wintering ranges of each population in separate columns, and the inclusion of English species names.

Waterbird Monitoring Steering Committee (Western Palearctic and southwest Asia)

The annual Waterbird Monitoring Steering Committee meeting was held on 28-29 September 1999 in Brittany, France, after the annual conference of the Wader Study Group. The meeting was very productive and positive. The minutes are finished and we will send a summary to all national co-ordinators of waterbird monitoring schemes in the New Year. If there are any issues you would like to raise at next year's meeting in Wageningen, please let us know.

We would like to focus on two important issues which were discussed at the meeting:

Gap-filling Census

One of the principal subjects discussed at the Steering Committee meeting was the expansion of IWC in January 2002 to fill as many of the existing gaps in coverage as possible. The aims of this census will be as follows:

- To find out the numbers of birds missed in normal census years. This will lead to more accurate population estimates, and will allow calibration of counts in normal census years to totals which for many species will be close to the actual numbers of birds.
- To obtain high quality information about midwinter waterbird numbers in little-known and hitherto unknown sites and countries.
- To raise the profile of IWC and increase capacity for waterbird counting throughout the region.
- To set baseline values for seaducks. For this group, a complete census in one season is the only way accurate estimates can be achieved.

Most IWC national co-ordinators completed a questionnaire last year about this proposed census, and the completed questionnaires formed the basis of much of the discussion at the Steering Committee meeting. The gap-filling will concentrate on wetlands in eastern and southern Europe, north Africa and southwest Asia where

counts for IWC cannot be organised in normal seasons because of a lack of resources. The expansion in coverage will be achieved by organising a series of expeditions from about fifteen countries, mainly in northern and western Europe, where coverage for IWC is usually near-complete.

It will be very helpful if national count co-ordinators in countries with well-developed waterbird monitoring schemes could publicise these subsidised expeditions to potential participants and compile a list of expedition teams for January 2002. We will compile a list, in approximate order of priority, of gaps to be filled, and next year we can start matching expedition teams to gaps. We will send detailed information and instructions next year after a comprehensive project proposal has been submitted to potential funders. We have obtained funding to produce this proposal early next year and we are confident that the census will go ahead. A mop-up census will probably be organised in January 2003 to cover areas where counts could not be organised in 2002. After that, it may be possible to use a similar approach to improve coverage of waterbird monitoring in sub-Saharan Africa.

Monitoring Introduced Species

Introduced species are a growing problem. The threat posed by North American Ruddy Ducks to the globally threatened White-headed Duck is a well-known example in our region. At the Waterbird Monitoring Steering Committee meeting, Sacred Ibises regularly flew over the venue of the meeting. Their population is growing steadily after escapes from a zoo started nesting on the coast of Brittany. The Waterbird Monitoring Steering Committee agreed that we should ask co-ordinators of national monitoring schemes to include details of all non-native waterbird species in counts submitted to Wetlands International. In this way, we can monitor the numbers of these species and inform policy makers of any problems as they develop.

AEWA MoP1: The first Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, Cape Town, South Africa, 7-9 November 1999

The first Meeting of the Parties to the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) took place in Cape Town, South Africa, in November. The Agreement came into force on 1 November 1999, three months after seven countries in Africa and seven in Europe had signed and ratified it. This fortuitous timing meant that the meeting was recognised by the United Nations and that the resolutions adopted are legally binding. Wetlands International produced many of the technical documents which form the basis of AEWA, principally a report on the conservation status of all 170 waterbird species covered by the Agreement, and a series of Conservation Guidelines for use by conservation practitioners at national level. All 170 species are now included in the AEWA Action Plan. It was very pleasing to see these measures adopted by

delegates from all countries in the Agreement area with only minor amendments. Good progress was also made with identifying sources of funding for activities required by the Agreement and the future for waterbird monitoring in the agreement area looks hopeful.

AEWA – Posters

As part of the contribution of Wetlands International to AEWA MoP1, we produced three posters and a leaflet about IWC, about Waterbird Population Estimates and about Flyway Atlases. A limited supply of these is still available to anybody who would like them. Please let us know if you would like us to send you copies of these posters and leaflets.

Offer of assistance in producing national reports on waterbird monitoring

Professor Les Underhill is Director of the Avian Demography Unit in the Department of Statistical Sciences at the University of Cape Town. The unit is highly productive and Les has been at the forefront of analyses of bird numbers and distribution for many years. The first national report on waterbird monitoring to come out of Africa was recently published. Titled *Total CWAC Report: Co-ordinated Waterbird Counts in South Africa, 1992-1997*, the report is available from: Sue Kieswetter, Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa; email suek@maths.uct.ac.za. The report costs R120 (that's just less than 20 Euros or US dollars)

plus postage, which varies from country to country.

The Avian Demography Unit is willing to assist national waterbird count coordinators in the Western Palearctic and southwest Asia with analyses of data and report production. They would do this on a consultancy basis, but South Africa is not an expensive country and the rates there are competitive. If you would benefit from high quality and inexpensive help in reporting the results of your waterbird monitoring scheme, why not contact Les at the address above (or by email: LGU@maths.uct.ac.za).

Summary: Action Points for national co-ordinators of waterbird monitoring schemes:

1. If possible, and if you have not already done so, please compile January waterbird count data from 1997, 1998 and 1999 and submit them to Wetlands international for the next IWC report.
2. In countries where waterbird monitoring is well developed, Start planning the gap-filling census in January 2002.
3. Investigate national sources of funds for expanding count coverage in January 2002.
4. Publicise the subsidised expeditions to exciting, little-known wetlands in the south and east of the region and compile lists of teams with an interest in participating.
5. Include non-native species on your national recording forms and in instructions to counters.

Finally...

Season's greetings to everyone involved in waterbird monitoring work throughout the Western Palearctic and southwest Asia. We hope that your counts in January are successful, rewarding and enjoyable.

Many thanks indeed for your continuing contribution to IWC