Newsletter of the Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group

No. 1, May 2003

Wetlands International
Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group

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Re-launching Wetlands International's Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group

By Gilles Deplanque, WHSG Coordinator

Wetlands International's project to re-launch the Specialist Group set up by Dr. Tempo Lampio, initially devoted to just game harvests and named "Hunting Research Group" and inactive since 1995, could become a vast project indeed!

The new challenge is issued with a wider objective than before and the wish to be directly or indirectly involved in all waterbird harvests by men, wherever done and whatever the methods used.

Some views will perhaps consider this project as too ambitious, and therefore doomed if not to fail, and at least be earlier focused on more modest goals, or even a return to game harvests only; the future will show how this develops with your co-operation.

However, after long and extensive brain storm sessions, meetings and exchanges of ideas, it seems that collecting data on the global harvesting of waterbirds, in all forms, provides key information for global and coherent wetlands conservation.

Aiming lower than this would neither permit to provide the responses we are entitled to expect in the improvement of the knowledge of waterbird populations, nor to define credible directions for the regulation or control of man's exploitation of this natural resource.

In this regard, the work of the Harvest Group will sometimes ties in with that of the "Sustainable Use of Wetlands" Programme of Wetlands International.

This preliminary Newsletter, more an extensive notification about the restart of the group, is intended to be the first stone of a structure, which we need to build together, in pursuant of the objectives set in November 2001 during the Board of members Meeting and the themes developed in Wageningen, in April 2002, during the meeting of Wetlands International Specialist Groups Coordinators.

- To define the intervention area of the group. Which harvests are we concerned with?
- To distinguish the causes of the harvests.
- To distinguish the harvesting modes and techniques.
- To elaborate action plans specific to each harvesting cause or each harvesting mode.
- To set up a network of stakeholders and communicators.

The last item on this list is in fact the most important, without which nothing will be possible; the others are developed in this Newsletter in order to delineate the project of the Waterbird Harvest Group and its intervention area, but ab
ove all, with a view of making you want to contribute in great numbers to the work of this group, the output of which, if it meets our expectations, will be useful to all, and most importantly, to waterbirds and wetlands.

Gilles DEPLANQUE
Age: 46
French Nationality

- New Coordinator of the WHSG.
- Lawyer and ornithologist.
- OMPO Consultant / Migratory Birds of the Western Palearctic - Paris - France.
- ANCGE Consultant / National Wildfowlers Association - Paris – France.
- Member of the French delegation to AEWA / African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.
- Member of the French Delegation to CIC / International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation.
- Member of CNCFS - National Council for Shooting and Wildlife - France.

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Important note on membership:

Setting up a new Specialists Group (SG) will take some time and the need to re-engage (after the group has been silent for such a long time) those actively involved in research, policy development and management of waterbird harvest.

Therefore we encourage all people interested in the work of the newly established Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group and prepared to contribute in different ways (Board Membership, news, short contributions, papers, reports, etc.) to contact Gilles Deplanque (see address above) and copy your first reaction also to Tunde Ojei, Wetlands International Specialist Groups Co-ordinator at the Wetlands International HQ at the following address :

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2. Introduction by Wetlands International

By Gerard Boere, WI International Programme Coordinator (e-mail: gerard.boere@wetlands.org)

Wetlands International, during its last Board of Members meeting in November 2001 in Wageningen, agreed on a new strategy for the organisation. A strategy which builds upon four main programmes: Species Conservation, Wetlands inventory assessment and monitoring, Wise-use, and Capacity building: all related to wetland habitat and wetlands species. The four programmes reflect the international priorities as determined by governments and the international organisations, conventions etc.
More than ever, Wetlands International has paid attention to cross-cutting issues of which sustainable use is a very important one. From its start, Wetlands International (and its predecessors like IWRB) have promoted the sustainable use of wetlands resources within strict limits in order to also conserve these resources for future generations. Protection of vulnerable and endangered species has also been a priority with a tendency to be careful towards species and consistent in our policies.
In the light of the discussions on sustainable development (Johannesburg 2002) it was already for some time felt that the now silent Hunting research group should be re-activated into a Specialist Group in the new Wetlands International structures. Changing the name from 'hunting' which was seen as too restricted, into a 'harvest which is a more general term regarding use of waterbirds, reflecting issues at stake in the international conservation policies: *Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group.*
After a number of consultations with organisations like CIC, FACE etc. we were very pleased that Gilles Deplanque accepted the challenge to act as the first co-ordinator and take on the enormous task of leading this course. The first Newsletter, with a focus on Europe, is the result of his hard work and it underpins his commitment to the work. It is our hope that this will stimulate membership not only from Europe but also from other parts of the world, notably North America, where waterbird harvest is well advanced.
Gilles deserves all the support he can get and Wetlands International, through the support by Tunde Ojei, WI Specialist Group Network Development and support Officer, will do its utmost to facilitate rapid and good development of the WHSG.
The upcoming Wetlands International Conference, hosted by the Netherlands and the UK, 'Waterbirds Around the World', April 2004 in Edinburgh, is an excellent opportunity to present the new WHSG, its proposed workplan, and to stimulate its member ship and activities. We look forward to a close relation towards achieving our common goals.

Waterbird harvest: a jig saw puzzle with many pieces, CIC acknowledges the Wetlands International WHSG

By Niels Kanstrup, President of the CIC Migratory Birds Commission (e-mail: nk@jaegerne.dk)

Today there is a clear need for and demand that any kind of utilisation of natural resources is sustainable. Sustainability can be considered from more angles, be that ecological, social or economical. In order to ensure, that no population or habitat suffers long-term declines caused by unsustainable use, management must be based on a clear and well functioning strategy for monitoring of wildlife populations.

Management and conservation of waterbirds sets up special demands to the responsible bodies, be that governmental or non-governmental institutions.

Most species of waterbirds have complicated migratory strategies, and are therefore shared by a large number of range states hosting the population at different times of the annual cycle. Management and long-term safeguarding of these species can only be secured through a detailed and integrated system of monitoring at all levels.

During the recent decades methods of monitoring have been developed, supported by new means of communication and modern techniques. One of the traditional, but still highly appreciated and valuable methods, is monitoring of harvest of the huntable species. In many countries bag statistics are regarded as a corner stone in the modern wildlife management. For many species the harvest statistic is the most precise set of data available. The principle is simple: By assuming the rate of hunting harvest to be constant, the trend in actual annual harvest will reflect the trend of the hunted population. Trends are central. The actual harvested number, *per se*, is less interesting, although of interest when planning and managing rates of sustainable utilisation.

However, being based on a simple principle, hunting bag statistics are actually complex and very often connected to series of assumptions and unknown factors. In addition, a clear and valid picture on population level will very often suffer from a serious lack of data. This is in particular the situation when regarding migratory birds crossing a large number of countries with very different regimes for wildlife management. Some have long traditions for detailed studies of the bag of these species, based not only on the harvest rates but also on analysis of the age and sex composition of the bag. Others have no knowledge at all.

Therefore, to collect and put harvest data into a system on international and flyway basis is a huge challenge. It is like a jig saw puzzle with thousands of pieces. By joint efforts it is possible over time to get an overview of the picture, but without any ambitions of getting it fully completed.

People, organisations and institutions working with harvest monitoring systems must be motivated to join and coordinate their efforts internationally.

They must still maintain a strong network at national or even local level, respect the diversity in methodology, secure compatibility and avoid a rigid standardisation. Anybody with interest in the conservation of wildlife populations should be supported in this activity.

CIC, the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation - is and international body with an overall priority on conserving populations of wildlife based on the principles of wise and sustainable utilisation of these populations. Before “wise” comes “knowledge”, and knowledge must be the key to a long-term strategy for nature conservation. Getting knowledge of wildlife by harvesting populations is a unique possibility of getting double value. It should not be wasted!

On this background the CIC welcomes the reestablishment of the Wetlands International Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group. Having a widespread network combined with expertise and capacity of international co-operation this group is in a perfect position to optimise the output of existing systems of harvest collection and to motivate systems to be developed at all levels. With its international network in the communities of wildlife conservation CIC not only recognises the Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group but also offers a partnership in the work of collecting and fitting the pieces in the future waterbird harvest “puzzle”.

4. OMPO and knowledge on waterbird harvest

By Raymond Pouget, OMPO President
(e-mail: ompo@ompo.org)

As its name indicates, target No. 1 of OMPO, Migratory Birds of the Western Palearctic, is to improve the knowledge on migratory birds, including waterbirds, and to support any kind of action which could contribute to it. Winter censuses, estimates of reproduction success and population trends are some of the key elements of its strategy which mobilize a good part of our energy and our activity. But this is not sufficient as it does not meet the peculiarities of some species.

Undoubtedly these techniques prove to be efficient for waterbirds such as geese, swans and most ducks species, but undoubtedly also, they are unfit for other more secret species, less gregarious, such as snipes (and particularly the Jack Snipe) or the Woodcock and turdidae.

For such species, knowledge on the hunting bags is an utmost requirement without which no serious population estimate can be produced; whereas for the others species, it is an additional information which will quickly prove very valuable and essential, would it be only to more precisely appreciate the population trends for each of them. Knowledge of hunting bags still is the fundamental data which will make it easier to conceive and justify conservation strategies, species per species, based on the concept of sustainable use.
One could not, indeed, consider the implementation of specific action plans without measuring the impact of the voluntary harvest carried out by man.
For all these reasons, OMPO, which had previously contributed to WI Hunting Group and which always was concerned with migratory birds harvests, can only be satisfied with the restarting of such group of specialists which will make it possible to fill an essential part of the lacks as regards knowledge on waterbirds.
Of course, OMPO is fully conscious that the target of the WHSG is both, ambitious and complex; ambitious as regards to the number of countries concerned and complex as regards the diversity of harvesting methods, the multiplicity of the regulations or their absence, as well as the difficulty in obtaining information on the matter.
But OMPO also considers that time has come to join all energies and good wills to progress with this file. The first steps will be difficult, no one can deny it, but OMPO is willing to support the WHSG aware of the fact the repercussions of its action will be determining and useful to all, especially to migratory waterbirds.
Thus, OMPO puts much of hope in this new specialized group of Wetlands International which should very quickly become a privileged spot for meetings and exchanges between hunters and non-hunters, thus opening a way to an era of new collaboration which will be undoubtedly very rich in teaching and determining source for an improvement of our knowledge on migratory waterbirds.

5. Position of FACE on the WHSG

By Yves Lecocq, FACE Secretary General
(e-mail: ylecocq@face-europe.org)

For FACE, *the Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the E.U.*, the availability of reliable data on waterbird harvesting is an essential tool to monitor population levels and trends, and to guarantee the sustainability of hunting. Therefore, FACE welcomes the initiative of *Wetlands International* to re-establish its *Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group*.
Founded in 1977, FACE is an international non-profit-making NGO with its H.Q. in Brussels, the seat of the *European Union*.
Through its 29 members, the national hunters' associations of the Member States of the E.U. and other *Council of Europe* countries, FACE currently represents the interests of some 7 million European hunters. It promotes hunting and wildlife management, in accordance with the principle of *sustainable use*, as a tool for conservation and rural development. Since its early days, FACE has always maintained excellent relations and co-operation with *Wetlands International*.
Being a key-partner, together with *BirdLife International*, of the *Sustainable Hunting Initiative* launched recently by the *European Commission*, FACE wants in particular to promote the collection of reliable and appropriate data on bird harvests in the EU. Together with other national and international organisations (such as CIC and OMPO), FACE uses an international network of experts to examine and assess existing data and to develop appropriate schemes to reduce any gaps in knowledge. Bag statistic schemes should be carried out in ways to obtain high quality and reliable data. At the same time, such schemes contribute to the education and awareness raising of individual hunters, by involving them in research and conservation programmes and by promoting the idea of international co-operation and co-ordinated action. In this respect, it seems important that the collection of "bag statistics" is well embedded in national schemes and does not impose an unreasonable burden on hunters, especially in countries with decentralised hunting administration.
Bag data, when collected using an appropriate methodology, enable hunting levels and impact to be quantified and trends in harvests identified. They can indicate changes in population levels. Interpretation of these data has to take into account possible restrictions (in time and/or in space, legal or other) on hunting, as well as other factors, such as the number of hunters, their interest in certain game species or hunting methods, etc. Such data will be most reliable when collected at larger scale (countrywide) and over longer periods, using standardised methods. As for any scientific investigation, the continuity of the framework condi-tions is a highly important factor.
At the international population management level, the greatest need is for the individual national schemes to provide comparable and compatible data, rather than attempt to standardise the individual methodologies.
The *Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group* can provide an excellent framework for an international development and co-ordination of national and regional monitoring schemes. FACE pledges its support to this Group and looks forward to a long-lasting and successful co-operation.

6. Monitoring of waterfowl harvest in Europe

By John Harradine, BASC Director of Research
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Information on waterfowl harvest is essential for both the sound management of waterfowl populations and to assure interested parties, including hunters, that hunting is sustainable.
Hunters increasingly recognise this and are willing to contribute information.

Current schemes.

There are schemes of many sorts in Europe currently, varying from being mandatory for all hunters, as in Denmark, to voluntary among some hunters, as in the UK. Different schemes have developed within different countries to meet different objectives and in response to different cultural and other practices. In Denmark, for example, all hunters have to submit every season a detailed account of their hunting bag, broken down into species or species groups (some submitting wings to enable the hunting bag to be broken down into age and sex composition). In France there is a periodic (10-15 year) comprehensive study by the ONCFS to quantify the hunting bag of all species. In the UK two organisations operate voluntary schemes: BASC monitors particularly the waterfowl shooting by its members and the Game Conservancy Trust monitors mainly gamebird shooting on shooting estates throughout the country. The British Government, however, is currently looking to introduce a new scheme for obtaining information on the national bag of all huntable species in the near future.

What can be achieved?

Whilst improving the quality and quantity of information is important to meet current and future needs, standardisation of the methodologies and data collection is neither necessary nor likely to be achievable. Some twenty years ago through the International Union of Game Biologists a working group on game statistics was formed with this initially very much in mind. It soon found that it was unrealistic. It concluded "The method of organisation and approach to data collection and the presentation of results vary considerably. Whilst the aims and objectives are essentially similar the system operational details have evolved to suit the conditions which prevail in each particular country". The group also concluded that "The ultimate goal is to obtain agreement on the most appropriate methods of collecting game statistics in each country, based on the experiences of countries with established systems. An important feature of any system should be the ability to express results in such a way that direct comparisons can be drawn between countries - particularly in the case of migratory game species".
The aim of the group accordingly became one of increasing awareness of the need for and benefits of hunting statistics, improving the methodology involved in their collection, interpretation and presentation, and advising those where either no scheme was in place or where improvements were sought in existing schemes.

What is needed?

For any scheme to be successful, hunters need to understand and own the reasons for it and the means of its achievement. They must be confident that their efforts are going to be worthwhile as, generally, hunters are reluctant to provide details of their hunting activities.
They also need to be satisfied that the results of enquiries will be used in their best interests.
Any scheme must be developed with them as key stakeholders.
Simplicity of content is better than complexity. Requests for more information than is necessary should not be made. Failure in these areas can reduce responses and the reliability of resulting information.
Also needed is that such hunting data be interpreted in the context of how hunting is actually practised in the country concerned.
Care is needed particularly in how such information is used. Hunters too many times have seen information they have supplied being used in a way which is against their interests, either because the information is incomplete, and therefore cannot be interpreted correctly, or it is used uncritically in relation to equally uncertain estimates of population size, to infer that hunting mortality is unacceptably high.

Some suggestions for progress.

- The Wetlands International Harvest Research Group should be supported.
- The HRG should update and review information on current harvest monitoring schemes within Europe.
- Coordination and integration across various schemes on hunting harvest, including those under Birds Directive, AEWA, IUGB, and WI, should be encouraged.
- With all stakeholders involved, decisions should be taken as to what key information is needed from harvest monitoring schemes (additional information being collected if desired for other purposes within each state).
- Biases and other potential problems with the methodology of harvest data collection and interpretation need to be studied and guidance given on minimising their influence.

- Encouragement and advice should be given to the development of both new schemes, and existing schemes where appropriate, so that all deliver the minimum required information in compatible form.
- Criteria need to be agreed to guide interpretation of harvest data particularly when they are used to help assess the impact of hunting on waterfowl populations.
- Harvest data need to be used with care particularly in light of the difficulties involved in their collection, ant not simply compared directly with IWC counts alone or other spot counts which, for example, may not take into account total numbers of birds using hunted sites throughout the winter.
- Closer cooperation and joint working between hunting and conservation bodies in each country should be encouraged so that the monitoring of harvest data and their interpretation can be integrated where necessary, and the key stakeholders share in the process and own the results.

7. A first survey of the possible scope of activities

By Gilles Deplanque, WHSG Coordinator

Why to re-establish and for me to be motivated to co-ordinate the Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group (WHSG)?

Accurate estimates of the world bird populations are a constant need for ornithologists, managers, policy makers, conservationists etc. throughout the world, and this need for knowledge is difficult to fill for migratory bird species, to which, many waterbirds belong.
The various publications of Waterfowl Populations Estimates and its current Third Edition (Delany and Scott ed. 2002) based on the mid-winter counts, are key data. However, they need to be enriched and backed up by other information sources even of this seems to be contradictory data.
Monitoring and providing estimates on waterbird harvests worldwide are part of those other data and are key data for the future and contribute to improve our knowledge of waterbird populations.
The idea of a dedicated harvest group also reveals new approaches to the harvesters: who are they? How do they proceed? How many birds do they harvest and why? How to obtain from them the level of these harvests? How to examine the sustainable or non-sustainable nature of this harvest.

The event which, at least for me personally, triggered all these questions about the scope and relativity of our knowledge was the estimates of the harvests of Jack Snipes, *Lymnocryptus minimus,* provided by French hunters. These figures were far from the minimum levels of estimates of the Palearctic populations then available:

Population estimates:

- Tucker and Heath (1994): 44,000 individuals minimum.
- WPE 2, Rose and Scott (1997): i.e. 25,000 minimum.

Harvest figures for France only:

- Cahiers techniques Office National de la Chasse et Faune Sauvage n° 251, (2000) with the 1998-1999 season harvests: 49,650 individuals for France only!

This last publication confirmed the work by Club International des Chasseurs de Bécassines (CICB), providing for many years estimates of 25,000 – 50,000 individuals of the French hunter's yearly harvest of Jack Snipe.
For me it was all there, in these contradictory figures. The harvests on a tiny part of the distribution area of this species made the population estimates so far published, in fact useless.
Other population estimates are between 25,000 and 1,000,000 individuals, leading to a level of uncertainty of 975,000 birds, corresponding to 39 times the minimum level proposed, with an estimated harvest of 150,000 - 200,000 birds for the countries in the south of the European Union and in North Africa. Clearly with such a margin of error, it s impossible to pretend and continue talking about real knowledge…

Harvest figures in this context became a key, if not determining, the information about the population. This contrast between harvest and population figures, motivated my intervention in Cape Town in 1999, during the First Meeting of the Parties of the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (under the Bonn Convention) on the classification of Jack snipe. What should be done with these contradictory data? How to integrate them? What conclusions can be drawn from them?
This raised the interest of Professor Kalchreuter, a specialist of the Jack Snipe, while at the same time Wetlands International felt the need to reactivate a waterbird harvest specialist group; this stimulated the first discussions on re-establishing a group involved in waterbird harvest and hunting.

This could be combined with related issues such as:

- waterbirds marketed ("aquatic bush meat").
- water- and seabirds caught in fishing nets.
- water- and seabirds killed in oil spills.
- waterbirds as basic food needs in certain regions of the world.
- the economic exploitation of waterbirds and more particularly migratory species.
- game tourism developed around waterbirds.

To harvest, yes, but provided that we are able to estimate the level of the harvests and to use these data as information source for a better understanding and management of the populations and not to damage future wise use possibilities.

That's how, after all these reasoning and reflections, the interest in monitoring and measuring the whole waterbird harvest, in associating with it all the anthropogenic causes of bird mortality became an imperative for me for already quite some time.
At the same time, the project of relaunching the Specialist Group of Wetlands International came into to my knowledge and my interest in this work brought me to accept the position of WHSG Co-ordinator.
Achieving the goals of the group is something we have to do together. This is my dearest and most sincere wish.

Once more the case of the Jack Snipe; some more data.

The case of this bird is very particular but it is also one, which, today, best illustrates the logic for activities of a WHSG.
Harvest of this species is quite exclusively through hunting activity at various levels, traditional hunting or leisure and sports hunting and also commercial hunting.

Undoubtedly, this species is little hunted throughout the world, for numerous reasons: it is small, cryptic coloured and very discreet habits and therefore hard to locate or to disturb.
These same characteristics cause great (if not insurmountable) difficulty for estimating the species' numbers during the winter counts and also during the breeding season. Jack snipes cannot be seen, cannot be heard, do not gather together, live in a wet but extremely diffuse and often little observed habitat.

It is therefore important to find out other ways to collect reliable population data.

French hunters specialised in Common Snipe and Jack Snipe hunting were the first to wonder about the validity of the estimates published so far.
The most passionate amongst them have carefully recorded their harvests for many decades, thus establishing a database, which enabled them to think that:

- Between 25,000 and 50,000 Jack snipes where harvested every year in France.
- Nearly one Jack Snipe was harvest on every 5 Common Snipes, *Gallinago gallinago.*

A national survey on harvests in France conducted by ONCFS in the 1998-1999 season confirmed and clarified these data:

- Jack Snipe harvests: 49,640.
- Common Snipe harvests: 274,910.

These results highlighted two fundamental points:

- The minimum population estimates for Jack Snipes were obviously to low: (44,000 for Tucker and Heath, 94; 25,000 for Rose and Scott, 1997).
- The 1 Jack Snipe to 5 Common Snipes ratio seemed to be a constant one for the harvests; and this may closely reflect the ration of respective populations of both species also?

Professor Kalchreuter notified participants on this issue during the AEWA/MOP1 in Cape Town in 1999 as he was engaged in a programme of analysis based on the results provided by the ringing of these two species.
Out of 114,000 snipes (all species) ringed in the 20th century, 100,000 are Common Snipes and 14.000 Jack Snipes, that is to say 12% (*On the population status of the Jack Snipe, Kalchreuter, June 2002).*
This point is very important in many respects:

- The results of the ringing noticeably confirm the trends established from the harvests, and vice versa.
- A ratio established between a species which is visible, easier to count and to estimate, and another which is not, may cast a new light on the population level of closely related species which are difficult to observe.

In this case, if we use the above figures put study, the estimate for the breeding population of Common Snipe would be 5 million pairs while that of Jack Snipe would be, if we apply this ratio, 0.5 million. (20 to 30 million individuals during the winter season for Common Snipe and 2.5 to 3 million for Jack Snipe).

This conclusion is particularly interesting, in that it perfectly illustrates the possible connections between the different information sources available, for enhancing our knowledge of bird populations.
Thus, the IWC mid-winter counts obtained through classic visual observation should be compared with the data provided by ringing, but also those obtained through harvest data, starting regular hunting data, which are certainly the easiest to monitor and obtain.
This three-angle approach is most certainly the one, which must enable us to improve our global knowledge on waterbird populations, in order to know them better, therefore, to protect them better and act more efficiently for the preservation of their habitats.

Monitoring game harvest; the French example.

Systematic collection of harvest data in much more countries is important and the WHSG could play an important role to stimulate that.

The work carried out in France on the monitoring of game harvests has been done for long by various networks together with dedicated hunters, who are experts on certain species or group of species. The first ones to have engaged in this work were waterfowl hunters, exclusively for the Anatidae; Snipe and Woodcock hunters soon followed them.

However, the need to know the yearly harvest was also shared by hunters of other species, mammals or birds, as well as the government structures in France whose official mission is to manage the hunting activity, among which ONCFS (Office National de la Chasse et de la Faune Sauvage).

Three times an harvest survey has been carried out by a competent and recognised specialised Institute: in the 1974-1975 season; the 1983-1984 season and the 1998-1999 season.

This third survey was published in August-September 2000: *Enquête nationale sur les tableaux de chasse à tir saison 1998-1999 - Cahiers techniques Faune Sauvage n°251*, whose results and information are listed in the table below.

In this whole period the number of hunters in France went down from 2,300,000 in 1974-1975 to 1,929,366 in 1983-1984, then to 1,491,696 in 1998-1999 (for information only, for 2002: 1,400,000).

Of course, such surveys can be criticised for not being sufficiently detailed, for instance as it was not undertaken on a species by species level, thus making it impossible to carry out cross studies, as those previously developed for Jack Snipe.

One can also be surprised or sceptical about the average number of birds harvested per hunter in France, for species like geese, moorhens, water rails, golden plovers and other waders ; it seems that the number of catches, according to hunting information sources, is in fact much lower. Example: less than 0.5 goose per hunter and per season; which is different from this official survey.

Similarly, the Rallidae are very little valued birds, therefore very little (and less) hunted; same as the harvest of golden plovers is very occasional, if not exceptional; the table shows higher figures.

However, these studies are at present the most accurate estimates on hunting harvests carried out in France (the results have not been subject to particular contesting, even though a few criticisms have been formulated as indicated above) and what trends are visible in these harvests.

Estimates of birds harvested during each of the three hunting seasons here mentioned:

	1974-1975 season			1983-1984 season			1998-1999 season		
Species	**Estimated harvested quantity** in thousands (margin)	**% of hunters who have harvested**	**Average number of birds** per hunter	**Estimated harvested quantity** in thousands	**% of hunters harvested**	**Average nb of birds** per hunter	**Estimated harvested quantity** in thousands	**% of hunters who have harvested**	**Average number of birds** per hunter
Woodcock	760 - 2160	17.1	3.1	1 321.0	19.3	3.3	1 168.3	20.0	3.8
Geese	Insignificant			18.0	0.5	2.0	10.9	1.0	2.4
Mallard	728 - 2270	11.0	5.3	1 376.0	13.5	4.8	1 561.1	18.0	5.9
Other ducks (all species mixed)	265 - 1230	4.8	5.2						
Teal				Summer/winter : 411.0	5.4	3.7	Winter: 330.9	5.0	4.6
Other surface feeding ducks				195.0	2.4	4.0	234.4	3.0	5.8
Diving ducks				85.0	1.2	3.5			
Common Pochard							43.6	1.0	3.0
Other diving Ducks							37.9	1.0	3.1
Coot	130- 982	3.1	6.2	269.0	3.1	4.2	133.1	2.0	2.3
Other waterfowl (all species mixed)	325 - 1520	4.9	6.3						
Common moorhen							76.2	2.0	2.3
Water rail							30.3	1.0	3.2
Snipes				684.0	8.9	3.7			
Common Snipe							274.9	5.0	4.0
Jack Snipe							49.6	1.0	2.5
Lapwing				1 357.0	13.6	4.9	435.7	7.0	4.4
Golden Plover							63.0	1.0	3.0
Other waders				238.0	2.O	5.9	115.2	1.0	5.8

However these developments have to be analysed concerning various aspects such as:

- Does a decrease in harvests mean less birds present, less hunters interested, or a better quality of the responses obtained; and many more.
- On the contrary, how should an increase in harvests be understood?

However, even though the questions remain numerous and the enquiry perfectible, if such results could be obtained for each of the countries in which waterbirds are legally harvested, they would be a key input and a decisive progress to more precise estimate populations and population trends.
The current orientation of the French Government is to put in place a daily harvest book, systematically and obligatorily updated by the hunter, even in case of unsuccessful hunting. The implementation of such a project remains fairly burdensome and costly, and requires obviously some time, also because such an undertaking cannot be conceived without the full support of all hunters involved. Such process and approach would however represent a significant progress in the knowledge of the harvests and a particularly interesting initiative, which could be usefully replicated elsewhere.
It must be noted for that matter, that the few experiences carried out towards automatic follow-up of the daily harvests, with end-of-season exploitation, show that, statistically, once the reference grids are established, it is quite possible to obtain a reliable estimate of the whole of the harvests done from a very limited cross-section of hunters.

8. The WHSG, what could be its' actions and fields of interests. Some examples.

By Gilles Deplanque, WHSG Coordinator

It is not an easy task to formulate the activity of a specialist group at its beginning and certainly not in this case where we would like to extend the work of the group beyond just harvests of waterbirds towards a wider range of human use of waterbirds. In any case beyond the activities of the previous "Hunting Research Group".
This might lead, in the future, towards thematic working groups and will require the input of a significant number of data providers and/or regional stakeholders.
However improvement our knowledge of just the hunting of waterbirds at world scale, would already be a significant progress in all respects and will remain a key sector of WHSG activity. On the other hand, not dealing with other sectors would be a serious mistake for waterbirds, and would not enable us to meet the objectives clearly defined by Wetlands International based on the new Wetlands International Strategy 2002-2005 in a framework letter of April 2002, setting the general *WHSG Terms of Reference*.

"Objectives:

- *To promote research and monitoring in waterbird (and seabird) harvests.*
- *To develop the concepts of wise use, sustainable use, relative to waterbird harvests.*
- *To disseminate the results of the research and studies conducted, using different communication methods.*
- *To analyse and assess the development of legislations and policies on waterbird harvests at the level of each state and at international level."*

Some additional remarks on fields of possible interest:

Waterbird harvests data.

It is important to collect as much information as possible course, waterbird hunters are the holders of these data. And are those whom to work with and to convince them of the usefulness of such approaches. Follow-ups are already put in place in many countries, on a voluntary (but also compulsory) basis (see for example HIP, Migratory Bird Harvest Information Program in the USA - http://hip.fws.gov). These experiences must be looked at and their results collected and analysed through a global enquiry via a system of circulating a questionnaire. This was originally planned by Wetlands International for the period 1994-1996 but for many reasons never finalised.; the questionnaire could, with modification, still being used.
These examples must also be presented and proposed to hunters in the countries which have no harvest data system in place.
For the short term the most effective approach will be to sensitise the states in which bird hunting is legally practiced, in order to provide for, and encourage them to put in place, for each holder of a hunting permit, an annual evaluation of individual harvests.
A synthesis of these data Finally, these are all examples where systematic collection of data can help to understand what is happening with a population and provide added value to the results of International Waterbird Census and other population data.
and a review over several years should allow to move the waterbird hunting from *random harvest* (or *blind harvest*) to that of wise exploitation and sustainable use.

Waterbird mortality due to ingestion of led shot.

It is still useful to ensure the dissemination of all the studies carried out on the theme of poisoning risks, in order to sensitise governments, NGOs and hunting societies to the problems related to the use of lead shot in wetlands. Here Wetlands International has played an important role through the regular update of its reports: *Lead Poisoning in Waterbirds* – with the latest published in 2000.

In this connection, see also:

- AEWA Newsletter - Special Edition: *Lead poisoning in waterbirds* - September 2002.
- Veterinary thesis on the effects of lead shot ingestion in mallard. Ecole nationale vétérinaire de Nantes - France.
- Canadian Wildlife Service: http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/
- Link http://www.cws-scf.ec.gc.ca/pub/hunting/toxic.html
- Environment Canada: http://www.pnr-rpn.ec.gc.ca/index.en.html
- NRE Australia: http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/, linking recreation & tourism; hunting; non-toxic shot; fact sheets
- Remington: http://www.remington.com/AMMO/PAGES/Shotshell/steelselect.htm.

We could also be dealing with the effectiveness of the alternative ammunition proposed and the environmental pollution they could provoke in turn. For example, some goose and duck hunters in Canada are complaining about a significant number (some mention 20% more than with lead shot) of injured and lost birds with steel shot.. It is important to collect experiences elsewhere and the influences on waterbird populations. Would a Government or an NGO be ready to conduct such a study together with the WHSG? What by the end is more negative for waterbird populations?

Waterbirds (and also seabirds) as food resource.

In least developed regions waterbirds, particularly the migratory waterbirds, are exploited as a source of proteins. There are many examples around the globe such as the Inner Niger Delta in Africa, the extensive rural areas of Western Siberia, many lake areas in Asia etc. Far from criticising such harvest, they are a basic food resource, this harvest is in almost all cases uncontrolled and not estimated. Yet, it would be important to be able to assess their size as well as their impact on certain species whose status re already reasons for concern. Data should be collected and countries were it exists approach and requested to start collecting data and supervising this harvest.

The waterbird as commercial product.

This is a different level from above, but it can also be combined in the sense that birds are harvested not as a private food source only but also to be sold as a source of income. Little is known about this activity and a desk study is needed to decide on further actions. Examples are:

Selling the waterbird as basic meat:

This *commercial niche* seems to be more and more developed and reason for concern for, in the case of Europe/Africa migration, the European countries. Catching seabirds with fishing nets is practised in order to sell them in the markets (bird catches are often more important than fish catches), as well as on the African continent where waterbirds substitute for *bush meat* (highly valued but increasingly rare), under act as *aquatic bush meat*. On the Mediterranean coast, in Egypt, nets spread for catching migrating birds can be seen over several kilometres, forming a genuine death wall from which it is difficult to escape.

Practices to catch waterbirds such as with the use of dynamites on waterbird flocks or high tide roosts, are even used in Asia.

It is obvious that such methods are absolutely not selective, result in increasingly important harvests and a great influence on many populations, also rare and endangered species. It must be fought by all means.

It is necessary to produce an inventory of the places where this happens in order to convince the Governments concerned on their responsibilities, and encourage them to take measures.

In this context of waterbirds as a commercial product, we should also look at game tourism, which is increasingly expanding in certain countries, in relation to the improvement of transport at low costs. All these activities must become subject of strict supervision and of an estimate of the harvests.

Marketing of the live bird:

This phenomenon is also experiencing an increasing attention related to the new trends of the so-called developed societies such as NAC (nouveaux animaux de compagnie – new pets) or others. The desire to possess the bird determines its market value: the greater the desire is, the more significant the value is.

This trade largely concerns exotic waterbirds including Western Palaearctic Anatidae. Within the European Union itself, it is possible to buy wild waterbirds of protected or non-protected species, illegally caught. Collecting data on this activity is not considered to be a priority of the WHSG as an international treaty like CITES is already dealing with it.

Accidental mortality of waterbirds due to various human activities.

The list of these causes is long, but is worth to be looked at, so that measures could be taken whenever possible, in order to prevent unnecessary mortality which is detrimental to waterbirds.
Examples are numerous; some of them are developed below:
- Collisions against windows and buildings.
- Oil pollution (seabirds mainly).
- Wind turbines, high voltage lines.
- Discharge of toxic product, e.g. salt spread on roads.
- pesticides.
- Accidental catches of birds in fishing nets.
- trawl lines (long lines).

Collisions against windows and buildings.
Many studies show that this aspect, apparently considered as unimportant, is a quite surprising and generally underestimated cause of bird mortality.
The Chicago Ornithological Society has estimated that in the United States, 100 million to 1 billion (!) birds are killed every year from crashing into a building, because of the too intensive lights of the cities and skyscrapers. More studies are available, but few specifically dealing with waterbirds.

Accidental catches of water-and seabirds in fishing nets:
The French nature reserve of Goulien in Brittany (France), was created more than 40 years ago, to ensure the protection of seabirds, in particular Alcidae.
And yet, this conservation effort does absolutely not meet expectations and the situation of birds in this site has deteriorated, rather than improved.
It is estimated that every year, 6,000 to 10,000 seabirds are caught in the fishing nets in the Bigouden region outside the reserve. A Bigouden fisherman says that on certain days he catches between 15 and 20 birds.
Today, the guillemot population in the Finistère is limited to 35 pairs and no more Puffins breeding..." (Le télégramme de Brest, April 1998).
Also 500 to 1,000 Common Scoters, some fifty Common Eiders and some Velvet Scoters spend the winter in this same Bay of Douarnenez.
In the past, these birds were subject to regular game harvests by local hunters. For ten years now, due to the effect of the same fishing nets, the marine hunting association which manages and monitors harvests in this site, has only recorded the catch of a single common eider, and zero scoters!
The permanent and apparently insufficiently considered danger represented by fishing nets for diving birds.
Older data already shows this: for example, nearly 20,000 Guillemots have been caught in nets, in the bird sanctuary in Witless Bay, Terre-Neuve, in 1971 (Piatt *et al.*, 1982). However, these figures vary largely from one year to the other.
Finally, it must be noted that the effects of fishing activities are exacerbated by climate change effects, which have an influence on the survival of the larvae and the spatial distribution of the adults.

"In this context where the relative importance of the different factors is difficult to establish, the debate is pursued between greater conservation of marine diversity and enlightened exploitation of these resources (Mace and Fudson, 1999)" (Canada Source: http://www.gc.ec.gc.ca/faune/biodiv/fr).
This problem will be addressed, where relevant for discussions on the size of populations from other sources, in more detail in later issues of the Newsletter of the WHSG as many more data are available e.g. from the work of the Circumpolar Seabird Group of the Working Group Conservation Arctic Flora and Fauna (C Conclusion.BIRD/CAFF) and presented at their recent meeting in Norway (January 2003).
Also data on freshwater fishing and the killing of diving ducks will later be addressed.

Albatross harvest with trawl lines (long lines).
The use of long lines is a fishing technique largely practised worldwide. The long line can count several thousands of hooks all fitted with baits and can measure over 100 kilometers! Launched from the boat, the line remains a certain time on the water surface. It is then that sea birds which follow the wake of the fishing vessels fall upon the baits and swallow them.
When the line sinks, they are drawn under water and drowned irremediably.
One estimates that more than 300.000 seabirds including over 100.000 albatross and petrels are, each year, victims of this fishing method. This is all the more alarming since some of the species concerned are significantly declining. Thus the Amsterdam Island Albatross had its population fall to only some 90 individuals!
The CMS (Convention on Migratory Species) which met in Bonn (Germany) in September 2002 was concerned with this major subject.
The Prince of Wales issued a vibrating call to the many nations attending this international conference to urge them to sign and ratify a treaty aiming at protecting these birds. *"These migratory seabirds developed their astonishing capacities of navigation during millions of years, but are now threatened by mankind - particularly due to the use and the turning adrift of non-selective fishing tackle and of the incidental mortality which results from the commercial fishing activities"*. The Prince of Wales exhorted *"the international community and, in particular, the governments of the states of the distribution area as well as the countries which have significant fishing fleets so that, with the assistance of international organizations, they ratify the agreement and work in order to as soon as*

possible reduce the factors which put these splendid birds into the process of extinction".
When this conference opened, only two countries, Australia and New Zealand, had ratified this agreement (8 countries had signed it). The ratification by at least 5 countries is necessary for it to enter into force.
This agreement foresees the implementation of simple, effective and inexpensive solutions which would strongly reduce the mortality risks of sea birds:

- the bait used can be frozen so that the lines run more quickly.
- the lines can be launched at night; this would be a very simple but determining preventive measure.

Minor modifications can be made on the boats with the fixing of special tubes which would make it possible to directly launch the lines under water rather than on its surface.

The salt spread on roads is toxic for birds:

In 1986/1987, France experienced a cold spell with fairly important snow coverage. The roads were intensely covered with salt in order to make traffic ways practicable.
The birds which, could find open water nowhere because of the frost, concentrated on the pools, which formed under the action of the salt.
This phenomenon provoked, particularly in Brittany, a hecatomb among lapwings found dead precisely by the roads, poisoned by the salt.
Another example of this accidental mortality of birds related to human activity comes from Canada.
It is believed that songbirds are dying from the ingestion of salt spread on the roads. This has been reportedly observed throughout Canada, but rarely objectively documented (See CCCSF Bulletin 3[2]). Preliminary studies conducted by CCCFS and Centre de recherches toxicologiques (supported by Environment Canada) have revealed behavioural changes immediately after ingestion of one or two salt granules. In order to measure salt toxicity under “normal” conditions, people who find dead birds in a good conservation status along the roads where salt has been spread, are asked to collect the carcasses and freeze them for future examination. Blood specimens from sick birds, which can be used to measure salt concentration in the serum or plasma, would be also appreciated. These specimens must be submitted to the nearest CCCFS regional Centre. (Trent Bollinger - CCCFS, Centre régional de l’Ouest et du Nord; Mark Wickstrom, Centre de recherches toxicologiques, University of Saskatchewan). (http://wildlife.usask.ca/french/backNewsLetters/NewsVol6No2.htm#salt).

Wind turbines and bird mortality : some figures and comparative data.

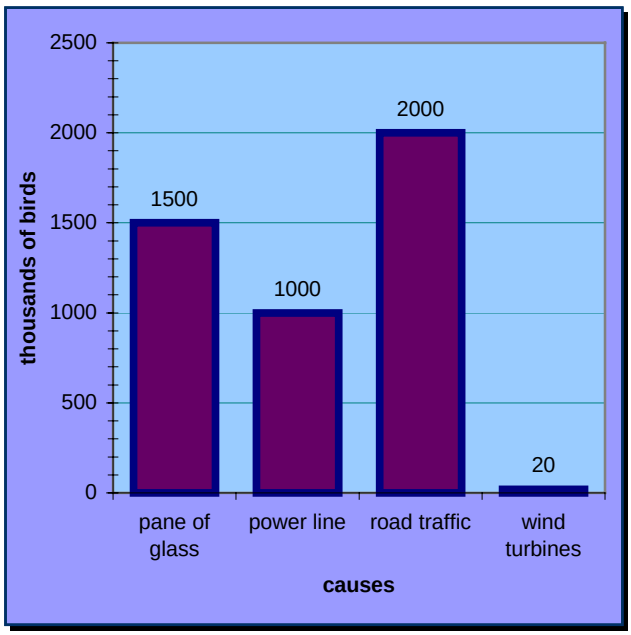
At the time when this source of clean energy tends to spread, it is important to accurately locate the impact of wind turbines on birds and to preventively contribute to minimize the risks which they can generate.

- Wire trellis or tubular masts:
This difference is fundamental.
The example of the gigantic Californian wind parks comprising hundreds of small wind turbines assembled on trellis masts is dismaying: 5.2 birds killed on the average per annum/per wind turbine! Primarily birds of prey wishing to use these towers located on vast and deserted flat areas as perches.
Thanks to tubular masts, studies carried out in Europe show that birds mortality falls to 0.4-1.3 individual per wind turbine/per annum.
On such basis, the Dutch Foundation for Bird Protection carried out a comparative estimate of various causes of occasional mortality.

These two impacts indubitably exist.
The first one, the collision risk with the blade or the tower, induces a direct mortality depending on several factors: the type of wind turbines, the choice of the installation site, weather conditions (influence of wind speed on the altitude of the flight, visibility problem...), the nature of movements be they local or migratory....
The second one relates to the habitat which changes with the setting up of a wind park; birds staging on the site or near the site be they nesting or wintering birds feel the disturbance.

- Steps to be taken:

- To rather choose the tubular masts.
- To avoid the sensitive areas: migration corridors, significant breeding sites…
- To arrange the installations according to an axis not perpendicular to the migratory axis.
- To bury electric connection network.
- To carefully choose the period of installation of the wind park.



Control of the damages provoked by waterbirds.

This damage mainly concerns agricultural crops and fish farming. Wetlands International has, in the past, been very active in this field by organising workshops and stimulating the exchange of expertise waterbirds. Here the WHSG can have a stimulating role and, in the future organise a follow-up of the last Wetlands International conference on this issue (Lelystad 1991).

These few examples are aimed at showing that the impact of man's activity on bird mortality can be often very significant, without as much corresponding to an expressed will to harvest (the cases of pollution by hydrocarbon discharges have been voluntarily excluded, but can also fall within this category).

Finally, these are all examples where systematic collection of data can help to understand what is happening with a population and provide added value to the results of International Waterbird Census and other population data.

Conclusion.

It is one thing to prepare an overview of the areas in which the Waterbird Harvests Specialist Group could be involved; acting effectively in each of them is quite another story and this is what WHSG must do in the first place: define its priorities and develop a programme for the next years.
In the light of the above the first priorities are to collect data on actual harvests of waterbirds around the world (by hunting, netting etc.) in order to determine what really is going on.

Other issues could be dealt with in a preparatory way but at a lower level.

However:

the first action to be carried out is the setting up of the group itself and of the network of stakeholders and/or experts who are ready to invest in this programme as part of the new Wetlands International long term strategy.

9. Would you like to join WHSG?

If so please contact Gilles Deplanque in the way as indicated on page 2 (with a cc to Tunde Ojei) by providing the following information:

1. Contact details:

- Your details (electronic and post-office) and if possible, your phone number.
- Working for Government, a specialised body, NGO or volunteer, hunter.
- The fields of interests in which you would like to be active or where you hold information.
- If providing information, original either in French or English and a summary in the other language. This would be very helpful!
- The areas of interest presented in this first Newsletter are for information only, please feel free to propose other research and study directions that could fall within the scope of the WHSG.

2. Priority setting.

The second action required from you is in thinking of priority actions for WHSG both with Governments and government structures and NGOs etc.

3. Network and communications to be established.

The third action is in forming around WHSG a communication and exchange network, in order to provide for information on the work carried out and underway, which will be disseminated and regularly updated on Wetlands International's Website.
It also consists of a frequent publication of the Newsletter (your opinions and criticisms on this first Pre-Newsletter, are welcome), which will require the participation and contribution of all of those wishing to provide articles, presentation of government or non-government initiatives in the field of game harvests, mortality estimates, reports on accidental mortality, information on commercial activities related to waterbird etc.
The long term goals as set by Wetlands International to WHSG will impose to each of those who want to participate in this network to provide a regular activity, knowing that some deadlines are already set:

- A general presentation of harvests worldwide and their impact on waterbirds for 2005 (methods, estimates, legislation's).
- A presentation of the action carried out by the Group and the results obtained in April 2004 during the Global Flyway Conference

WHSG is therefore only waiting for you and counts on your active contributions without which it would be nothing and won't be able to fulfil usefully its mission for waterbirds and wetlands.

Thank you.

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL

10. Draft organisation chart of the WHSG

VOLONTARY TAKING

Leisure hunting
- List harvest techniques and their impact (shotguns, nets,traps, falconry ,…)
- Estimate harvest levels and their evolution trend
- Set up methods in order to estimate this harvest

Trade of waterbird meat
- List and locate massive and non selective harvest techniques (air nets, fishing nets, explosives, traps,…)
- Estimate of takings performed
- Study and evaluate financial repercussions of these practices
- Analyse cultural incentives of this trade

The need in food
- Why and how such need?
- Which are the countries and populations concerned?
- What is the impact of the harvest on waterbird populations and how does it evolve?

Hunting as business activity
- Where, when, how?
- Which scale? Financial aspects, harvest levels
- By whom? (local populations or foreigners)

The preservation of cultures or of feeding resources
- Poisoning of granivorous birds
- Regulation of herbivorous waterbirds
- Protection of fishponds
- Estimate the impacts
- Seek solutions

HUNTING RELATED ACCIDENTAL MORTALITY

Fishing
- Capture in the fishing nets
- The « long lines »
- Estimate harvest levels
- Which solutions to suggest?

Collisions
- Buildings and glazed walls
- Overhead cables
- Wind turbines
- Road traffic and railway
- Air traffic

Toxic products
- Hydrocarbons (extraction and transport)
- Hunting lead
- Products poured at agricultural ends
- Salt used for road thawing

Ferral animals
- Estimate and monitor harvests performed by feral cats, ...