

DEVELOPING WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL'S SPECIALIST GROUP NETWORK

1. SUMMARY

This paper:

- summarises the current role, importance and network structure of Wetlands International's Specialist Groups;
- describes progress in implementing the 1995 Specialist Groups Development Strategy, approved by the Board of Members in 1995, and particularly since the appointment in September 1997 of Dr Nick Davidson on a two-year secondment as Science Co-ordinator in the International Co-ordination Unit, with global responsibility for Specialist Groups development.
- assesses the current strengths and weaknesses of the current network; and
- makes 15 recommendations for endorsement by the Board of Members for future priorities for maintaining and developing the Specialist Group network in its key role of supporting Wetlands International's scientific and technical activities.
- recommendations are as follows:
 1. Essential activities that must be undertaken as top priority by all groups should be a). the establishment, regular maintenance and accessibility to the group's expert network; and b). development of an agreed triennial forward plan, and annual reporting on achievement of plan targets.
 2. Priority activities in the next triennium are for all groups (unless otherwise agreed) to move to a global plus regional assistant co-ordinator structure; to involve other assistant co-ordinators to undertake specific group management tasks, and to encourage changes in lead co-ordinators on a regular (e.g. 6 year) basis.
 3. The International Co-ordination Unit should give priority to establishing for budget lines for SG network support and small grants, either from allocation of core funds and/or through sponsorship of network activities. Financial support from regional licencees for the development of regional SG activities should be maintained (Africa, Europe, Middle East) or developed (Americas, Asia-Pacific) as resources permit.
 4. A seconded or funded ICU post of Specialist Groups Network Assistant should be sought.
 5. The ICU should develop a Specialist Groups' Handbook to provide guidance to those co-ordinating the network.
 6. Priority should be afforded by both the ICU and Specialist Groups themselves to establishing electronic communications networks, both internal and external.
 7. Specialist Groups should be encouraged to examine options for developing as fee-paying membership networks.
 8. In developing the network in the light of the establishment of global strategic framework for Wetlands International, priority for network development should be given to establishing links with existing independent groups, and establishing task forces and working groups as needed.
 9. Continue to explore mechanisms for establishing formal links with the Society of Wetland Scientists and the Colonial Waterbirds Society.
 10. Rename the Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources SG as the Wetlands & Water Resources SG.
 11. Dissolve the Waterfowl Ecology SG.
 12. Suspend the Hunting SG.
 13. Create the Rail SG.
 14. Endorse appointment of Specialist Group Co-ordinators listed in Annex 4 to the Board of Members for the 1999-2001 triennium; and record thanks to those stepping down for their work for Wetlands International.
 15. Endorse continued evaluation of opportunities for restructuring existing Specialist Groups, including Economic Valuation, Herons, and Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills groups.

2. BACKGROUND AND CURRENT NETWORK STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Specialist Groups are networks of expert scientists who provide information and advice in support of Wetlands International's projects and programmes. Since Wetlands International is a networking and facilitating organisation it follows that Specialist Groups are a vital part of the work of Wetlands International - essential for the delivery of wetland and wetland species expertise in support of wetland conservation.
- 2.2 The purposes of Specialist Groups are to:
- provide strategic guidance to Wetlands International's scientific organisational development and priorities, through representation on Board of Members, Regional Councils and Board of Directors;
 - contribute to the delivery of wetlands International's information and advice on research, conservation and management of wetlands and wetland species, through accessing expert networks and developing partnerships;
 - provide information and technical advice as part of Wetlands International's technical support and input and input to global conventions (Ramsar, Bonn, CBD etc.);
 - represent Wetlands International, as members of its network, at external fora and to other organisations; and
 - promote and publicise the role of Wetlands International in wetlands and waterbirds conservation to the global scientific community.
- 2.2 The activities expected of Specialist Groups and their Co-ordinators are listed in Annex 1.
- 2.3 Most Specialist Groups have been established by Wetlands International (or its predecessor IWRB), with one or more Co-ordinators for each group identified and appointed by Wetlands International. In 1997 there were 21 Specialist Groups: 14 covering waterbird taxa and 7 thematic groups on wetland issues. Overall the network consists of approx. 2,000 people worldwide.
- 2.4 Although, since the establishment of Wetlands International in 1995, Specialist Groups are nominally global in coverage, in practice most are much stronger in some parts of the world than others. Since most were originally established to support IWRB, the network is most active and extensive in Europe, but is now developing in other regions and continents.
- 2.5 Most waterbird groups are of long-standing; wetland thematic groups are more recent, most being established in 1992. Waterbird Specialist Groups are operated as a 'Waterbird Network' jointly with the IUCN - Species Survival Commission and with Birdlife International.
- 2.6 Since their establishment, Specialist Groups have developed in a number of ways, and their size and structure reflect the nature of the constituency of expertise on their topics. Some are large groups with an open free membership; others are smaller networks of invited experts. One, the International Wader Study Group (WSG) is an independent NGO (non-profit) organisation that acts through a Memorandum of Agreement as the Wader Specialist Group.
- 2.7 The Specialist Group network is co-ordinated from the International Co-ordination Unit as part of the work of the Science Co-ordinator, currently Dr Nick Davidson.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1995 SPECIALIST GROUP DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- 3.1 In preparation for the creation of Wetlands International from IWRB, the Asian Wetland Bureau and Wetlands for the Americas, the then status of the network was reviewed and proposals made for improving its structure and operation and to clarify the relationships between Specialist Groups and Wetlands International and its regional licencees. This was approved by the 1995 Board meeting as *A strategy for development of the Wetlands International Specialist Groups*.
- 3.2 The implementation of this strategy is reported below.
- 3.3 The Strategy made seven major recommendations for the development of the network. Progress during the last triennium is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Implementation of the Specialist Groups strategy, 1995-1998

Recommendation	Implementation
<p>1. Appointment of a full-time Specialist Group Liaison Officer at the ICU (with the necessary secretarial support), to support the network, co-ordinate amongst groups and with Wetlands international's staff, report on activities, and liaise with the staff of Wetlands International's regional operations and other international partner organisations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure full coverage of the role of the ICU, the Terms of Reference of the Liaison Officer post were expanded to cover, in addition to Specialist Group co-ordination, helping to co-ordinate the technical programmes of Wetlands International, representing the organisation in certain global scientific and technical fora, and providing scientific support to the International Director and governance of Wetlands International. The post was retitled Science Co-ordinator. • In 1997 the post was advertised as a secondment, and in September 1997 Dr Nick Davidson took up the post on a two-year secondment, with financial support provided from English Nature. Limited secretarial support is available within the ICU. • A proposal for increased core funding to secure the future of the Science Co-ordinator post during the next triennium forms part of the Membership Dues proposal to the 1998 Board of Members (BoM 9). • Expanding the role of the Science Co-ordinator has proved important in developing the strategic development of Wetlands International's science work, of which the Specialist Groups are a key part. However, in view of the current limitations in the functioning of the SG network (see capacity evaluation below), it is clear that to fully develop the network from its current state into a form in which it can effectively deliver its work with Wetlands International, needs additional staff resources. • Proposals will be developed in 1999 for a secondment or funded (if funds permit) post to support the Science Co-ordinator in Specialist Group development.
<p>2. Provision of modest financial support to the Specialist Groups as seed money necessary to maintain the network of experts through a new line in Wetlands International's core budget which should provide at least £200 per year for each group, pending availability of funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the last triennium there have been no resources available from within the ICU core budget to provide this seed money for Specialist Group work. • A proposal for supporting this core budget line for the next triennium from the Regional Programme Funds allocation of core funds is being made to the Board of Directors. • In the coming triennium sponsorship support for Specialist Groups will also be sought to further enhance their resource base. • The opportunity also exists for SGs to improve their resourcing by undertaking more project work on behalf of Wetlands international. • Lack of financial support to Specialist Groups is identified as a current major limitation to ensuring effective development and delivery of their expertise to Wetlands International. Since many co-ordinators undertake this work on a partly or wholly volunteer basis, this is discouraging Co-ordinators from giving priority to such work priority, and preventing them communicating regularly with their networks, e.g. through newsletters and proceeding volumes, holding and attending workshops and conferences, and developing Web-sites and other electronic communication.
<p>3. Provision of a small grants budget of at least £4,000 for distribution to Specialist Groups on a competitive basis for priority activities, pending availability of funds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As for 2. above, in the last triennium there have been no resources within the ICU core budget to provide a small grants fund for Specialist Group work. • The Africa, Europe, Middle East regional licensee has maintained a Specialist Groups small grants budget, which has been used to fund some priority activities in this region; but there is currently no budget line in Americas and Asia-Pacific regions for Specialist Group support. • A proposal for supporting this core budget line for the next triennium from the Regional Programme Funds allocation of core funds is

	<p>being made to the Board of Directors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the coming triennium sponsorship support for Specialist Groups will also be sought to further enhance their resource base.
<p>4. For each Specialist Group there should be one Co-ordinator, supported by regional Assistant Co-ordinators, although alternative leadership structures may be more appropriate for some groups. The Co-ordinator should review the status of members and correspondents triennially for each group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each Specialist Group has one vote in the Board of Members, but current co-ordination structures differ greatly between groups, with between one and three Board-appointed Co-ordinators for different groups. Most more recently established wetland groups have (or have had) two equal status Co-ordinators in different regions - this does not appear to have worked well because of e.g. uncertainty over lead roles in network development.• Although the lead Co-ordinator for each group should now have a global role, in practice network activity is usually focused on one region (or part of it). Only a few groups currently have a structure approaching the global and three regional Co-ordinator structure recommended in the strategy. Groups have been encouraged to move towards this structure.• Over the last year, groups have been encouraged to review their co-ordination structure, and to place particular emphasis on developing their regional co-ordination mechanisms. Guidance has been issued to ensure that proposals to appoint regional Assistant Co-ordinators are approved by the Science Co-ordinator and the relevant regional licensee, so as to ensure development of closer working links with staff of regional licensees.• During 1998 the following Specialist Groups have appointed new regional Assistant Co-ordinators: Cormorant (Americas; Asia); Goose (Americas; Asia); Seaduck (Americas); and Woodcock & Snipe (Americas); and for the Duck SG a Board of Members Co-ordinator for the Americas is being appointed to ensure network capacity. In addition, the Wader Study Group is developing strengthened links with other groups active in the Americas and East Asia/Oceania.• It remains unclear how regularly most groups have reviewed and updated their network membership status, and not all have established or maintain an expertise register of their network.• Expert network maintenance is identified as a fundamental essential for all groups if the network is to function in its defined role for Wetlands International.• Annual reporting and provision of expert network information has now been introduced (see 6.).
<p>5. Co-operation should be improved among Specialist Groups, and between groups and Wetlands International staff, especially at regional level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding of the value and role of the Specialist Group network by Wetlands international regional staff, and about the priority activities and programmes of Wetlands International by Specialist Group Co-ordinators have improved over the last year, notably through the January 1998 Specialist Group workshop.• The appointment of more regional Co-ordinators is now set to further improve these links into regional programme and project activities, and staff are now increasingly consulting the groups for network expertise sources in regional project development.• Board-member Co-ordinators have the opportunity to become more closely involved in setting the future strategic direction of Wetlands International through the strategic development session of this Board of Members meeting.• In the last triennium Specialist Groups have led or are developing projects on behalf of the organisation, notably the Ramsar Global Review of Wetland Resources (Wetland Inventory & Monitoring SG), and waterbird SGs input to development and preparation of waterbird flyway atlases. There is scope for developing more such in project implementation by Specialist Groups, also as a means of providing funding support for their development.

(Paper presented to the BoM 10, in 1998)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-operation between groups, <i>e.g.</i> in joint project activity, is improving but has scope for further improvement. Examples of closer co-operation currently underway are closer links between the Wader Study Group and Woodcock & Snipe SG; and current development of joint project proposals on threatened waterbirds and protected sites led by the Threatened Waterfowl SG in association with other waterbird groups, and BirdLife International.
6. Each Specialist Groups should prepare a triennial report of activities, and one annual report in place of the multiple reports for different organisations which were required in the past for a number of groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new reporting structure has been introduced from 1998 for triennial and annual reporting and forward planning. This is provided in Annex 2. This is in four parts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a summary of groups structure and co-ordination an annual report on activities (requested retrospectively for the 1996-98 triennium); a report of achievements against forward plan targets for the last triennium; and a forward plan for 1999-2001. As for regional licensee and ICU triennial plans, the Specialist Group forward plans are drafts that will be reviewed, and if necessary modified, by groups in the light of the Board of Members development of the organisation's strategic priorities. Owing to lack of current capacity, not all Specialist Groups have completed their triennial reporting and forward planning. Reports from each group, including finalised forward plans, will be provided to the Board of Members in their post-conference papers. Annual reports from Specialist Groups will be provided to IUCN-SSC in line with their network requirements.
7. An ongoing collaborative process should be established to review the scope, activities and organisation of the Specialist Groups network to seek its continued approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In early 1998 the Science Co-ordinator, in consultation with the Specialist Groups, completed an initial review of the current Specialist Group coverage and capacity, which identified a number of weaknesses and gaps. This is summarised below, and was discussed by the Specialist Groups workshop. In 1995 Specialist Groups identified the value of meeting more frequently than at the triennial Board meeting, to consider network development. Through financial from the European Union and ICU, a Specialist Groups workshop, attended by 14 Co-ordinators representing all but 4 of the extant groups was held in Wageningen, The Netherlands in January 1998. The conclusions of this workshop are incorporated in the evaluation of current SG status, and the recommendations for future network development. It is intended that, resources permitting, further Specialist Group workshops will be held, preferably annually, with a focus on developing networks and capacity in other regions. Substantial gaps have been identified in the topic coverage of the existing network were identified in relation to the overall scope of Wetlands International's work, notably in the lack of wetland habitat groups. Priorities and means of filling such gaps will be established once the organisation's global strategic priorities have been established by the Board of Members. A priority in the coming year is to work with individual existing groups to resolve a number of problems in their co-ordination and network management. It is anticipated that a future priority will be where possible to establish links with other existing independent organisations and networks as a means of improving coverage, rather than Wetlands International itself seeking to establish further Specialist Groups. This model has been successfully tested through establishing the link via a Memorandum of Agreement with the International Wader

	<p>Study Group, which is now one of the most active parts of the network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion is underway with several external networks and endorsement for pursuing development of links with certain independent groups is requested in this paper.• Proposals for developing the scope, activities and organisation of the Specialist Group network will be brought regularly to the Board of Directors during the coming triennium, and to the 2001 Board of Members meeting.
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Evaluation of current SG capacity

3.4 In late 1997 a review of the current status of the Specialist Groups, two years on from the review made as the basis for developing the 1995 development strategy, was undertaken by the Science Co-ordinator and presented to the Board of Directors in February 1998.

3.5 The review confirmed the major strengths of the network as part of Wetlands International, notably in that:

- the Specialist Groups continue to undertake a great deal of work on Wetlands International's behalf for very little resources and recently with rather little support and direction; and
- overall they undertake an impressive range of activities, notably in holding workshops and conferences and producing newsletters and other publications; and
- Groups and their Co-ordinators are willing and able to help more directly in the work of Wetlands International, for example in helping to run Board meetings and conferences.

3.6 There are, however, major weaknesses in the present network. Whilst these must not be viewed as outweighing the great current contribution of the network to the work of wetlands International it is important that the weaknesses be identified so that they can be addressed in the recommendations for future network development.

3.7 Current weaknesses are notably that:

- Wetlands International has always not kept groups as fully advised of their role and priorities in the changing organisation for groups to focus their activities, nor always given enough advance warning of specific tasks or requirements for them to ensure delivery through their volunteer networks;
- network communications have been poor, and would be helped greatly by more development of Web-sites and electronic communication networks such as list-servers;
- overall coverage has developed in a rather *ad hoc* manner, and does not now fully match the scope of the Wetlands international activities, both in topics and issues, and geographically;
- some Co-ordinators continue to be completely, or largely, unresponsive to even basic contact or requests. Even if such people do have a functioning network it does not assist Wetlands International in undertaking its work;
- the lack of recent strategic guidance to Specialist Groups has led to their Co-ordinators being unsure of what is required of them, and what priority issues they should address;
- although nominally global in scope, the geographical coverage of most groups is, in practice, much more restricted, and in particular remains focused on the historical strength of the organisation in Europe - stronger regional co-ordination and links with regional licencees in the new structure is an urgent priority;
- there is great variation in the number and scope of Assistant Co-ordinators (*i.e.* non-Board members appointed by the Co-ordinator). Some groups have appointed numerous Assistant Co-ordinators for species but it is not always clear to what extent these are active;
- since most of the Specialist Groups have been created at the express request of Wetlands International, there are elements of a dependency culture in which lack of guidance and /or resource provision from Wetlands International undermines the enthusiasm of volunteer networks to meet Wetlands International's requirements and priority needs;

- with diminishing institutional support for the basic work of Co-ordinators (a problem that has accelerated further in the last year), the need for even modest financial support (network management funding and a small grants fund for project development and output production) becomes ever more pressing. Under the current structure, without such baseline resources, many groups will become less active and less able to help deliver Wetlands International's activities.
- a number of Co-ordinators appear to feel that the load of network establishment and management rests wholly on them alone. This is impeding effective development and evolution of their networks: spreading the load through an 'executive committee' structure of Assistant Co-ordinators should be encouraged;
- not all Specialist Groups have, or have maintained, an 'expertise register' of their members and/or correspondents. Since this is fundamental to their operation as expert networks this needs addressing as an urgent priority;
- with the present capacity and resourcing of groups, many are unable to deliver some or most of the 11 types of activity identified for them in the SG Development Strategy. This is creating a feeling of failure amongst hard-pressed Co-ordinators. Priority tasks need to be more clearly established and understood by both Co-ordinators and their teams, and Wetlands International staff, so that expectations of Specialist Groups do not exceed reality;
- within some longer-established Specialist Groups, particularly where the operation has been led, sometimes effectively single-handedly, by the same Co-ordinator for some years, there appears to be some inertia and resistance to change and/or lack of up-to-date knowledge of other relevant activities developing outside their network.
- thematic wetland groups are not, in general, working well. Of the 6 originally created in 1992, two have been dissolved, one has not developed a network, a fourth has only recently begun network development and only two have achieved an, albeit so far small, expert network. There appear to be two main reasons for this:
 - a. there are not natural communities of experts willing to collaborate in forming a network; and
 - b. the approach of appointing two equal status Co-ordinators has not led to effective direction and co-ordination of the groups. Such Co-ordinators have not been clear about who has responsibility for what, and group development is highly dependent on agreement between Co-ordinators - in at least one group, major disagreement over scope and direction of the group has prevented any group development in the last triennium.
- a similar problem is emerging in several other groups where there are joint Board-appointed Co-ordinators. Implementing the strategy-recommended structure of a single global Co-ordinator to lead the group, working with a 'committee' of Assistant Co-ordinators with regional and topic responsibility offers a potential solution to such problems.
- not all topics or themes may therefore be best addressed by a long-term Specialist Group - these may be better addressed through time-limited task forces and working groups on specific issues or projects. More such flexibility in the overall network is appropriate, but for such topics there is still a need for Wetlands International to maintain links with a lead expert or experts so as to develop appropriate working groups.

3.8 Proposals for addressing these weaknesses to create a more effective network are made below.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE NETWORK PRIORITIES & DEVELOPMENT

Guiding principles

- 4.1. The following principles apply in developing recommendations for future Specialist group development over the next triennium:
- a. the SG network, as experts in wetland and wetland species ecology, should help focus and guide the direction of Wetlands International;

- b. topic coverage should match the scope of Wetlands International's business, particularly its priority areas;
- c. the SG network should have the capacity to provide information and advice at both global (e.g. to conventions) and regional (e.g. regional licensee) programmes and projects;
- d. the SG network should be capable to lead or undertake projects on behalf of Wetlands International, either directly or through Co-ordinators' host institutes;
- e. Specialist Groups should be formed wherever possible as a link to a 'natural community' of experts/enthusiasts;
- f. as SGs are part of Wetlands International their Co-ordinators should, in appropriate fora, be able to represent the organisation, and therefore need to understand the organisation's business and strategic positioning; and
- g. the SG network should, through accessing project funds or other resources (e.g. establishing membership fees) seek to be self-supporting in maintaining their networks.

Recommendations for endorsement

4.2 The following activities and actions for developing the scope and functioning of the the Specialist Group network are recommended to the Board of Members for endorsement.

4.3 **Essential activities.** Priority activities have not been identified in the overall list of activities provided to Specialist Groups (Annex 1). Since the underlying objective of establishing and maintaining groups is to ensure access to networks of experts on wetland-related topics, it follows that maintaining an expert network that is accessible to Wetlands International, and through it to partner organisations (notably IUCN-SSC), must be a required task of all groups. Without this, the value of the network is greatly reduced, and cannot be reliably promoted externally as a feature of Wetlands International, to mutual benefit.

Similarly, developing a forward plan the fits with Wetlands International's priorities and scope of business, and reporting annually on achievements against this plan, is essential if Wetlands International is to ensure groups acting on its behalf meet its priority needs.

Recommendation 1. *Essential activities that must be undertaken as top priority by all groups should be a). the establishment, regular maintenance and accessibility to the group's expert network; and b). development of an agreed triennial forward plan, and annual reporting on achievement of plan targets.*

4.4 **Other priority activities.** Other activities listed in Annex 1 should be regarded as optional but desirable; the extent to which they can be achieved depends on the size, vitality and resourcing of each group. However, certain activities should be a priority for all groups in the next three years, notably the restructuring of group co-ordination to that of a single global co-ordinator with regional Assistant Co-ordinators covering the regions (or parts of them) linked to Wetlands International regional licensees; and the establishment for each group of a 'management committee of these Co-ordinators and others as necessary for effective group management. Long-standing Co-ordinators should encourage increased involvement of new assistance (including spreading the load of network management - e.g. membership maintenance, newsletter production etc. - to a team to ensure continued group vigour, and as a guiding principle should be encouraged, where appropriate, to pass on responsibility for overall co-ordination after two terms (six years).

Recommendation 2. *Priority activities in the next triennium are for all groups (unless otherwise agreed) to move to a global plus regional assistant co-ordinator structure; to involve other assistant co-ordinators to undertake specific group management tasks, and encourage changes in lead co-ordinators on a regular basis.*

4.5 **Specialist Group network support.** Lack of access for groups to limited financial resources for network management, network communications (e.g. newsletters, workshops, web-site developments) and production of group publications is identified as identified as a key limiting step to maintenance and development of the network in the next triennium. Lack of ICU staff time, with the broadened role of the Science Co-ordinator, to work with network development and the needs of individual groups is also identified as a limiting the speed of developing the network to more fully reflect Wetlands International's business. The Science Co-ordinator is currently a 2-

year secondment; increasing core funding to support the continuation of this post for the next triennium is being considered under BoM 9).

Recommendation 3. *The International Co-ordination Unit should give priority to establishing for budget lines for SG network support and small grants, either from allocation of core funds and/or through sponsorship of network activities. Financial support from regional licencees for the development of regional SG activities should be maintained (Africa, Europe, Middle East) or developed (Americas, Asia-Pacific) as resources permit.*

Recommendation 4. *A seconded or a funded ICU post of Specialist Groups Network Assistant should be sought.*

- 4.6 **Better guidance on Specialist Group roles and responsibilities.** Specialist Group Co-ordinators, both old and new, need clearer guidance on their roles and responsibilities, and on the business and strategic priorities of Wetlands International if they are to operate appropriately.

Recommendation 5. *The ICU should develop a Specialist Groups' Handbook to provide guidance to those co-ordinating the network.*

- 4.7 **Improving network communications and publicity.** To develop more effective communications between Specialist Groups, and between them and Wetlands International staff, there is a priority need to develop electronic communications networks. Priority should be given to establishing a list-server for Co-ordinators and key staff; for individual SGs to develop list-servers for communication with their expert networks (the Threatened Waterfowl SG has already established such a system), and the development of SG web-site information for external publicity and promotion of the network

Recommendation 6. *Priority should be afforded by both the ICU and Specialist Groups themselves to establishing electronic communications networks, both internal and external.*

- 4.8 **Reducing group dependency on Wetlands International resources.** Particularly for groups with a large 'correspondents' network in receipt of newsletters free of charge the costs to Wetlands International and/or supporting institutes are considerable. Such groups should be encouraged to explore options such as charging membership fees for those wishing to benefit from group activities but who are not part of the group's core expert network. Such an approach has two advantages: a). of reducing dependency on financial support from Wetlands International; and b). increasing ownership of the network by its members rather than solely by Wetlands International. The model of the International Wader Study Group, as an independent 650-strong network paying annual membership dues in return for receipt of newsletters and other publications, and opportunities for attendance at members' conferences, is relevant here.

Recommendation 7. *Specialist Groups should be encouraged to examine options for developing as fee-paying membership networks.*

- 4.9 **Developing the SG network coverage.** Priorities for filling gaps in coverage will be driven by the the development of Wetlands International's global strategic framework. In developing broader coverage, there are many opportunities for establishing links with existing independent groups, and for developing time-limited working groups or task forces on specific topics. In particular there a a number of wetland habitat networks in existence and IUCN-SSC has a number of non-bird taxonomic groups. This would have the added advantage of creating access to an expanded expert network at the same time as reducing the overall dependency of the network on Wetlands International. Nevertheless there will remain some topics for which it is most appropriate for Wetlands International to lead the creation of further groups where independent networks do not exist - the request for endorsement of the creation of the Rail Specialist Group is an example.

Recommendation 8. *In developing the network in the light of the establishment of global strategic framework for Wetlands International, priority for network development should be given to establishing links with existing independent groups, and establishing task forces and working groups as needed.*

- 4.10 **Establishing links with independent groups of broader scope.** Specialist Groups currently individually cover a waterbird taxa or a wetland theme. There are several independent societies with much broader networks of wetland experts, notably the Society of Wetland Scientists and the

Colonial Waterbird Society. Initial discussions with these groups have indicated willingness to consider developing stronger links with Wetlands International. Such links would have considerable advantage in expanding the organisation's access to expertise.

Recommendation 9. *Continue to explore mechanisms for establishing formal links with the Society of Wetland Scientists and the Colonial Waterbirds Society.*

4.11 Changes to existing Specialist Groups. Several changes are recommended to the existing Specialist Groups, as follows.

- a). **renaming of Specialist Group:** simplification of the title of the Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources SG to the *Wetlands & Water Resources SG*

Recommendation 10. *Rename the Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources SG as the Wetlands & Water Resources SG.*

- b). **dissolution of Specialist Group: Waterfowl Ecology SG.** This group existed to organise, jointly with Wetlands International and the International Wader Study Group, a triennial conference on waterfowl ecology. It has been inactive since holding a conference in Aveiro, Portugal in 1995, had never established a formal expert network and has had no Co-ordinator since 1995. It is considered that the role of this group can be better continued by establishing links and holding joint meetings between waterbird SGs, and with other independent networks such as the Colonial Waterbird Society.

Recommendation 11. *Dissolve the Waterfowl Ecology SG.*

- c). **suspension of the Hunting SG.** This group has been inactive for several years and its co-ordinators are stepping down. The issue of hunting and its impact on waterbird populations is, however, an important one and one on which Wetlands International should continue to have access to expert knowledge. Rather than dissolve this group it is therefore recommended that the group be suspended pending further consultation and evaluation of options. Options include re-establishing the group with new co-ordinators; drawing on the expertise on hunting and population dynamics from within the network of waterbird Specialist Groups; and establishing working groups to, *inter alia*, complete the publication of the group's global review of waterbird hunting; and assess the value of developing and international compilation of wing-survey data in evaluating impact of hunting on waterbirds.

Recommendation 12. *Suspend the Hunting SG.*

- d). **creation of new Specialist Group: Rail SG.** Rails have remained the only major waterbird taxon (with the possible exception of gulls and terns for which BirdLife International have traditionally had lead responsibility) for which Wetlands International has no access to expertise. There is no existing independent network with which to link. The proposed new *Rail SG* will be co-ordinated by Dr Barry Taylor, South Africa, author of the recently published authoritative monograph *Rails of the World*, and will cover all global species of Rails and Flufftails. Since many rails are endangered it is anticipated that the group will work closely with the Threatened Waterfowl SG.

Recommendation 13. *Create the Rail SG.*

4.12 Re-appointment of Specialist Group Co-ordinators as members of the Board of Members.

Twenty-seven Co-ordinators have indicated their willingness to stand for re-appointment or appointment to the Board of Members for the 1999-2001 triennium. Six Co-ordinators have advised that they do not wish to be re-appointed to the Board of Member. Names are listed in Annex 4.

Recommendation 14. *Endorse appointment of Specialist Group Co-ordinators listed in Annex 4 to the Board of Members for the 1999-2001 triennium; and record thanks to those stepping down for their work for Wetlands International.*

4.13 Future changes to Specialist Groups. It is anticipated that during the next triennium proposals for other changes to the network will be developed. Some are being discussed at present, but no firm recommendation has yet been agreed with . These include options for the Economic Assessment of Wetland Functions and Values SG, and options for restructuring the co-ordination of the Heron SG and the Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills SG.

(Paper presented to the BoM 10, in 1998)

Recommendation 14. *Endorse continued evaluation of opportunities for restructuring existing Specialist Groups, including Economic Valuation, Herons, and Storks, Ibises and Spoonbills groups.*

Annex 1. Activities of Specialist Groups and their Co-ordinators

Note. These terms of reference for Specialist Group activities are modified and clarified from those listed in Annex 2 of the *SG Development Strategy*, in the light of further evaluation of the role and priorities for the groups by the ICU and discussions during the January 1998 Specialist Groups' workshop.

1. General Activities of Specialist Groups

Some of the tasks listed below are essential if a group is to be able to help deliver the role for which Wetlands International has such groups. Those activities highlighted in **bold** are those now recommended as essential for all groups; those in *italics* are identified as priorities during the next triennium. The ability of SGs to deliver other tasks depends on the level of development of the group, but should be targets included in a group's capacity development, particularly since they will help the groups develop, expand their operations and/or become better resourced.

- a. **prepare a strategic plan for group development and implementation.**
- b. **produce triennial report to the Board meeting summarising group activities; and produce annual reports to the Science Co-ordinator.**
- c. **develop a core network of members willing to contribute advice and expertise, and maintain a register of identified expertise of members, accessible to the group and to Wetlands International.**
- d. *identify a Co-ordinator with global responsibility for maintaining the link with Wetlands International.*
- e. *develop a regional structure, appointing regional co-ordinators to provide more direct links with Wetlands International regional HQs.*
- f. *appoint Assistant Co-ordinators or Task Forces (by agreement with Wetlands International) to undertake particular group activities and projects or lead on specific projects.*
- g. (Co-ordinators) attend Board meetings (e.g. Senegal, Nov 1998) and other meetings/workshops (e.g. Wageningen, Jan 1998) as appropriate.
- h. produce a newsletter (at least 1 per year), circulated to SG membership/other SG co-ordinators/Wetlands International HQs.
- i. workshop/publications: hold workshops (at present no frequency suggested), and summarise results in publications.
- j. prepare articles/information for *Wetlands* newsletters and Web-sites.
- k. ensure Wetlands International and its activities are made known to the global scientific community (e.g. through newsletters and displays at meetings).
- l. provide specialist advice on the group's topic to Wetlands International offices and other parts of the specialist network.
- m. develop and undertake funded projects in association with Wetlands International ICU and regions.
- n. develop electronic communications capacity, both within the group and for external publicity e.g. by Web site development.
- o. assess costs/benefits from establishing a large membership network (cf a small core of experts), and how best to service it.

2. Additional tasks for waterbird groups

Waterbird SGs have existed for longer than the wetland groups and have some additional specific roles in providing input to Wetlands International projects, as follows. Some are inputs to AEME regional activities only at present.

- a. *Waterfowl Population Estimates*, 3rd edition. Provide new estimates (in association with database managers/waterbird officers) and comment on draft listings. Next activity needed late 1998/early 1999.

- b. IWC global strategy.* Advise on proposals for future IWC operation.
- c.* Develop species and taxon group Action Plans, in association with IUCN-SSC.
- d.* Contribute to compilation of IUCN Red Lists.
- e.* identify up to 20 of the core network for membership of IUCN-SSC through the Wetlands International 'Waterbird Network'
- f. W Palearctic IWC Annual Report.* SGs (AEME only) to prepare short taxon chapters, in close collaboration with database managers (1998/9).
- g.* Populations in decline (AEME only). Advise if declines are 'significant' against a set of rules being developed.

Annex 2. New Specialist Group annual and triennial reporting and forward planning pro-formas

Name of Specialist Group:

1. Group structure, membership and management

1.1 Aims and objectives of the Group

1.2 Group Co-ordination

a. Co-ordinators

i.e. Board of Members appointed Co-ordinators (In case you do not yet know, the Wetlands International Board(i.e. SG Co-ordinators, National Delegates and Partner Organisations) that meets once every three years at the Board meeting is now called the Board of Members; the former Executive Committee is now called the Board of Directors). If more than one, please identify who acts as the global Co-ordinator, and give the geographical areas covered by each. (Addresses and contact numbers will be added later)

b. Assistant Co-ordinators

i.e.those appointed within the Group by the Co-ordinator. Please identify role, topic and/or geographical coverage of each

1.3 Group size and structure

a. Network structure

Co-ordinators only ☐, core 'members' ☐, or core 'members' + 'correspondents' ☐

as defined in the SG Strategy, 'members' are those people who are actively engaged in research and conservation activities of direct relevance to the Group's programme; 'correspondents' are other individuals who have an interest in the group's programme

b. Network size

it would be very helpful if you can list nos. in your network in the table below by Wetlands International region (or within this by geographical region e.g. N America, Central and S America, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Asia, Australasia, Oceania). If this is not possible, please just complete the 'total' column

	Africa, Europe, Middle East	Asia-Pacific	the Americas	TOTAL
no. of 'members'				
no. of 'correspondents'				

1.4 Criteria for membership

a. do you have criteria for membership: yes ☐, no ☐, if yes, give:

b. criteria for core 'members':

c. criteria for 'correspondents':

1.5 Expertise list/database

a. do you maintain a list of members/correspondents expertise: yes ☐ no ☐, if yes:

b. is this held as an electronic database: yes ☐ no ☐

1.6 Web-site/pages

a. do you have a Web site or pages for the Group: yes ☐, no ☐ if yes:

b. give its address:

c. are the Group's newsletters available on the Web site: yes ☐ no ☐

1.7 Institutional support for Co-ordinators and SG management

e.g. staff time for Group management, telephones, computer use, copying and mailing, financial support for meeting attendance etc.

1.8 Issues for group management and maintenance

*list here the main difficulties you face in maintaining and developing your network and its co-ordination. This section will **not** be used in compiling public information about the Group, e.g. Web pages*

institutional support for group management ☐

resources (time, funds etc.) ☐

establishing/maintaining a responsive network ☐

maintaining network contact ☐

gaps in geographical coverage ☐

support from Wetlands International ☐

liaison between Co-ordinators ☐

other(s) - please state:

1.9 Comments and other information

2. Annual activity and achievement report for 1996, 1997 and 1998

A. 1996 (note: forms for 1997 and 1998 are identical)

Development of Specialist Group structure and management

e.g. appointment of new Co-ordinators, development of membership and expertise databases, changes in Group structure and size

Projects

list here the titles of all Group projects active during the year, their objective(s), their planned duration, how they are funded and what has been achieved in each project during the year

Specialist Group conference & workshops

list here meetings (e.g. SG conferences) organised by your Specialist Group. Give title of meeting, location and date, and (if possible) approx. number of participants

Participation in other meetings

meetings where Co-ordinators or Group members attended as representatives of the SG

Specialist Group Newsletters

give volume/issue number, date of publication, and number of pages

Conference & workshop proceedings

Volumes published during the year produced wholly or jointly by the Specialist Group

Other publications relating to the Group's activities

e.g. articles and journal papers; articles in Wetlands newsletter

Collaboration with other Specialist Groups

e.g. joint projects, meetings and information sharing etc.

Collaboration with other groups and organisations

e.g. links with other expert networks outside the SG network on joint projects, information sharing etc.

Provision of information & advice to Wetlands International

e.g. information on waterfowl population estimates, advice on wetland restoration, etc.

Provision of information & advice to other organisations

e.g. to convention secretariats, NGOs incl. IUCN-SSC, governments and agencies, World Bank etc.

Financial and other support received from Wetlands International

list here assistance received during the year for Group activities such as publication and circulation of Group newsletters and reports, organising meetings, attending meetings, project implementation etc. Give amounts where relevant

3. Summary of achievements against 1996-98 plan objectives

Please list your 1996-98 Triennial Plan objectives as set out in the Research Group Report 1993-95, and comment on what you have achieved against these objectives during the triennium.

1996-98 triennial plan objectives	Achievements against plan objectives
Aims	
Priority issues	
Priority actions	
Group Structure	
General comments	

4. Forward plan for 1999-2001

In setting out your forward plan for the next triennium could you ensure that you address objectives for developing your Group in line with the recommendations of the Specialist Group Strategy and the January 1998 Specialist Groups' Workshop. In particular please include objectives for:

- *regional co-ordination, network development and activity, with links to Wetlands International regional offices;*
- *identification of a global Co-ordinator where one does not already exist;*
- *development and maintenance of an expertise register;*

Remember that from now on you will be compiling an annual report for your Group on these planned activities, so where possible please indicate the target year for achieving each objective, or indicate the activity as ongoing.

In line with the SG Strategy you should treat your plan as a draft. You will need to check your plan against the Wetlands International draft triennial plans that will be discussed at the November Board meeting to identify common areas of work, and finalise your plan after that.

In compiling your forward plan please follow the headings below as far as possible. Some Specialist Groups have already drafted a forward plan - submitting your draft plan in its current format is fine, but please ensure that it includes some coverage the topic headings listed below.

4.1 Overall aims and objectives for 1999-2001

where these differ from those set out in section 1.1. If there is no change planned, note this

4.2 Priority issues for action

summarise and highlight here the key work areas and issues for the Group in this triennium, derived from your plan in the sections below

4.2 Group structure and management

a. Global

b. Regional

4.3 Membership development

e.g. membership numbers and roles; expertise register development

4.4 Projects

4.5 Conferences, workshops and meetings

4.6 Newsletters and other Group communications and publicity

e.g. Web site development, promotional material for conferences etc.

4.7 Other publications

4.8 Collaboration with other Specialist Groups and organisations

4.9 Provision of information and advice

a. to Wetlands International

b. to other organisations

4.10 Other activities

Annex 3. Appointment of Specialist Group Co-ordinators for the 1999-2001 triennium.***Co-ordinators indicating willingness to be appointed for the 1999-2001 triennium***

Name	Specialist Group	Re-election	
Mennobart van Eerden	Cormorant	✓	
Joseph Kerekes	Diver/Loon	✓	
Jeff Kirby	Duck (Global & AEME)	✓	
Marc Woodin	Duck (Americas)	✓	new Co-ordinator
Alan Johnson	Flamingo	✓	
Bart Ebbsinge	Goose :Global & Western Palearctic	✓	
Jon Fjeldsa	Grebe	✓	
Heinz Hafner	Heron : Old World	✓	
Alain Crivelli	Pelican :Old World	✓	
Daniel Anderson	Pelican : New World	✓	
Barry Taylor	Rails	✓	new Co-ordinator
Stephan Pihl	Seaduck	✓	
Koen Brouwer	Storks, Ibises & Spoonbills : Old World	✓	
Malcolm Coulter	Storks, Ibises & Spoonbills :New World	✓	
Eileen Rees	Swan : Eurasia	✓	
Roberto Schlatter	Swan : Neotropics	✓	
Andy Green	Threatened Waterfowl : Eurasia	✓	
Tom C. Rothe	Threatened Waterfowl : North America	✓	
David Stroud	Wader Study Group	✓	
Heribert Kalchreuter	Woodcock & Snipe	✓	
Fern Filion	Economic Assessment of Wetland Functions & Values	✓	
Max Finlayson	Wetland Inventory & Monitoring	✓	
Luis Naranjo	Wetland Inventory & Monitoring	✓	
Palle Uhd Jepsen	Wetland Restoration	✓	
Kevin Erwin	Wetland Restoration	✓	
Jon Kusler	Wetlands, River Basins & Water Resources Management	✓	
Doug Hulyer	Education & Public Awareness	✓	

Co-ordinators stepping-down from the Board of Members

James Kushlan	Heron: New World	X	
Alexander Andreev	Goose: Eastern Palearctic	X	
Austin Reed	Goose:Nearctic	X	
Rosemary James	Economic Assessment of Wetland Functions & Values	X	
Jacques Trouvilliez	Hunting :Europe/Africa	X	Suspension of SG
Rollin Sparrowe	Hunting :Americas	X	Suspension of SG
<i>vacant</i>	Waterfowl Ecology	X	Closure of SG