

News from the International Waterbird Census
Western Palearctic and Southwest Asia
Issue no. 4 - DECEMBER 2002
Newsletter for Coordinators of national waterbird monitoring schemes

The main function of this publication is to keep coordinators of national waterbird monitoring schemes up-to-date with developments in the International Waterbird Census (IWC) in the Western Palearctic and Southwest Asia region. This year we have kept the newsletter more brief so that the information is more accessible. This newsletter was produced by Niels Gilissen and Simon Delany, with assistance of Ward Hagemeijer and Gerard Boere. Please e-mail us if you have any questions or comments:
Gilissen@wetlands.agro.nl or Delany@wetlands.agro.nl

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Introduction

Dear colleagues, it has been a dynamic year for Wetlands International and for the waterbird monitoring team in particular and we are proud that we can present two major publications: the new IWC Western Palearctic & Southwest Asia 1997-99 report and the third edition of Waterbird Population Estimates! These publications are a direct result of the activities of IWC counters and coordinators: Wetlands International wishes to express its gratitude to all of you! These publications show that we have overcome the difficulties that the organisation faced in 2001. The future is looking bright enough to set new goals, which will result in new publications, e.g. on waterbird population trends. A lot of work happened in the background: the datamanagement system has been thoroughly upgraded with the help of external consultants. This important work was financially supported by the Swiss government (BUWAL). This system will be launched and implemented at the global scale in a workshop that will be organised in March 2003. This workshop will bring together the regional coordinators for Oceania, Asia, Africa, WP&SW Asia, South America and North America. The next step is that we will set new quality standards for the IWC involving a major check of all data held by the IWC database and, in cooperation with the National Coordinators, improve the quality and usability of the data. This work will start in 2003 with the WP &SWA database

Global coordination of IWC

In 2001 Wetlands International produced its draft Programme Action Plan, titled "Global Waterbird Monitoring and Conservation in the new

Millennium" (Wetlands International in prep.). In this document a strategic positioning of Wetlands International's waterbird related work is presented.

The major change in direction proposed for the IWC is development of a more global character and closer interaction of the regional schemes in terms of standardisation and data management. Following a decision of the Board of Members of Wetlands International, the strategic formulation of the work on waterbirds and other species was changed to "Wetland Species Conservation". A summary of the decisions can be found in the Wetlands International strategy 2002-2005 (Wetlands International 2002).

www.wetlands.org/aboutWI/strategy.htm

IWC in the regions

Wetlands International is pleased to announce that our office in North America will be re-established in 2003 and that Melanie Steinkamp will be the new Wetlands International Liaisons Officer for North America. She will set up the IWC in North America, serve as the focal point for waterbird flyway initiatives and develop and implement the Wetlands International strategy and policy for North America. Melanie is a wildlife biologist and has been working for the Patuxent Wildlife Centre - US Geological Survey - on their monitoring program.

In 2001 the latest report on the Neotropical Waterbird Census was published (Blanco & Carbonell, 2001). The regional offices in Malaysia and Dakar are currently working on the publication of new IWC reports for the Asia-Pacific and Africa regions. It is expected that both reports will be published in 2003.

Count dates: January 2003

Please note that the **recommended dates** for IWC counts in 2003 for Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia are:

11-12 January 2003

Recommendations for the counts

As usual, for the convenience of volunteer counters, the recommended dates cover the weekend nearest the middle of January. Please note that these dates are for guidance only, and that counts from any dates in January are very welcome.

Please include non-native species in the counts, because this group is more and more of interest in relation to waterbird conservation issues.

Please follow the general rules for data submission: include all necessary fields (species, count, date, sitecode, sitename) and check if the sitenames and sitecodes match the sitelist. Any changes in the sitelist should be reported.

IWC 1997-99 report and Waterbird Population Estimates 3rd edition

All National Coordinators should have received one or more copies of the new IWC report by now and will have received one or more copies of WPE3 by the end of this year. Please notify us if you have not received these publications and we will ensure that they are sent to you.

To download these reports from the Web, please visit our website at:

www.wetlands.org/pubs&/waterbird_pub.html - ngetal

Numbers and distribution of wintering waterbirds in the Western Palearctic and Southwest Asia in 1997, 1998 and 1999 – Results from the International Waterbird Census

This is the title of the new IWC report, covering three years, 47 countries, more than 6,000 sites, over 230 species and more than 22 million birds! The design is very similar to the previous report (Delany et al., 1999). In the results section, tables with count totals and site coverage maps are shown. New is the inclusion of weather maps, showing the 0-degree isotherms in the period prior to the census date. However, the biggest improvement is the inclusion of distribution maps for 51 species, showing the average distribution during the midwinter census over three years. The maps present a wealth of data on the different species and show where concentrations occur. Also, the relation with weather conditions can be investigated using the maps. For National Coordinators the chapter on coverage for each country is particularly interesting as it highlights the gaps that we have found in the census data. We hope it will encourage you to help us filling these gaps or to help us checking errors in our (site) data. It is still one of our highest goals to achieve a better coverage every year, in order to produce better and more reliable results. We hope the report will find its way to the policy makers

and scientists, to be used for wetland and waterbird conservation. (See the box on page 1 for online availability of these reports). After publication of the report we received valuable comments on the contents and countries also provided us with additional data that was not included in the report. We hope that all National Coordinators will be stimulated by the IWC report to look for gaps in the IWC data and for possibilities to increase the coverage of the IWC in their country.

Waterbird Population Estimates-third edition

The new, third edition of Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE3) was launched at the 8th Ramsar Conference in Valencia, Spain, in November 2002. Two of the most important questions you need to be able to answer if you want to conserve a population of a species are: how many are there? and where are they?. WPE3 provides this information for 33 families of waterbirds. The publication aims to:

- Assist in identification of wetlands of international importance, by using waterbirds as bio-indicators and provide the basis of the 1%-criterion under the Ramsar convention;
- identify priorities for waterbird conservation and research;
- identify gaps in knowledge;

- support the Ramsar, Bonn & Biodiversity Conventions, EU Birds Directive, and other policy frameworks at international and national level.

In order to achieve this, this edition:

- identifies 2,271 biogeographical populations of 868 species;
- provides estimates of the numerical abundance of 76% of these populations;
- estimates population trends for 50% of these populations;
- sets 1% levels for identification of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands;
- provides fundamental information to the conservation of waterbirds under regional initiatives;
- identifies gaps in knowledge.

A big improvement on the previous editions is the increased amount of populations the editors were able to give estimates for and the increased accuracy of the estimates.

Another major improvement on the first and second editions (1994 and 1997) is the inclusion of distribution maps generously provided by Lynx Edicions, publisher of *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Inclusion of these maps at species level, and of more detailed range descriptions at population level, make it easier than ever for users to identify which populations occur within their country, region or site. The usefulness of the publication is further enhanced by the inclusion for the first time of English names for species, and by a Notes column providing (among other things) information on the derivation of the estimates.

IWC database and data quality upgrade

In March and April 2002 a consultant assisted us in upgrading the IWC database program. Data extraction for the new IWC report has been a perfect test case for the new product and has resulted in a few more changes and modules to be added. Because of the complexity and the amount of data, the database program has to be of a very high quality. The final programming will be done in the beginning of next year. In spring the programme will be launched as the global standard for the IWC datamanagement. We will organise a small workshop where the regional IWC coordinators of Wetlands International will be introduced to the new program.

In the meantime, we want to perform a quality upgrade of the data. The above mentioned workshop will also be used to discuss the quality standards between coordinators, specialist groups and 'external' stakeholders and data users.

During the work for the IWC report it became clear that there are still a few problems with the

data. One cause of these problems is the fact that some countries still submit data in hardcopy, which makes it harder to link it to a sitelist and which can introduce mistakes. Some countries submit data only using sitenames. We then have to link sitenames to our sitelist (-codes), which can be difficult or at least very time-consuming, due to differences in names, spelling, transcription or when new sites were counted. Even countries that have a good sitelist sometimes submit datasets, with sitecodes that do not match the sitelist. Another cause of errors is the fact that not all countries provide new site information when a new site is counted or when sites are merged into a bigger unit. In a few weeks' time we will ask all National Coordinators to cooperate in an exercise to check their site and count data and report any errors or problems. We will then try to 'repair' these errors and enhance the quality of the data. We hope that you will find some time to help us doing this, it is of great importance to the quality and usability of the data.

Status of the data submission to Wetlands International

Below you will find an IWC data status overview. This serves as a log for keeping a record of which countries have sent us data for which years. If you see your country has not yet sent data for these years, we hope this will encourage you to send it as soon as possible. We are constantly trying to keep our database as complete as possible, especially in the light of the planned trend analyses, IWC reports and data quality upgrade. Thank you for cooperating with us in getting the IWC database filled with your waterbird data!

COUNTRY	2000	2001	2002
Baltic/Nordic			
Belarus	-	-	-
Denmark	-	-	-
Estonia	+	+	-
Finland	-	-	-
Iceland	-	-	-
Kaliningrad	-	-	-
Latvia	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-
Norway	+	-	-
Poland	+	-	-
Sweden	+	-	-
Black Sea/East Mediterranean			
Albania	+	+	-
Bosnia and Herz.	+	-	-
Bulgaria	+?	+?	-
Croatia	-	-	-
Cyprus	+	-	+
Egypt	-	-	-
Greece	-	-	-

Israel	+	+	-
Lebanon	+	-	+
Macedonia	-	-	-
Moldova	-	-	-
Romania	-	-	-
Slovenia	+	+	+
Syria	-	-	-
Turkey	-	-	-
Ukraine	-	-	-
Yugoslavia	+	+	-
Central Europe			
Austria	+	+	-
Czech Republic	+	-	-
Germany	-	-	-
Hungary	+	-	-
Slovakia	+	-	-
Switzerland	+	-	-
Northwest Europe			
Belgium	-	-	-
France	+	+	-
Germany	-	-	-
Ireland	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-
Netherlands	-	-	-
United Kingdom	+	-	-
Southwest Asia			
Armenia	-	-	-
Azerbaijan	+	-	-
Bahrain	-	-	-
Georgia	-	-	-
Iran	+	+	-
Iraq	-	-	-
Jordan	-	-	-
Kazakhstan	-	-	-
Kuwait	-	-	-
Kyrgyzstan	+	?	?
Oman	-	+	-
Qatar	-	-	-
Russia	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-
Tajikistan	-	-	-
Turkmenistan	+	+	-
United Arab Emir.	-	-	+
Uzbekistan	+	+	-
Yemen	-	-	-
West Mediterranean			
Algeria	-	-	-
France	+	+	-
Italy	+	-	-
Libya	-	-	-
Malta	-	-	-
Morocco	-	-	-
Portugal	-	-	-
Spain	+/-	+/-	-
Tunisia	-	-	+

+ = available
 +/- = partly available
 - = not available

New trend analyses of waterbirds in the Western Palearctic and Southwest Asia

One of the first projects that will be started after the database and data quality upgrade, is a new analysis on population trends of waterbird species in the region. The most recent analysis was published in 1999 in the IWC report for 1995-96 and new population trend estimates are being called for from many sides. More reliable and accurate trend figures will be possible as data become available from more years and more countries, and after next year's data quality upgrade. We are now trying to raise funds for this crucial project and hope to start with it in the course of 2003. Population trends can be used to develop tools for using waterbird data as indicators for environmental change. A recent pilot project has used data for some species like Wigeon. The results have already been used in high level meetings as one of the few examples of long-term, high quality monitoring data in Europe. Furthermore the Wigeon trend will be used in 'the Kiev Report' a ministerial report of the European Environment Agency to be published in Spring 2003. Wetlands International is constantly advertising the use of these data for these purposes.

One of the themes that might be subject of future studies is the relation between climate change and waterbird numbers and distribution.

Project on the delimitation of IWC count sites

In 2002 a graduation student, Debbie van Ledden, conducted a project on the delimitation of wetland sites in the IWC. She asked NC's to cooperate in a questionnaire and several of you replied and had valuable input into the project, for which we are grateful. One of the conclusions was that there are no general criteria available for count site delimitation. Most countries have their own (sometimes pragmatic) criteria for definition of sites. However, when it comes to delimitation of 'non-standard' wetlands, e.g. rivers, seasonal wetlands or transboundary sites, there is a need among National Coordinators for a common standard of criteria. Suggestions for criteria are made and the report of the project will be sent to the National Coordinators who participated.

Guidelines for a waterbird monitoring protocol

An important element of the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement Action Plan is a document known as the *AEWA Conservation Guidelines*, prepared by Wetlands International in 1999. The aim of this document is to facilitate implementation of the Agreement in countries within the AEWA region. These guidelines contain detailed practical advice to conservation practitioners at national level. There are nine *Guidelines* in the 1999 version, which is available on the World Wide Web and will be published in hardcopy before the 3rd Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement 2005. Of particular interest to coordinators and counters in national waterbird monitoring schemes is Guideline No. 9. Titled *Guidelines for a waterbird monitoring protocol*. This is a step-by-step guide to setting up and running a national waterbird monitoring scheme using IWC methodology. The guidelines are available at:

http://www.unep-wcmc.org/AEWA/eng/info/mop1/1_8.pdf

If you would prefer to receive *Guidelines for a waterbird monitoring protocol* as a document in MS word by e-mail, please send a message to Simon Delany or Niels Gilissen in Wageningen.

Goose Specialist Group Meeting 2002 in El Rocio, Spain

From 13 to 18 December nearly 100 people gathered in the Annual General Meeting of the Goose Specialist Group. This took place in a venue at the edge of the Coto Doñana National Park, where thousands of Greylag Geese and other waterbirds winter. There was a good variety of presentations, focussing on the ecology and conservation of geese and special attention was

paid to the Greylag Goose and to hunting issues. During a wetlands International presentation on the status of the goose data in the IWC database for the WP&SWA, it was made clear that we are still missing data, either through lack of census coverage or through a backlog in receiving data from our network. In the course of next year we will present the data on the website of the Goose Specialist Group to give an overview of the data and to ask for any update that might be possible. For more info, please check:

www.wetlands.org/networks/Goose/Goose.htm

Ramsar CoP 8, CMS CoP7 and AEWA MoP 2: high profile for IWC

Support of international conventions and agreements is an important aim of Wetlands International and IWC plays a vital role in that. The Ramsar Convention of Wetlands, The Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and The African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) all use waterbird information to underpin their work. Main source of this information is IWC, worldwide. Wetlands International has therefore been prominently present at the Conferences of Parties (CoP) of Ramsar and CMS and the Meeting of Parties (MoP) of AEWA and raised a high profile of IWC. IWC related publications were launched at these occasions (WP&SWA report and WPE3) and important resolutions, adopted by these conferences were fed by IWC data. Furthermore the opportunity was used to include in these resolutions a call to all parties of these conventions, to support the IWC. These resolutions are a strong tool in showing the importance of IWC and can be used by all of you who are looking for support for IWC in international policy documents.

For more information, please contact Ward Hagemeyer at hagemeyer@wetlands.agro.nl

Finally...

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

Many thanks indeed for your continuing contribution to the IWC