

**WeBS Steering Group – 43rd meeting
JNCC, Peterborough
15th December 2011**

Present

Simon Wotton, RSPB, Chair [SW]
David Stroud, JNCC [DS]
Andy Musgrove, BTO [AM]
Chas Holt, BTO [CH]

Viola Ross-Smith, BTO [VRS]
Richard Hearn, WWT [RH]
Deborah Proctor, JNCC [DP]

1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted. SW chaired and CH/AM took minutes.

2. Minutes of 42nd WeBS Steering Group meeting

The minutes from the two previous Steering Group meetings were adopted. It was agreed that a section relating to data request surplus required more formal wording.

AP43/2/1: Ensure SG Minutes include appropriate wording throughout [CH] *Completed*

3. Progress on Action Points (APs).

The action points arising from earlier meetings were considered. All were either complete or considered later in meeting. Others were as follows (numbering refers to list in BTO papers – **any new actions arising in red.**)

Actions from 41st Steering Group meeting

AP41/4/1: Because Mersey Estuary is such a key site, HM to keep in regular contact with the local organiser there to monitor progress [HM]. **Action completed.**

AP41/6/1: Introduction of a header block for each species listing the different sub-populations with their respective international thresholds, where applicable. [CH] **Action not yet completed; required for WITUK 2010/11 [CH]**

AP41/6/2: Introduction of indices for gulls. This issue will probably be tabled for further discussion at SC42, before finalising WITUK0910. **Action completed.**

AP41/10/2: The possibility of a short note using low tide densities to be explored further as time allows. [CH, NC]. **Action not yet completed.**

AP41/10/3: A short paper on when LTC trump Core counts to be prepared for Steering Group. [CH, NC]. **Action not yet completed.**

AP41/13/1: Continue with rationalisation of sites as per BoEE cards, and push forward with whole mobilisation of historical dataset. [CH et al]. **Action slowly on-going. Need to come up with more definitive plan for historical data, including outputs and milestones [CH]**

AP41/15/2: Inclusion of a page on new website describing and showing what index graphs mean; a “dummy’s guide to WeBS indices”. [CH] **Action completed**

AP41/16/1: Old reports to be scanned and uploaded to the web; integrated into the menu of the new website. [CH] **Action on-going, annual reports back to 1973/74 uploaded by SG43**

Actions from 42nd Steering Group meeting

AP42/2/1: Ensure SG Minutes do not include reference to named external individuals. [CH] **Action completed.**

AP42/6/1: Add press releases and procedure for Official Statistic releases into Gant chart. [CH] **Action completed.**

AP42/6/2: This distinction in indexing methods will be summarised in intelligible notes on (i) website, and (ii) in an article in WeBS newsletter. [CH, GA] **(i) completed, and (ii) article to be in next WeBS News [CH]**

AP42/6/3: regional press releases to be prepared ahead of publication of WITUK0910. [CH] **Action was not completed – to be implemented for WITUK 1011 [CH]**

AP42/6/4: include a suitably-worded caveat with respect to gull indices. [CH] **Action completed.**

AP42/6/5: Indices for other species should be included; moorhen, (possibly shag) [CH]. **Action completed.**

AP42/6/6: Maximise cross-linkages, and use explicit pointers to the web. [CH] **Action completed.**

AP42/7/1: Let Partners know when Alerts are all uploaded so local offices can be advised. [GA] **Action not completed as Alerts situation is unchanged. Latest (using 2010/11 WeBS data) to be available in Dec 2012**

AP42/10/1: invite VR-S to next SG meeting. [CH] **Action completed.**

AP42/10/2: Provide costing of proposed Dispersed Waterbirds Survey, and forward to Partners. [AM] **Action completed (although survey subsequently postponed)**

AP42/13///: Various actions relating to Population Estimates [AM]. **Actions completed.**

AP42/14/1: Provide hard data on possible savings with respect to report production and postage at SG43. [CH] **Action not completed. Awaiting figures from printers; will be presented at SG44 [CH]**

AP42/15/1: AM to circulate note by end of financial year, detailing state of data request surplus, buffer reserve fund, and the costed uses of surplus funds for 2011/12. [AM] **Action completed.**

AP42/15/2: Short paper: start semi-systematic review of indexing methods, including SOVON, IWC etc. Aim for Wader Study Group Bulletin. [GA, CH et al] **Action not completed, but initial approach has been made to SOVON and IWC.**

AP42/15/3: Multi-species indicators; poster for Wader Study Group Conference. [CH, GA] **Action completed**

AP42/15/4: Enhance information on website about Low Tide Counts. [NC] **Action on-going**

AP42/15/5: On-going work on consolidation of on-line database. [AM, CH, GA] **Action on-going**

AP42/16/1: A section on recent publications to be added to the WeBS newsletter. [CH] **Action completed.**

4. Counter network

The WeBS counter network and vacancies within the network of Local Organisers were reviewed. No major issues were identified.

New LOs have been recruited for: Irt/Mite/Esk Estuary; Leicestershire and Rutland; Montrose Basin; North Lincolnshire inland; Northumberland coast; Poole Harbour; Solway Estuary Outer South; West Glamorgan; West Midlands.

Current gaps in LO coverage are: Bucks, Burry Inlet (North); Carlingford Lough; Cheshire North; Clwyd; Co. Antrim; Co. Armagh; Co. Down; Co. Fermanagh; Co. Londonderry; Co. Tyrone (**despite a number of new counters in Northern Ireland, all these recent LO vacancies remain**); Derbyshire; Durham; East Lancashire and Fylde; Essex (other sites); Harris and Lewis; Huddersfield/Halifax area; Loughs Neagh and Beg; Merseyside inland; Outer Ards; South Down coast; South Yorkshire; Sutherland (excl. Moray Basin); West Inverness/Wester Ross; West Kent.

The 6th meeting of the WeBS LOAC was held at BTO on 19 July 2011. The minutes are available at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs/about-webs/webs-local-advisory-committee-loac>

The WeBS Partners considered two issues that were raised at 6th meeting of the WeBS LOAC:

- a) **The rationale for adding Dipper to the WeBS species list** was considered and it was deemed unnecessary. It is anticipated that the following list of issues raised should act as a framework for any future considerations of potential additions to the WeBS monitoring species list:
 - (i) As a sedentary species, Dippers are monitored (and a satisfactory trend derived) through WBBS/BBS. It was deemed that WeBS monitoring would produce a less useful trend for this species (probably of little difference to the WBBS trend).
 - (ii) The species is not Annex 1 or BoCC listed.
 - (iii) Although it is straightforward to add new species to on-line lists, it would require the reprinting of paper forms.
 - (iv) Although many counters like the idea of being able to submit records of extra species noted during WeBS counts, current plans for the easier cross-transfer of data between WeBS and BirdTrack during the on-line data submission will deal with this issue. This is part of a wider initiative to record all sightings within a single on-line recording system.

- b) A need to **update an inventory of known roost sites** was discussed and considered a priority to take forward. This is potentially an increasingly important topic with respect to coastal framework directives and accessibility issues. It was noted that although this is of primary importance for estuaries, this development was also applicable to inland sites.

It was agreed that the collection of this information should be integrated into current on-line mapping tool developments. In addition to being able to provide site boundary information, counters could also have the facility to map locations of roosts and potentially other useful information. In conjunction, it was suggested that assessment of the historical data could be used as an incentive for the collection of contemporary data.

AP43/4/1: Consider a newsletter article on mapping of roost sites [CH]

AP43/4/2: Take forward plans for collection of roost site information; liaise with BTO software development team [CH]

5. WeBS publicity and training

WeBS has featured in a variety of media during the reporting period, particularly in connection with publication of the annual report and the population estimates paper.

WeBS training courses, led by NC, are now a fixture in the winter calendar. There are also plans for a training portal within the on-line developments of the BTO and WeBS websites. In light of these developments, it was suggested that there should be enhanced communication with national organisers of other waterbird monitoring schemes in order to facilitate the sharing of training resources.

AP43/5/1/: Contact other national scheme organisers about training issues [CH/NC]

6. WeBS Online and website developments

WeBS Online continues to operate smoothly. Improvements continue to be identified and timetabled with BTO's IS team. The recently introduced National Organiser interface is functioning well, enabling the WeBS office to manage counters and allocate sites efficiently. Further improvements will enable creation of sites and changes to site boundaries to be carried out through this interface, rather than through the separate Oracle and GIS databases. There are now 1,500 registered on-line users (representing an increase of ca. 250 users in each of the last two years).

WeBS visits per year continue to increase. A review of this increase in coverage, and the use of WeBS Online, could feature as an article in a future WeBS newsletter.

AP43/6/1/: Draft an article on the history of WeBS coverage [CH/NC]

7. WeBS newsletter

During the course of the meeting, several potential articles for *WeBS News* were suggested. Where relevant, these are referred to in the relevant section of these Minutes. They include articles on (i) Geographical population estimates, (ii) Indexing, (iii) Review of proposed changes to WeBS report, (iv) roost sites, (v) History of WeBS coverage. An article about I-WeBS is also planned.

8. Annual report – format and content

Waterbirds in the UK 2009/10 was produced on schedule, received by counters in August 2011.

The format and content of the annual report were discussed, within the context of proposed changes in line with the re-profiling of JNCC's contribution to WeBS.

In summary, it is suggested WITUK1011 will be the final year of the report in its current book format. The report for 2011/12 will be a slimmed-down BBS style report, by which time website developments will include an increased element of on-line reporting.

AP43/8/1: Circulate post-meeting briefing paper of proposed developments to annual WeBS and Alerts reporting [AM]

The new specification for the annual reporting output should include list of existing elements, the vision, and technical details (e.g. potential for users to generate a tailored WeBS report, integration of population estimates as a standard output, etc).

All agreed that it would be useful to organise a workshop to consult relevant stakeholders about the proposed changes and associated new outputs. This workshop could include environmental consultancies and people from other user groups. (Organisation of a workshop would also satisfy a requirement within the WeBS Agreement that a stakeholder-based workshop should be held during the agreement term). Should this workshop only focus on WeBS or relate to more waterbird reporting more generally?

AP43/8/2: Organise a stakeholder workshop (in June; paperwork to be circulated by mid-May) as soon as possible. In addition, a separate meeting of the WeBS SG should be dedicated to this issue alone (the meeting in March 2012 could be used for this?) [CH/AM]

AP43/8/3: Circulate link of a recent Swiss waterbird report [AM] **Completed**

AP43/8/4: Any developments to reporting are to be communicated early on to I-WeBS [AM/CH]

Following the inclusion of gull trends in WITUK0910, the potential inclusion of annual indices and trends for additional species was discussed.

AP43/8/5: Forward unpublished indices/trends for other species, e.g. shag and snipe, to Partners [CH]

9. Waterbird population estimates

A paper of updated waterbird population estimates (Musgrove *et al.* 2011) was published in British Birds.

The initial six-year plan for the WeBS budget anticipated the production of a set of population estimates in the year 2012-13. Given the timing of the latest estimates, this is clearly no longer a sensible requirement and it was proposed that this item is dropped from the work programme for 2012-13, and be revisited in 2015-16 as planned. The Steering Group considered and agreed to this.

10. WeBS Low Tide Counts

LTC coverage was reviewed.

In 2010/11, LTC were undertaken at: Hayle, Kingsbridge (using Core data), Poole Harbour (using Core data), Langstone Harbour, Chichester Hbr, Adur, Crouch-Roach, Stour, Orwell, Alde, Breydon Water, Loch Fleet, Loch Indaal, Solway, Traeth Lafan, Carmarthen Bay, Burry Inlet, Strangford Lough, Belfast Lough, Killough Harbour and Beaulieu.

A major set of LTCs at the Humber Estuary began in October 2011 and will run until September 2012. Funding is from North & East Yorks Data Centre, plus some from Environment Agency. Professional gap-filling will be carried out by the Institute for Estuarine and Coastal Studies Unit of Hull University under contract to NE.

LTCs are being carried out in 2011/12 on Humber, Swale, Blackwater, Wear, Drigg Coast (1st time), Glaslyn (1st time), Conwy, Cromarty Firth, Fal, Fowey, Loch Indaal and Northwest Solent in addition to repeat sites. In view of recent counter issues on the Mersey, Natural England has expressed awareness of the potential requirement for funding for LTC at the site. NE may treat this as something of a priority because of current barrage proposal on the Mersey. Discussions have begun with RSPB about LTCs on Ribble in 2012/13.

11. WeBS Data Requests

Data request charges were discussed and it was agreed that they should be reviewed on a three-yearly cycle, thereby fitting in with other timetables associated with the scheme.

AP43/11/1: Undertake a review of data request charges in April 2012 [AM/NC/BTO Dev.]

The group considered a request from the MoD that they should be able to pay a fixed annual fee for WeBS data. It was decided that some general principles and guidelines need to be worked out for such service level agreements, using the MoD request as a case study. Consistency is fundamental, and issues to be considered include what is deemed to be an appropriate approach, and how frequently it should be reviewed. RH raised the point that he considered that similar guidelines had been drafted previously in the context of a historic project.

AP43/11/2: Principles and guidelines for WeBS service level agreements to be drafted for SG44 [NC *et al.*]

Projected data request income was presented by AM. It was suggested that the WeBS Alerts three-yearly update scheduled for 2012-13, and originally budgeted for as part of the core WeBS budget, should be funded from the data sales surplus, to reduce the temporary increase in the WeBS budget for 2012-13. This was agreed in principle by the partners.

The need for establishment of a WeBS contingency fund was reasserted – covering the costs of running the scheme for three months.

AP43/11/3: Ensure that three-month running costs are held in the contingency fund, and liaise with BTO Development Team regarding the production of a formal document with the relevant details [AM]

AP43/11/4: All mention of the contingency fund to be removed from summary accounts [AM]

AP43/11/5: Liaise with BTO Services to discuss (a) whether there are any implications of VAT on data request surplus accounts, (b) methods used for calculating projections. [AM]

12. WeBS development programme

AM reviewed the development programme within the context of the proposed changes to reporting (in line with re-profiling of JNCC contribution) and the projected surplus income from data requests.

Remaining work already budgeted for 2011/12, using data request surplus, is:

- **Semi-systematic review of indexing methods**
Start semi-systematic review of indexing methods, including SOVON, IWC etc. Aim for Wader Study Group Bulletin. [GA CH *et al.*]
- **Flyway indicators**
Continue work on flyway indicators (begun as a poster for Wader Study Group conference). [CH]

The flyway indicator work and associated poster were discussed at length and several potential developments were suggested; including refined wader origin, inclusion of Dutch data, inclusion of wildfowl, and alternative ways of comparing flyways e.g. using Teal from different sources.

AP43/12/1: Contact CAFF re possible development of indicators for remote Arctic monitoring [CH] **Completed**

AP43/12/2: Contact AEWA re possible development of indicators for remote monitoring of biodiversity [CH/BTO Dev.] **Completed (poster at next AEWA meeting)**

- **Low Tide section on website**

Finalise loading to website of Low Tide maps for principal estuaries [NC]

- **Database consolidation**

On-going work on consolidation of on-line database. [AM, CH, GA]

13. Efficiency savings

Data on some possible savings were presented by AM. It was agreed by the SG that small additional efficiencies will be made through further development of WeBS Online, and in the long-term significant savings would be made following the proposed changes to reporting.

In order to make further savings, it was decided that from 2012 onwards WeBS will no longer man a separate stand at Rutland Birdfair. However, it was decided that two SG meetings per year should be retained.

AP43/13/1: Communicate the cessation of a WeBS stand at Rutland Birdfair to relevant individuals [AM] **Completed**

AP43/13/2: Discuss with BTO Membership Team about the potential for a member of the WeBS team to help on the main BTO stand on at least one day of Birdfair [CH]

14. WeBS Stratification

The entire GB dataset derived from the OS MasterMap™ has now been classified into standing waters, rivers, canals, drains and tidal waterbodies, and the whole country checked thoroughly against remotely sensed data backdrops (BingMaps) within the GIS.

A presentation was provided by VRS, with an example (Teal in Wales) used to illustrate progress. There is excellent potential for further developments, and there are plans for a paper on this. All agreed that there were potential positive implications for designing surveys in other countries with more limited volunteer workforces. It was also suggested that some county bird clubs might be in a position to do blitz surveys in order to assist in the next waterbird population estimates.

AP43/14/1: Continue stratification work and draft the proposed paper [VRS]

AP43/14/2: Produce article for WeBS newsletter [VRS]

15. Any Other Business

RSPB (via Casework and Site Protection Team) proposed a Risk Assessment of WeBS data coverage, with the intention of highlighting WeBS sites/sectors without recent coverage which are at high risk from development or other threats. DS pointed out an approach taken by WWT to gap filling in 2002.

AP43/15/1: Document and cost the proposed WeBS gaps analysis, possibly for submission to Natural England. [AM, SW, CH]

16. Date of next meeting

WeBS 44th SG: 1145 am, 7th March 2012 @ Grange Farm (RSPB)