

**WeBS Steering Group – 44th meeting
Grange Farm RSPB
7th March 2012
FINAL MINUTES**

Present at meeting

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

Chas Holt, BTO [CH]
Richard Hearn, WWT [RH]

Referred to in minutes (not present at meeting)

Heidi Mellan, BTO [HM]
Neil Calbrade, BTO [NC]

Graham Austin, BTO [GA]
Viola Ross-Smith, BTO [VRS]

1. Introduction and adoption of the agenda

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

2. Minutes of 43rd WeBS Steering Group meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were adopted. Two changes were proposed, both included in the final version of the minutes for SG43.

(i) Initials alone should not be included of people not present at meetings.

(ii) The text referring to exclusion of dipper from the WeBS list should be converted to a general principles statement about why WeBS covers the species it does. This is to be posted on WeBS website.

AP44/2/1: Remove initials of people not present at SG meetings. [CH]

AP44/2/2: Produce a general principles statement for website, regarding species monitored by WeBS. [CH]

3. Progress on Action Points (APs).

The action points arising from earlier meetings were considered. Most were either complete or considered later in meeting, as follows. **Any new (and on-going) actions arising are show in in red.**

AP41/6/1: Introduction of a header block for each species listing the different sub-populations with their respective international thresholds, where applicable, for WITUK 2010/11 [CH] **On-going (considered less of a priority due to reporting changes)**

AP41/13/1: Need to come up with more definitive plan for historical data, including outputs and milestones [CH] **On-going, item discussed**

AP42/6/3: Regional press releases to be prepared ahead of publication of WITUK 1011 [CH] **On-going.**

AP42/14/1: Provide hard data on possible savings with respect to report production and postage at SG44. **Completed, item discussed**

- AP43/2/1:** Ensure SG Minutes include appropriate wording throughout [CH] **Completed**
- AP43/4/1:** Consider a newsletter article on mapping of roost sites [CH] **Deferred to next newsletter**
- AP43/4/2:** Take forward plans for collection of roost site information; liaise with BTO software development team [CH] **Completed (may be incorporated into developments after current work)**
- AP43/5/1/:** Contact other national scheme organisers about training issues [CH/NC] **On-going; informal opportunities of future meeting to be utilised.**
- AP43/6/1/:** Draft an article on the history of WeBS coverage [CH/NC] **Deferred to next newsletter**
- AP43/8/1:** Circulate post-meeting briefing paper of proposed developments to annual WeBS and Alerts reporting [AM] **Completed**
- 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] **On-going, item discussed**
- AP43/8/3:** Circulate link of recent Swiss waterbird report [AM] **Completed**
- AP43/8/4:** Any developments to reporting are to be communicated early on to I-WeBS [AM] **Completed (on-going)**
- AP43/8/5:** Forward unpublished indices/trends for other species, e.g. shag and snipe, to Partners [CH] **Completed, item discussed**
- AP43/11/1:** Undertake a review of data request charges in April 2012 [AM/NC/BTO Dev.] **On-going**
- AP43/11/2:** Principles and guidelines for WeBS service level agreements to be drafted for SG44 [NC *et al.*] **On-going; item discussed**
- AP43/11/3:** Ensure that 3-month running costs are held in the contingency fund, and liaise with BTO Development Team regarding production of a formal document with the relevant details [AM] **Completed.**
- AP43/11/4:** Mention of contingency fund to be removed from summary accounts [AM] **Completed**
- 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] **Completed**
- AP43/12/1:** Contact CAFF re possible development of indicators for remote Arctic monitoring [CH] **On-going**
- AP43/12/2:** Contact AEWA re possible development of indicators for remote monitoring of biodiversity [CH/BTO Dev.] **Completed (poster possibly at next AEWA meeting)**
- 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] **Completed**
- AP43/14/1:** Continue stratification work and draft the proposed paper [VRS] **On-going**
- AP44/3/1/:** Produce timetable for progress on stratification. [GA, VRS]

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

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

AP44/3/2/: Submit gaps analysis proposal to the country agencies (cc JNCC) [AM/CH]. It was suggested that this work could be developed into an on-going process (compatible with reporting developments).

4. Counter network

The WeBS counter network and vacancies among Local Organisers were reviewed. New LOs have been recruited for: Cornwall, Bucks, Carmarthenshire, and Somerset. Current gaps in LO coverage are: Carlingford Lough; Cheshire North; Clwyd; Co. Antrim; Co. Armagh; Co. Down; Co. Fermanagh; Co. Londonderry; Co. Tyrone; 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, North Kent Estuaries (a new RSPB replacement is likely here).

AP44/4/1/: Contact regional RSPB office to ascertain who will be LO for North Kent Estuaries. [HM/SW]

Coverage issues at Mersey Estuary and the future retirement of the LO there, were discussed. Further consideration was given to ways of addressing this.

AP44/4/2/: Maximise RSPB links in Mersey area, both for recruitment of new LO and counters. [SW/HM]

AP44/4/3/: If funding is secured for the proposed WeBS gaps analysis risk assessment, Mersey Estuary is to be included as a priority case-study in that work. [CH *et al.*]

5. WeBS publicity and training

WeBS featured in the media during February, in connection with a period of freezing weather and *World Wetlands Day*. Preparation of press releases ahead of the next annual report was discussed. Having already been agreed that regional press releases would be prepared this year, DS recommended that press teams in the Partner organisations be advised of this as soon as possible.

AP43/5/1/: Advise relevant press teams of intention for regional press releases w.r.t. WITUK1011. [CH]

All agreed that both the next International Waterbird Census meeting (March 2012) and the Pan-European Duck Symposium (April 2012) would provide good opportunities for CH to liaise with international contacts regarding training issues and facilitate the sharing of training resources.

AP43/5/2/: Liaise with international colleagues about training issues as opportunities arise. [CH]

6. Website and WeBS-Online

CH described initial work on the development of an on-line mapping tool, aimed at enabling LOs (and counters) to provide boundary information for new and existing WeBS sites. This work is on-going and it is anticipated that by the summer it will be at a stage to be used by the Local Organiser network.

Historical waterbird monitoring reports, dating back to 1940s, are now available for download from the website; there are a small number of gaps. It is planned that historical WeBS newsletters and articles featuring WeBS will also be made available.

AP43/6/1/: Partners to check WeBS website and send copies (to HM) of any missing reports and other relevant waterbird articles to which they have access. [All]

7. Low Tide Counts

CH reported on the continuation of 12 months of Low Tide Counts on the Humber, due to be completed in October 2012.

DS re-stressed the need for a closer look at a comparison between Core and Low Tide data at individual sites; this previous Action Point (not completed) has been revised as new AP below.

AP43/7/1/: Produce a short report for next SG meeting on Core v Low Tide counts – comparative totals; how/when LTC used in place of Core; recommendations if necessary for some sites. [NC/CH]

8. Contemporary WITUK – content and production

CH presented indices and associated trends for three species not currently included in the annual report; shag (SA), jack snipe (JS) and snipe (SN). All agreed that given sufficient data, all should be included in future reports (paper/on-line) with suitable caveats and interpretation. It was noted that the snipe trend was similar to that for lapwing and golden plover, and the apparent increase in from late 1980s to early 2000s may therefore be related to habitat degradation in the wider countryside combined with an increase on key sites. It was suggested that the shag trend may help to support trend derived through JNCC Seabird Monitoring Programme.

AP43/8/1/: Include trends for shag, jack snipe and snipe in next WITUK, with appropriate caveats and interpretation. [CH]

CH presented comparative costs of printing the paper report on recycled (as currently) and non-recycled paper. It is 15% cheaper to use non-recycled paper. All decided it was important to continue to use recycled paper.

9. Changes to WeBS reporting

AM reviewed a working document (later circulated via email) detailing a specification for changes to WeBS reporting. The revamp will involve an increased on-line reporting element in combination with a slimmed down annual paper report. Further details are to be finalised; a process that will include a stakeholder workshop (see 10. below).

AP43/9/1/: Partners to review specification and suggest any further additions as necessary. [All].

10. WeBS Stakeholder Workshop

In association with reporting changes (and also listed as a requirement in the WeBS Agreement), a WeBS workshop is planned for 2012. This represents a good opportunity to gauge opinions of stakeholders with respect to requirements and aspirations in the context of the reporting changes, both in terms of annual reporting and the Alerts.

The group generated a list of stakeholders to be invited to a WeBS workshop, to be arranged for a date in later this year. To be invited are:

- Conservation agencies
- Consultancies (to be selected following a review of data requests)
- government
- WeBS LOAC
- county bird recorders
- I-WeBS representative
- IWC representative
- SOVON representative
- GCT representative
- Academics – selected waterbird ecologists from universities
- Water authorities
- A selection of other relevant individuals

It was also suggested that an additional second day could be used to discuss (particularly with international attendees) the proposed review of indexing methods, use of supplementary counts, poorly monitored species (e.g. snipe), blitz surveys.

AP44/10/1: Finalise date(s) for the workshop a.s.a.p. and invite selected delegates. [CH].
Date is Thurs, September 6th.

11. Review of WeBS development list

The group briefly revisited the list of potential developments.

It was suggested that the proposed semi-systematic review of indexing methods (to include SOVON, IWC etc.) should probably be targeted towards a journal that has a wider audience than does Wader Study Group Bulletin. It is envisaged that work on this will progress in the year ahead; a follow-up meeting after the stakeholder workshop this summer would look to address this (amongst other items).

The timing of the next **NEWS (Non Estuarine Waterbirds Survey)** was discussed, and currently this is planned for winter 2013/14. It was agreed that it would be best to seek funding for this through sources outside WeBS. It should be noted that current and future WeBS developments will markedly increase the efficacy of NEWS, as it is anticipated that a WeBS-Online type interface will be used for the survey.

The possibility of offering small grants (e.g. to cover petrol costs) to encourage county bird clubs to do “**blitz surveys**” was discussed. Such surveys would derive significant benefits by providing data for poorly-monitored species and/or poorly-monitored areas. All agreed that the database and reporting developments (e.g. on-line mapping tool) could enable counties to more readily undertake such surveys,

and this capacity should be built in to the development specifications. A primary issue will be effective communication of this push for blitz surveys with bird clubs, particularly if there is to be sufficient time for results to be utilised in the next revision of waterbird population estimates. To that end, all agreed that blitz surveys would be most appropriately timetabled for winter 2015/16. Local Atlas forums and *BTO News* are examples of media through which the topic can be raised more widely. AM suggested there may be potential for promotion of blitz surveys to be linked with recent SNH funding secured by BTO Scotland; for example, perhaps this could part fund the production of guidance notes on “how to run a blitz survey”.

AP44/11/1: Contact BTO Scotland about details of SNH funding for volunteer engagement. [AM]

All agreed that a useful action at the current time was to invite interest from university contacts in order to take forward research on a list of priority WeBS research questions. The anticipation would be that this would involve supervision by representatives from the WeBS office and the wider partnership.

AP44/11/2: Partners to compile list of research questions (concept-note format) to suggest to universities. This will probably initially be based on ideas listed on the development list, but can also be broadened. (All)

AP44/11/3: Partners to suggest university contacts who could be approached. (All)

12. WeBS Data Requests

The issue of potential service level agreements was discussed, with particular reference to the MOD which has requested such. Data requested and data purchased by MOD in recent years was reviewed. Based on average expenditure over the last three years of £6,395+VAT, it was considered appropriate to suggest an annual charge of £5,000. This would be subject to review every three years.

AP44/12/1: Service level agreement to be proposed to MOD, and progressed as necessary. [NC/BTO Dev.]

The group discussed the need for promoting the submission of data to WeBS by environmental consultancies that have used WeBS data as part of Impact Assessment work. It was suggested that IEEM may already have accreditation rules with respect to the provision of their data to NBN etc. It was also noted that within the contract of WeBS data acquisition, it stipulates that the WeBS office should be sent a copy of all reports that have used WeBS data.

AP44/12/2: Establish IEEM accreditation rules and what is stated regarding data availability. [AM]

AP44/12/3: Increase effort in following up reports that should have been forwarded to WeBS office. This could begin with a selection from last year from consultancies and other groups who are regular purchasers of WeBS data. [NC/HM]

AP44/12/4: JNCC to remind Natural England about requirement to send copies of reports to WeBS. [DS]

13. Mobilisation of historic datasets

CH reviewed progress with mobilising the historic waterbird datasets (NWC and BoEE). All agreed that speeding up the inputting of historical data represented an appropriate use of any surplus from data request sales if it is proportionate, because it is unlikely to be fundable from other sources. A reasonable pace of progress is required, and it was agreed that a deadline of five years should be set for completion of the task. A clear work-plan and timeline against which to measure progress is required.

AP44/13/1: Produce work-plan and timeline against which to measure progress with historic datasets. [CH]

14. AOB

None

15. Next meeting

WeBS 45th SG: 17th October 2012, 1030am @ JNCC Peterborough

A principal discussion item will be format and content of new paper report.