

**WeBS Steering Group – 47th meeting
JNCC Peterborough
24th October 2013**

Present at meeting

Richard Hearn, WWT, Chair [RH]
Simon Wotton, RSPB [SW]
David Stroud, JNCC [DS]

Andy Musgrove, BTO [AM]
Chas Holt, BTO [CH]
Graham Austin, BTO [GA]

Referred to in minutes (not present at meeting)

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

Veronica Mendez, BTO [VM]

1. Introduction and adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted. RH chaired. CH reported and took minutes.

2. Minutes of 46th WeBS Steering Group meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were adopted. DS confirmed that WeBS contingency fund should be clear part of financial summaries. All also agreed that the review of waterbird monitoring methods which is currently in preparation should be more 'general purpose' than simply 'defensive'.

3. Progress on Action Points (APs).

The action points arising from earlier meetings were considered. Most were either complete or considered later in meeting. **New actions are shown in red.**

AP46/2/1: Include a line in SG45 Minutes stating that Irish Greylag Goose item was discussed. **Completed**

RH commented that WWT are producing a review paper on Greylag Geese and the associated implications for reporting of the sub-populations. This will include a review of birds in Ireland.

AP45/2/1: Ensure DS receives a copy of final documentation re. WeBS Contingency Fund. **Completed**

AP46/3/1: Modify Development document into a spreadsheet to assist in costing projects, drafting of concept notes, and liaising with universities. As time allows, look to turn each idea into a concept note. **Completed**

AP46/4/1: Update the reporting dates on the 'Progress vs. Deadlines' table with timings for new online and paper reports, and produce a Gant chart to plan the reporting schedule. **Completed**

AP46/5/1: Promote WeBS on the Humber and maximise opportunities for counter recruitment. **On-going**

AP46/5/2: Assess demographic of WeBS counter network [HM] **Not Completed; defer to next fy.**

AM suggested that acquisition of this information could be linked to a similar initiative to be introduced in BBS. All agreed that the WeBS LOAC would be the appropriate start point to look to establish a WeBS Mentoring Strategy; one of the objectives of this would be to address a potentially ageing counter network. (see AP47/5/1).

AP46/5/3: Update wording on website and elsewhere, to ensure that all counters are aware that WeBS is committed to making data and information readily available to users. Remove any associated means of requesting data to be withheld. [HM] **Completed**

AP46/5/4: Provide a brief summary of water rail tape-lure study for SG47 [NC]. **Not yet completed**

It was agreed that results from the water rail tape-lure study would be a good feature for the next WeBS newsletter. (see AP47/6/1).

AP46/6/1: Finalise and publicise dates of intermediate-level WeBS training courses for 2013/14. [NC] **Completed**

AP46/6/2: Finish on-line tutorials and upload to website [HM] **Completed**

AP46/7/1: Amongst other items, on-line mapping to be discussed at WeBS-GSMP meeting [CH, RH] **Completed**

RH updated the group that the GSMP mapping facility was nearing completion. It uses an Indicia tool-kit.

AP46/10/1: Relevant parties to be advised of the new date for Alerts publication as appropriate. [DP, CH] **Completed**

AP46/10/2: GA to produce short summaries detailing (i) Alerts data for publication at end of March, and (ii) additional Alerts data likely to be available for publication before the end of 2013. [GA] **On-going**

It was agreed that the most pragmatic approach would be to integrate these additional Alerts data (geese, some extra SSSIs, split Gibraltar Point from The Wash) in the next major update of WeBS Alerts (for release in winter 2015/16).

AP46/11/1: End-of-year data request figures to be circulated to Partners. [CH] **Completed**

AP46/12/2: Update on progress with processing of historic waterbird data to be produced for SG47. [HM] **Completed**

It was agreed that it would be useful to have an article in the next newsletter that both formally thanks the current volunteers for their efforts, and also serves to recruit other helpers. (see AP47/6/3).

AP46/12/3: Correspondence with AEWA and Wetlands International on review of monitoring methods to be progressed [CH], and the item to be circulated within the AEWA Technical Committee [DS]. **On-going**

It was suggested that this could be integrated with a report focusing on geese that it is being undertaken to serve as an audit trail for the generation of goose population estimates. That general approach would also fit with the Country Agencies' approach to assessing "Science Quality". DS suggested that the current draft AEWA Technical Note should be circulated to WeBS Partners asap, then for input from non-UK parties such as SOVON, and then to the wider AEWA Technical Committee (see AP47/13/2).

AP46/12/4: Progress work on development of Arctic indicator [CH, RH, DS] **On-going**

AP46/12/5: Facilitating organisation of Golden Plover survey to be costed for circulation at end of FY. [CH]
Completed

AP46/12/6: Progress proposal for integration of remote waterbird monitoring into WeBS; costs to be circulated at FY end [AM, CH]. Training workshop attended in April 2013 **On-going (NEWS)**

AP46/12/7: Progress proposal & funding strategy for NEWS; costs to be circulated at FY end [DN, CH]
Completed

AP46/12/8: Produce concept NEWS note for RSPB by July 2013 [DN, CH] **Not Completed**

The NEWS spec was reviewed at the meeting.

AP46/12/8: Relay feedback to RAFOS, and encourage participation in NEWS [CH] **Completed**

AP45/14/1: GSMP & WeBS to add issue of BS trend discrepancies to agenda for their spring meeting [RH]
Completed

4. Progress versus deadlines

CH reviewed progress against standard data submission and reporting deadlines. The reporting deadlines have been modified to account for the new reporting schedule, and a Gant chart produced with intermediate milestones which will help plan the reporting schedule.

5. Counter network

CH provided update. New LOs have been recruited for: Gwent [excl. Severn Estuary], Caithness, East Yorkshire & Scarborough [excl. Humber], Derbyshire and East Lancashire & Fylde. Vacancies in the Local Organiser network were reviewed; current gaps in LO coverage are: Carlingford Lough; Cheshire North; Clwyd; Co. Antrim; Co. Armagh; Co. Down; Co. Fermanagh; Co. Londonderry; Co. Tyrone; Durham; Essex (other sites); 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. In terms of specific site issues, CH reported that the improved coverage of the Mersey Estuary had been maintained. However, some gaps in coverage on the Humber Estuary, combined with the departure of LO, means that site continues to be the priority in terms of recruitment.

In conjunction with an assessment of the demographics of the counter network (to be done once per Agreement period), all agreed that now would be a good time to seek to develop a "WeBS Mentoring Strategy". It would be good to initiate this discussion with the WeBS LOAC at the next meeting in Nov 2013.

AP47/5/1: Initiate discussion re WeBS Mentoring Strategy at the WeBS LOAC meeting in Nov 2013. [HM]

AM updated on the group on a recent case of a team of counters requesting their WeBS count data to be withheld from the WeBS Local Organiser, county bird club and other external conservation NGOs. All agreed that LOs should be reminded of the ToR of the LO role and the associated stipulations re use of WeBS data. These ToR should be reviewed by the WeBS LOAC at the next meeting in Nov 2013.

AP47/5/2: Review WeBS LO job description at the WeBS LOAC meeting in Nov 2013. Then ensure that all WeBS Local Organisers are aware of the Terms of Reference of the LO position. [HM]

CH informed the group that WeBS had received interest from BASC in developing closer BASC-WeBS collaboration. BASC are keen to promote WeBS to their members, which should have the benefit of enabling some priority gaps in WeBS coverage to be filled, potentially on important estuarine sites such as the Humber. All agreed that BASC members should contribute as volunteers to WeBS in the same way as standard WeBS volunteers (liaising with the relevant Local Organisers etc.). It would be a positive step to develop closer, positive relationships between ecologists and the hunting community. CH should look to contribute an article to the BASC membership magazine; RH suggested this could also highlight the positive situations re both the hunting community's input to AEWA and integration of FACE in the Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership.

AP47/5/3: Reply positively to BASC re promotion of WeBS to wider BASC membership, including offer of written article about WeBS for BASC membership. [CH]

6. WeBS newsletter

The following were suggested as articles for inclusion in the next issue of *WeBS News*, in spring 2014:

- **AP47/6/1:** A summary of the Water Rail tape-lure study piloted in winter 2012/13 [NC]
- **AP47/6/2:** An article explaining complexities of goose reporting in the new annual report (see 9.2) [GA *et al.*]
- **AP47/6/3:** Feedback to volunteers on progress with inputting historic waterbird data – both to provide thanks and as a push for more voluntary help [HM]
- **AP47/6/4:** An article highlighting plans for NEWS III [CH]

7. Website and WeBS Online

CH reported that WeBS Online is operating smoothly and that the proportion of data submitted on-line continues to increase annually (now at approximately 80%). Recent developmental work has been focused on the changes to reporting (see below).

8. Low Tide Counts

CH reported (on behalf of NC) that the final report of the 12 months of funded LTC of the Humber was delivered; this work is used as a 'LTC feature' in the new-look paper report. In 2013/14, estuaries due for LTC coverage include Pagham Harbour, Deben, Cleddau, Loch Indaal, and Blyth (Northumberland).

9. WeBS report

9.1 Paper report

The group spent time working through the first draft of the new paper report. All agreed that content and length (44 pages) were appropriate. All agreed that CH should aim to circulate the next draft by 11 Nov 2013, allowing two weeks for the receipt of detailed comments; by 25 Nov 2013.

AP47/9/1: Aim to circulate next draft of WeBS paper report by 11 Nov 2013 [CH]

AP47/9/2: Latest RSPB and WWT logos to be sent to CH for inclusion in the annual report [SW, RH]

AP47/9/3: Ensure compliance with Official Statistics procedures [CH]

9.2 Online report

The group invested considerable time working through the online reporting interface, functionality of which was demonstrated by GA. All were pleased with progress and agreed that the content looked good and forms the basis of an excellent product.

Time was spent discussing the reporting of some of the goose populations; this was needed to ensure agreement on integration within the interface of species monitored by other censuses and those species for which different populations are routinely reported. Specific issues (and APs) are listed below:

AP47/9/4: Ensure that users are appropriately advised (on the static web pages) that a degree of caution may be needed when interpreting some monthly index plots. This particularly relates to the species of geese for which monthly indices relate to WeBS data whereas the annual indices/trends are based on non-WeBS census counts. [GA/CH]

AP47/9/5: Ensure that appropriate support documentation is available to describe allocation of sites to different goose (sub)populations, though introduction of an additional link within the existing 'Links to external pages' functionality. [GA]

AP47/9/6: Circulate a document detailing the agreed approach to on-line reporting of different goose populations. [GA] **Completed.** This can also form the basis for an article in the WeBS newsletter explaining some of the complexities to the counter network and wider WeBS stakeholder community (see AP47/6/2).

AP47/9/7: Ensure that change points between years for the listing of goose populations are introduced appropriately. [GA]

AP47/9/8: Collate any feedback on the new format report from users and counters. [HM]

DS suggested more explicit links on the interface to the IWC-based 'CSN Tool'. This was acknowledged by CH as a worthy aspiration, but he and RH pointed out that that this might be best deferred until the data in the CSN Tool were more up-to-date.

10. WeBS Stratification

CH/GA provided an update on recent progress by VM on the WeBS stratification work (VM was unable to attend the meeting). All were pleased with progress, and agreed with the proposed workplan which will probably be developed to involve a comparison with Atlas winter data and potentially comparison with regional blitz surveys. This approach will allow further validation of the derived population estimates.

In summary, the two major outputs will be (1) recommendations for derivation of improved population estimates for some species, (2) a stratification based on more refined understanding of UK water bodies, with associated improvements for survey planning. All agreed that it would be useful to produce a document reviewing potential developments after completion of (1) and (2). It was suggested that there could be potential for a PhD to be developed on the back of this work. An overall target should be to work towards integrating these results into the next APEP and improve quality of habitat-specific indices.

11. WeBS Data Requests

CH reported that the WeBS data request service continues to run smoothly. End-of-year figures will be circulated in early April; based on projections, accrued surplus is likely to be similar to past years.

12. NEWS planning

CH circulated a draft spec for the next NEWS (2014/15-2015/16), intended to be used in approaching potential funders. All agreed with the content. In terms of the reference to protected sites and associated Common Standards Monitoring, DS suggested it was key to ensure within the spec that coverage of SSSIs was treated as being equally as important as coverage of SPAs. The inclusion of data collection on seaducks and tidal wrack in NEWS will be refined during the course of the planning phase.

The general concensus was that it would be most efficient to run NEWS as a two-stage project:

- (a) 2014/15, would involve (i) the necessary IT & database work to allow integration of NEWS with WeBS and ensure on-line data entry, and (ii) full surveys of priority SPAs and other protected sites.
- (b) 2015/16 would feature the wider full survey NEWS III, covering randomised stretches of coast across UK (synchronised with Ireland), as per previous NEWS.

AP47/12/1: Continue dialogue with BirdWatch Ireland re. NEWS, and ensure Ireland remains on board for undertaking the survey in 2015/16. [CH]

There was also discussion regarding the potential for a sub-project within NEWS that would trial the use of UAVs to monitor birds on the non-estuarine coast. CH is writing a spec for this, and will follow up interest from SAMS to collaborate. Although large-scale remote use of such devices is likely to be impractical in UK due to strict legislation and safety laws, use on more restricted areas would be possible.

AP47/12/2: Circulate spec for UAV pilot study. [CH]

13. WeBS developmental work

A spreadsheet of proposed and on-going uses of WeBS DR surplus was circulated to SG in April. The group reviewed some specific on-going work, and other potential developments.

Historic waterbird data

There is a medium-term timetable (5 years; agreed at SG45) in place for this task. Several volunteers continue to assist and steady progress is being made. An update (provided by HM) was circulated. All agreed that it was important to review progress at SG48; in the meantime HM should distil the resources needed to enable completion of the task; where are the bottlenecks, and how can they best be overcome, etc..? It was also agreed that it was important to provide good feedback to the volunteers. This can be done initially through an article in the WeBS newsletter (see **AP47/6/3**).

AP47/13/1: Provide review on progress of inputting of historic data for SG48. This is to include recommendations for resources likely to be needed to complete within the 5-year timetable. [HM]

'Methods review'

Following initial discussions with AEWA and Wetlands International, a review of waterbird monitoring methods has been drafted. This needs further input from CH, after which it will be circulated to the SG.

AP47/13/2: Circulate draft paper/AEWA Technical Note to WeBS Partners. [CH]

Indicators

A short doc crystallising objectives and way to progress was suggested, and in response DS indicated that the format of a potential paper could most effectively take the approach of presenting a number of different indicators that are derived through varying methods/contributory species etc. Development of an Arctic indicator remains in the work schedule, and time has been allocated; it was agreed that the aim should be for this to be a feature in 2012/13 paper report.

AP47/13/3: Progress Arctic indicator work upon completion of the annual report. [CH *et al.*]

Protected Sites paper

CH reported that there had been no progress on this to date, but with the SPA Review nearing completion it would be timely for a start to be made this FY. Some WeBS DR surplus has already been allocated.

DS reviewed the intended objectives of this work, and it was agreed that it could link well with the on-going IWC-based flyway analysis of Smew distribution in the context of SPA provision (paper in prep.).

AP47/13/4: Progress protected sites paper upon completion of the annual report. [CH et al.]

Contributions to international initiatives

CH reported that the next flyway survey of Golden Plover (and Lapwing) within the framework of Wader Study Group census is scheduled for 11-12 October 2014. Organisation (via collaboration with IWSG and NCs) has been initiated, and many NCs are beginning preparations.

There has been a recent approach by SOVON/Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative for WeBS to assist in west Africa with respect to both capacity building and 6-yearly flyway count. 4k of WeBS DR surplus has been suggested by CH to help with this in Sierra Leone; thereby matching 4k to be provided from the WSFI. All agreed this was an appropriate use of this resource. Three expert volunteers from UK would take part for a minimum of two weeks from mid January. RH mentioned that he may be available if needed, and names of several other potentially suitable participants were also suggested.

AP47/13/5: Progress the contribution of 4k and UK expert help to the flyway initiative work in Sierra Leone. [CH]

It was agreed that this opens up useful opportunities for WeBS to potentially (i) involve LOAC and experienced volunteers from the counter network, (ii) develop a site-twinning approach to capacity building and development of monitoring in the flyway (proposed by Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership). The situation would be reviewed at SG48.

14. Selected conferences, meetings, other events

RH/CH provided an overview of the latest meeting of the Africa-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership (at Wetlands International, October 2013).

The EBCC conference (Romania, Sept 2013) featured a waterbird session and hosted a workshop for National Coordinators of waterbird monitoring schemes (organised by IWC/Wetlands International). CH and RH attended the workshop. Both considered that there had been a positive feeling throughout.

CH met Natural England and RSPB regarding WeBS input into proposed long-term monitoring Falmouth Bay pSPA.

15. AOB

DS provided an update on progress with the SPA review.

16. Next meeting

WeBS 48th SG: 12th March 2014 (11.00) @ JNCC Peterborough