

# UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

## MEETING 2003/1 29<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2003

10.00 - 15.35 WWT London Wetland Centre

### Approved Minutes

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#### Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (Chair) - SEERAD  
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC  
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH  
Claire McSorley (CMcS) - JNCC  
Colin Hedley (CH) - CLA  
Andrew Clark (AC) - NFU  
Jeremy Wilson (JW) - Scottish Environment  
Link  
Ben Fraser (BF) - EN

Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of  
Wildlife & Countryside Link  
James Robinson (JR) – WWT  
Lucy Adams (LA) - ABPmer  
Geoff Audcent (GA) - DEFRA  
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC

#### Apologies:

Peter Clement (EN), Ian Enlander (DOENI), David Mallon (SEERAD), Trevor Salmon (DEFRA), David Smallshire (DEFRA), Chris Spray (Water UK), Jill Thomas (NAW), Sian Whitehead (CCW).

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#### 1. Introductions and apologies

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed new representatives and re-iterated the workings of the Group.
- 1.2. Apologies were received as listed above.

#### 2. Minutes of last meeting (24<sup>th</sup> September 2002, 2002/4)

- 2.1. Two minor amendments were agreed:
  - 2.1.1. Paragraph 5.3 – reference to agreement on inclusion of satellites of high density was thought too negative given that further consideration of boundary placement issues was planned for the future. It was agreed to delete the term ‘unable to agree’ and replace it with ‘unable to conclude’, also emphasising that this related to boundaries in general and not specifically Carmarthen Bay.
  - 2.1.2. Action point 11 – adjust to state that RSPB to request the Wildlife & Countryside Link to nominate a new representative.
- 2.2. The Group approved the minutes with these minor amendments.
- 2.3. A query was raised over the Natura 2000 Steering Group and the other fora that consider Natura issues – the membership and schedule of meetings, and the relationship and lines of communication between these fora and the SPA SWG wasn’t clear.

**Action Point 1: Chair to request that Defra provide a briefing note to the SPA SWG outlining the Terms of Reference, membership and meetings schedule of the Natura 2000 Steering Group and the Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group, and guidance on the**

**process of information exchange between both of these groups and the SPA SWG. Also, to transmit all approved minutes from these fora, as available, to the SPA SWG Secretariat for circulation to the Group.**

## **General items**

### **3. Annual Report**

- 3.1. IB introduced the Draft Annual Report for the period 2001-2002 and thanked JNCC for their hard work in both producing it and supporting the SPA SWG over the year.
- 3.2. As well as specific amendments agreed in the meeting, several generic issues were raised:
  - While it was agreed that the report needs to focus on science, it also needs to clearly reference the commentary within the Group's minutes on timetables and urgency of work.
  - All agreed that the Group's links with the Natura 2000 Steering Group need strengthening and that a formal process of bilateral communication should be developed in consultation with that group. The Chair agreed to pursue this with Defra.
  - The report should include a glossary.
  - All briefing papers presented to the Group to be listed in an appendix, with those of a confidential nature denoted as such.
  - Consider publishing decisions of the Group in the scientific record by submission of suitable material in the form of short communications to relevant journals.
- 3.3. Members of the Group agreed to send any further comments to the Secretariat by 17<sup>th</sup> February 2003. The Secretariat is to circulate a second draft to include comments from today's meeting by 7<sup>th</sup> February 2003 to aid this process. Once all comments were received a third draft would be circulated for final approval, or approval would be sought at the May meeting if any of the comments received required Group agreement. On approval the Chair would send the report to the Natura 2000 Steering Group. The Chair will also clarify with Defra the timing of publication of the report on the JNCC website.
- 3.4. Members of the Group were generally satisfied with progress in business to date, recognising that developing good science to underpin decision making takes time, and agreed that the Group had achieved an impressive work programme.
- 3.5. The Group also recognise that the links between it and other Natura fora need strengthening and that one of the challenges will be capturing and influencing casework related science. It agreed that a paper on the latter issue would be valuable.

**Action Point 2: Secretariat to circulate revised draft Annual Report to members by 7<sup>th</sup> February 2003.**

**Action Point 3: Group members to return all comments on the Annual Report to the Secretariat by 17<sup>th</sup> February 2003.**

**Action Point 4: Secretariat to circulate final draft Annual Report for approval prior to May 2003 meeting of Group.**

**Action Point 5: Chair to send approved Annual Report to the Natura 2000 Steering Group.**

**Action Point 6: Chair to discuss with Defra the appropriate timing of publication of the Annual Report on the JNCC website.**

**Action Point 7: RSPB to develop a paper on casework science issues and submit to Group at a future meeting.**

**4. *Waterbird Population Estimates, Third Edition* (JNCC briefing)**

- 4.1. DAS introduced this briefing – the third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* (WPE3) had been published and adopted for use by the Ramsar Convention late in 2002. JNCC had circulated an extract of estimates of UK relevance to the statutory agencies in January 2003 and called for adoption of new estimates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003.
- 4.2. The Group agreed to adopt the third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* for future relevant business.
- 4.3. JNCC was asked to check the briefing for full accuracy and then circulate a final version to the Group.
- 4.4. A revised copy of the briefing will be published on the JNCC website.

**Action Point 8: JNCC to check extract of waterbird estimates from Third Edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* and circulate final copy to the Group.**

**5. Amendments to legal SPA documents (JNCC briefing)**

- 5.1. HB introduced this briefing, which although a policy issue requires consideration due to potential implications of the recent publication of new international population estimates for waterbirds, and the impending publication of new national bird population estimates from the Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP).
- 5.2. It was agreed that there should be no retrospective application of the new estimates. However, it was agreed that potential practical implications should be scoped by comparing the review data against the new estimates – this would highlight those cases, if any, where individual species did not meet the new thresholds and so any subsequent citation amendment could be problematic. JNCC agreed to do this analysis and prepare a briefing for the Group and the Natura 2000 Steering Group.
- 5.3. In addition, a long-term strategy for the use of new population estimates would be beneficial. This could provide a process framework for dealing with major revisions to estimates, such as APEP and Seabird 2000, and could be used to flag appropriate timing for reviews of SPA suites of single species or species groups. This will be taken forward by JNCC in collaboration with the Group.
- 5.4. It was noted that such a process should include recommendations on which specific biogeographical populations are relevant for generating thresholds for use in the UK.
- 5.5. The brief will be revised and agreed prior to publication on the JNCC website.

**Action Point 9: JNCC to scope practical implications of new waterbird population estimates by comparison with the SPA review data and present a briefing to the Group at the May meeting, to also be circulated to the Natura 2000 Steering Group.**

**Action Point 10: JNCC to assess and clarify the use of *Waterbird Population Estimates 3* to derive appropriate international 1% thresholds for non-breeding waterbirds in the UK, and present this to the Group at its May 2003 meeting.**

**6. Non-estuarine waterbirds (JNCC briefing and BTO Report 272 (Austin & Rehfisch, 2003. *Identifying stretches of the UK's non-estuarine coast that may be worthy of SPA designation*))**

- 6.1. HB gave a brief introduction to this report, which was summarised in the JNCC briefing. Some non-breeding waders have significant proportions of their overall UK populations in non-estuarine coastal habitats. However, they are more dispersed in these habitats and few areas have therefore been identified as supporting internationally or nationally important populations. For some species, those that are more typical of non-estuarine habitats, the suite of SPAs supports a relatively small proportion of the UK population. To allow further assessment of populations in these habitats, on behalf of the WeBS Partnership the BTO prepared a report that explored possible ways of identifying areas supporting higher densities or higher overall diversity of species (BTO Report 272).
- 6.2. Group discussion included consideration of whether weighting species by their national population threshold was useful or not. It was noted that density had been used for assessing best areas to include within individual SPAs and that this is consistent with the SPA selection guidelines. As a general principle it was agreed that assessment of new areas for these species should be made within the scope of the existing guidelines.
- 6.3. The briefing will be published on the JNCC website.

**Action Point 11: Group members to review BTO report 272 and provide comments to JW by end of March 2003; JW to present these for further discussion at May 2003 meeting.**

**Species items**

**7. Chough (Confidential RSPB briefing)**

- 7.1. Preliminary results of the 2002 national chough survey were discussed. It was agreed that the next step was to discuss implications of the survey in bilaterals between the RSPB and country agencies.
- 7.2. The briefing will not be published as it presents preliminary results and not the full analysis of the national survey.

**Action Point 12: RSPB to develop site-level interpretation of the national chough survey for aiding bilateral discussions, and to report back to the Group in September 2003 on progress.**

**8. Capercaillie (Confidential SNH briefing)**

- 8.1. NB briefed the Group on progress in monitoring capercaillie, detailing the results of the 2002 lek surveys and stressing the need for a new national survey.
- 8.2. SNH and SEERAD are still considering the sites proposed by the RSPB as suitable for SPA designation, but more data are required for some of these.
- 8.3. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website.

## 9. Breeding raptors (Confidential SNH briefing)

- 9.1. NB gave a summary of the SNH position on consideration of SPA suite revisions for hen harrier, peregrine, golden eagle and merlin.
- 9.2. Hen harrier surveys in 2002 are currently being analysed and full results are not yet available; once they are further assessment will be made of several areas proposed by the RSPB as suitable for SPA designation. Formation of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) has greatly facilitated collection and collation of data for this species in these areas. SNH has funded the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH; [www.ceh.ac.uk](http://www.ceh.ac.uk)) to study range use by hen harriers.
- 9.3. Two golden eagle SPAs were classified in December 2002: Cuillins (Skye), and Cnuic agus Cladach Mhuile (Mull). The Group has previously agreed to defer further review of the SPA suite until after results of the 2003 national survey become available.
- 9.4. Final results from the 2002 national peregrine survey are not yet available, but a press release was made in October 2002.
- 9.5. SNH are collating data for merlin from the previous national survey (1993/4), but plans for a 2004 national survey have been delayed by the need to survey hen harrier again in 2004 – it is now likely that the next national survey of merlin will be in 2005.
- 9.6. The Group agreed not to pursue updates on these four breeding raptors until significant progress had been made in analysing surveys.
- 9.7. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website.

**Action Point 13: Secretariat to monitor progress on analysis of breeding raptor surveys and request input to the Group from relevant members at appropriate times in future.**

**Action Point 14: Secretariat to circulate the October 2002 press release about the 2002 national peregrine survey to members of the Group.**

## 10. Treatment of Eider Duck and Mute Swan biogeographical populations in the UK (JNCC briefing, plus update)

- 10.1. DAS introduced the background to this briefing, which raises the issue of biogeographical population splits in relation to the publication of new population estimates in *Waterbird Population Estimates 3* (Wetlands International 2002). At the previous update of international population estimates, the country agencies decided not to adopt the biogeographical splits proposed for eider and mute swan. Review of this issue is now required.
- 10.2. The eider population in the UK appears to comprise a sedentary, closed population in the Northern Isles and a partially migratory population throughout the rest of the country. However, understanding of genetics and movements is poor. A review of studies of genetic exchange in populations elsewhere would be useful to inform whether it would be worth examining this in UK birds. Further collation of evidence of movements is needed.
- 10.3. It was agreed that until further work clarifies the treatment of eider that the population of NW Europe should be used for UK context – this is the four *mollissima* populations occurring in the area (Britain, Ireland, Baltic, Norway to Novaya Zemlya and the White Sea), with a biogeographical 1% threshold of 15,500 individuals.

- 10.4. The Group agreed that the evidence for separate biogeographical populations of mute swan in Ireland and in Britain is good and that the species is not migratory. However, birds in the Western Isles do move to and from Ireland and may be considered part of the Irish population.
- 10.5. The briefing will not be published at present given the agreed additional work.

**Action Point 15: JNCC & WWT to develop a more detailed paper on eider genetics and movements and present this to the May 2003 meeting of the Group.**

## **11. Bilateral discussions**

- 11.1. The RSPB briefed the Group on progress in its IBA/SPA project, which builds on the RSPB's original response to the SPA Review consultation. A report on Scotland had been submitted to SNH, and reports on the other countries were to follow in next 2-3 months. There was no intention of producing a UK perspective, but this could be gathered by combining the individual country reports. In this exercise, the focus of the report had been on verifying data to enable clarification via bilateral talks with the relevant country agency of whether issues are considered resolvable or should be considered by the SPA SWG. The Group requested that the scope of generic issues to be dealt with in future meetings be summarised by the RSPB, and submitted to the Secretariat for circulation, to facilitate agreement on an appropriate work programme. The RSPB agreed that the briefing note in support of this discussion should be published on the JNCC website, with the caveat that the summary tables for England, Wales and Northern Ireland are provisional.
- 11.2. CCW submitted a note to the Secretariat on discussions in Wales; these continue to focus on chough. In particular, a summary of a recent chough SSSI notification was provided, highlighting the following points:
- Council (CCW) supported the designation of agricultural land in this context
  - Data have to be both robust and accessible
  - Site designation should wherever possible be made on data collected for that specific purpose
  - Legal challenge is becoming common practice with increasing scrutiny of data by independent experts
- 11.3. No developments reported for Northern Ireland or Scotland.
- 11.4. EN is currently consulting on the proposed extension to the Stour and Orwell Estuaries SPA. A second season of monitoring waterbirds in the Nene Valley was underway and analysis is expected to be complete late spring 2003.
- 11.5. Both the NFU and CLA requested that local staff in EN liaise with their local officers, and agreed to provide contact lists. EN agreed that it would endeavour to improve local links with these organisations.

**Action Point 16: RSPB to take forward bilateral discussions with each country agency, and all to report, as usual, at each meeting of the Group.**

**Action Point 17: RSPB to provide a summary of the scope of generic UK issues to be considered by the Group, with an indication of prioritisation, to the Secretariat as soon as finalised and the Group to establish appropriate work programme to deal with these at the following meeting.**

**Action Point 18: NFU and CLA to provide EN with lists of local officers in England.**

## 12. Progress reports

- 12.1. DAS gave an update on progress with the Cropped Habitats Information Project (CHIP); several draft species accounts were now complete. Comments were invited on how these might be best interpreted; it was noted that descriptions of the use of specific crops was important. It was agreed that JNCC should do an initial interpretation and circulate this to the Group prior to the May 2003 meeting, along with a consultation questionnaire.
- 12.2. Survey and data use guidelines: HB informed the Group that a small group of representatives from relevant organisations had been formed and that JNCC was leading on developing guidelines. A paper will be put to the Group in May 2003.
- 12.3. Work on smew and ring ouzel information had not progressed far, but a synopsis would be presented to the Group in May 2003.

**Action Point 19: JNCC to make an initial interpretation of CHIP draft species accounts and circulate this to the Group prior to the May 2003 meeting, along with a consultation questionnaire.**

## 13. Any other matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting

- 13.1. None.

## 14. Review work programme

- 14.1. The Secretariat agreed to review the work programme in light of this meeting and circulate this prior to the next meeting in May 2003.

**Action Point 20: Secretariat to revise the work programme and circulate prior to the next meeting in May 2003.**

## 15. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 15.1. The next meeting will be on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2003, at RSPB Scotland, Edinburgh.
- 15.2. Following that, meetings will be held on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2003, at NFU, London, and on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2004 (venue to be confirmed by Secretariat).

### **Attachments:**

Approved minutes of the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2002 meeting (2002/4).

# UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2003/1, 29<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2003

## Action Point Summary

(In Chronological order and not minute order, batched by work period or future meeting)

**Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 7<sup>th</sup> May 2003 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):**

**(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2003)**

**Action Point 1:** Chair to request that Defra provide a briefing note to the SPA SWG outlining the Terms of Reference, membership and meetings schedule of the Natura 2000 Steering Group and the Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group, and guidance on the process of information exchange between both of these groups and the SPA SWG. Also, to transmit all approved minutes from these fora, as available, to the SPA SWG Secretariat for circulation to the Group.

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**Action Point 18:** NFU and CLA to provide EN with lists of local officers in England.

**Action Point 19:** JNCC to make an initial interpretation of CHIP draft species accounts and circulate this to the Group prior to the May 2003 meeting, along with a consultation questionnaire.

**Action Point 20:** Secretariat to revise the work programme and circulate prior to the next meeting in May 2003.

**Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2003 meeting or another future meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):**

**Action Point 5:** Chair to send approved Annual Report to the Natura 2000 Steering Group.

**Action Point 7:** RSPB to develop a paper on casework science issues and submit to Group at a future meeting.

**Action Point 12:** RSPB to develop site-level interpretation of the national chough survey for aiding bilateral discussions, and to report back to the Group in September 2003 on progress.

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