

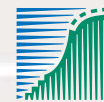
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Waterbirds around the world

A global overview of the conservation,
management and research of the
world's waterbird flyways

Edited by G.C. Boere, C.A. Galbraith and D.A. Stroud

*Assisted by L.K. Bridge, I. Colquhoun, D.A. Scott,
D.B.A. Thompson and L.G. Underhill*



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Cover photography: Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* arriving at Martin Mere, England. Photo: Paul Marshall.
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Address by the Patrons of 'Waterbirds around the world'

We were pleased to be part of nearly 500 waterbird conservationists from all parts of the world, and honoured to act as patrons of the conference. It was good to see three Ministers presenting their views on the importance of migratory water bird conservation and to hear His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales draw attention to the current major threats to albatrosses, those 'perpetual oceanic migrants'.

Boyd, H., Kuijken, E., Hoffman, L., Matthews, G. & Nelson, H. 2006. Address by the Patrons of 'Waterbirds around the world'. *Waterbirds around the world*. Eds. G.C. Boere, C.A. Galbraith & D.A. Stroud. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, UK. p. 2.

Since we began to be involved in waterbird research, management and conservation in the late 1940s and 1950s, much has changed. (From 6 x 30 binoculars to magnificent telescopes and digiscoping photography, from simple handwritten notebooks to laptops). Research techniques have developed enormously, with the arrival of video-recording, radio-marking and satellite tracking, geographical data-loggers and automatic electronic data collection in the field. There have been corresponding improvements in the presentation and availability of data, illustrations and text. Coloured illustrations are now no longer prohibitively expensive and 'Power Point presentations' full of sound, light and action are now commonplace. Detailed remote sensing images can now be downloaded for every site, even the most isolated or secret place on Earth. For our own field explorations in so many wetlands reliable maps were hardly available!

Yet perhaps the most important change has been in the numbers of players on the conservation scene. Both professionals and volunteers, especially bird people have founded the base of conservation world wide. Where there were hardly any reserve wardens or researchers there are now hundreds. Professional administrators of conservation programmes have inserted themselves too, as they have in so many areas of government.



Participants enjoy a conference talk in Edinburgh. Photo: Dougie Barnett.

During the second half of the 20th century, international policy instruments proliferated. Unfortunately, if unsurprisingly, they have not been accompanied by sufficient funding to enable them to be fully effective. In particular, enforcement of laws and regulations has often been feeble and far too little effort has been devoted to following up the effectiveness of the reserve networks that have been created. Communication with the public at large in order to raise awareness still is an essential priority in conservation.



Patrons of *Waterbirds around the world*: from left to right: Harvey Nelson (USA), Hugh Boyd (Canada), Geoffrey Matthews (UK) and Eckhart Kuijken (Belgium); Luc Hoffmann could not be present at the conference. Photo: Dougie Barnett.

Waterbird conferences since the 1950s organised by IWRB (now Wetlands International) succeeded to attract specialists from over the world and have convinced participants about their growing power to encourage ecologically sound conservation. In this regard the Ramsar Convention is a real masterpiece that sets the scene for further multilateral treaties, and (in a European context) Directives related to biodiversity to follow in later decades.

The Edinburgh conference heard many accounts of progress in research and the development of management tools. Much remains to be done, especially in broadening out from 'saving threatened species' to bringing about major changes in land use beyond the boundaries of reserves, for the benefit of entire ecosystems, including the people who depend on them.

We saw and listened to many outstanding performers. By definition, they will always be scarce. One of the continuing requirements of wetland and waterbird conservation world-wide is to encourage and enable these talented people to flourish, in a far more complicated world than confronted us at the start of our careers. One major feature of the conservation world is its massive dependence on volunteers and their 'citizen science'. This must surely be healthy and help to ensure that ever-broadening circles of people around the world come to understand the importance of keeping it fit for many forms of life to flourish.

We are very grateful for the opportunity we were given to be symbolically involved in the *Waterbirds around the world* conference on such undemanding terms, just presenting a glimpse of historical facts in the growing movement of conservation that we are happy to be part of as pioneers of the mid 20th century. We especially hope that we were able to encourage those now active in the field to continue to work as hard as they can to create and maintain a better world, where biodiversity conservation is an integrated part of sustainable development.