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Waterbirds around the world

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

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Cover photography: Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* arriving at Martin Mere, England. Photo: Paul Marshall.
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6.3 Sustainable waterbird harvest. Workshop Introduction

Niels Kanstrup

Danish Hunters' Association, Molsvej 34, DK-8410 Rønne, Denmark.

Kanstrup, N. 2006. Sustainable waterbird harvest. Workshop Introduction. *Waterbirds around the world*. Eds. G.C. Boere, C.A. Galbraith & D.A. Stroud. The Stationery Office, Edinburgh, UK. p. 848.



Trapped ducks for sale at Fereydoon Kenar market, Iran. Increasing harvests of waterbirds by growing human populations in many parts of the world challenge waterbird sustainability. Photo: Crawford Prentice.

Waterbird harvest is widespread, long-standing and an important activity for local communities around the world. In many countries the harvest takes place as a primary food source, but sport or recreational hunting is also popular. Waterbird harvesting is a diverse activity and includes a huge variety of methods, and both formal and informal management systems.

Subsistence hunting of waterbirds has a history that stretches back to the dawn of man. In many remote regions (*e.g.* the arctic, central Siberian lowlands, tropical regions), waterbirds are still an important food resource. Local communities (including of indigenous peoples) in these areas have considerable cultural knowledge of trapping techniques, including how to locate species within the landscape, and have considerable emotional links to waterbird populations as an integral component of their environment.

At the same time, sustainable utilization at all levels is regarded as a cornerstone in the conservation of nature. Kanstrup reviews the different components of sustainability, whilst has both ecological and political aspects.

One of the major challenges for waterbird managers is to assess annual harvest levels and to ensure, through regulation, that these are sustainable for the populations concerned. In many countries there is a long tradition of detailed wildlife harvest management including programmes for bag surveys and monitoring of harvest levels. America has a long history of such regulation, and Padding *et al.* and Gobeil outline North American experiences, whilst Bregnballe *et al.* review Danish policies and practices. At the scale of single sites Mondain Monval summarise harvest levels in the Camargue, whilst Sorrenti similarly assesses take in the Po Delta.

In most countries, however, the management of waterbird harvests is poor or completely lacking, and very little information is available on the annual harvest and its impact on populations. In addition, international and flyway based co-ordination is lacking in many regions, and systems need to be developed in order to obtain reliable data on harvest rates in relation to population levels and trends. Despite this, various projects are underway to reduce unsustainable waterbird harvests.

The symposium provided an overview of current waterbird harvest activities and various methods applied; to identify harvest numbers and to review methods of collecting harvest data. It also explored aspects of traditional hunting, such as the use of toxic lead gun-shot that are now known to be unsustainable. Olivier and Kanstrup reviewed Danish and other experiences in moving towards eliminating lead gunshot from waterbird shooting.

Although there are examples of unsustainable harvest practices, there seems to be no reason to believe that harvesting/hunting should inherently be thus. On the contrary, the right to use natural resources can motivate local people – especially hunters – to get involved in conservation. Training, however, is a vital element.

To build capacity at all levels, the workshop concluded that more knowledge is needed in terms of (a) the direct impact of harvest (bag, products) and indirect impact (disturbance); (b) population status and trends at flyway, migration route and population level; (c) mankind and nature, in relation to the processes of sustainable development. To secure the conservation of flyways across borders and across continents world-wide, co-operation is needed at all levels – including that of the hunters.