

# UK SPA Scientific Working Group

## Terms of Reference

### Aims

The SPA Scientific Working Group is a consultative group established by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to assist government administrations and the statutory conservation agencies in taking forward the further development of the SPA network within the UK, in particular looking forward to the coherent management of the network and monitoring of sites.

The Group will consider UK-scale scientific and technical issues regarding the SPA network in the terrestrial and marine environment. In particular, it will consider a range of issues raised in the context of the 2001 SPA review, *inter alia*:

- issues in respect of those species where the 2001 SPA review has indicated that there may be future cases for additional SPA provision, in particular, in the light of new national surveys, analyses, and conservation needs;
- consider those issues which the 2001 SPA review indicated as outstanding;
- the development of understanding of broader European contexts as relevant to informing the evolution of the SPA network within the UK;
- the implications of revisions of estimates of the sizes of bird populations, both nationally and internationally;
- the development of understanding of data needs for SPA classification and management, and the further development of systems and processes to ensure the timely delivery of such information; and
- the application of processes to monitor the SPAs individually and collectively.

There is a significant range of potential issues to be addressed by the UK SPA Scientific Working Group. The attached Annex seeks to outline the principal activities and orders these into short, medium and long-term priorities. An initial task for the Group will be to develop a more detailed work programme, with key 'milestones', based on this Annex.

The activities of the Working Group in assisting government to meet the scientific and technical requirements of the Birds Directive will be complemented by discussions taking place within each of the countries. It will work closely with the UK Natura 2000 Steering Group. A UK Natura 2000 Liaison Group will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to consider broader issues regarding the development and management of the Natura 2000 network.

### Composition

The Group will be representative of the Government departments/devolved administrations and their statutory agencies across the UK, Joint Nature Conservation

Committee (JNCC), and representation from the voluntary conservation sector as well as other stakeholder groups. The Group will thus comprise representatives of: Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Scottish Executive; National Assembly of Wales; English Nature; Scottish Natural Heritage; Countryside Council for Wales; Environment and Heritage Service; JNCC; and a representative selection of voluntary conservation agencies plus other stakeholder groups, such as those representing land-owning, land management, water industry, marine and business sectors, with the necessary scientific expertise.

On occasion, representatives from other organisations may be asked to attend where there is the need for information of a specific nature to be discussed by the Group.

### **Method of operation**

It is anticipated that the Group will hold about three meetings per year, with actions between these periods being taken forward by electronic communications.

### **Chair and Secretariat**

The Chair will be appointed by government prior to the first meeting. The Secretariat will be provided by JNCC who will convene and support the Group.

### **Sub-groups**

It may, from time-to-time, be desirable to establish smaller sub-groups to resolve certain issues. These will be time-limited and will focus on concluding specific tasks on behalf of the Working Group as a whole.

### **Reporting**

The Scientific Working Group will provide regular updates of its activity to the UK Natura 2000 Steering Group.

### **Issues for attention**

The Scientific Group will develop a work programme with priority given to the following issues:

1. Appraisal of any further sites/boundaries/species which may qualify on the basis of high quality data from the 1992/97 data window of the 2001 network review.
2. Development of a strategic approach to further work to resolve issues outstanding from the 2001 Review.
3. Appraisal of further sites based on substantial high quality datasets collected during 1997-2000, and later 2001-2004.
4. Development of a strategic approach to the collection and interpretation of new data, information on population sizes, and site monitoring.

5. 'Sweep-up' review of outstanding network needs commencing with data window concluding 2005/6 (*i.e.* review starting in autumn 2006) informed by outcomes of monitoring processes.

Framework for future update of UK SPA network

		Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA Scientific Working Group	UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group	UK Natura 2000 Steering Group
F o r u m a n d p r o c e s s	Lead organisation	<i>Country agencies</i>	<i>JNCC</i>	<i>DEFRA</i>	<i>DEFRA</i>
	Geographic scope	<i>Country</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>UK</i>
	Objective	Detailed consideration of site-related issues within countries.	Consideration of UK-scale scientific issues related to the SPA network (note not policy issues).	Government to disseminate key messages regarding the future development of the <i>Natura 2000</i> network in the UK, and Liaison Group to be a sounding board for relevant advice and opinion. Includes broad range of non-conservation stakeholders and sectors	Government to consider and decide upon policy and management issues, including those raised that the Scientific Working Group
	Issues for resolution and timescale				
A g e n d a	<b>Immediate</b> (by end 2001)  Issues for attention = 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of additional SPA provision for Capercaillie (any data up to 2001)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establishment of SPA Scientific Working Group and determination of timetabled workplan based on items listed below:</li> <li>● Confirmation of issues outstanding from the 2001 SPA Review</li> </ul>		
	<b>Short-term</b> (by end of March 2003)  Issues for attention = 1 and 2  Commence 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of SPA provision for wintering Smew</li> <li>● Possible cases for boundary extensions</li> <li>● Initiate discussion on sharing knowledge of site management regimes for SPAs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of SPA provision for species where major new national surveys or existing data are already available since SPA review data window (ie 1997-2000: eg Spotted Crane, Ring Ouzel, Twite?)</li> <li>● Consider broad implications of new population estimates nationally (Avian Population Estimates Panel 2 in early 2002) and internationally (waders in 2002)</li> <li>● Planning of national survey timetables to align with SPA reporting timetable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The context of UK network of Natura 2000 sites and its contribution to conserving UK wildlife and habitats in relation to obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives</li> <li>● Sustainable development in relation to SPAs and the wider countryside</li> <li>● The SAC network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider the views of the scientific working group and offer it and the Liaison Group opinions and reactions.</li> </ul>

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	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA Scientific Working Group	UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group	UK Natura 2000 Steering Group
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review specific cases of site/species rejection at Stage 2</li> <li>● Review specific “sites no longer qualifying”</li> <li>● Develop shared understanding of use of data in site selection processes, and advise on new or supplementary data collection, and data collection standards</li> <li>● Commence processes to monitor site series and its performance in national and site contexts (including alerts processes, and to guide management)</li> <li>● Issues surrounding treatment of sites for waterbirds on passage and on rocky shores</li> <li>● Look at policies in other EU Member States regarding the scientific basis for incorporation of cropped habitats within SPAs</li> </ul>		

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA Scientific Working Group	UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group	UK Natura 2000 Steering Group
<p><b>Medium-term</b> (2003/4 to end March 2005)</p> <p>Issues for attention = conclude 1, continue 3 commence 4 and 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of additional SPA provision under Stage 1.4 where additional high-quality data are currently available</li> <li>● Site specific management issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of SPA provision for species where major new national surveys have become available since SPA review data window (2001-2004: eg Chough, Red Kite, Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Nightjar, Merlin). Consideration of implications of Seabird 2000 results for seabird colonies. Overall priorities to be discussed and agreed.</li> <li>● Continue to consider, if necessary, issues regarding incorporation of cropped habitats within SPAs</li> <li>● Monitoring and reporting protocols for the UK SPA network including consideration of Common Standards Monitoring and WeBS Alerts scheme</li> <li>● Generic Site management issues at UK level</li> <li>● Develop site selection approach for rare Annex I non-breeding birds</li> <li>● Consideration of data issues surrounding possible SPA provision for wintering gulls and wintering raptors (especially on coasts)</li> <li>● Possible SPA provision for re-establishing raptors (Red Kite &amp; Sea Eagle)</li> <li>● Review needs for longer term research requirements to determine movements of birds between component parts of composite sites</li> </ul>	<p>Continued discussion of issues listed above and any other topical issues arising from the issues of the day</p>	<p>Consideration of respective roles of site-based as contrasted with wider-countryside measures for conserving UK wildlife and habitats in relation to obligations under the Birds Directives</p>

	Bilateral contact at country level	UK SPA Scientific Working Group	UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group	UK Natura 2000 Steering Group
<p><b>Long-term</b> (2005/6 to end March 2008)</p> <p>Issues for attention = conclude 3, 4 and 5</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consideration of SPA provision for relevant species as major new national surveys become available</li> <li>● ‘Sweep-up’ review of outstanding network needs commencing with data window concluding 2005/6 (<i>i.e.</i> review starting in autumn 2006) informed by outcomes of monitoring processes</li> </ul>	Ditto	Ditto