

UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

17 January 2002

Common Standards Monitoring

Background on the process

One of the special functions of the country conservation agencies is the establishment of common standards throughout Britain for the monitoring of nature conservation. Monitoring standards are required for all designated sites - SSSI, ASSI, Natura 2000 sites and Ramsar sites.

The purpose of site monitoring is to determine whether the features of interest in the site are in the desired condition, or are at a favourable conservation status. Conservation objectives for a site will define what constitutes favourable condition by describing broad targets to be met for each feature. The monitoring and assessment of features will enable judgements to be made about management of the site. Common standards of monitoring will allow for assessment of all sites at the national level, which is especially important for a suite of sites designated as a 'network' for a given feature (such as SPAs).

A generic framework, setting out the basic requirements for standards of monitoring, was published by JNCC in 1998, and is available on the JNCC website at <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/idt/csm/default.htm>.

The country conservation agencies are now developing practical guidance on the implementation of standards using the generic framework described above. These are being collated by JNCC in order to produce detailed practical guidance for Common Standards Monitoring (CSM) across the UK.

In practice, CSM is likely to utilise existing national monitoring schemes, such as WeBS, to supply site-based data, complemented by special surveys for species or sites not covered in such schemes.

The basic monitoring and reporting cycle has been agreed as six years, based on needs for reporting site condition under the European conservation Directives.

Current and planned activity

UK generic guidance for birds is currently being drafted by an inter-agency group. The guidance sets out the practical aspects of monitoring for individual species and species assemblages, and for the habitats used by the interest features. It also sets out guidance on setting targets and judging the condition of the interest features.

It is anticipated that the generic UK guidance will be drafted and approved for consultation in spring/summer 2002.

Implications for the future development of the UK SPA network

CSM will be of significant benefit in assessing the condition of both individual SPAs and the UK SPA network as a whole. It also has the potential to provide site-based data outside of the SPA network that may identify additional areas for consideration against the SPA Guidelines, in particular for rarer and recently colonising species.

Recommendations

In light of the activity outlined above, it is recommended that the UK SPA Scientific Working Group:

- ◆ **Provide** input into the development of CSM for birds on SPAs through the consultation exercise at the appropriate time (anticipated summer 2002), building this into the Group's workplan.
- ◆ **Consider** the results of monitoring the SPA network, and SSSI/ASSIs outside of this, when they become available.

- ◆ **Support** the continuation of national monitoring schemes that will assist in CSM, including WeBS, SCARABBS, the RBBP and JNCC's Seabird monitoring programme.
- ◆ **Consider** any future proposals for the enhancement of current national monitoring schemes to produce an 'Integrated National Bird Monitoring Scheme' that will enable a more holistic approach to monitoring protected site networks in the UK.