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**JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

**UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP - 2003 ANNUAL REPORT**

**1. Summary**

- 1.1. This is the second report of the SPA Scientific Working Group and includes all issues considered at meetings between January 2003 and December 2003. During this period the Group met on the following occasions; 29 January, 7 May and 23 September.
- 1.2. The report includes reviews of a number of work areas identified within the Terms of Reference:  
Population estimates for birds, future bird surveys, sites for species with data since 1997, cases of Stage 2 (SPA selection guidelines) rejection of sites, boundary extensions, process and timetable for addition of qualifying species to existing SPAs, monitoring, cropped habitats, wintering gulls, marine SPAs and the Ramsar Review.
- 1.3. A key element of the report is to summarise the decisions of the Group, and the following are those generated from 2003:
  - 1.3.1. **Recommendations and referrals to the UK Natura 2000 Steering Group**
    - 1.3.1.1. *The SPA SWG recommends that* future reviews of Wetland International's *Waterbird Population Estimates* are adopted as a matter of normal procedure once ratified by Ramsar CoPs. (See 4.1.1)
    - 1.3.1.2. *The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that* the mute swan populations of Great Britain and Ireland be treated as two separate biogeographical populations, both non-migratory. (See 4.1.3)
    - 1.3.1.3. *The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that,* until more information becomes available, the Northwest European population of eider (the sum of the four *mollissima* populations in this area) be used as the relevant biogeographical population for the UK and that this population be considered migratory. (See 4.1.3)
    - 1.3.1.4. *The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that* further consideration of SPA provision for the Annex I species little egret be deferred until after a future status review in 4-6 years time. (See 4.3.3)

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. The SPA Scientific Working Group is a consultative group established in November 2001 by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to assist government administrations and the statutory conservation agencies in further developing the SPA network within the UK, in particular promoting the coherent management of the network and monitoring of sites.
- 2.2. The Group considers UK-scale scientific and technical issues regarding the SPA network in the terrestrial and marine environment.
- 2.3. The Group comprises representatives from Government departments, devolved administrations and their statutory conservation agencies across the UK, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and scientists from the voluntary conservation sector and other stakeholder groups, such as land-owners and managers, the water industry, marine and business sectors. A list of organisations represented in the Group is given in the 2001-2002 Annual Report.
- 2.4. The Group sits within a network of fora for the consideration of Natura 2000 issues:
  - bilateral discussions between NGOs and the Country Agencies
  - the *UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group*<sup>1</sup>
  - the *UK Natura 2000 Steering Group*

It provides advice and recommendations to the *UK Natura 2000 Steering Group* as well as acting on issues identified by them.

- 2.5. Formal *Terms of Reference*, along with an initial framework for discussions, were established at the Group's inauguration (See the 2001-2002 Annual Report). This framework was further developed into a rolling work programme.
- 2.6. The Group meets at least three times per year (January, May and September). Issues for discussion are typically supported with briefing papers that are circulated prior to each meeting (a full list for 2003 is given in Appendix 2). JNCC provides the Secretariat for the Group and hosts a web-page<sup>2</sup> on which selected briefings and the approved minutes of meetings are published.
- 2.7. The role of the *Annual Report* is to summarise active areas of work considered in the meetings of a calendar year, clearly denoting advice to Government, seeking the guidance of the *UK Natura 2000 Steering Group* or other fora where relevant, and also highlighting issues of a policy nature that were raised within the year but are outside of the remit of the Group.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 3 provides further detail of these groups and a glossary.

<sup>2</sup> ([http://www.jncc.gov.uk/species/UKSPA\\_ScientificWG/default.htm](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/species/UKSPA_ScientificWG/default.htm))

### 3. Response from the Natura 2000 Steering Group to the 2001-2002 SPA SWG Annual Report

- 3.1. A letter from the Chair of the Natura 2000 Steering Group was received in response to the 2001-2002 Annual Report being presented to the group in July 2003; a copy of this letter is appended to this report (Appendix 1).

### 4. Progress during 2003

#### 4.1. Population estimates for birds

- 4.1.1. Wetlands International published revised waterbird population estimates in November 2002 (*Waterbird Population Estimates 3*<sup>3</sup>), which were endorsed by the Ramsar Convention's eighth Conference of Parties (Resolution VIII.38). The Group adopted this source of biogeographical population estimates for future relevant business. The Group also recommends that future revisions of *Waterbird Population Estimates* are adopted as a matter of normal procedure once ratified by Ramsar CoPs.
- 4.1.2. Other areas of work arose out of the publication of *Waterbird Population Estimates 3*, which will be completed by JNCC in 2004: 1% thresholds for mixed populations of the same species, and; the implications of the new thresholds for updating SPA citations.
- 4.1.3. In addition, again as a result of *Waterbird Population Estimates 3*, the treatment of biogeographical populations of eider and mute swan were also discussed. The Group agreed that there was good evidence that the mute swan populations of Great Britain and Ireland were distinct and non-migratory. Eiders present a more complex picture and it was agreed that further work on genetics and movements of the species would be beneficial – this will be taken forward in 2004. It was agreed that until further work was complete that the Northwest European population (the four *mollissima* populations in this area) would be used as the relevant biogeographical population for the UK (1% threshold of 15,500 individuals).
- 4.1.3.1. ***The SPA SWG recommends that*** future reviews of Wetland International's *Waterbird Population Estimates* are adopted as a matter of normal procedure once ratified by Ramsar CoPs.
- 4.1.3.2. ***The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that*** the mute swan populations of Great Britain and Ireland be treated as two separate biogeographical populations, both non-migratory.
- 4.1.3.3. ***The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that,*** until more information becomes available, that the Northwest European population of eider (the sum of the four *mollissima*

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<sup>3</sup> Wetlands International. 2002. *Waterbird population estimates – third edition. Wetlands International Global Series No. 12*, Wageningen, The Netherlands.

populations in this area) be used as the relevant biogeographical population for the UK and that this population be considered migratory.

#### 4.2. *Future bird surveys*

- 4.2.1. A significant issue arising out of discussions on surveys is the risk to species from the publication of data during the SPA designation process. The sub-group established last year presented a first draft of the first part of *Best Practice Guidelines for Bird Surveys and Data Handling* to the Group in May 2003. The first draft of the second part of these guidelines was developed during the year, but not finalised. Further work will be done on producing the guidelines during 2004.

#### 4.3. *Sites for species with data since 1997*

- 4.3.1. The Group reviewed BTO Report 272: *Identifying stretches of the UK's non-estuarine coast that may be worthy of SPA designation* (Austin & Rehfish 2003). The report presents density estimates and distributional data derived from the Non-estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS) for a number of waders more abundant in non-estuarine coastal habitats outside of the breeding season. It also presents a novel method for assessing relative importance of areas of coast based on weighting density by national abundance. The Group agreed that any assessment of new areas for these species should be based on the existing principles within the SPA Guidelines, especially favouring the selection of areas supporting higher concentrations (densities) than others. JNCC agreed to summarise the status of the SPA suites for the relevant species (from the 2001 SPA Review) and produce a list of the 'best' 10km squares. The Group will discuss this issue further in 2004 and subsequently seek guidance from the Natura 2000 SG on whether additional SPA provision for this small group of birds was necessary.
- 4.3.2. Preliminary results of the 2002 national chough survey and a site-level interpretation of this survey were discussed by the Group. RSPB considers the current coverage of the population by the SPA suite, at about 39%, to be inadequate. Population dynamics and the functional links between areas used by groups of birds were discussed, as was dependence on man-made nesting sites. Recent evidence suggests that groups of chough may use a complex of sites throughout the year. Hence, composite sites which link key areas used by a group of birds may be the best approach for maintaining these populations.
- 4.3.3. Agencies agreed to review the site-level interpretation of the 2002 national chough survey, continue bilateral discussions with the RSPB and report back to the Group in May 2004.
- 4.3.4. Dr. Andy Musgrove, BTO, gave the Group a comprehensive presentation on the current status of little egret, a recently established Annex I species. The population continues to increase in size and range at a rapid rate, with no signs of stabilising (the review will be published on the BTO website in 2004).

Given the continued rapid rate of change in the species status the Group agreed that it would be difficult at present to apply the SPA guidelines. Recognizing also that the currently most important breeding colonies are within SPAs and that these will receive a general level of protection despite the species not being a cited interest, the Group agreed to review the species in another 4-6 years.

4.3.4.1. ***The SPA SWG recommends to the Natura 2000 Steering Group that*** further consideration of SPA provision for the Annex I species little egret be deferred until after a future status review in 4-6 years time.

4.3.5. An information paper, prepared by EN, on the population status of ring ouzel was submitted to the Group in September 2003. A decision on the relevant biogeographical population estimate and the 1% threshold for this species will be taken early in 2004.

4.3.6. EHS informed the Group that discussions between themselves, Duchas, RSPB and BirdWatch Ireland were taking place over SPA provision for hen harrier in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

#### 4.4. *Cases of Stage 2 (SPA selection guidelines) rejection of sites*

4.4.1. RSPB had submitted a revised IBA/SPA project report on Scottish sites to SNH prior to the May 2003 meeting; the report represents a review of the RSPB's response to the SPA Review. RSPB continued to work on its IBA/SPA project for Wales, England and Northern Ireland in 2003.

4.4.2. Bilateral discussions had continued between the Country Agencies and the RSPB throughout the year, although RSPB expressed disappointment at lack of progress in Scotland following submission of its revised IBA/SPA report. The Group requested that any generic issues that emerged from bilateral discussions, and which were not already being considered by the Group, be summarised by the RSPB and brought to the Group for discussion.

#### 4.5. *Boundary extensions (excluding cropped habitats)*

4.5.1. See 4.4 (above).

#### 4.6. *Process and timetable for addition of qualifying species to existing SPAs*

4.6.1. See appended response from the Natura 2000 Steering Group to the 2001-2002 Annual Report of the SPA SWG [SPA SWG: 1.3.1.4].

4.6.2. See also 4.1.2 of this report.

#### 4.7. *Monitoring*

4.7.1. Dr. Mark Rehfisch, Head of the Wetlands & Coastal Ecology Unit of the BTO, gave a presentation to the Group on the WeBS Alerts System and an example of its application. The WeBS Alerts System compares smoothed

trends of individual species over various time periods at national, regional and site levels against thresholds: changes of 25-50% and >50% trigger 'alerts'. The sites are SPAs and SSSIs. A paper on the approach will be submitted to a journal in 2003 and full internet access to the alerts report will be available from March 2004.

#### 4.8. *Cropped habitats*

- 4.8.1. JNCC initiated the *Cropped Habitats Information Project* (CHIP) in 2002, with the project phased to collate information on high priority species in 2002 and lower priority species in 2003. Just Ecology were contracted to produce species accounts for phase one in accord with the format previously agreed by the SPA SWG.
- 4.8.2. The phase one species accounts were collated by JNCC into a discussion report, with some added basic interpretation on the conclusions that could be drawn, and this was discussed by the Group in September 2003. The Group was invited to send additional comment to JNCC by the end of November 2003.
- 4.8.3. Species accounts for phase two of the project and initial feedback from the phase one discussion report will be reported in 2004.

#### 4.9. *Wintering gulls*

- 4.9.1. Dr. Mark Rehfisch, Head of the Wetlands & Coastal Ecology Unit of the BTO, gave a presentation to the Group on the preliminary results of the 2002/2003 pilot Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS).
- 4.9.2. The pilot survey showed that considerable numbers of gulls roost along the coast away from known key roost sites, but that few birds arrive at roosts after dark. Hence, the full survey would be designed to sample coastal stretches, in addition to key site coverage and inland sampling, to improve population estimates. The full survey would provide the most accurate winter estimates for five species of gulls to date, allowing better assessment of the importance of site populations.
- 4.9.3. The full survey is planned to begin in 2003/2004, with field work over three winters, and estimated to cost £130,000.

#### 4.10. *Marine SPAs*

- 4.10.1. The Group was apprised of the work of the EC Marine Experts Working Group by Defra. The Secretariat agreed to circulate all minutes from this group to the SPA SWG.
- 4.10.2. The Group was consulted on draft guidelines for site and boundary selection for marine SPAs for non-breeding waterbirds. Several issues requiring further consideration were identified: how to treat satellite aggregations around main aggregations; the link between open water areas and the coast in terms of

multi-species assemblages (should open water and terrestrial waterbirds be considered as part of a single assemblage); and acceptable quality of data, for which additional guidance may be required.

- 4.10.3. The Group agreed that the general approach outlined in the guidance was appropriate; although the RSPB re-iterated its position on the SPA Guidelines (1% thresholds should be considered criteria and not guidelines). It was agreed that boundaries based on modelled distribution was an appropriate approach, but that in some cases shore-based surveys may be adequate to define boundaries.
- 4.10.4. JNCC updated the Group on status of aerial data analysis for the Tay/St. Andrews Bay and for Liverpool Bay. Of important note was that the Tay analysis had produced slightly different results for the use of cumulative density for determining boundary placement, with a 98% threshold (Carmarthen Bay was 95%) appropriate and consistent for all species analysed. Each site analysed in this way may have a specific threshold rather than a generic approach being appropriate.
- 4.10.5. EHS sought advice from the SPA SWG on extending Belfast Lough to include an open water area for great crested grebe; the only qualifying species in the SPA is redshank. The Group's advice was that if the site did not merit extension to include the waterbird assemblage that the addition of great crested grebe under Stage 1.4 be considered as Belfast Lough supports the second largest concentration of the species in the UK.
- 4.10.6. In relation to Defra's review of Natura 2000 and Ramsar groups and responsibilities toward the end of 2003, the Group confirmed that it wished to remain the main forum for discussion of scientific and technical issues in the development of marine SPAs.

#### 4.11. *Re-established raptors*

- 4.11.1. The Group agreed that species for consideration at present included red kite (to include the Welsh population), white-tailed eagle and osprey (in England). To facilitate discussions the Agency representatives agreed to produce briefing on status and trends for consideration in 2004.

#### 4.12. *Ramsar Review*

- 4.12.1. Late in 2003 Defra requested that the SPA SWG broaden its work to include the avian elements of the UK Ramsar Review – the Group agreed that this would be appropriate given the many common issues between developing the Ramsar and SPA networks. The Group's Terms of Reference and work programme will be revised in early 2004 to incorporate the new area of work. The Group will also change its name to reflect this.
- 4.12.2. The work will not involve detailed consideration of avian Ramsar issues in the Overseas Territories, but future consultation may be requested.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Response from the Chair of the Natura 2000 Steering Group to the 2001-2002 Annual Report of the SPA Scientific Working Group**

European Wildlife Division  
1/10 Temple Quay House  
2 The Square  
Bristol BS1 6EB  
Telephone: 0117 372 8233  
Fax: 0117 372 8233  
E-mail: [martin.capstick@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:martin.capstick@defra.gsi.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)



To: Dr Ian Bainbridge  
Chair of the SPA Scientific Working Group  
Scottish Executive  
Victoria Quay  
EDINBURGH  
EH6 6QQ

Date: 19 September 2003

Dear Ian

**Natura 2000 Steering Committee meeting 15 July 2003 – Report back from SPA SWG**

Thank you for presenting the SPA SWG 2002-2003 Annual Report to the Natura 2000 Steering Committee (NK 2000 SC) on 15 July. The Report made a number of recommendations and referrals to this Committee. We had a useful discussion of these issues at the meeting; and I agreed to provide for the record a summary of the recommendations and responses of the Committee:

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.1 – *The SPA SWG recommends that the English population of twite be recognised both as a distinct biogeographical population and migratory, and that the SPA provision for it be assessed in accordance with the SPA Selection Criteria.*

The committee accepted this recommendation in principle. But careful consideration should be given to the timetable and levels of resources required for implementation. I look forward to seeing how your group takes forward proposals for consideration of this species.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.2 – *The SPA SWG refers consideration of whether an area meeting the thresholds defined in stages 1.1-1.3 of the SPA selection guidelines should automatically be recommended for classification as an SPA, irrespective of Stage 2 judgements.*

I have asked for a paper to be prepared, jointly by the Scottish Executive and Defra, exploring the consequences of this approach and to make preliminary recommendations for the next meeting of the Natura 2000 Steering Committee scheduled for November 2003. I shall keep your group apprised of those discussions and considerations, and I hope to be able to agree a policy early next year.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.3 – *Pending the decision on 1.3.1.2, the SPA SWG refers consideration of whether Annex 1 species should be automatically cited as a qualifying feature in an existing*

*SPA if that SPA supports a nationally important population, or in the case of regularly occurring migratory species if the SPA supports an internationally important population.*

The Committee agreed that this should be considered in the context of the further work relating to 1.3.1.2.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.4. - *The SPA SWG seeks urgent clarification of the timetable and process for amending existing SPA citations and Natura 2000 data forms to take account of the SPA Review given that the new data at both site and population levels have become available since its publication in 2001 and the implications of these, if any, will need to be considered by the Group*

The Committee recognises the importance of amending the SPA citations and Natura 2000 data forms so that they reflect the latest information. But it also recognises that there are resource implications in undertaking this work. It was agreed that Defra and the Devolved Administrations should separately approach the respective conservation agencies and discuss the timetables involved in amending the citations and data sheets. Following those discussions the Natura 2000 Steering Committee will be informed of likely timetables at its next meeting. I shall convey the outcome of the meeting at that time.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.5. – *The SPA SWG seeks guidance on how it should develop its role in advising on data needs for interpretation of the influence of landscape-scale management on the SPA network.*

The Committee accepted that guidance in this area would be helpful. It encouraged the SPA SWG to adopt a broad approach in developing this role - that is, that it should not artificially constrain consideration of what might be needed, but should bear in mind the need for proportional action.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.1.6. – *The SPA SWG, aware of current development issues in the marine environment, advises that the scientific research and assessments required to identify marine SPAs be treated as of high priority.*

The Committee noted this advice. A number of initiatives are currently or will shortly get under way. The establishment of a UK marine sub-group is a key step to give better focus to this area. I hope this group will be established and meet for the first time in the next two months to coordinate this matter.

**SPA SWG:** 1.3.2.1. – *The SPA SWG seeks clarification of the timetable for development of marine SPA selection guidelines, UK site lists and the initiation of the classification process for marine SPAs so that its contribution, via assessment of the science underpinning this process, can be planned accordingly.*

Selection criteria are to be considered in the next 2 years by the EC Marine Working Group. However, recognising the complicated nature of the issues to consider, criteria for mobile species are not anticipated until the end of next year (2004). The work of the, UK Marine sub-group (mentioned above) – when it is established - and existing JNCC Marine Working Group, will feed into this. Following the initial meeting of the new UK group, I shall provide the SPA SWG with a note of the expected work programme and timetable.

This provides a formal report back on the SPA SWG's recommendations. I shall write further, as promised above, to report on the follow-up work put in hand.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin Capstick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Martin Capstick**  
Head of European Wildlife Division

## APPENDIX 2

### List of briefing papers presented to the SPA Scientific Working Group during 2003

Note: Many of these papers are available from the JNCC website. However, some of the papers presented to the Group were confidential in nature and so will not be published (they are denoted by an asterisk). In addition, some papers were preliminary briefings and most of these will not be published (these are noted).

#### January 2003

2001-2002 Annual Report of the SPA SWG

Third edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates*

Amendments to SPA citations following the SPA review, and submission of data to the EC SPA provision for non-estuarine non-breeding waders

\*SCARABBS 2002 chough survey draft results and discussion

\*Current status of SPA assessment and site survey of capercaillie and four raptor species in Scotland

\*Preliminary results of hen harrier surveys in Scotland 2002

Treatment of Eider Duck and Mute Swan biogeographical populations in the UK (preliminary briefing)

Update on Spotted Crakes and SPAs (preliminary briefing)

RSPB IBA/SPA project: Progress Report

#### May 2003

\*Critical assessment of BTO Research Report 272; *Identifying stretches of the UK's non-estuarine coast that could be worthy of SPA designation for their waterbird interest.*

\*Best Practice Guidelines for Bird Surveys and Data Handling

Oral paper from Dr. M. Rehfisch, BTO, on the WeBS Alerts System

Oral paper from Dr. M. Rehfisch, BTO, on the Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS)

#### September 2003

Letter from the Chair of the Natura 2000 Steering Group in response to the 2001-2002 Annual Report of the SPA SWG.

Arrangements for Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Groups

Objectives for the UK Ramsar Sites Review

UK Ramsar Review Steering Group Terms of Reference

Guidelines for the selection of marine SPAs for aggregations of inshore non-breeding waterbirds (preliminary briefing)

\*Belfast Lough Open Water proposed SPA

\*Implications of the 2002 national chough survey for the UK SPA network

Oral paper from Dr. A. Musgrove, BTO, on the status of little egret in the UK

Cropped Habitats Information Project (CHIP): draft discussions report (preliminary briefing)

Short information paper: SPAs for Ring Ouzels (preliminary briefing)

## APPENDIX 3

### Glossary

Biogeographical population	A group of birds which breed in a particular location (or group of locations), breed freely within the group, and rarely breed or exchange individuals with other groups.
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology; has existed since 1933 as an independent, scientific research trust, investigating the populations, movements and ecology of wild birds in the British Isles. The BTO's speciality is the design and implementation of volunteer wild bird surveys.
CHIP	Cropped Habitats Information Project; a JNCC project to collate information on the use of cropped habitats by a range of birds. CHIP will inform consideration by the SPA SWG of the need for designation of cropped habitats as SPAs.
EC Marine Experts Working Group	The main objective of the Marine Expert Group, established by DG Environment, is to develop a common understanding of the provisions of Natura 2000 relating to the marine environment in order to facilitate the designation and future management of these areas by the Member States. The group includes representatives from governments and NGOs.
Marine Natura 2000 Project Group	A statutory group, made up of government and conservation agency representatives, responsible for development of Natura 2000 in the marine environment and accountable to the Natura 2000 Steering Group. The group is chaired by an independent member of the Joint Committee and JNCC provides the Secretariat. The chair of the SPA SWG is a co-opted member.
Ramsar	The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 138 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1328 wetland sites, totaling 111.9 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.
Ramsar Review	In the context of the Strategic Framework and Guidelines for the Future Development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance (Resolution VII.11), the UK Government is currently reviewing its list of Ramsar sites, with special emphasis on assessment of non-avian features. The review aims to agree a list of proposed new or revised designations and report this to CoP 9 in 2005. Tied to this will be the submission of updated Ramsar Information Sheets (RIS) and site maps to the Ramsar Bureau for CoP 9.
SPA Review	The working name of the published results of the review of the SPA network; <i>The UK SPA network: its scope and content. JNCC 2001</i> (cited as Stroud <i>et al.</i> 2001). [ <a href="http://www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm">www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm</a> ]

SPA selection guidelines	Guidelines developed and adopted by UK Government and the statutory conservation agencies for the selection of SPAs in the UK (published by JNCC in 1999; available from JNCC or at <a href="http://www.jncc.gov.uk/idt/default.htm">www.jncc.gov.uk/idt/default.htm</a> )
Stage 1/Stage 2	Refers to the two stages of the UK SPA selection guidelines.
UK Natura 2000 NGO Liaison Group	A large group, with representatives from a wide range of stakeholders, established by Defra in 2002 to act as a consultative group on policy issues related to Natura 2000.
UK Natura 2000 Steering Group	A statutory group, made up of government and conservation agency representatives, responsible for development of Natura 2000. Chaired by Defra.
Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE)	A publication of Wetlands International; WPE presents international population estimates for non-breeding waterbirds throughout the world. This is the standard reference for the Ramsar Convention and for statutory use in the UK. The most recent revision is WPE3, published in 2002 and adopted for UK statutory use from January 2003.
WeBS	Wetland Bird Survey; a joint scheme of the BTO, WWT, RSPB and JNCC to monitor non-breeding waterbirds in the UK. The principal aims of the scheme are to identify population sizes, determine trends in numbers and distribution, and to identify important sites for waterbirds.
WeBS Alerts System	A method of assessing changes in national, country, regional and site populations of non-breeding waterbirds over the short, medium and long term, drawing on WeBS data. The alerting system shows when these changes exceed certain thresholds and when evaluated in the context of wider changes will help inform conservation needs.
Wetlands International	A leading global non-profit organisation dedicated solely to the crucial work of wetland conservation and sustainable management. The organisation's mission is to sustain and restore wetlands, their resources and biodiversity for future generations through research, information exchange and conservation activities, worldwide. Well-established networks of experts and close partnerships with key organisations provide Wetlands International with the essential tools for catalysing conservation activities worldwide. [ <a href="http://www.wetlands.org">www.wetlands.org</a> ]
WinGS	Winter Gull Roost Survey; a BTO lead survey which has taken place every 10 years since 1953 and gives national population estimates and trends for several wintering gulls. The latest survey is being undertaken over a three year period from 2004-2006 and is funded principally by the Country Agencies, with input from Northumbrian Water.