

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2006/1 1ST FEBRUARY 2006

09.30 - 14.45 EN, Northminster House, Peterborough

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (IB) (Chair) – SEERAD

Wendy Twell (WT) – NAW

Ben Dean (BD) – JNCC

Lucy Adams (LA) – ABPmer

Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH

Ian Enlander (IE) – EHS

Kate Jennings (KJ) – EN

Gwyn Williams (GWi) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link

David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC

Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC

Jeremy Wilson (JW) – SEL

David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD

Andy Webb (AW) – JNCC

Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW (by VC)

Apologies:

Trevor Salmon (Defra), Louise Vall (Defra), Andrew Clark (NFU), Colin Hedley (CLA), Peter Cranswick (WWT), Diana Reynolds and Louise George (NAW), Jim Reid (JNCC).

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above.

2. Minutes of last meeting (5th October 2005, 2005/3)

2.1. The minutes of the 5th October 2006 meeting were accepted with two changes:

2.1.1. Second sentence of 3.4 to be amended to; For this reason it was agreed that whilst a minimum extent of 4km should be proposed for use for Skomer, ...

2.1.2. First sentence of 8.3 to be amended to; SNH is progressing well the additional 11 areas identified by the Minister earlier this year and is considering a few other Golden Eagle areas. Second sentence of 3.8, beginning ‘Other IBA...’, to be deleted.

General Items

3. 2005 Annual Report: first draft

3.1. The Group agreed a number of amendments to the text of the report, especially in relation to sections 4.2 (Marine SPAs), and 4.5 (Development of a site provision index). Secretariat agreed to circulate a revised report by 10th February, inviting comments by 20th February and then finalising the report in time for submission to the next Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC) in mid March.

3.2. It was noted that the N2RSC had ‘bounced’ a number of recommendations from the SPAR SWG back to the group for further work, but that some of these related to policy rather than strictly scientific/technical subjects. The Chair agreed to discuss and seek clarification of the process of resolving issues raised within the SPAR SWG’s recommendations with the N2RSC.

- 3.3. The final 2005 Annual Report will be published on the JNCC website after having been considered by the N2RSC.

Action Point 06/1/1: Chair to clarify the process of resolving issues raised within the Group's recommendations with the N2RSC.

4. 2008 SPA & Ramsar networks Review: summary note for N2RSC (JNCC paper SPAR_010206_1/HB)

- 4.1. In response to initial discussions of the possible scope of the 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar networks review at the October 2005 meeting, JNCC had circulated a summary note to be approved for submission to the N2RSC.
- 4.2. There was a request to provide clear guidance on use of new population estimates for various purposes relating to the SPA network and designated sites in general and JNCC agreed that this would be included in the full scope of the review. It was commented that the review may need to tackle some of the 'grey' issues around policy that, to date, the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Forum had failed to resolve and that the summary should make reference to this potential broadening of scope.
- 4.3. The possible scope suggests inclusion of broader subjects related to the SPA network, such as coherence, and it was noted that the development of thinking on these kinds of subjects may touch on policy issues that would require input from the N2RSC and N2RForum.
- 4.4. The summary note will not be published on the JNCC website until after consideration by the N2RSC.

5. Treatment of mixed waterbird populations: decision of Ramsar CoP9 (JNCC paper (uncoded)/DAS)

- 5.1. A number of changes to the Ramsar selection criteria had been agreed at the last Conference of Parties (Kenya 2005). Of specific relevance to birds were changes to Criteria 2, 5 and 6. It was clarified that Criterion 5 applies to assemblages of 20,000 individual waterbirds of a single species, as well as multi-species assemblages. Under Criterion 6, additional guidance on treatment of mixed populations was agreed: where mixed populations occur and are inseparable in the field, the larger of the relevant 1% thresholds for the species should be used to identify sites of international importance.
- 5.2. The Group agreed that these changes should be taken into account in the 2008-2010 review, including the need for amendment to the SPA selection guidelines.
- 5.3. The JNCC paper will be published on the JNCC website.

6. International waterbird population estimates: progress of WPE4 (JNCC oral briefing/DAS)

- 6.1. Wetlands International had not been able to present the 4th edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* (WPE) to Ramsar CoP9 for adoption due to resource limitations. There remains insufficient support for production of this list, but a resolution was agreed at the AEWA MoP3 in Senegal 2005 that sets in motion the development of a multi-partner international funding consortium. Despite this, the 4th edition of WPE was largely completed and would be published in spring 2006. There is likely to be little change for the UK, but once available JNCC will make an assessment and present this to the subsequent meeting of the Group (possibly May 2006).

Action Point 06/1/2: JNCC to assess the implications of any changes in international waterbird population estimates in the 4th edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* and present this to a future meeting of the Group.

7. National population estimates: draft guidance on setting 1% thresholds for statutory use (JNCC paper SPAR_010206_2/HB)

- 7.1. The Group congratulated APEP (the Avian Population Estimates Panel) on publishing a new list of national population estimates in February 2006¹.
- 7.2. It was agreed that in deriving 1% thresholds from range estimates that the most appropriate method would depend on how the estimate had itself been derived and that each would need to be considered individually. The Group endorsed the principles outlined in the guidance and it was suggested that JNCC produce a revised paper for publication.
- 7.3. The Group had previously upheld the 'minimum of 50 rule' and agreed that this should still apply to wintering species with small populations, with exceptions only as specified in the agreed rule. However, JNCC agreed to look at those species with populations of <5,000 individuals to assess whether any additional species might need to be exempted from the 'minimum of 50 rule'.
- 7.4. JNCC agreed to add a 'best single estimate' to the spreadsheet of estimates published on the JNCC website in May 2006.
- 7.5. The JNCC paper will be published, once agreed by the SCAs, along with a list of 1% thresholds for statutory use on the JNCC website in May 2006.

8. Site provision index: update on progress (oral briefing/DAS & GW)

- 8.1. Following on from the work presented to the Group in May 2005, additional work had been done to develop a site provision index for general application, but this had not yet been completed. A paper will be presented to the Group in May 2006.
- 8.2. Some changes to the approach had been made – removal of trend as a factor and the addition of a factor designed to represent network coherence for migratory species. The next step was to test the new index, including with various methods of weighting factors, and then rationalise the outcomes. Whatever the final proposed index comprises, it was agreed that it would be recommended to the N2RSC for adoption as guidance only and not a prescriptive way to assess SPA provision. To aid in testing the index, JNCC & RSPB would produce a questionnaire and circulate to the Group prior to the May 2006 meeting.
- 8.3. It was agreed that this approach should be fully developed and tested for the terrestrial part of the network prior to consideration of a similar index for marine SPA provision – it was recognised that an approach for marine provision might be different.

Action Point 06/1/3: JNCC & RSPB to finalise the site provision index and present it to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.

9. Marine SPAs: modelling Red-throated Diver occurrence in inshore waters in the breeding season (JNCC PowerPoint presentation/BD)

¹ Baker *et al.* 2006. Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. *British Birds* 99: 25-44.

- 9.1. JNCC presented the results of the pilot work done in 2003-05 to assess the use of inshore waters by breeding Red-throated Divers. Three field methods had been tried: boat-based surveys, land-based observations of flight lines, and radio-telemetry. Boat-based surveys gave good data on use of waters, but did not allow reference to breeding areas. Flight line observations required considerable manpower to provide sufficient data, but this method provided useful data that allowed a link to be made between specific breeding areas and marine waters. Radio-telemetry had proven difficult, required intensive field work and was expensive.
- 9.2. The general conclusions were that site-specific study of use of inshore waters by Red-throated Divers in the breeding season would not be feasible and so a modelling technique, based on current knowledge, was developed. The model used information about habitat preference (water depth and sediment type) and distance to nesting location to define areas that were likely to be favoured. When tested against existing data (not used in the model) the model performed well, but more work will be required in 2006/07 to further validate it.
- 9.3. The Group agreed that the JNCC model showed considerable promise and should be further developed: JNCC will brief the Group on further validation of the model at a future meeting. It was noted that the 1994 national survey of breeding Red-throated Divers had complete coverage for both Shetland and Orkney, and that a new national survey was due in 2006. It was agreed that once finalised the model should be applied to the national dataset and not be limited to reviewing use of inshore waters around existing SPAs.
- 9.4. The Red-throated Diver presentation will not be made available on the JNCC website as this is work in progress.

Action Point 06/1/4: JNCC to brief the Group, following further field work in 2006/07, on the development of a model for assessing the use of inshore waters by Red-throated Divers in the breeding season.

10. Marine SPAs: update on progress and revised timetable/costs (JNCC oral briefing and paper MN2KPG9_11_SPATimetable/AW)

- 10.1. The Joint Committee formalised its advice to government on defining extensions to seabird colony SPAs in December 2005 (paper JNCC 05 P14B – available on JNCC website) – this concluded a strand of JNCC advisory work on marine SPAs that the SPAR SWG had been consulted on at several previous meetings.
- 10.2. JNCC is undertaking analysis of aerial surveys of the Moray Firth. Preliminary results suggested that the area may qualify for several species of diver and seaduck. However, divers occurred at lower density than in other areas already reviewed and so boundary determination would be based on an alternative method. The Moray Firth analysis has highlighted that habitat preference may be a valuable tool for aiding in determination of boundaries. The final analysis will be presented to the Group in May 2006.
- 10.3. Analysis of aerial data for the Greater Wash area had been initiated by JNCC, but additional data are to be collected for this area. Additional aerial surveys were planned for winter 2005/06 in the Thames and Liverpool Bay areas to cover new areas beyond previously surveyed ones.
- 10.4. The Group welcomed the updated timetable for marine SPA work. For offshore waters, the analysis of ESAS data being done for SEA will show gaps in coverage – there are no plans for further surveys at this stage. It was queried whether the current SEA approach was adequate, and suggested that the full scope of seabird surveillance needs should be outlined to government, including costs. It was noted that several organisations are

undertaking ecological surveys in offshore waters and that there may be potential for working with these to get future seabird surveys.

- 10.5. The marine SPA timetable is confidential and will not be published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 06/1/5: JNCC to present the results of the Moray Firth aerial survey analysis to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.

11. Bilateral discussions

- 11.1. EHS: Progressing two hen harrier sites that are expected to be classified at end of March 2006 – these will not be underpinned by ASSIs, but will rely on existing management mechanisms. Have contracted BTO to do further analysis of diving duck declines at Lough Neagh. Zebra Mussels are now present in Lough Neagh and effects being monitored. NI due to formally ratify all SPAs and Ramsar sites approved to date.
- 11.2. CCW: Working through the RSPB IBA/SPA report for Wales and have no major issues – awaiting results of CHIP for one site and two sites do not qualify. Have initiated boundary review for existing breeding Chough SPAs, based on agreed generic approach, but more work still to do. Reviewing one inland area for Chough outside of breeding period and may take a generic approach to boundary definition despite agreed guidance.
- 11.3. SNH: Main Board endorsed timetable for extending seabird colony SPAs into marine waters (see SNH website). Of 11 terrestrial areas under consideration: Anagach consultation has closed and will be reported to SE soon; Renfrew Heights is under consultation; four other areas have had briefs submitted to SE; three other areas (West Inverness Lochs, South Colonsay & Oronsay, and The Oa) are being considered by SNH Boards in March 2006 and briefs will then be submitted to SE in April/May; for two other areas (for Golden Eagle) the boundaries are under development. SNH has initiated a project with NGOs to survey for Short-eared Owls – will update Group in September 2006. Also, completed pilot work for Scottish Crossbill survey, but as yet there are no firm plans for a full survey (RSPB will circulate the results of the pilot work).
- 11.4. EN: formation of Natural England a primary concern and much uncertainty about staffing and responsibilities – teams should be formed by December 2006. No bilateral discussions with NGO since last meeting, but progressing nine sites. Liverpool Bay has been approved for consultation, which is likely to be April-October 2006. The SSSI underpinning the Nene Valley pSPA has been notified – pSPA consultation will be April-May 2006. Extension to Dungeness SPA likely, along with Ramsar designation, in April 2006. Other designations are likely to be delayed due to formation of Natural England. Currently planning implementation of the 2001 SPA Review and will also review RSPB IBA/SPA project in near future.

Action Point 06/1/6: RSPB to circulate to Group the results of the pilot Scottish Crossbill survey.

12. Any other matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting and discharge of actions

- 12.1. It was noted that consideration of casework science had been scheduled for this meeting, but had not been included. The Secretariat apologised for this oversight and the RSPB agreed to bring this area of work to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.
- 12.2. JNCC apologised for delay in bringing the final paper from CHIP to this meeting and will now bring this to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.

13. Work programme review

- 13.1. Secretariat to revise work programme and circulate to Group for May 2006 meeting: revision to include detail on 2008 review and a revision of the progress column.

14. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 14.1. 24th May 2006, SEERAD Edinburgh
- 14.2. 20th or 21st September 2006, RSPB Sandy (tbc)

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 5th October 2005 meeting (2005/3).

Revised work programme (version 19 – May 2006)

Approved 2005 Annual Report

Final note to the N2RSC on the possible scope of the 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar networks review

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2006/1, 1ST FEBRUARY 2006

Action Point Summary

(In Chronological order and not minute order, batched by work period or future meeting)

Actions from this meeting to be discharged prior to 24th May 2006 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to Secretariat by 5th May 2006)

Action Point 06/1/1: Chair to clarify the process of resolving issues raised within the Group's recommendations with the N2RSC.

Action Point 06/1/3: JNCC & RSPB to finalise the site provision index and present it to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.

Action Point 06/1/5: JNCC to present the results of the Moray Firth aerial survey analysis to the May 2006 meeting of the Group.

Action Point 06/1/6: RSPB to circulate to Group the results of the pilot Scottish Crossbill survey.

Actions from this meeting to be discharged at a later date:

Action Point 06/1/2: JNCC to assess the implications of any changes in international waterbird population estimates in the 4th edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates* and present this to a future meeting of the Group.

Action Point 06/1/4: JNCC to brief the Group, following further field work in 2006/07, on the development of a model for assessing the use of inshore waters by Red-throated Divers in the breeding season.