

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/3
5TH OCTOBER 2005
09.30 - 14.30 CCW, Maes-y-Ffynnon, Bangor

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (IB) (Chair) – SEERAD
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH
Gwyn Williams (GWi) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link
Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW
Andy Webb (AW) – JNCC

Gregor Watson (GWa) – EHS
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC
Peter Clement (PC) – EN
David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD
Jim Reid (JR) – JNCC

Apologies:

Trevor Salmon (Defra), Louise Vall (Defra), Ian Enlander (EHS), Lucy Adams (ABPmer), Jeremy Wilson (SEL), Andrew Clark (NFU), Colin Hedley (CLA), Peter Cranswick (WWT), Kate Jennings (EN), Diana Reynolds and Louise George (NAW).

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above.

2. Minutes of last meeting (25th May 2005, 2005/2)

2.1. The minutes of the 25th May 2005 meeting were accepted with two minor changes: a typographic correction in 5.4, and the following insertion (italicised) at 6.6 - ... Scotland opted to use the National Envelope for the beef sector *at the last CAP round*.

General Items

3. Marine SPAs: results of radio-telemetry study of rafting behaviour in Manx Shearwaters (JNCC PowerPoint presentation/AW)

3.1. JNCC presented an overview of results of radio-telemetry studies of Manx Shearwater rafting behaviour at Skomer (data collected 2003), Rum (2004) and Bardsey (2005). Around 30 radios were fitted to birds in each colony – the radios did not affect breeding performance. Spatial data were analysed by kernel contour analysis to determine home ranges. At Skomer, the 95% confidence interval of the kernel core was at 4 km from the island shore, and there were insufficient data to be able to determine whether nesting location on the island influenced range. At Rum, the 95% confidence interval of the kernel core (excluding satellites) was at 6 km from the island shore. Anecdotal evidence suggests that birds raft all around the island. At Bardsey, the 95% confidence interval of the kernel core (excluding satellites) was at 9 km from the island shore. There was evidence that birds also fed in waters around the island during the day, but these data were not included in the rafting analysis. Ranges around each island were not correlated with the number of registrations – at each the patterns of distribution were consistent from sub-samples of the data. The only

generic guidance that can be taken from the analysis was that a minimum requirement for protecting rafting waters was 4 km from shore.

- 3.2. Group discussion focused on data sufficiency, especially whether the single season's data for each colony was enough to draw conclusions on regularity of use or whether the extent in the one year was truly representative. JNCC recognised that there were limitations to the data, but it would not be possible without considerable additional funds and time to do repeat surveys at colonies or cover other colonies, or carry out surveys at other times of the year. JNCC's recommendation was that the existing data should be used to guide boundary placement. However, a number of further analyses using the current data were suggested that would test robustness of the within-year patterns of distribution.
- 3.3. Discussions on boundaries emphasised that JNCC policy on setting boundaries already exists and would be followed, and that judgements on boundary placement for Manx Shearwaters would be guided by the locations within existing SPAs of nesting areas.
- 3.4. It was noted that the UK supports the majority of the world population of Manx Shearwater, and suggested that this should dictate a precautionary approach to setting boundaries to protect rafting areas. For this reason it was agreed that whilst a minimum extent of 4 km should be proposed for use for Skomer, and other colonies that will not be studied in the short term, the boundaries selected at Rum and Bardsey should be colony-specific and based on the current analyses. The Group also agreed that repeat surveys at the three colonies and survey at Copeland would add to understanding of the species rafting behaviour and protection requirements.

Action Point 05/3/1: JNCC Aberdeen to consider the feasibility and value of performing additional tests of the robustness of their analyses of Manx Shearwater radio-telemetry data and to present any further work to the Group as an information paper.

4. Marine SPAs: results from the Thames Estuary aerial surveys (JNCC PowerPoint presentation/AW)

- 4.1. JNCC presented the results of aerial surveys of wintering seabird in the Thames Estuary. Eleven surveys had been done over the periods 1988/89 and 2001/02-2004/05. Estimates of numbers of several species show that only Red-throated Diver occurs in sufficient numbers to qualify under the SPA Selection Guidelines, and the average peak number of waterbirds of all species was too small to qualify as an assemblage.
- 4.2. The peak number of Red-throated Divers was 11,089 individuals in January 2003 and 99.3% of all diver registrations were identifiable as this species. Estimates from each survey exceeded the current 1% national threshold of 50 individuals. The national estimate is recognised as being too low and the real non-breeding population of this species in British waters is more likely to be 12,000-15,000 individuals, giving a tentative 1% threshold of 120. However, this latter estimate has not been peer reviewed or adopted for statutory use. Nevertheless, the 5-year peak mean for Red-throated Diver in the Thames Estuary area was 4,302 individuals (based on surveyed areas only). Application of the Marine Classification Criterion (MCC; Skov *et al.* 1995 – see also JNCC Report 325) gives a high degree of confidence that Red-throated Divers are sufficiently aggregated in the Thames Estuary area to warrant consideration of an SPA.
- 4.3. Distribution of Red-throated Divers in the Thames area was analysed using indicator (presence/absence) and ordinary (density) indicator kriging. Birds were most aggregated over banks within the Greater Thames. Survey coverage at the edge of this area was limited, but aggregations in these areas may be ephemeral. However, distribution within surveyed areas suggests that birds are present much further out to sea and certainly beyond the

currently surveyed areas. More surveys are required beyond the areas already surveyed. It is possible to make boundary recommendations, and these differ little with the inclusion of small satellites of high density occurrence, but any such boundary is likely to require amendment if additional surveys are undertaken.

- 4.4. The Group agreed that the Thames area supports a significant proportion of the British non-breeding population of Red-throated Diver, despite the relatively poor quality estimate of the total national population, and was supportive of the analysis techniques adopted. It also recognised that more survey work was necessary, but that this should not hold up further consideration of an SPA in the Greater Thames area.

5. Scope of the 2008 SPA & Ramsar network review: initial ideas for discussion (JNCC paper SPAR_051005_2/HB)

- 5.1. JNCC introduced a draft paper on the possible scope of the 2008 SPA and Ramsar network review. The need for a further review was identified at establishment of the Group and was originally timetabled for publication in 2008 within the *Framework for future update of UK SPA network* (see Terms of Reference). The JNCC paper had adopted this timetable, but it was noted that Defra had requested that the review should start in 2008 and be published in 2010 (letter from Martin Capstick, 27 September 2004): JNCC will amend future drafts accordingly.
- 5.2. The JNCC paper proposes not to repeat the 2001 SPA network review, but to build on this through application of both its own decisions and those of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC). The Group was supportive of this as a general approach and agreed that the focus of the review should be to identify real conservation gains.
- 5.3. It was noted by RSPB that there remain significant discrepancies between the IBA and SPA networks and that the 2008 review should attempt to narrow the gap. In particular, finalising the site provision index work should be a priority to inform the 2008 review – this will help clarify the list of species for which full network review will be beneficial. The Group noted that ongoing bilateral work would have to be taken into consideration in the review, as this work was tackling the gaps identified by the RSPB's IBA/SPA project.
- 5.4. Concerns were noted over the consideration of 'grey' areas – where science and policy overlap – as the SPAR SWG had had difficulty in its discussions. RSPB commented that it had been disappointed in the lack of resolution of 'grey' areas within the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Forum.
- 5.5. Several organisations noted that the marine SPA work was now the priority for further development of the SPA network. The 2008 review could provide a means to consolidate guidance on marine SPAs, but would not be a full review of marine SPAs.
- 5.6. It was agreed that the paper needed further development, and comments from the Group were invited. It was also agreed that JNCC would produce a short briefing for the February meeting of the N2RSC outlining major points and objectives – this briefing will be circulated to the Group in November 2005 to allow comment and sign-off.
- 5.7. As the JNCC paper was a very first draft for discussion and contained errors in timetabling it will not be published on the JNCC website until substantially revised later in 2006.

Action Point 05/3/2: JNCC to present to the Group a more detailed paper on the scope of the 2008 review in late 2006.

Action Point 05/3/3: JNCC to prepare a short briefing for the N2RSC on the scope of the 2008 review for February 2006 – to be circulated to the SPAR SWG for comment and sign-off in November 2005.

6. Cropped Habitats Information Project: summary paper of species accounts and initial conclusions (JNCC paper SPAR_051005_3/HB)

- 6.1. JNCC had circulated the first draft of the final paper on the Cropped Habitats Information Project (CHIP). However, this had been done too late to allow for useful discussion and so comments on the conclusions of the paper were invited by the end of October 2005. JNCC agreed to present a second draft to the February 2006 meeting of the Group.

Action Point 05/3/4: Members to send JNCC comments on the first draft of the final CHIP paper by the end of October 2005.

Action Point 05/3/5: JNCC to prepare a second draft of the final CHIP paper for the February 2006 meeting of the Group.

Species Items

7. Peregrine: brief update on progress with analysis of the 2002 National Survey (JNCC update/HB)

- 7.1. JNCC has drawn up a draft specification for analysis of the 2002 national survey data for peregrine and had discussed this with the BTO. The specification relies on availability of geo-referenced data (to the 4 or 6-digit grid reference) and BTO does not hold all of the national survey data in this form. JNCC will liaise with BTO and Raptor Study Groups to collate and analyse the relevant data, and aims to present this to the Group in late summer 2006.

8. Bilateral discussions

- 8.1. EHS is preparing papers for two Hen Harrier SPAs and will bring further briefing to the February 2006 meeting of the Group.
- 8.2. CCW is progressing Chough issues and is in discussion with RSPB on other areas.
- 8.3. SNH is progressing well the additional 11 areas identified by the Minister earlier this year and is considering a few other Golden Eagle areas. A pilot survey for Short-eared Owl is in planning and should take place early Spring 2006 – a short briefing will be given at the February 2006 meeting.
- 8.4. Upper Nene Valley and Liverpool Bay pSPAs have been submitted to Defra. Awaiting an announcement on Breckland pSPA.

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

- 9.1. It was agreed that action points 05/2/1, 3, 5 & 6 (from the May 2005 meeting) will be taken forward during 2006.

10. Work programme review

- 10.1. Secretariat to revise work programme and circulate to Group for February 2006 meeting: revision to include detail on 2008 review.

11. Any other business

- 11.1. The first annual report from the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme has been published.

12. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 12.1. 1st February 2006, EN Peterborough
- 12.2. 24th or 25th May 2006 (tbc), SEERAD Edinburgh

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 25th May 2005 meeting (2005/2).
Revised work programme (version 17-Dec 2005)

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/3, 5TH OCTOBER 2005

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 1st February 2006 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to Secretariat by 17th January 2006)

Action Point 05/3/3: JNCC to prepare a short briefing for the N2RSC on the scope of the 2008 review for February 2006 – to be circulated to the SPAR SWG for comment and sign-off in November 2005.

Action Point 05/3/4: Members to send JNCC comments on the first draft of the final CHIP paper by the end of October 2005.

Action Point 05/3/5: JNCC to prepare a second draft of the final CHIP paper for the February 2006 meeting of the Group.

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

Action Point 05/3/1: JNCC Aberdeen to consider the feasibility and value of performing additional tests of the robustness of their analyses of Manx Shearwater radio-telemetry data and to present any further work to the Group as an information paper.

Action Point 05/3/2: JNCC to present to the Group a more detailed paper on the scope of the 2008 review in late 2006.