

# UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

**MEETING 2006/2**  
**21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006**  
09.30 - 14.40 RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy

## Approved Minutes

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### **Present (around table):**

Ian Bainbridge (IB) (Chair) – SEERAD  
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC  
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC  
Richard Evans (RE) – SEL/RSPB  
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of  
Wildlife & Countryside Link  
Nigel Buxton (NEB) – SNH  
Kate Jennings (KJ) – EN  
Jim Reid (JR) – JNCC

Ian Enlander (IE) – EHS  
Bob Ford (BF) – Defra

### **Via teleconference:**

Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW  
Sue O'Brien (SO) – JNCC

### **Apologies:**

Louise Vall (Defra), Lucy Adams (ABPmer), Jeremy Wilson (SEL), Diana Reynolds, Louise George, Wendy Twell (NAW), David Mallon, Steven Dora (SEERAD), Andy Webb (JNCC)

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## **1. Introductions and apologies**

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above.

## **2. Minutes of last meeting (1<sup>st</sup> February 2006, 2006/1)**

2.1. The minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006 meeting were accepted without change and will be published on the JNCC website.

## **3. 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar (avian) networks review: detailed proposed scope (JNCC paper SPAR\_210906\_1/HB)**

3.1. This paper followed an initial JNCC briefing presented to the Group in October 2005, which was also sent to the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC) for information. The primary aim of the current paper was to explicitly describe the policy relevance of the proposed review and provide additional information on its possible scope.

3.2. It was agreed that it was crucial to secure a commitment from government to implement outcomes of another review before developing ideas further. A cover note to the paper for N2RSC should seek clarification of the purpose of the review and the process for implementation. It was also agreed that the cover paper needed to clearly define the role of the review in light of the ongoing decision making process via the SPAR SWG, N2RForum and N2RSC.

3.3. It was noted that the October 2005 paper included some species detail that this paper lacked – it was agreed to include that detail to make it clear which species would receive full review. It was requested that provision of SPAs in the marine environment be given a

clearer profile. The paper lacked any guidance on prioritisation and it was agreed that this should be added.

3.4. It was agreed that a revised and more detailed paper was required for the next meeting of the Group. However, it was noted that the timetable was tight and that engagement of the N2RSC was needed in the short-term. It was therefore agreed that the current paper will be presented to the N2RSC with a cover note touching on issues identified above and also setting out next steps from the SPAR SWG.

3.5. This is ongoing work and so the paper will not be published on the JNCC website.

**Action Point 06/2/1: Group members to send comments on the 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar (avian) Networks Review paper to JNCC by 15 October 2006.**

**Action Point 06/2/2: JNCC to draft a cover note to N2RSC on the 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar (avian) Networks Review. Draft to be circulated to Group for comment by 6<sup>th</sup> October and members to return comments by 15<sup>th</sup> October 2006. Cover note and paper to be submitted to N2RSC for decision by 27<sup>th</sup> October 2006.**

**4. Casework science: implications of scientific aspects of case law for development of the SPA network (RSPB paper SPAR\_210906\_4 and PowerPoint presentation/GW)**

4.1. The RSPB presentation provided an overview of the regulatory issues around SPAs, pSPAs, areas outside of sites but used regularly by the birds for which the site has been identified, and areas outside of sites used only irregularly. It raised the question of what was an adequate site boundary given the ecological requirements of the birds and suggested that the Cropped Habitats Information Project would be a valuable assessment for further evaluating boundary determination principles.

4.2. It was noted that site designation was not appropriate for wider countryside management and that other adequate measures exist. However, it was questioned as to whether current planning policy is adequate and whether appropriate assessments were being made at the appropriate ecological level (wider than the individual site).

**5. CHIP: discussion on final paper and recommendations, and way forward (JNCC paper SPAR\_210906\_2/HB)**

5.1. It was noted that more information was available on a number of species and agreed that the species reviews for hen harrier, merlin and oystercatcher be updated, especially in relation to data from Northern Ireland for the former two species. It was also agreed that the species/management system matrix in Table 2 be expanded to include habitat descriptions and that species could be listed in Table 1 by habitat groups. The addition of a table outlining conservation priorities was suggested.

5.2. It was queried whether we knew what approaches had been taken elsewhere in Europe. JNCC had made an attempt to review this previously (see papers for September 2002 meeting), but data held centrally were inadequate. Some countries had included extensive areas of cropped habitats in SPAs, but others had largely excluded such habitats. It was noted that there was debate elsewhere in Europe of this issue and that the UK approach could be shared with other MSs.

5.3. The content of the cover note for N2RSC submission was discussed and JNCC agreed to draft this for comment at the Group's next meeting. In particular, it was felt necessary to emphasise that the recommendations were not intended to preserve unsustainable agricultural management.

**Action Point 06/2/3: Group members to provide JNCC with any additional comments on the CHIP paper by 24 November 2006.**

**Action Point 06/2/4: JNCC to revise the CHIP paper and produce a final draft for circulation. Also, to draft a cover note for N2RSC submission and seek comment via next SPAR SWG meeting (note and paper to be submitted to N2RSC in May 2007).**

**6. Re-introduced species: status of White-tailed Eagle in UK (confidential paper SPAR\_210906\_3/RE)**

- 6.1. RE presented a confidential paper on the history and current status of the white-tailed eagle in Scotland (due to time constraints the paper had not yet been approved by the Sea-eagle Project Team or the RSPB).
- 6.2. Over last ten years there has been an annual rate of increase of around 10%, with the proportion of wild-bred birds increasing rapidly; in 2006 80% of breeding birds had been born in the wild in Scotland. After initial spread from re-introductions and early nesting successes the distribution has remained fairly constant with new birds mainly 'in-filling' suitable vacant territories within this range; there are several inland territories now established. It is estimated that around 30% of potentially suitable territories in NW Scotland are now occupied. White-tailed eagles show a preference for lowland areas close to water, which is in contrast to golden eagles. There are currently five distinct clusters of birds with 36 territories occupied in 2006. Once established a territory tends to remain occupied with rapid replacement of lost birds.
- 6.3. Five territories occupied in 2006 were within the SPA network, but no SPAs have yet been classified for this Annex I species. A further six nesting locations were in SACs. Areas of highest white-tailed eagle density do not correspond with the Natura 2000 network.
- 6.4. The growth of the population and stability of occupied territories suggests that west Scotland provides suitable habitat to establish a self-sustaining population of white-tailed eagles and over the short- to medium-term the areas now occupied are likely to remain important.
- 6.5. The Group discussed territory occupancy and range expansion, recognising that some areas within the range are likely to remain in use in the long-term but that there is considerable potential for new areas to be colonised. The potential to develop a home range model, as has been done with golden eagle, was discussed, but foraging areas are extensive and highly variable. The issue of persecution and confidentiality was raised in the context of site designation, but it was agreed that this would require further discussion. It was agreed to invite the Sea-eagle Project Team (SEPT) to do a finer scale analysis of home range occupancy for Mull and Skye birds.
- 6.6. RE agreed to report to SEPT in November 2006 and suggest the idea of a research project. The Chair agreed to write to RE summarising the views of the SPAR SWG.

**Action Point 06/2/5: Chair to write to Secretary of the Sea-eagle Project Team summarising discussion in SPAR SWG and inviting thoughts on feasibility of an analysis of the Mull and Skye data to show occupancy history and home range characteristics.**

**7. Marine SPAs: Red-throated diver population estimate and Home Range Analysis (JNCC PowerPoint presentations/SO & JR)**

- 7.1. JNCC presented a paper on the methods used to derive a new estimate for wintering red-throated divers in British waters. Data from a wide range of years have been used, but assurance was given that the majority of data were from recent surveys and that older data were being used only for areas with relatively few birds and which have not been surveyed recently; these were the only data available for these areas. It was queried whether we knew anything about trends in numbers, but apart from an apparent slight change in distribution over the last few decades, the older data are insufficient to allow estimate of change in abundance.
- 7.2. The paper was currently being reviewed by two independent specialists and JNCC agreed to submit a revised paper for endorsement to the February 2007 meeting. It was agreed that the N2RSC should be apprised following SPAR SWG consideration. The Inter-agency Ornithologists' Working Group would be asked to sign-off the new estimate for operational use by the agencies and JNCC will submit the paper for journal publication.
- 7.3. JNCC presented an overview of application of home range analysis to red-throated diver aerial survey data. Not all aerial survey data can be analysed by the kriging techniques used previously and so the outcomes of home range analysis, which estimates the probability of presence across the survey area from observational data, had been tested. JNCC demonstrated that home range analysis was an adequate alternative method for describing areas where red-throated divers were likely to be present if kriging was not possible.
- 7.4. The Group discussed the technique, which was developed to analyse the behaviour of individual birds, and was appraised of the peer review process to date. However, the Group agreed that it would be valuable to have other expert input on whether this method was suitable for sparse data. JNCC was requested to provide an update on developments at a future meeting.

**Action Point 06/2/6: JNCC to send its finalised red-throated diver population estimate paper to SPAR SWG in February 2007 for endorsement of approach.**

**Action Point 06/2/7: JNCC to update the SPAR SWG on the use of home range analysis of aerial survey data at a future meeting.**

## **8. Bilateral discussions**

- 8.1. EHS has classified four new SPAs and is in discussion with RSPB about protection mechanisms for two of these sites. The latest report from the BTO on the Loch Neagh study now suggests that declines in diving ducks are site-related, but the drivers of change have still not been identified. A research workshop on Loch Neagh is planned for November 2006.
- 8.2. CCW is still awaiting chough data from RSPB.
- 8.3. SNH is consulting on five new SPAs.
- 8.4. Breckland SPA was being classified today and consultation on the Upper Nene will start early October 2006. NE has started an informal consultation over Liverpool Bay pSPA. NE has had a bilateral meeting with RSPB and agreed some priorities on progression of the work arising from the IBA/SPA comparison undertaken by the RSPB. In a number of cases further action will depend on the outcomes of generic policy work of the SPAR SWG arising from the 2001 SPA Review (for example, cropped habitats).

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

- 9.1. It was agreed to action APs 06/1/1, 06/1/3 and 06/1/5 prior to the February 2007 meeting (included in action summary below) and that RE would request that RSPB action AP 06/1/6 (see February 2006 minutes).
- 9.2. A query on the status of publication of national 1% thresholds derived from the APEP06 list (published February 2006) was raised. JNCC had prepared rules, which SPAR SWG had commented on, and was awaiting approval from the Agencies' Chief Scientists' Group.

## **10. Work programme review**

- 10.1. Secretariat to revise work programme and circulate to Group for February 2007 meeting.

## **11. Any other business**

- 11.1. A recent opinion from the Advocate General on Birds Directive implementation in Ireland was noted and possible implications for UK, especially with regard to SPA provision for dispersed species like kingfisher. It was noted that Defra is seeking legal advice on this opinion and may request some work from SPAR SWG in future. The ORNIS Committee was due to meet in October 2006 and presented a chance to gauge the Commission's position: JNCC will provide feedback.
- 11.2. Attendance of meetings from industry side remained poor and Chair agreed to write to members to encourage participation. Chair also agreed to write to Chief Executive of WaterUK to seek a new representative. In addition, it was agreed that a representative from the marine team at Defra be invited to join the Group: Defra to action.

**Action Point 06/2/8: Chair to write to members from industry side to encourage participation and to write to Chairman of WaterUK to seek new representative.**

**Action Point 06/2/9: Defra to invite a member of their marine team to become a member of the Group and to provide Secretariat with details.**

## **12. Dates and venues of next meetings**

- 12.1. 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007, SEERAD
- 12.2. 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2007, EHS, Northern Ireland

### **Attachments:**

Approved minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2006 (2006/1).

# UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2006/2, 21<sup>ST</sup> SEPTEMBER 2006

## Action Point Summary

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

**Actions to be discharged prior to 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007 meeting:**  
**(Papers to be submitted to Secretariat by 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007)**

**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 (revised):** JNCC & RSPB to finalise the site provision index and present it to the February 2007 meeting of the Group.

**Action Point 06/1/5 (revised):** JNCC to present the results of the Moray Firth aerial survey analysis to the February 2007 meeting of the Group.

**Action Point 06/2/1:** Group members to send comments on the 2008-2010 SPA & Ramsar (avian) Networks Review paper to JNCC by 15 October 2006.

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**Action Point 06/2/8:** Chair to write to members from industry side to encourage participation and to write to Chairman of WaterUK to seek new representative.

**Action Point 06/2/9:** Defra to invite a member of their marine team to become a member of the Group and to provide Secretariat with details.

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

**Action Point 06/2/7:** JNCC to update the SPAR SWG on the use of home range analysis of aerial survey data at a future meeting.