

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/2

25TH MAY 2005

09.30 - 15.30 JNCC, Monkstone House, Peterborough

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

David Stroud (DAS) (Acting Chair) – JNCC
Jim Reid (JR) - JNCC
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC

Lucy Adams (ABPmer)
Jeremy Wilson (SEL)
David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD
Ben Fraser (BF) - EN
Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW (by video
conference)

Apologies:

Ian Bainbridge (Chair; SEERAD), Trevor Salmon (Defra), Louise Vall (Defra), Ian Enlander (EHS),
Trish Fretten (NAW), Andrew Clark (NFU), Colin Hedley (CLA), Peter Cranswick (WWT).

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above.

2. Minutes of last meeting (26th January 2005, 2005/1)

2.1. The minutes of the 26th January 2005 meeting were accepted without change.

General Items

3. Annual Report for 2004: response from N2RSC April 2005 meeting (Chair)

3.1. The Acting Chair had presented the 2004 Annual Report to the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC) at its meeting in April 2005. The majority of recommendations were accepted by the N2RSC. However, recommendation 1.6.1.5, relating to treatment of re-introduced/re-establishing species was referred back to the SPAR SWG for clarity of what was required. It was noted that, in a case from the Dutch high court that White-fronted geese re-introduced to Sweden that migrated to the Netherlands must be regarded as wild birds for the purpose of implementing the Birds Directive. RSPB suggested that the role of the SPAR SWG was being confused as this is a policy issue, and it had had concerns about this recommendation being included in the Annual Report.

Action Point 05/2/1: JNCC to produce an independent briefing for the N2RSC on policy regarding re-introduced/re-established species (RSPB offered to provide information).

4. Revision of national population estimates: the new APEP list and possible risks associated with new estimates (JNCC PowerPoint presentation)

4.1. JNCC gave an overview of the process for revision of the list of national population estimates being undertaken by the Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP) and due to be published this summer. A simple analysis of possible risks associated with using the new

estimates was provided. JNCC and the SCAs will use the new list for statutory purposes once published.

- 4.2. The Group agreed that revisions to the listing of national population estimates by APEP needed to be properly resourced. Concerns were raised over the 3-year cycle of review – both whether it was realistic and also that sourcing estimates for statutory purposes from the list would restrict timely use of new estimates, especially for SCARABBS species. JNCC agreed that some flexibility was required, but that *ad hoc* use of new estimates should be restricted to rare special cases that related to clear operational priority.
- 4.3. The Group agreed that best practice should be to source all estimates from peer review literature, but that where methods had been previously peer reviewed then any new estimates derived from the same method could be used without full peer review being needed. It was noted that journal publication of population estimates has become difficult and it was suggested that alternative methods of peer review should be considered.

5. Marine SPAs: update on survey priorities and other progress (JNCC)

- 5.1. The survey priorities paper¹ that the Group had discussed in January 2005 had been revised in light of comments, but reference to ‘ecological coherence’ had been retained. JNCC was waiting for information from EN before finalising the list of areas in the paper and then sending it to N2RSC (prior to doing a public consultation).
- 5.2. The marine SPA timetable had been revised as JNCC has a new member of staff (funded in part by SNH and EN) who will focus on analysis of the aerial survey work. JNCC is still waiting for some data from industry for the Thames, but intends reporting on its analysis by June 2005. Analysis to-date for the Thames suggests that the survey area was not extensive enough and that further concentrations of Red-throated divers occur outside of the survey area – further survey will be done in 2005/06. The case for including Red-throated divers in the Liverpool Bay pSPA is still under consideration by CCW Directors, but has been endorsed by the Chief Scientists’ Group.
- 5.3. The next JNCC Marine Natura Project Group (MNPG) meeting is 26th May 2005 and JNCC will present a paper on the indicative schedule and costs for completing survey, analysis and advice for all strands of the marine SPA work. This is provisionally a 6-year programme, ending in 2011/12, at a total cost of around £2,115,500.
- 5.4. RSPB is concerned that the ESAS data may not be adequate for defining offshore marine SPAs. JNCC needs to do the full analysis before such an assessment can be made and for the moment JNCC is not considering additional surveys.
- 5.5. JNCC tabled a draft paper on ‘ecological coherence’, which explored the definition under the Habitats Directive and suggests that it also applies to the SPA network and should influence the development of marine SPAs. SEERAD considers this to be a legal or policy debate and, as there is no legal certainty on the definition of what is meant by the terms used in the Habitats Directive, would prefer that the terminology used accurately reflects that in the nature Directives. It was suggested that JNCC could develop scientific thinking on what the terms within the nature Directives might mean and that the paper tabled here would be a good starting point. The draft paper will not be published on the JNCC website.

¹ Reid, J. Developing the UK network of SPAs in the marine environment: immediate priorities for further work.

Action Point 05/2/2: JNCC to keep SPAR SWG briefed on the progress of the marine SPA survey priorities paper and to circulate the schedule/costs paper after endorsement by the MNPG.

Species Items

6. Chough: report from sub-group (JNCC briefing)

- 6.1. JNCC introduced its paper summarising the findings of the Chough sub-group. The paper was in three sections – the first relating to existing SPA provision and other conservation issues, the second relating to boundary definition and the third to the adequacy of the UK SPA suite.
- 6.2. Evidence supporting the use of a generic radius approach (of 1 km) around nest sites to help define boundary placement was consistent between different locations and the Group had a high level of confidence that this approach would be robust across the UK. Habitats within 1 km radius of a nest were likely to provide a minimum core foraging area (important foraging areas do occur at >1km in some situations in Scotland), but it was agreed that the approach would be a pragmatic solution to boundary definition.
- 6.3. It was queried whether the data from Wales on foraging behaviour during the non-breeding period were likely to apply to Scottish birds. Limited consideration to date of data from Scottish sites has suggested this is probably the case.
- 6.4. It was noted that care was needed in use of the term ‘non-breeding’ for Chough as the population in the breeding season includes flocks of non-breeding birds (juveniles), whereas the term is usually used in reference to birds outside of the breeding period (formerly referred to as winter). It was also noted that SPA provision for flocks of non-breeding birds in the breeding season would be difficult to assess due to less predictable foraging and roosting behaviour than seen outside of the breeding season. It is likely that non-breeding Chough in the breeding season will benefit from SPAs for breeding birds and it may be possible, with current data, to assess this. It was agreed that ongoing SCA-funded studies should be asked to consider tackling this assessment.
- 6.5. The Group agreed on the principles outlined in the paper for defining Chough SPA boundaries and congratulated the sub-group on this work.
- 6.6. The issue of wider countryside management was discussed. In Wales, Tir Gofal doesn't lend itself well to many species-specific prescriptions and the benefits to Chough will be limited to coastal grazing; there are concerns that current reduction in stocking levels (as a result of CAP reform) will be detrimental to Welsh Choughs. In Scotland, generic agri-environment provisions do not readily allow species-specific prescriptions for chough – these are better delivered through the Natural Care programme, or through individual management agreements. SNH also currently has management agreements with individual farmers. However, Scotland opted to use the National Envelope for the beef sector at the last CAP round and this is likely to be beneficial to Chough as it encourages retention of stock. In Northern Ireland, agri-environment provisions have been developed for Chough.
- 6.7. It was recognised that agri-environment issues are devolved matters and policy debate outside of the remit of the Group, but it was also noted that communicating species-specific requirements is a key part of informing any debate on the further development of schemes; for Chough, the species’ management requirements could be agreed and communicated at the UK level by the SPAR SWG. However, national implementation remains the role of the devolved administrations and their agencies. The sub-group had set out to explore the balance between SPA provision and wider countryside delivery of measures for Chough

conservation, and it was agreed that the conclusions need to be presented to the N2RSC for consideration. However, the advice paper needs to further clarify the role of wider countryside measures and make it clear that targeted measures are the key mechanism for this species; several suggestions for amending the paper were made and JNCC agreed to reword section 5 accordingly.

- 6.8. The need for further guidance and action plans was discussed – most countries have or are developing Chough action plans and these will provide guidance on habitat needs and management. It was agreed that a UK forum for discussion of Chough conservation was not needed as long as the flow of scientific information between countries continues.
- 6.9. The adequacy of the SPA suite for Chough sits within the more general development of a concept note for the N2RSC and a separate paper (under agenda item 7) is relevant to Chough.
- 6.10. The SPAR SWG thanked the Chough sub-group for its excellent work and noted that at sign-off of its paper the sub-group was effectively disbanded.

Action Point 05/2/3: JNCC to revise its Chough briefing to clarify the term non-breeding, amend section 5 and incorporate conclusions on the SPA adequacy debate from the May 2005 meeting. JNCC to circulate revised briefing for sign-off and then publish on JNCC website.

General Items

7. Site provision index: further developments (JNCC briefing)

- 7.1. The JNCC briefing was welcomed and generated considerable debate. The Group agreed that the methods should be tested and further parameters and weightings tested, exploring real situations and the reasons why a particular species produces the score that it does. Other parameters should be explored according to the list in the SPA Review (Vol 1, p17) and both international responsibility and aggregation scoring further developed. Ultimately, the simplest combination of parameters that gives the most robust outcome should be included in the final model. It was queried whether trends were appropriate to define SPA provision or were more relevant to prioritisation of SPA provision and other measures.
- 7.2. RSPB stated that any indexing method should not be deterministic, but that it should be treated as guidance for assessing adequacy of SPA provision. The Group agreed that completion of the index work should be a high priority so that it could be used for the 2008 review. It was also agreed that a small sub-group be established to assist JNCC in developing the index (RSPB and SNH offered help).
- 7.3. The briefing will be annotated and published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 05/1/4: JNCC to develop a site provision index on basis of discussions at this meeting and bring a revised paper to a future meeting (February 2006 if possible).

Species Items

8. Spotted crane: draft advice note to N2RSC on status and SPA provision (JNCC)

- 8.1. JNCC tabled a draft advice note to conclude discussions on Spotted crane. The note reiterates that the British population is likely to be closed, and recent evidence suggests a serious decline in the population. There was some debate over whether those sites that have been key historical sites should be classified, but there was concern over whether historical

status is a good rationale for adding sites. RSPB stated that urgent action was required and that given the SPA Review had not been implemented that the addition of Spotted crane to existing SPAs could be done urgently as part of that process. The Group agreed that better monitoring at key sites should be sought over the next few years and it was suggested that a repeat national survey would be beneficial (last one was in 1999). It was agreed that the 2004 data would be important and that the advice note should be informed by these.

- 8.2. JNCC/RSPB will be submitting a paper to *Bird Study* soon on the status of Spotted cranes in the UK.

Action Point 05/2/5: JNCC to finalise Spotted crane advice note taking into consideration discussions at May 2005 meeting, 2004 survey data, and further exploring the international status of the species. Note to be agreed intra-sessionally, transmitted to the N2RSC and then published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 05/2/6: JNCC to discuss possibilities of a repeat national survey of Spotted crane with SCARABBS partners.

9. Bilateral discussions

- 9.1. EHS has commented on the RSPB IBA/SPA project outputs for Northern Ireland. An information note from EHS is also attached to these minutes (Appendix 1).
- 9.2. CCW is awaiting outcome of discussions at this meeting before further consideration of SPA provision for Chough in Wales. There are few other issues outstanding, but consideration of Greenland White-fronted goose will be dependent on CHIP outcomes.
- 9.3. SNH has approval from Scottish Ministers to progress 15 SPA additions in Scotland. Darnaway & Lethen Forest SPA was classified in April 2005 for Capercaillie.
- 9.4. Thames Basin Heaths SPA and an extension to Stour & Orwell Estuaries SPA were classified in March and May 2005 respectively. The case for the Upper Nene Valley is well progressed. EN and RSPB had a useful bilateral meeting and RSPB is revising some of its IBA/SPA report tables and will circulate a revised copy soon.
- 9.5. RSPB has produced a report on 25 years of Birds Directive and this will be launched soon – it will be sent to SPAR SWG members.

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

- 10.1. The report of the Birds Directive 25th Anniversary Conference has been published and is available for download:
(http://www9.minlnv.nl/servlet/page?_pageid=736&_dad=portal30&_schema=PORTAL30).
- 10.2. All immediate actions from the meeting of the 26th January 2005 were discharged, with the following exceptions/notes:
 - 10.2.1. AP05/1/3: concept note on achieving desirable conservation status of birds carried forward to October 2005.
 - 10.2.2. AP05/1/9: update on SPA Review implementation from N2RSC; discussed at April meeting, but will await minutes. Secretariat to circulate N2RSC minutes when available.

11. Work programme

- 11.1. Group agreed some revisions. See 10.2.1. JNCC briefing on Non-estuarine Waterbird Survey deferred to May 2006. Discussion of results of 2002 national peregrine survey deferred to October 2005. RSPB paper on casework science to be added to January 2006 agenda (paper already completed and sent to N2RSC). JNCC briefing on site provision index to be presented in January 2006. Secretariat to revise and circulate work programme with minutes of this meeting.

12. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 12.1. 5th October 2005, CCW Bangor
12.2. 1st February 2006, EN Peterborough

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 26th January 2005 meeting (2005/1).
Revised work programme (version 16-June 2005)

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2005/2, 25TH MAY 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 5th October 2005 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 15th September 2005)

Action Point 05/2/1: JNCC to produce an independent briefing for the N2RSC on policy regarding re-introduced/re-established species (RSPB offered to provide information).

Action Point 05/2/2: JNCC to keep SPAR SWG briefed on the progress of the marine SPA survey priorities paper and to circulate the schedule/costs paper after endorsement by the MNPG.

Action Point 05/2/3: JNCC to revise its Chough briefing to clarify the term non-breeding, amend section 5 and incorporate conclusions on the SPA adequacy debate from the May 2005 meeting. JNCC to circulate revised briefing for sign-off and then publish on JNCC website.

Action Point 05/2/5: JNCC to finalise Spotted crane advice note taking into consideration discussions at May 2005 meeting, 2004 survey data, and further exploring the international status of the species. Note to be agreed intra-sessionally, transmitted to the N2RSC and then published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 05/2/6: JNCC to discuss possibilities of a repeat national survey of Spotted crane with SCARABBS partners.

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 05/1/4: JNCC to develop a site provision index on basis of discussions at this meeting and bring a revised paper to a future meeting (February 2006 if possible).

APPENDIX 1

Information note from EHS for meeting of SPAR SWG, May 2005

No issues against agenda items. I would be grateful if you could note the following under bilateral discussions -

1. Meeting between EHS and RSPB in May to familiarise new RSPB staff with EHS's post-designation monitoring and management programmes. RSPB notified us of their forthcoming 'Safe and Sound' campaign highlighting the importance of government site designation and management programmes. This campaign will run 2005 - 2010.
2. Meeting between Forest Service Northern Ireland, EHS and RSPB to familiarise EHS ornithologists and RSPB with Forest Services operations in Northern Ireland, including their conservation programmes. This provided an opportunity to discuss in more detail the implications of the proposed Hen Harrier SPAs on Forest Service operations.
3. For information - meeting between National Parks and Wildlife Service (Republic of Ireland) and EHS to discuss cross-border issues in relation to the proposed Slieve Beagh Hen Harrier SPA. Some interesting differences in approach to boundary definition were highlighted.

Finally I would hope to be in a position to present our Hen Harrier SPA proposals to the next meeting in October.

Ian Enlander