

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2004/2

26TH MAY 2004

09.30 - 15.30 RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (Chair; IB) - SEERAD
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC
Jeremy Wilson (JW) – Scottish Environment
Link
Chris Spray (CS) – Water UK
David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH
Trevor Salmon (TS) – Defra
Louise Vall (LV) – Defra

Lucy Adams (LA) - ABPmer
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link
David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC
Ben Fraser (BF) - EN
Andy Webb (AW) - JNCC
Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW (by video
conference)

Apologies:

Gregor Watson (EHS), Andy Swash (Defra), Trish Fretten (NAW), Wendy Twell (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 meeting on 23rd September 2003 (2003/3)

2.1. The minutes were approved without further amendment, and will now be published on the JNCC website.

3. Minutes of last meeting (28th January 2004, 2004/1)

3.1. A number of amendments were agreed:

3.1.1. Action Point 1 to be reworded to read: ‘The Group to request that the Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Committee considers the mixture of measures implemented in the UK to meet the requirements of the Birds Directive in achieving desired conservation status of birds. To request that this consideration takes into account the risk of voluntary measures and aims to identify the need for additional SPAs, and to offer the assistance of the SPA SWG in undertaking this review.’

3.1.2. Under 4 add: 4.6: Secretariat to revise work programme to include Ramsar Review needs and circulate to the Group for information. Also, added to Action Point 4: Also, to circulate revised work programme prior to next meeting.

3.1.3. Minor changes to wording under 6.3, including change from ‘90% or 95%’ to ‘98% or 95%’, and 6.5 & 6.6. Under 6.4 delete the reference to ESAS.

3.1.4. Under 10.2 add: 'SNH and EN to present further analysis to the Group in September 2004.' Also, under 10.3 reword: 'It was noted that using the national 1% threshold (60 pairs) for this species was not in accord with the SPA Selection Guidelines.'

3.1.5. Last sentence of Action Point 16, beginning 'To also request ...', to be deleted.

3.1.6. Change 11.1 to read: 'Deferred pending data acquisition from WeBS.'

3.2. The minutes were approved with the agreed changes detailed above.

General Items

4. Annual Report for 2003

4.1. It was agreed that the Chair and Defra, with the help of the Secretariat, will produce a cover note to the Annual Report and a summary of the key work areas over the next 12 months to be presented to the Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC) along with the full Annual Report in June 2004.

4.2. It was also agreed that future Annual Reports will include a summary of significant work areas in the subsequent year.

4.3. Several minor edits were agreed and the report approved for submission to the N2RSC. The report will be published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 1: Chair and Defra, with help of Secretariat, to produce cover note and summary of next 12 months work for presentation to the Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Committee with the 2003 Annual Report in June 2004.

5. Ramsar Review (JNCC Report)

5.1. In addition to the JNCC report (Comparison of the UK Ramsar network against the UK SPA and IBA networks: discussion report. May 2004), a letter from Defra to the SPAR SWG Chair, the UK interpretation of the Ramsar Criteria and a Ramsar Review Steering Group (RRSG) consultation report were circulated to the Group prior to the meeting.

5.2. The Group discussed prioritisation of Ramsar Review work and agreed that SPA network development remains of higher priority. However, there remains a commitment to the Ramsar Review and to report to the next CoP (9) in November 2005. For avian issues, Defra indicated that although the review process should be complete for reporting in the UK National Report to CoP9, that any implementation of the review is likely to be after the CoP. SEERAD and SNH re-iterated that a formal position statement on Ramsar had been sent to the Ramsar Committee and that this remained in place.

5.3. The Group agreed that the RRSG consultation had raised some issues that could not be addressed by the review, specifically turn-over of waterbirds during migration and definition of ecological units. However, it was suggested that one issue – that of use of new population estimates – would benefit from some guidance.

5.4. The Group agreed two actions to clarify the procedure required to finalise advice to the N2RSC (detailed below).

Action Point 2: Members to send comments on the JNCC Ramsar Review report to the Secretariat by 30th July 2004.

Action Point 3: Sub-group of SPAR SWG (IB, TS, DAS & HB) to review comments on the Ramsar Review report and produce final report to the Group for September 2004 meeting. Secretariat to arrange meeting of sub-group in mid-August 2004.

6. Marine SPAs (JNCC Report)

- 6.1. JNCC has done additional work on developing guidelines for extensions to breeding seabird colonies; specifically on fulmar, gulls and red-throated diver.
- 6.2. The JNCC Report (Generic guidelines for seaward boundary extensions to existing northern fulmar breeding colony SPAs. May 2004) provides results of the additional fieldwork done in 2003 on fulmar distribution around colonies. These demonstrate that fulmars make significant use of up to 2 km of open water from the colony for maintenance behaviours and the recommendation is that fulmar SPAs should be extended out to 2 km into marine waters. The work was based on study at two colonies and the Group queried whether this was adequate. The results are highly consistent and similar to patterns for auks, hence, JNCC is confident that a 2 km extension as a generic approach is appropriate. Fulmar frequently qualifies only as part of an assemblage and the Group agreed that guidance was needed on adopting seaward extensions for assemblage species.
- 6.3. The Group agreed that a 2 km SPA extension into marine waters for fulmar was appropriate, but that if any additional data become available in future they should also be considered.
- 6.4. JNCC had also reviewed information available on use of inshore waters by gulls (Do gulls use coastal waters for maintenance activities? JNCC, Sep 2003). This review showed that gulls make little use of inshore waters during the breeding period, but information is relatively poor. JNCC recommends that coastal SPAs for breeding gulls are not extended to cover maintenance activities.
- 6.5. The 2003 research on red-throated divers had shown that generic guidance for extending SPAs for breeding birds may be appropriate, but the work was insufficient to draw any confident conclusions. Further field work will take place in 2004.
- 6.6. The JNCC reports mentioned above will be published on the JNCC website.

Action Point 4: JNCC (DAS & AW) to draft guidance on adoption of seaward SPA extensions for species listed solely within breeding seabird assemblages.

7. Common Standards Monitoring (JNCC PowerPoint presentation)

- 7.1. JNCC gave a short PowerPoint presentation on the Birds Common Standards Monitoring Guidance. The Group briefly discussed the problem of conflicts in SPA management, the risk associated with setting and adjustment of baselines, and reporting.
- 7.2. The Group was told of the launch of the guidance and its availability on the JNCC website and invited to be part of the stakeholder assessment phase as described on the website.

Action Point 5: JNCC (HB) to circulate the Birds Common Standards Monitoring PowerPoint presentation to the Group.

8. Developing a framework for winter raptor monitoring

- 8.1. Deferred to September 2004 meeting.

Action Point 6: The Group to consider the framework for winter raptor monitoring at its September 2004 meeting.

Species Items

9. Chough (SNH and CCW briefings)

- 9.1. There is linkage between many areas used by chough in Wales, hence, an understanding of both productivity and important non-breeding areas may be important in determining viability of any one area. CCW and RSPB have used field level data to define boundaries of 'key' areas (any site this used by 1% or more of the breeding or non-breeding population) and are uneasy about a more generic approach, because of the risk of challenge to the scientific basis of a site designation. However, CCW and RSPB are concerned about the lack of SPA provision for non-breeding chough, and agree that provision needs to be considered.
- 9.2. There has been no systematic survey of non-breeding distribution in Scotland, although Islay was covered in 1981/82, and new data would need to be collected if further assessment was necessary. SNH has selected SPAs in Scotland for breeding chough on the basis of numbers, density, range and naturalness of the site. New productivity data will be available from the Chough Study Group at the end of 2004/05 FY. Thus, in common with certain other species, productivity of nests can now be taken into account in site selection.
- 9.3. RSPB considers current SPA provision to be inadequate given that the species is at risk and SPA provision is an important tool for conservation of this species. It values the Stage 2 approach in meeting a specific target, but does not consider it necessary to use detailed productivity information to select sites.
- 9.4. The Group agreed that a sub-group comprising TS, GW, NEB and SW meet in late June/early July to further discuss chough provision. To enable this meeting to be effective an immediate analysis of areas and numbers of birds would be required. The sub-group should then review the data to determine whether there are any areas that warrant further consideration. The sub-group should also debate what proportion of the chough population it would be desirable to have in the SPA network, using the SPA Selection Guidelines to help define this. These considerations should relate to both breeding and non-breeding areas and productivity data could be included, but this work should not wait for new data to become available. SW agreed to organise the meeting of this sub-group and produce an objective statement for it.

Action Point 7: CCW (SW) to organise a meeting in late June/early July of a chough sub-group, to comprise TS, GW, NEB and SW, and produce an objective statement to guide its work.

10. Golden Eagle 2003 National Survey results (RSPB paper)

- 10.1. Results from the 2003 national golden eagle survey indicate that the population is relatively stable with roughly the same distribution as that shown by the last survey. In 2003, there was 12-15% of the population represented in some way within the SPA network (the feeding areas of some pairs are within the network, but not the corresponding nest sites).
- 10.2. RSPB considers that SPA representation for golden eagle is too low and that some high density areas exist in important parts of the range where SPAs are lacking. SNH stated that the SPA suite for golden eagle was selected to include areas with the highest density and productivity. It was suggested that golden eagle is a species for which wider countryside measures are important and this should be taken into consideration.

- 10.3. The Group agreed that further consideration of the survey results should be taken forward through bilateral discussions between SNH and RSPB.

11. Goosander population status

- 11.1. Deferred to September 2004 meeting.

Action Point 8: Group to consider goosander population status at its September 2004 meeting.

12. Status of red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey

- 12.1. The SNH papers were not discussed due to time constraints. Members were invited to send SNH comments by the end of June 2004 and the Group agreed to discuss these at its September 2004 meeting.

Action Point 9: Members to send SNH (NEB) any comments on the SNH papers on red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey by the end of June 2004.

Action Point 10: Group to consider the status of red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey at its September 2004 meeting.

13. Bilateral discussions

- 13.1. No report from EHS.
- 13.2. Nothing to report in Wales. RSPB Welsh IBA/SPA report due in c.10 days time.
- 13.3. No meetings in Scotland, but Director level meeting planned in next 10 weeks. RSPB would like more frequent bilateral meetings with SNH. Funding for a pilot Scottish Crossbill survey is being pursued by SNH and SEERAD.
- 13.4. No meetings in England. RSPB English IBA/SPA report due in next 2 months. National nightjar survey is taking place in 2004. EN has submitted advice over Stour & Orwell extension to Defra. Advice on Liverpool Bay is being finalised. Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore pSPA is likely to be classified soon.

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

- 14.1. 2004/1, AP6: AW had commented to the Secretariat on this action. The Group asked for a form of words to be provided that explains the type of estimate produced from aerial survey. AP carried forward.
- 14.2. 2004/1, AP7: The Group requested that AW circulate his draft paper for the proceedings of the Waterbirds Around the World conference.
- 14.3. CS notified the Group that he was leaving Northumbrian Water and was therefore no longer able to represent Water UK. The Group thanked CS for his valuable inputs and wished him success in his new job with SEPA. The Chair asked CS to suggest a candidate to represent Water UK in future meetings.

Action Point 11: AW to circulate to the Group his draft paper on aerial survey methods, in preparation for the proceedings of the Waterbirds Around the World conference.

Action Point 12: CS to discuss with IB and TS a suitable candidate to represent Water UK in the SPAR SWG.

15. Work programme

- 15.1. There was no discussion of the work programme, but deferral of some items from this meeting means revision will be necessary.

Action Point 13: Secretariat to revise the work programme and circulate with the draft minutes of this meeting.

16. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 16.1. 30th September 2004, Defra, Bristol.
16.2. 26th January 2005, Edinburgh (venue TBC).

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 23rd September 2003 meeting (2003/3).
Approved minutes of the 28th January 2004 meeting (2004/1).
Approved 2003 Annual Report.
Revised work programme (version 12).
JNCC PowerPoint presentation on Birds Common Standards Monitoring Guidance.

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2004/2, 26TH MAY 2004

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 30th September 2004 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 11th September 2004)

Action Point 1: Chair and Defra, with help of Secretariat, to produce a cover note and summary of next 12 months work for presentation to the Natura 2000 and Ramsar Steering Committee with the 2003 Annual Report in June 2004.

Action Point 2: Members to send comments on the JNCC Ramsar Review report to the Secretariat by 30th July 2004.

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Action Point 10: Group to consider the status of red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey at its September 2004 meeting.

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