

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2004/3
30TH SEPTEMBER 2004
10.00 - 15.30 Defra, Temple Quay, Bristol

Approved Minutes

Present (around table):

Ian Bainbridge (Chair; IB) - SEERAD
Helen Baker (HB) (Secretary) - JNCC
Andy Webb (AW) - JNCC
Nigel Buxton (NB) – SNH
David Mallon (DM) – SEERAD
Ian Enlander (IE) – EHS
Louise Vall (LV) – Defra
Andy Swash (AS) – Defra
Ben Fraser (BF) - EN

David Stroud (DAS) – JNCC
Trevor Salmon (TS) – Defra
Richard Evans (RE) – Scottish Environment
Link
Gwyn Williams (GW) – RSPB & on behalf of
Wildlife & Countryside Link
Sian Whitehead (SW) – CCW (by 'phone
conference)

Apologies:

Gregor Watson (EHS), Trish Fretten (NAW), Wendy Twell (NAW), Andrew Clark (NFU), Colin Hedley (CLA), Peter Cranswick (WWT), Jeremy Wilson (SEL), Lucy Adams (ABPmer).

1. Introductions and apologies

1.1. Apologies were received as listed above. The Chair welcomed new representatives.

2. Minutes of last meeting (26th May 2004, 2004/2)

2.1. The minutes of the 26th May 2004 meeting were accepted without amendment.

General Items

3. Annual Report for 2003: response from the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee

- 3.1. The Chair briefed the Group on discussions at the June 2004 meeting of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee (N2RSC) on the 2003 SPAR SWG report. The N2RSC accepted all of the recommendations made in that report and considered that the SPAR SWG was working in a helpful way.
- 3.2. The minutes of the N2RSC meeting will be circulated to the SPAR SWG when available.
- 3.3. The Chair of the N2RSC had written to the Chair of the Group, on 27th September 2004, reiterating the role of the Group as an advisory group and clarifying the roles of the JNCC and Agencies in advising Government on SPA designations. The letter was tabled at the meeting. The letter requested that the SPAR SWG re-focussed its work to ensure that it remained within its Terms of Reference. It also requested that the Group develop a more strategic approach in dealing with new data and prioritise within its work programme. The Group agreed that the issues remaining from the SPA Review should remain separated from the consideration of new data and continue to be considered as per the work programme, but that consideration of new data could be more strategic, especially linking into the 2008 review. It was recognised that there remain disparate views within the Group as to how the

SPA network should be developed, and hence how new data were used. However, it was agreed that reviewing new data for individual species when they became available was an appropriate approach, but that advice generated from such review could be presented in a more strategic way. The Group was invited to consider the letter further and to either submit views via the Secretariat for discussion at the next meeting, or to discuss directly with Defra.

Action Point 1: Secretariat to circulate the minutes of the June 2004 meeting of the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee when available.

Action Point 2: Members invited to submit views on letter from Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee Chair, dated 27th September 2004, to Secretariat or Defra prior to January 2005 meeting. Group to discuss the letter further at January 2005 meeting if necessary.

4. Ramsar Review (JNCC briefing): draft advisory note

- 4.1. HB briefly presented the outcome of Group consultation on the JNCC Ramsar Review (Avian) report presented in May 2004 (Baker & Chambers¹) and the resultant draft advisory note.
- 4.2. The Group agreed that the advisory note should be appended with more information on species conservation listings and Ramsar habitat types. For the latter, reference to habitat interpretation in the JNCC Ramsar Review report (Moore *et al.* 2004²) should be made.
- 4.3. The draft advice was agreed with minor changes to wording. Secretariat tasked with revising the advice note for presentation to the Ramsar Review Steering Group and N2RSC.
- 4.4. This briefing will not be published on the JNCC website – the final advisory note will after consideration by the N2RSC.

Action Point 3: Secretariat to revise Ramsar Review advisory note and circulate to the Group. Chair to present the advisory note to both the Ramsar Review Steering Group and the Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee, and to request a steer on the way to proceed.

5. Marine SPAs (JNCC update/AW)

- 5.1. Strand 1: extensions to breeding seabird colonies – further to consultation with the Group on draft guidance in May 2004 (see minutes of May meeting; 2004/2 (6)) and consideration by the JNCC Marine Project Group, public consultation will be carried out this autumn. A final draft guidance document will be presented to the Joint Committee for endorsement in spring 2005. However, further field work is planned for Manx Shearwater and Red-throated Diver in 2005 and so guidance for these species will follow later.
- 5.2. Strand 2: non-breeding waterbirds – substantial progress in surveying has been made and the JNCC Marine Project Group is currently developing an approach to prioritising survey of other areas. DTI hosted a meeting to develop a systematic approach to survey of wind farm

¹ Baker, H & Chambers, D (2004) *UK Ramsar Review. Comparison of the UK Ramsar network with the UK SPA and IBA networks: a discussion report*. Unpublished report to the SPA & Ramsar (avian) Scientific Working Group, May 2004. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

² Moore, E, McLeod, C, Chambers, D & Betts, H (2004) *UK Ramsar Review (GB and Northern Ireland). JNCC analysis on distribution of nationally-threatened species (freshwater fish and vascular plants) and underrepresented SAC Annex I habitats*. Unpublished discussion paper prepared for Ramsar Review Steering Group meeting, July 2004. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough

SEA areas. JNCC intend doing Thames Estuary analysis this winter, but dependent on availability of privately owned data.

- 5.3. Strand 3: seabirds at sea – JNCC is looking at feasibility of doing ESAS analysis in-house. Under DTI SEA Phase 5 research programme an analysis of spatial and temporal gaps in data coverage of UK waters is being done.
- 5.4. Data accessibility was discussed. DTI/Defra will be part-funding surveys undertaken for Round 2 wind farm applications and these data will be available to JNCC. In Scotland, it is a condition of consent that raw data are made available to SE & SNH. Defra requested that any problems over data access be raised with them.
- 5.5. The Group requested a marine SPA timetable from JNCC.
- 5.6. Defra updated the Group on the activities of the EU Marine Experts Group; guidance for SPA selection will be considered in January 2005 (it has been strongly influenced by the IBA approach detailed in Skov *et al.* 1995³).

Action Point 4: JNCC (AW) to request a timetable for marine SPA work from the JNCC Marine Project Group and circulate to the Group. This timetable to be appended to the 2004 Annual Report.

6. Treatment of biogeographical populations and thresholds for mixed waterbird populations (JNCC update)

- 6.1. In November 2002, the Ramsar Convention adopted *Waterbird Population Estimates 3*, which was adopted in the UK in January 2003. The Group realised that where populations mixed this created difficulties in evaluating importance of sites and, after discussion, agreed that its initial advice was too simplistic. It also recognised that guidance needs to be published.
- 6.2. JNCC agreed to lead on producing a paper early in 2005 that will be formally peer-reviewed and published.
- 6.3. The Scientific & Technical Review Panel of the Ramsar Convention (STRP) is developing guidance on this issue to present at CoP9 in November 2005. It is likely to recommend that where two populations mix, that a site is evaluated on the larger of the two thresholds, but there are likely to be caveats.

Action Point 5: JNCC to draft a paper on biogeographical populations of waterbirds and treatment of mixed populations in the UK in early 2005.

Species Items

7. Chough (JNCC briefing on sub-group activity)

- 7.1. The sub-group met in July 2004 and agreed a number of needed outputs to inform further discussion; a risk assessment of differing conservation strategies, review of data and mapping, and review of approaches to target setting. All of these have been progressed well and the sub-group will meet again in November 2004.

³ Skov, H, Durinck, J, Leopold, MF & Tasker, ML (1995) *Important Bird Areas for seabirds in the North Sea*. BirdLife International, Cambridge.

- 7.2. The sub-group sought a view on when the Group would like to be consulted on its outputs. It was agreed that any papers could be circulated for comment at a stage the sub-group thought appropriate. However, JNCC has been tasked with presenting a single view on the principles underpinning the chough suite of SPAs work to the Group, informed by the outputs of the sub-group.
- 7.3. The sub-group was asked to provide a progress report to the January 2005 meeting. RSPB indicated that it wished to continue to be represented on the sub-group by its chough experts – the Group welcomed this input and was content that this should continue.
- 7.4. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website as it remains work in progress.

Action Point 6: JNCC to circulate, when appropriate, draft outputs from the chough sub-group for comment, specifying deadlines at time of circulation.

Action Point 7: JNCC, on behalf of the chough sub-group, to provide an update on progress to the January 2005 meeting of the Group.

8. Goosander population status (JNCC/WWT briefing): agreement on recommended treatment

- 8.1. It was agreed that birds breeding in the UK can be considered migratory as a large proportion of the population regularly moves to moulting areas in Norway. In addition, there are regular influxes of continental birds into parts of the UK in winter, where they mix with UK birds. However, there is relatively little ringing information and so the degree of exchange between UK and continental birds remains uncertain.
- 8.2. The Group agreed to ask Wetlands International for the rationale underpinning its treatment of goosander populations in Europe and to then review the issue again. It was also agreed that JNCC should invite Dr. James Robinson, a former member of the Group and lead author of the briefing, to complete the paper with a view to publication on the JNCC website.

Action Point 8: JNCC to ask Wetlands International for the reasons underpinning its treatment of goosander populations in Europe.

Action Point 9: JNCC to invite Dr. James Robinson to complete the goosander paper for publication on the JNCC website.

9. Spotted Crake (JNCC/RSPB briefing): results of review

- 9.1. Spotted crake was surveyed nationally in 1999 and so is a species for which new data have become available since the SPA review. The review of records demonstrates that there are a number of areas that support qualifying numbers on a regular basis that are not SPAs. In addition, there are a number of areas used regularly during the non-breeding period that are not SPAs. Excluding Lower Derwent Valley, for which records are under review, the current spotted crake suite of SPAs supports around 25% of the British population. Despite being a migrant there is some evidence that the British population may be closed; the numbers of juveniles recorded in the autumn roughly matches the number expected from breeding records, rather than reflecting a significant influx of migrants from continental Europe.
- 9.2. Annual survey coverage is patchy and hence there are many areas that have either no birds or no survey; it was agreed that it is important to try to distinguish between no surveys and surveys with no birds, i.e. more fully reflect survey effort in the review. At present there is a risk that those areas that support the most birds do so because of bias in survey effort rather than reflecting the real occurrence of birds.

- 9.3. It was agreed that data quality is an important issue in assessing the status of spotted crakes and this introduces uncertainty in evaluating areas. The review has demonstrated that most of the apparently best areas are already SPAs – the exception is the Muir of Dinnet complex in Scotland. Improvements to monitoring, including a review of methods, would be beneficial and it was agreed that JNCC/RSPB should explore opportunities to gather new data in a more systematic way, including through the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP).
- 9.4. The Group agreed that JNCC should lead on producing an advice note for the N2RSC and present a draft version to the SPAR SWG in January 2005. This note should clarify the current state of data quality and implications for assessment of regularity of occurrence, and should make an assessment of prioritisation for this species and inherent risks associated with the current level of SPA provision.
- 9.5. The briefing will not be published on the JNCC website at this stage – a revised paper will be published at a later date once actions have been addressed.

Action Point 10: SPAR SWG to comment to JNCC on the spotted crane briefing by the end of November 2004.

Action Point 11: JNCC & RSPB to explore opportunities for improving annual surveillance of spotted crane, including the need for revised guidance on survey methods.

Action Point 12: JNCC to draft an advice note on spotted crane for the N2RSC and present to the SPAR SWG in January 2005.

10. Capercaillie (SNH update)

- 10.1. The national survey was completed last winter; the population estimate is around twice that of 1998 estimate, but the two are not significantly different. The 2004 brood counts show extremely poor productivity. Consultation on three new SPAs closed in mid-September and reports will be sent to the SE soon.

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

- 11.1. Papers, prepared by SNH, on the status red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey (all Annex I species) were circulated for comment at the May 2004 meeting of the Group. Each paper raised a number of key questions: does the Birds Directive apply to re-introduced species/populations; if the Birds Directive does apply, at what point should Article 4 be implemented for an establishing population, especially if that population is predicted to become large and widespread; in the UK, how do we apply the SPA Selection Guidelines to rapidly growing populations.
- 11.2. Many members of the Group believe that the Birds Directive does apply to re-introduced red kite, white-tailed eagle and osprey, given that these species are ‘naturally occurring in the wild state in the European territory of the Member States...’ However, guidance from the N2RSC would be beneficial in this respect.
- 11.3. The red kite population is increasing very rapidly, both the re-introduced and naturally occurring elements, and new re-introductions have been started recently and others are planned. The species is predicted to become widespread and common throughout much of Britain and so further SPA provision may not be the best approach to its long-term conservation. However, red kites do form roosting aggregations outside of the breeding period and these roost areas may be worthy of consideration under the SPA Selection

Guidelines. Given the current rate of change of the red kite population, all agreed that it would be difficult to assess SPA provision for the species at the present time, and should be revisited in the 2008 review.

- 11.4. It was agreed that more information on the white-tailed eagle population was required, especially in relation to rates of change of the population and the implications of this and behaviour for future population expansion. The Chair offered to approach the Sea-eagle Team for this information, and the Group to consider this prior to the 2008 review.
- 11.5. The attempt to re-introduce osprey into England has been relatively unsuccessful and the species has recently naturally begun to colonise both England and Wales. It was agreed that, in light of this, further consideration should be parked. The native population in Scotland continues to expand at a relatively fast rate and is widely dispersed. The 2008 review will provide an opportunity to make an assessment of the suite of existing SPAs for osprey.

Action Point 13: Park consideration of further SPA provision for red kite until 2008 – include assessment of the re-introduced part of the population in the 2008 network review.

Action Point 14: Chair to ask the Sea-eagle Team whether they can provide the Group with a more detailed review of the status of the re-introduced population. Group to review this species prior to the 2008 review.

Action Point 15: Park consideration of further SPA provision for osprey until the 2008 network review.

12. Bilateral discussions

- 12.1. EHS and RSPB have had bilateral discussions over RSPB IBA/SPA project report; EHS will respond in October 2004 and a further bilateral meeting will be planned. Copeland Island and Belfast Lough Open Water will be classified soon. Approval from Council had been secured for taking forward hen harrier site protection – the 2004 survey will input into considerations.
- 12.2. Nothing to report in addition to chough discussions from Wales.
- 12.3. Nothing to report in addition to chough discussions from Scotland. A senior level meeting between SNH, SE and RSPB will take place in early October.
- 12.4. No meetings in England – awaiting full IBA/SPA report from RSPB, will then arrange bilateral meeting.

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

- 13.1. A small number of actions were outstanding from May 2004 (meeting 2004/2): AP4 (guidance on extending seabird colonies) – discharged; AP6 (winter raptor monitoring) – carried forward to January 2005; AP11 (paper on aerial survey methods) – carried forward; AP12 (representative for Water UK) – Chair to discuss suggestions with Secretariat.
- 13.2. The Chair noted that attendance of meetings by NGO representatives had declined; he agreed to re-iterate the invitation to attend. The Chair also invited suggestions for including any other NGOs; British Wind Energy Association was highlighted as an NGO with the relevant scientific capacity that may wish to have an involvement.

14. Work programme

- 14.1. The Secretariat was asked to consider the letter from the N2RSC Chair, dated 27th September 2004, and make suggestions for changing the work programme accordingly. The Group will consider any changes at its January 2005 meeting.
- 14.2. An international workshop on passage populations of waterbirds is taking place in October and a briefing on the results will be brought to the January 2005 meeting.

Action Point 16: Secretariat to assess changes to the work programme in light of the letter from the N2RSC Chair, dated 27th September 2004, and present suggested changes to the January 2005 meeting for discussion.

15. Dates and venues of next meetings

- 15.1. 26th January 2005, Edinburgh (SEERAD – location to be confirmed).
- 15.2. 25th May 2005, JNCC Peterborough

Attachments:

Approved minutes of the 26th May 2004 meeting (2004/2).

Final advisory note to the Ramsar Review Steering Group and Natura 2000 & Ramsar Steering Committee on the Ramsar Review.

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

MEETING 2004/3, 30TH SEPTEMBER 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 26th January 2005 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

(Papers to be submitted to secretariat by 11th January 2005)

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Actions from this meeting to be discharged after 26th January 2005 meeting (see minutes of last meeting also):

Action Point 5: JNCC to draft a paper on biogeographical populations of waterbirds and treatment of mixed populations in the UK in early 2005.

Action Point 11: JNCC & RSPB to explore opportunities for improving annual surveillance of spotted crane, including the need for revised guidance on survey methods.

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