

WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee

Minutes of 12th Meeting: 9th May 2022

Attendees

Chair: Gill Birtles (BTO)

Allan Brown (South and East Scotland), Neil Calbrade (BTO), Teresa Frost (BTO), Chris Gunn (Eastern England), Brian Moore (Midlands), Bob Swann (North and West Scotland), Eve Tigwell (South West England).

1 Apologies for absence

Kerry Mackie (Northern Ireland)

2 Welcome and introductions

All attendees of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) introduced themselves.

3 Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Members of the LOAC were asked to note that agenda items marked with an asterisk [*] should be regarded as strictly confidential. The LOAC may add or remove asterisks during the meeting. LOAC members are asked to notify the Chair of any conflict of interest for any particular item and to absent themselves from the discussion, decision or vote for this item as appropriate.

4 WeBS Progress Update

WeBS News Special Edition to replace 2020/21 report

Following investigative analysis, we have decided we do not have sufficient data to be able to produce the usual trends and other outputs in WeBS Report Online for the Wetland Bird Survey as usual this spring. This is due to Covid-19 lock down restrictions over winter 2020/2021 limiting the number of surveys being able to go ahead. We will instead produce a special issue of *WeBS News* which will be published in May/June 2022.

Low-tide Update

In the 2020/21 Low-tide Count (LTC) year, counts were started on the Dee, Swale and Tay estuaries, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these had to be discontinued. We are very pleased to say that full surveys were completed in these areas in 2021/22 and counts were also carried out on the Stour and Orwell Estuaries and Portsmouth Harbour along with the annually counted Belfast Lough, Strangford Lough and Adur Estuary.

A review of LTC was carried out and the results will be available online shortly. The Key recommendations that came out of this review are to:

- Increase the number of sites which achieve annual coverage at least once every six years, particularly in Scotland, Wales and northern England.
- Facilitate more flexibility in the months in which WeBS Low Tide Counts data are collected to include passage periods, as an addition to but not replacement of winter visits and distribute a list of priority sites and species where this would be most relevant.
- Ensure that for winter counts, preferably at least three-monthly visits are carried out during any winter a site is covered and single visits are avoided where at all possible, to better capture within-winter variation.
- Engage with ecology staff, especially within consultancies, more proactively to see if data are available from professional surveys which could be submitted to and made available within the WeBS Low Tide Counts scheme to fill temporal and spatial data gaps.

It was raised that the passage periods of May and August/September in particular are also a time of increased human disturbance on estuaries so this should be considered as a potential issue with data collection.

AP/LOAC12/1 Add coverage maps of LTC sites onto the BTO website.

WeBS Roost Counting

There was a pilot in Wales for carrying out roost counting, which was successful, so it is planned to roll this out for the rest of the UK. This will be completed this year and we hope to demonstrate the new feature at the LO meeting in the autumn and to create a guidance video.

It was raised that high-tides can be a difficult time to count roosts. At some sites they are mobile as there are lots of suitable areas. It might be possible to draw large areas for the roosts with a note that the roost can be anywhere within the area.

There was a concern about over-burdening current LOs and counters with extra work and so the idea was raised of asking general birdwatchers, such as those who use BirdTrack, to consider carrying out roost counts. However, it has been decided that the knowledge of the local WeBS teams, and especially the Local Organiser for the estuary, is essential for confidence in the dataset for policy and evidence-based decision making, so only people with WeBS permissions to the sector will be able to add roost data. Organisers will be able to give input permission to additional contributors through WeBS Online (but shouldn't make those users allocated counters on the sector).

Age/Sex Recording

There was a discussion as to how easy and user friendly this part of WeBS recording is for WeBS counters as some are experiencing problems with adding information for specific species. Many counters are still putting this information in the comments section instead, so more needs to be done to raise awareness and encourage participation in this feature.

AP/LOAC12/2 Finish the Age/Sex recording guidance video and send round to LOAC to sense check before making it available on the website.

5 Reports from LOAC Regions

LOAC members were invited to contact the Local Organisers within their regions prior to the meeting to see if there was anything they would like to raise with the committee:

- The coastal Lothian LO had a meeting with their counters and found it useful, so the idea was raised for LOs to organise WeBS Zoom meetings with their own counters. The WeBS office would be happy to support and attend any such meeting.
- The idea of setting up a Whatsapp group as a way of counters contacting their LOs was also discussed. This would need to be considered with regards to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and sharing contact information but if people gave permission for everyone to see their phone number this could be useful.
- Clarification was sought for the validation process of casual counts. It is unclear how LOs search for specific casual counts or species.
- Also, it is now known if counters are aware that they can submit supplementary counts and casual and roost counts and that it is encouraged.

AP/LOAC12/4 Look into reviewing how casual counts are viewed and verified by Local Organisers and used in WeBS Online and encourage additional supplementary counts.

6 LOAC Network

In order to raise the profile of LOAC, it was agreed that an article should be written for the next edition of the newsletter in the autumn, to introduce LOs to the LOAC members. This can include questions and quotes that LOAC have answered beforehand.

AP/LOAC12/5 GB to email LOAC with questions prior to the publication of the newsletter and write an article to be included.

7 Role of LOAC

The idea of asking LOAC to review completed LO applications, prior to any appointments being made (such as what the Regional Network Committee does with Regional Organiser applications) was raised and it was agreed that this should be carried out going forward. It was also agreed that GB will have a Zoom meeting with all applicants before their application forms are reviewed, so as to gain a better picture of why they want to take on the role.

It was agreed that LOAC meetings will continue to be annual, in the spring and that Local Organiser-wide meetings will be carried out six-months afterwards in the autumn, in order to have continued conversations and support with the network.

AP/LOAC12/6 GB to email LOAC with LO applications for comment after initial discussion with the applicant.

AP/LOAC12/7 Organise a Local Organiser zoom meeting for autumn 2022

Any other business

It was asked when the base map will be updated for when drawing in new WeBS site boundaries are required. This is a high priority and should be completed within the year.

Date of next meeting

TBC – this will be in May 2023 and GB will send a poll closer to the time to set the date.