

WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee
Minutes of 6th Meeting: 19th July 2011

Attendees

Chair: Nick Mason (Deben)

Attendees: Neil Bielby (Central), Neil Calbrade (BTO), Chas Holt (BTO), Andrew King (Breconshire), Ian Lees (Oxfordshire), Heidi Mellan (BTO), David Shackleton (Cumbria), David Stroud (JNCC), Simon Wotton (RSPB).

1 Apologies for absence

John Armitage (Islay), Gladys Grant (Devon), Colette Hall (WWT), George Henderson (NIEA), Andy Musgrove (BTO), Shane Wolsey (Belfast Lough).

2 Welcome and introductions

All attendees of the WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee (LOAC) introduced themselves. The Chair welcomed everyone.

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 Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

The Chair summarised the minutes of the last meeting and the action points were discussed:

AP/LOAC5/1	Online Leaflet to be distributed to everyone who returns forms – not done
AP/LOAC6/1	Online Leaflet to be distributed to everyone who returns forms.
AP/LOAC5/2	Calculate figures for cost of processing paper forms – done

There has been a good increase in online submissions for 2009/10 with 7,131 paper forms being processed during this period (74% of all 2009/10 visits were submitted online). The figures from 2008/09 showed only 59% of visits submitted online with 11,812 forms processed. The cost of processing paper forms works out at approximately £0.45 per visit.

AP/LOAC5/3	When downloading data need to be told if the count accuracy is Low – added to online development document
AP/LOAC5/4	Consider adding a regional reference to the end of a site name for more obscure sites or adding regional references to the Principal Site table - ongoing
AP/LOAC5/5	Include a note with the report informing counters that the report is available online and giving them the opportunity to opt out of receiving further hard copies – included in 2011 newsletter
AP/LOAC5/6	WeBS staff to contact Local Organisers with a request articles for ‘WeBS site in the spotlight’ – done/ongoing
AP/LOAC5/7	Local Organisers to be made aware that a standard power point presentation, for a display/talk, is available for them to use - ongoing
AP/LOAC6/2	Local Organisers to be made aware that a standard power point presentation, for a display/talk, is available for them to use
AP/LOAC5/8	WeBS staff to distribute leaflets to Tourist Info centres, RSPB centres, SOCs – ongoing

- AP/LOAC5/9 Consider having 'Count Your Small Ponds/Waters' on front of Make Your Day Out Count leaflet/renaming MYDO leaflet – **to be considered when re-ordering leaflet**
- AP/LOAC5/10 WeBS Staff to liaise with Laura Smith about creating a WeBS Local Organiser section on the website – **ongoing**

Laura Smith has now left the BTO. Protected pages are still to be considered but it may be possible to create a hidden page especially for Local Organisers to access.

- AP/LOAC5/11 NC to have a test run available for LOAC members to comment on before the WeBS Steering Group Meeting in September – **done, results discussed in section 6.**
- AP/LOAC5/12 Adding all species to Online additional species list to be added to online development document – **added to online development document**
- AP/LOAC5/13 Discuss with IS ways to tie WeBS data to BirdTrack - **ongoing**
- AP/LOAC5/14 HM/CH to ask LOs to suggest sites that might be affected by the tide so that the validation levels can be adjusted to take this into account - **ongoing**
- AP/LOAC5/15 Tweaks to Manage My Team and View Submissions to enable LOs/counters to see when a count has been checked by way of a colour changing tick – to be added to Online Development Document – **added to online development document**
- AP/LOAC5/16 Fixed column headings in WeBS Online to be added to WeBS online development document – discussed with IS
- AP/LOAC5/17 Review the inclusion of multiple inputs in the Online Development Document and increase its priority rating to high priority - **done**
- AP/LOAC5/18 CH/NC to look at how Geese are reported to clarify greylag situations before deciding which greylag options to include in the online data submission pages - **ongoing**

It was felt that a review of how best to describe Greylag Geese was required with perhaps a page on the website explaining how to report them.

- AP/LOAC6/3** Greylag Geese to be discussed at next Steering Group meeting.
- AP/LOAC5/19 WeBS staff to speak with other BTO Survey forum organisers to see how they work and how they are monitored – **done**
- AP/LOAC5/20 Invite Gladys Grant to join the Committee - **done**
- AP/LOAC5/21 Requests for expressions of interest to continue to be included in the Newsletter in order to create a pool of Local Organisers to call from – **done/ongoing**
- AP/LOAC5/22 LOs to let us know if anyone expresses an interest in helping with the inputting – **done, discussed further in section 5**
- AP/LOAC5/23 WeBS staff to make it clearer how to add counts that are not completed on the Core Count Priority Dates – **ongoing**

This needs to be prioritised as some counters are entering data as supplementary instead of core counts which can make things difficult when using the Search and Download facility. It was suggested that perhaps a flag could be added to indicate when a supplementary is in fact the only count submitted in a month.

- AP/LOAC6/4** Add to website instructions on how to submit counts that were not completed on the priority date or add a flag to Search and Download.

5 WeBS Progress Update

WITUK

The 2009/10 report is on schedule to be released at Rutland Bird Fair. Counters can collect their report there.

The survey methods section of the report is now only available on the website in an effort to reduce costs.

AP/LOAC6/5 Find out cost of producing/posting annual report.

AP/LOAC6/6 Ask LOs to speak to counters to see if any of them would like to opt out of receiving a hard copy of the report.

It was suggested that regional accounts could be reproduced on the website.

AP/LOAC6/7 Reproduce 'Total Numbers' tables on website, broken down into countries (England, Scotland & Wales)

Newsletter

The newsletter had a new look this year that brings it more into line with other newsletters produced by the BTO. Please send any comments about the new design to Neil Calbrade.

It was suggested that historical stories could be sought from retiring counters especially those who have been counting for WeBS for several years.

AP/LOAC6/8 Contact LOs with request for articles of any kind including site in the spotlight.

WeBS Training

Three courses have been arranged: 12th November 2011; 14th January 2012 and 11th February 2012. These courses are aimed at beginners as we will be covering methods and basic bird ID with a trip out into the field. They will be advertised on the WeBS section of the website; the BTO training sites; WeBS Facebook page and we will be sending notifications out on Twitter.

There are plans for more advanced courses to be organised in the future.

It was suggested that a section on flock counting should be included as there are existing programmes available, unsure if they are free or have to be paid for, that simulate this. David Stroud suggested that a joint licence could be a possibility.

AP/LOAC6/9 WeBS staff to find information on what flock counting programmes are available.

Courses designed with professionals/consultants in mind are another possibility.

AP/LOAC6/10 LOs to inform WeBS of any suitable venues for courses close to wetland areas.

LT Report

This year (2010/11) 21 sites were counted, including Solway, Alde, Crouch-Roach, Hayle, Lavan Sands, Bembridge, Chichester Harbour and Beaulieu, which is a vast improvement on last year. Loch Indaal was counted for the first time this year.

Sites to be counted this winter (2011/12) include Wear, Glaslyn, Cleddau, Lindisfarne, Exe and Blyth. The Humber will be counted as part of a contract, partially funded by the Humber Data Centre, Natural England and EA. The Mersey has been requested by several organisations, especially NE, but more volunteers are needed. If volunteers can't be found this may require funding to go ahead.

Partners are invited to suggest future sites (Southampton Water and Thames Estuary are possibilities)

Old NWC data

We have several hundred National Wildfowl Count forms containing data for over 87,000 visits. These forms are being stored within 17 archive boxes. The data for sites that can be matched to current WeBS sites now need to be entered into the online system.

Last year a request went out for volunteers to help with this task. We now have two permanent volunteers inputting data on a regular basis and one other volunteer who is able to help out now and then. We have also have three members of BTO staff who are helping out when they have time to spare.

This has meant that within the last three months we have managed to enter over 3,500 visits. If any counters would like to volunteer to help out with the inputting please ask them to contact Heidi.

6 Counter Network

WeBS Volunteer 'Satisfaction' Survey Results

The 'Satisfaction' survey was rolled out to 1789 WeBS volunteers with an email account in October 2010. The survey was not made available to volunteers without an email address as the costs in postage alone would have been too high. We had 1010 responses to the survey and a summary of the results was published in the 2011 Newsletter. A full report is included with these minutes.

Some of the results were as we expected, e.g. more than half of our volunteers (58%) are aged 56 or over, others were a bit of a surprise, e.g. a third of the people who took part in the survey are not using WeBS online to submit their data. As the survey was sent only to people with access to the internet we expected this figure to be a lot lower.

The survey also showed that the majority of our volunteers would like to keep the report either in its current format or to have a slightly shorter version. This result can be used by WeBS Partners to defend the need for a hard copy of the report to be produced each year.

Although the results are biased towards counters with an email address, the survey will be repeated every few years.

Counter Recruitment

With the Atlas coming to an end we have an opportunity to recruit new WeBS volunteers. There are several high priority sites that require additional counters and now would be a good time to push these sites.

BTO Regional Reps would be in an excellent position to know which Atlas volunteers would be capable and willing to take on a WeBS site. It was felt that generally Atlas participants would be more capable of counting at the more difficult coastal sites.

AP/LOAC6/11 WeBS staff to contact LOs to ask for list of vacant, high priority sites that can be passed to BTO RRs.

AP/LOAC6/12 WeBS staff to pass on contact details of BTO RRs to WeBS LOs.

7 Social Media

Facebook

As reported in the newsletter, we now have a WeBS Facebook page <http://www.facebook.com/WetlandBirdSurvey> that we are using to try to engage with our current volunteers, raise awareness of the survey and try to encourage new volunteers. The page can be viewed even if you do not have a Facebook Profile. Those people who do have a Facebook profile can 'like' the page to receive notifications when something (comments, photos etc) is added to the page.

It was suggested that perhaps a “bird/site of the week” feature could be added to Facebook and the website with information, graphs and photos being added.

AP/LOAC6/12 WeBS staff to create a “bird/site of the week” feature on Facebook and website.

YouTube

The BTO has started to produce videos that can be viewed on YouTube, we’d like to be able to do the same. The BTO is producing the videos in partnership with BirdGuides, BG supplies the videos and BTO provides the narrative. LOAC members suggested several topics to be considered including:

- A basic video on WHAT we do (not why we do it)
- Eclipse ducks
- Big flocks training
- Video version of the guide to WeBS Online
- Introduction to WeBS
- How do you know its a Pochard etc
- Female Goosanders/Mergansers
- Female Ducks

AP/LOAC6/13 WeBS staff to look into how these videos could be produced (whether videos already exist or if there is equipment/computer software available that will allow us to produce our own)

8 Website and WeBS Online

Low Tide Results

Neil Calbrade is currently producing dot density maps for all the Low Tide sites that have ever been counted. These will be added to the website in due course. Each site will have its own page and maps can be viewed by year or by species.

It was suggested that a list of what resources are available should be sent out to the country agencies once the maps are in place.

AP/LOAC6/14 WeBS staff to contact Country Agencies with list of resources once LT maps all online.

LO pages on the website

We still hope to be able to provide password protected pages on the website for Local Organisers. Once a new Website Manager has been hired we will be working with them to develop this further. If this task is not possible we will create pages that are invisible to the general public but make the page address available to all Local Organisers.

Changes to WeBS Online

At previous LOAC meetings we have spoken of a WeBS Online Development Document where improvements to WeBS Online have been listed. A summary of the document is included with these minutes.

Several items on the list have already been put into place or will be available shortly, others will remain on the list to be worked on in future.

Changes that have already taken place or will be available soon include:

- a) Speed up inputting of multiple visits (done)
- b) Entering data on behalf of someone else (available soon)
- c) Recording missed counts (available soon)
- d) WeBS staff can log receipt of paper forms (available soon)

Currently, counts submitted online are shown as a tick. It was suggested that missed counts should show as an 'N' and paper forms should show as a 'P'.

AP/LOAC6/15 WeBS staff to speak to IS about how missed counts and paper forms are recorded in the 'Manage my Team' section.

It was requested that the checking of online submissions and the county summary outputs be graded as high priority.

AP/LOAC6/16 WeBS staff to alter Online Development Document to show online submission checks and county summary outputs as high priority.

The absence of some waterbirds from the WeBS species list was queried. Dippers and Pipits were mentioned as examples.

AP/LOAC6/17 WeBS Steering Group to reassess which species should be analysed through WeBS.

9 Rutland Bird Fair 2010

WeBS is having its own stand again at the 2011 Rutland Bird Fair in August. WeBS staff are keen to have 'real people' on the stand so any volunteers wishing to help man the stand to speak to Neil Calbrade.

A request for ideas for quizzes/prizes was made. Please pass any ideas to Neil Calbrade.

It was suggested that people manning the stand should try to gather the public's feelings on mortality rates for last winter. These details are to be gathered from general conversations rather than anything official.

AP/LOAC6/18 Rutland attendees to gather public views on 2010/11 winter mortality rates.

It was suggested that for the next annual report an analysis of zero counts/mortality rates/distribution shifts should be included. This should be a fast track analysis that doesn't hold up production of the report. The possibility of comparing these findings to international surveys was discussed.

10 Reports from partners

RSPB – There has been lots of use of WeBS data for casework this year. The Thames Estuary and the London Gateway proposal should be coming up in the next winter or so. WeBS data is being used in the ongoing Dungeness airport public enquiry. It is likely that a new attempt to build an expanded container port at Southampton Water will begin soon and will probably generate a large requirement for WeBS data. There are lots of small projects including a Slavonian Grebe project (Scotland) and a Brent Goose project looking at distribution and the number of juveniles.

JNCC – There are six main areas where WeBS data are being used. Casework through the country agencies (similar issues to RSPB). Site protection/designation, especially with establishment of INC network. The Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits SPA was classified in April for a range of species. Mersey Narrows and North Wirral are currently being assessed and will hopefully be classified for Bar-tailed Godwit and Common Gull. A review of the UK SPA network is ongoing with Andy Musgrove taking the lead on gathering data from DEFRA, pulling data from WeBS and looking at the changing numbers of the suites. The review will check to see if the suite of sites is adequate. Population estimates are also being updated and this will feed into the international reporting processes. There is a new directive for assessing population estimates across Europe. Under the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement, UK has to report on the status of waterbirds. International

action plans are being developed, three are coming up for sign off on three species incl. Dark-bellied Brent Goose. DEFRA are funding work on climate change impacts on the SPA network – a report is due next month using WeBS data and future climate models to look at what will happen to distribution and check that the SPAs are in the correct place.

BTO – BTO (with others) are working on a new Avian Population Estimates paper, under the auspices of an SPA review for DEFRA (which also includes a review of the bird data underlying the Ramsar network). BTO produced a review of waterbird numbers on the English SSSI network for Natural England.. WeBS data are being fed into Bird Atlas 2007-11; the book should be produced by 2013. BirdTrack online recording software is increasing in popularity and BTO has been in discussions with European Colleagues on how to put these together with the aim of producing a European Atlas and live migration maps (similar to USA ebird). BTO are involved in a non-native species project looking at all non-native species (not just waterbirds). BTO takes part in a lot of high-level/government meetings about strategic views/citizen science and WeBS is frequently cited as an example of best practice of how to conduct surveys, to stress that well designed surveys can produce valuable and robust results. A Dispersed Waterbird Survey is planned to take place within the next few years.

It was suggested that an article listing the ways WeBS data are used should be included in the next newsletter. The article should be basic without going into too much detail.

AP/LOAC6/19 WeBS staff to produce article about how WeBS data are used for the next newsletter.

It was felt that the amount of effort that goes into collecting the data wasn't recognised as well as it could be. It was suggested that a tag line along the lines of '60 years of effort', '*** counts by *** counters' or '*** hours producing *** counts' could be used on a poster for Rutland to help highlight the vast amount of time and effort from our volunteers that goes into the survey.

Other ways to present information about WeBS were discussed including a flow diagram that was produced in 1993.

AP/LOAC6/20 David Stroud to check to see if he has a copy of the 1993 flow diagram.

11 Any other business

Marine and Coastal Access Act – Local Organisers of coastal regions have been approached by consultants wishing to know the location of roost sites. With several micro turbines being built it would be very helpful to know where the roost sites are. Pre-WeBS reports did used to map the roost sites, the last known roost maps were produced in 1996/97, David Stroud may have copies.

AP/LOAC6/21 WeBS Steering Group to look at this to decide whether this needs to be revisited.

Committee Member Turnover

Nick Mason made it known that he is prepared to step down if another LO should volunteer.

12 Date of next meeting

The 7th meeting of the LOAC has been provisionally set as Tuesday 17th July 2012, 10.00 am, at the British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford. TBC.