

**WeBS Local Organiser Advisory Committee
Minutes of 8th Meeting: 21st November 2013**

Attendees

Chair: Nick Mason (Deben)

Attendees: Neil Calbrade (BTO), Chas Holt (BTO), Andrew King (Breconshire), Ian Lees (Oxfordshire), Heidi Mellan (BTO), David Stroud (JNCC), Shane Wolsey (Belfast Lough),.

1 Apologies for absence

John Armitage (Islay), Neil Bielby (Central), Gladys Grant (Devon), Colette Hall (WWT), Neil McCulloch (NIEA), David Shackleton (Cumbria), Simon Wotton (RSPB).

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

Attendees had no comments or queries concerning the minutes for the last meeting.

5 Counter Network

Local Organiser Job Description

Comment from John Armitage via email: "I think this is perfect for the task in hand. It's succinct, it expresses all the tasks and responsibilities very well and sets out precisely any necessary procedures leaving no room for misinterpretation. Whilst I accept the point that different areas will demand slightly different approaches, and at differing times too, I compared what is stated to what I do, or try to do, and the template seems to fit perfectly."

CH explained that we have recently had an instance where a set of counters have been unhappy with the way their data have been used. This has led to a need to review the LO Job Description in order to make clear the LO responsibilities with regards to safeguarding WeBS data and counter information.

The question of when is it ok to use data was raised as some committee members produce reports to provide feedback to all of their WeBS volunteers and/or are involved in producing County Bird Reports with the local County Bird Club. The committee were assured that WeBS data can be used for both purposes.

There have been instances when consultancies have approached the Local Organiser direct asking for data or to be put in touch with counters. It was explained that whilst the data collected belongs to the individual who can do what they wish with those data, data can only be considered official WeBS data if it comes direct from the WeBS Office via a data request.

Also, in order to be compliant with the Data Protection Act 1998, counter contact details must not be given out without their expressed permission. LOs can, however, forward the consultant's details to the counters and ask them to make contact.

Because Local Organisers are not currently informed when data from their region have been supplied to an external company, it was suggested that an annual summary of data requests should be made available. It was thought that the summary should include the uses that the data have been put to.

AP/LOAC8/1 Produce annual summary of data requests and make available to Local Organisers.

It was noted that all new WeBS volunteers who sign up to WeBS online are asked to read and agree to the WeBS Terms and Conditions which specify how the data may be used by the WeBS Partners and the ways in which the volunteer may use the data they've submitted to WeBS. However, as we do still have some counters who are not online, they will not have seen these Terms and Conditions.

AP/LOAC8/2 HM to add terms of use to counter handbook and ensure all non-online counters receive a copy of the TOU within the next year.

During a meeting with the Humber counters earlier this week it was suggested that there should be something to tell counters why their data are important and how their data are used.

It was decided that the terms of use should be added as a bullet point under 'Key Responsibilities', referring the Local Organiser to the full TOU in the Local Organiser section of the Counter Handbook (section 6).

AP/LOAC8/3 HM to add bullet point to LO Job Description and rewrite section 6 of the Counter Handbook to include the full TOUs.

The number of volunteers receiving feedback from Local Organisers was discussed. It was generally agreed that the amount of feedback would vary depending upon number of counters/sites within a region and the time available to each Local Organiser. However it was recognised that there is a need for Local Organisers to be in contact with their counters at least once a year. The new online reporting system will allow Local Organisers to find county data that can be passed onto their counters.

WeBS Mentoring Strategy

A mentoring scheme has been suggested by the WeBS Steering Group as a way to recruit new counter to ensure coverage of key sites. It was decided that the main functions of a mentoring scheme should be to build capacity and to help with planning for succession.

The committee members who are also Local Organisers agreed that they already go out with new volunteers to visit their chosen site. It was suggested that this task should be added to the Local Organiser Job description. However, due to concerns of making the job description too long, it was decided that this should be added to the Local Organiser section (6) of the WeBS Handbook. The wording needs to recommend that generally only one visit should be made in order to make sure the volunteer is confident in covering the site and to 'show them the ropes'.

AP/LOAC8/4 HM to add mentoring to the Local Organiser section of the WeBS handbook.

If Local Organisers are concerned with the number of vacant important sites within their region then a workshop can be arranged in the local area to encourage new volunteers – please contact Neil Calbrade (neil.calbrade@bto.org) if you would like to discuss having a workshop in your region.

The BBS mentoring scheme was mentioned as an appeal went out on the BTO website asking for volunteers to come forward to act as mentors to help 'train' new BBS counters. The BBS mentoring scheme was funded and were therefore able to offer travelling expenses to the mentors. A WeBS mentoring scheme would not be funded and therefore we cannot offer to pay travelling expenses. However, a similar appeal might be worth considering.

It was mentioned that the WeBS training days have also been used instead of/as well as mentoring with several participants having already been assigned a site prior to the training day. The spaces available for these training courses were initially intended for volunteers who were completely new to the scheme who might then go on to take up a site. The training courses have been useful in highlighting where extra mentoring is required due to a volunteer's id skills not being up to scratch. Several participants have also expressed concerns about identifying waders.

It was decided that Training and Mentoring issues should be covered in the newsletter.

AP/LOAC8/5 NC to dedicate a half page of the newsletter to training and mentoring.

It was felt that most Local Organisers would be running an informal mentoring scheme already and therefore there was no need to set up anything more official.

The effectiveness of having a stand at the Rutland Bird Fair for recruitment was queried. It was confirmed that the number of new volunteers recruited at the bird fair was extremely low (single digits), it turned out to be more useful for meeting existing counters, some of whom counted as part of a team and were previously unknown to the WeBS Office.

It was confirmed that every year HM provides a list of counter contact details to each Local Organiser and requests updates. However, there was some concern that volunteers who regularly contribute to WeBS may not be receiving their complimentary copy of the WeBS report.

AP/LOAC8/6 HM to contact LOs with a list of their counters contact details, including details of the site(s) allocated to them, and request details of any volunteers missing from the list.

In order to future proof key sites gap-fillers/stand-ins would need to be found. To do that birders would need to be encouraged to become counters whenever possible, vacant key sites/sectors should be promoted more via the newsletter. The BTO ran a campaign this year where members were encouraged to sign up a friend, could WeBS do something similar?

It was suggested that the list of vacant key sites should be circulated to LOs within 50-100 miles to alert them in case they have a counter.

AP/LOAC8/7 NC/HM to update vacant key site section and circulate list to Local Organisers

6 WeBS Progress Update

WeBS Online Reporting (demo) & WITUK

Committee members were given a demonstration of the new WeBS online reporting interface which will be a similar model to the Alerts reporting interface that was released earlier this year.

All the same species tables that have previously been available in the printed version will now be available to view online but in a much more interactive way. You will also be able to view the data for all, top-level WeBS sites individually, this means that counters can now view the trends for their site. Species data can now also be filtered by county, country and/or habitat.

As the data shown on the online reporting interface may have changed since the publication of the reports (due to late data submissions), counters will be able to view the data as it was published within each of the previous reports.

There will still be a printed report but it will be much slimmer and of a similar size to that of the newsletter. However, we will make it distinct from the newsletter, which is more site/counter based, the report will have key stories, there will be reviews of trends and WeBS Alerts, we'll be looking at a different habitat in each report. The report will also include International stories, research stories from flyway, species stories. An effort has been made to retain some consistency with the previous format. It will still contain a Low Tide Count review.

There will be a use of data section and, in light of today's discussion, this can be built upon.

The intention is to change the content annually to make the report more interesting and readable.

The new online WeBS reporting interface is due to be released in January so that full IS support will be available in case there are any problems. The printed 2011/12 report will be published at the same time. Unfortunately the paper version cannot be published prior to the release of the online report because the data within the WeBS report are an official government statistic and, therefore, can't be released until DEFRA have seen it in its entirety.

The committee were informed that the intention is for the 2012/13 report to be published 6 months after the 2011/12 report.

It was queried why there are trend graphs for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales but not for Isle of Man and Channel Islands. There was some concern about whether we'd be able to produce sensible trends for these areas but it was agreed that this needs looking at.

There are plans to add a Low Tide section to the online reporting interface which will include dot density maps etc.

Complimentary was received from the committee members following the online reporting demonstration. It was thought that the new format for the paper report would make it more readable and the online interface was described as being "better than watching X Factor".

The question of which is the best way to input data on behalf of counters was asked, it was confirmed that inputting data using the drop-box to select the counter's username was the best way as the data are then linked to that counter.

There were concerns that counters may not receive their report and newsletter if the Local Organiser is inputting data on their behalf. It was confirmed that, as long as the WeBS Office have been notified that a volunteer is an active counter and a postal address has been provided, the counter will automatically be put on the mailing list to receive publications.

The question of whether the data that have been input last month will appear in the new online reporting interface was raised. It was explained that no, the online reporting interface would not include the most recent data. Because WeBS data are an official Government statistic the online report cannot be allowed to automatically update itself. As with the previous format, an analysis will be run each year and the results will be published and uploaded to the online interface once DEFRA have seen them first. By having the online reporting interface it will be possible to publish the results a lot sooner than with the previous format.

It is hoped that the annual report can be published in the spring and that the newsletter will be delayed until the autumn. This will be easier for us to do because it used to take six months to write the old

format report but the new slimmer version can be produced a lot quicker. Data that are submitted on paper forms and in spreadsheets do slow down the production of the report.

It was confirmed that all data that are submitted will be used in the report even if there are only one or two counts for a site in a year.

Newsletter

Neil Calbrade will soon be asking for articles to go into the next newsletter. WeBS staff are keen to give the newsletter its own identity, therefore, we're looking for more counter involvement with more stories from a counter's point of view. He would like to have a "life and trials of a Local Organiser" type story. Anyone can write an article from a counter with years of experience to a newly joined counter.

It was suggested that an article guide with questions that can be answered would be helpful. It would give people a format/idea of what is required.

AP/LOAC8/8 NC to produce an article guideline sheet.

Blogs about WeBS counts can also be used as articles, if anyone writes or follows a blog by a WeBS counter please send the link to Neil Calbrade.

Andrew King offered to write an article, it was suggested that it should be about 400-500 words in length.

AP/LOAC8/9 NC to contact AK regarding article.

Other suggested ideas for articles included: feedback on historical data; article about geese and how they're being misidentified.

Nick Mason offered to write an article.

AP/LOAC8/10 NC to contact NM regarding article.

Water Rail

The Water Rail pilot had a good response with eight people using tape lures during their WeBS counts. Briefly, the results show that using tapes does present more birds than normally seen.

NM confirmed that Deben counters were prepared to use tapes if required.

Low Tide Report

A one-year study was completed on the Humber for 2011/12.

A report has been produced which looked at trends for sites in the Liverpool Bay area, including Ribble Estuary, Dee Estuary and the Mersey Estuary. This is the first time in many years that the Ribble and Mersey Estuaries have been counted at Low Tide.

Sites that will be completing Low Tide counts for 2013/14 are: Pagham Harbour; Deben Estuary; Cleddau Estuary; Medway Estuary, Blythe Estuary (Northumberland); Rough Firth; Loch Indaal; Lough Foyle and Swansea Bay.

AP/LOAC8/11 NC to provide NM with some Low Tide instructions, maps and forms/spreadsheet.

It was confirmed that in the new paper report there will be a Low Tide section that focuses on one site but that, eventually, there will be a tab for Low Tide, similar to the Core section, in the online reporting interface.

WeBS Training

There are no training days planned for this winter. Unfortunately the uptake from training sessions at the Nunnery is not great. A training session was held at Snettisham last year, unfortunately the tide was against us and the birds didn't come in as hoped. Overall the experience was better than those held at the Nunnery as hundreds of birds were available.

AP/LOAC8/12 HM to circulate link to flock training programme to LOAC members

WeBS Staff are keen for Local Organisers to hold training sessions in their own regions. Those who do can be provided with slides/image and supporting material.

7 WeBS Social Media

The Facebook page is currently just short of 500 followers.

We have also recently set up a Twitter account which already has over 200 followers. We're tweeting about general birding and wetland topics as well as WeBS related items.

Twitter can be a useful way to get messages out quickly to counters, we're hoping it will also be a way to recruit new volunteers.

One of the ways BirdTrack uses Twitter is to send out a 'mystery reporting rate' and get their followers to guess the species from a graph showing how many complete lists have been submitted over the year. Now that we have the online reporting interface we will be able to do something similar.

We're also planning to use Twitter to promote training courses. It was agreed that because WeBS will be competing with lots of other birding organisations WeBS staff will need to be very proactive about updating all the social media sites.

8 Reports from Partners

JNCC – WeBS data are fundamental to a JNCC-led review of UK SPA Network which has been on-going since 2008. Assessment of current population sizes on each SPA and overall numbers within each SPA suite – those sites specifically classified for each relevant species. Those assessments then reported to EU via Article 12 process. Review has also identified some SPA suites as 'insufficient' thus leading to on-going work to assess potential further sites for SPA classification (including adding species as 'qualifying interests' on SPAs already classified for other species. Since the 1990s (JNCC's SPA Network Review published in 2001) WeBS data shows there to have been significant range expansion of species such as *e.g.* non-breeding (and breeding) Avocet and other distributional change.

Birds Directive 'Article12' report on the status of UK Birds. WeBS data were crucial to reporting on status and trends of non-breeding waterbirds (typically using population estimates processed and published in early 2013 by the Avian Population Estimates Panel). The Article 12 data will be used in European assessments due for publication in 2015 – Birds in Europe 3 by BirdLife International and an EU28 assessment published by European Commission collating the 28 Member State reports. Also in UK in Birds of Conservation Concern 4 due for publication also in 2015.

The Article 12 reporting cycle will be useful to tie all reporting together for non-breeding and breeding birds. Where we have SPAs Country agencies are using WeBS data on a daily basis.

Article 17 is a habitats directive which looks at all habitats with SPACs, it looks at all protected European species, including bats, newts etc.

Bringing the reporting for these together gives a snapshot of the health of European biodiversity.

A number of recommendations in relation to some specific data issues will be included in the write-up of the SPA review, specifically for WeBS. In particular, since totals for specific SPA suites are calculated on the basis of numbers in specific 'snapshot' months (when peak numbers are in UK), need to ensure that coverage in those months are as complete as possible. Typically this is January but for some species is other months (e.g. February for Curlew, May for Sanderling etc.). A paper outlining various issue will be submitted to the WeBS (Steering group + LOAC) by JNCC in due course.

BTO – BBS is adding more recording options therefore there are online system developments going on.

BirdTrack will be going international in early spring.

A National Breeding Peregrine Survey is planned for 2014.

The Winter Thrushes survey is on-going.

Another NEWS survey is planned to run over two winters, hopefully 2014/15 and 2015/16. This will help to ensure better coverage of open coastline that are not normally well covered for WeBS especially in remote areas. The first winter will be about getting key areas (SPAs/non-estuarine coastline) covered with paid workers. The second winter will be rolled out as a counter survey – we are applying to the Country Agencies for funding for this.

The Atlas book has been published.

WWT (via email from Richard Hearn)

New WWT waterbird monitoring website

During summer 2012, WWT's Species Monitoring Unit (SMU) developed their new website, which provides information on various aspects of their work; including the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (annual survey results, species accounts, reports *etc.*), seaduck monitoring and capacity building. The website went live at the beginning of September (<http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/>).

WWT Waterbird monitoring online recording website

WWT's SMU are developing an online recording system, the first phase of which should be going live in early 2014. This first phase will include online forms for the Icelandic-breeding Goose Census and goose and swan age assessments. There will also be an online mapping, search and reporting system for capturing, verifying/validating and managing information about survey sites, which, just like for WeBS, makes up the Count Unit Definition Inventory (CUDI).

Future stages of development will include online forms for submitting sightings of colour-marked birds.

The online recording website has been developed using *Indicia*, an open source biological recording system. Any developments, such as the new module for recording colour-marked birds, can be made available to the *Indicia* community.

For further information about *Indicia* see <http://www.indicia.org.uk/>.

Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP)

Spring and summer 2013 was the reporting period for the 2012/13 surveys.

Results in brief:

- Bewick's Swan: good breeding season at 17.7% young, compared with 11.9% in 2011/12.
- Whooper Swan: average breeding success at 16% young, compared with 12.5% in 2011/12.
- Pink-footed Goose: population estimated at 359,175, a 38% increase on 2011 (260,325); average breeding success at 21%, compared with 8.5% in 2011.
- Taiga Bean Goose: a peak of 76 birds recorded at Yare Valley (Norfolk), which is below the ten-year average of 128 birds and continues the decline at the site, whilst a peak of 233 was seen at Slamannan (Falkirk), the lowest count since 2003/04, although numbers there have remained stable at around 200–250 birds.
- Greenland White-fronted Goose (results for 2011/12): population estimated at 22,403 (spring 2012), representing a 13% drop compared with 2011, and the lowest recorded since 1986 (21,890); poor breeding success with only 8.8% young recorded amongst birds in Britain (compared with 21.2% in 2010/11) and 7.6% in Ireland (compared with 14.4% in 2010/11).
- Iceland Greylag Goose: population estimated at 104,632, a 13% increase on 2011 (111,558); average breeding success at 21.7%, compared with 19.6% in 2011.
- Greenland Barnacle Goose: see below for abundance results; low breeding success with 7% young recorded amongst flocks on Islay and Tiree (compared with 11% in 2011/12).
- Svalbard Barnacle Goose: population estimated at 31,000, an 8.5% decrease on 2011/12 (33,900); poor breeding success at 5.5% young, compared with 12.8% in 2011/12.
- Dark-bellied Brent Goose: very poor breeding season with only 3.1% young recorded, compared with 16.2% in 2011/12.
- Canadian Light-bellied Brent Goose: population estimated at 41,465, a 14% decrease on 2011 (48,002); very poor breeding season with only 1.9% young recorded amongst flocks, compared with 25% in 2011
- East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Goose: low breeding success with 7.6% young recorded amongst flocks at Lindisfarne, compared with 4.9% in 2011/12; combining these results with those from Denmark produced a productivity estimate of 10% (low productivity).

Complete survey results are available on the species account pages of WWT's waterbird monitoring website at <http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/our-work/goose-swan-monitoring-programme/species-accounts/>.

The 12th edition of *GooseNews*, the annual newsletter of the GSMP, was published in September 2013. It includes summary reports of monitoring activities, information on forthcoming surveys, and other information of relevance and interest. *GooseNews* is available to download from WWT's waterbird monitoring website at <http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/our-work/goose-swan-monitoring-programme/reports-newsletter/>.

Summer survey of Greylags on Orkney

In August 2013, WWT organised a second survey of Greylag Geese on Orkney (funded by SNH), with the assistance volunteer counters. The aim of the survey was to assess the abundance, distribution and breeding success of British Greylag Geese on Orkney.

A total of 20,241 birds were recorded, only slightly lower than in 2012 (21,367), and of the 1,285 geese aged, 18% were young birds, compared with 25% in 2012. The report will be available to download from WWT's waterbird monitoring website in the next few months.

Greenland Barnacle Goose Census

The 13th International Census of Greenland Barnacle Geese took place in March 2013. This census takes place every five years and involves both ground and aerial counts. WWT coordinated the counts in Scotland with WWT's Carl Mitchell and Colette Hall undertaking the aerial counts, whilst the ground counts were carried out by volunteers. Counts in n Ireland were coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with help from BirdWatch Ireland and volunteers.

A total of 80,670 birds were recorded, which is an increase of 14.4% on the 2008 total (70,501). The report will be available to download from the website in the next few months.

Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme conference/workshop, 2014

WWT are planning a one day GSMP conference/workshop, which is due to take place in September 2014. The conference will provide an opportunity to get together to discuss GSMP issues as well as facilitating greater contact between WWT and the GSMP network. The location has yet to be decided but it is likely to be held in central Scotland. Further information will be made available on WWT's waterbird monitoring website (<http://monitoring.wwt.org.uk/>).

International Swan Census, 2015

The next International Swan Census is due to take place in January 2015. The overall organisation is being undertaken by the Swan Specialist Group. WWT will be organising the Icelandic Whooper Swan census and the survey of Bewick's in Britain and Ireland. Preparation for this will start in summer 2013. As before, this will involve using WeBS data as well as additional counts, and WWT will likely be in contact with WeBS Local Organisers to ask for help. Further details will be available nearer the time.

9 Date of next meeting

The 9th meeting of the LOAC has been provisionally set as Tuesday 15th July 2014, 10.00 am, at the British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford. TBC.