



WeBS Steering Group – 51st Meeting

JNCC, Peterborough 13th January 2016

Present at meeting:

Andy Musgrove (AM), BTO
Dawn Balmer (DB), BTO
Teresa Frost (TF) BTO

Richard Hearn (RH), WWT
Simon Wotton (SW), RSPB (Chair)
David Stroud (DAS), JNCC

Referred to in minutes (not present at meeting):

Heidi Mellan(HM), BTO
Kathryn Ross (KR), BTO
Chas Holt (CH), ex-BTO

Neil Calbrade (NC), BTO
Graham Austin (GA), BTO

Apologies: Deborah Proctor, JNCC

Introduction and adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted. SW chaired. DB/AM took minutes.

Minutes of 50th Meeting

Minutes of 50th meeting were adopted. Action points from previous meetings were checked at the end of the meeting. DAS suggested the action points are simply numbered numerically throughout the minutes to avoid the otherwise confusing protocol.

Reports

1. Progress vs. deadlines

Teresa Frost started as WeBS National Organiser in mid-November, taking over from Chas Holt who left at the end of May 2015. Teresa has been learning about WeBS and getting to grips with the way things work.

The WeBS Newsletter went out on time in September 2015; suggestions for 2016 edition made in item 9 below.

Low-tide data are now all in, though there are some core data still to chase, some to input. Still need to add in goose data from WWT (in hand).

We reviewed the proposed timetable for the report and suggested shifting the publication date to early April so to avoid Easter (late March).

AP51.1: Review timetable for report; change date for comments received to after 18th March and publication to early April (TF).

AP51.2: Send data to IWC as soon as possible (TF).

AP51.3: WWT need final wild swan data for Jan 2015 by June 2016 (TF).

2. WeBS Counter network

DAS is considering taking on the role of LO for Northants.

The third SPA Network Review makes a number of explicit recommendations regarding improvement of coverage of those SPAs monitored by WeBS. Targeted publicity is needed, including an article for the next WeBS Newsletter identifying key months for species at particular sites and promoting the importance of completing WeBS counts in those months.

NC going to Exeter to run a training course for Natural England (NE). Should encourage other NE office and country agencies to do this. Perhaps time to do this for RSPB staff again.

There was a renewed request from the Local Organiser that the existing East and West Cotswold Water Park, together with the new developments in the middle, to be treated as one WeBS site. SG considered this and felt it was now appropriate, but noted that counters needed to be clear that treatment as one site within WeBS didn't have any automatic statutory implications. If there was to be any attempt to promote the "site" designation based on overall numbers, there would need to be clear evidence of the degree of movements within and between the component elements of the "site".

AP51.4: Contact David regarding LO role (HM).

AP51.5: Article in WeBS Newsletter about importance SPA monitoring, especially during passage periods (NC/DAS).

AP51.6: Combine Cotswold Water Park sites in WeBS database and inform local counters that understanding the movement between the pits would be vital if they are considering promoting statutory site recognition (HM,TF).

3. Website & WeBS Online

WeBS online continues to work well but is need of a 'refresh'. Given the financial constraints, we should look for quick wins in refreshing the website, especially tasks that make the LO job easier. It was agreed there was value in asking LOAC for their views. We also discussed whether adding spatial information regarding roost sites to the database was possible. This information could be very useful for site case work and current data gaps.

AP51.7: Identify any changes to the website that would make the LO tasks easier and suggest quick wins to improve look and feel. Cost these with the BTO Information Services team (TF).

AP51.8: Locate original documents regarding recording spatial information for roost sites. Identify changes that need to be made and cost these with IS. Produce broad proposal then consider how we might approach funding it. Consider asking country agencies if they are interested (TF, AM, DB).

4. WeBS Low Tide Counts

There are still some very large sites that need low tide coverage (Humber, North Norfolk, Forth) as well as Southampton Water. We discussed the possibility of splitting some of these big linear sites into smaller sub-sites to reduce potential barriers to getting counters to tackle them.

AP51.9: What are the pros and cons of covering some of these big sites as multiple smaller sub-sites? (NC, TF).

AP51.10: Prioritise site list and identify those which would need professional coverage in order to proceed (NC).

5. 2015/16 Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS)

Allocation of sectors is going well with 67% high-priority sectors in UK allocated.

Heidi Mellan has worked very hard on NEWS, in addition to her usual role and the SG thanked her for her efforts. Some issues have been identified (e.g. additional habitat codes would be useful; consider adding additional species; adding guidance on what constitutes disturbance) and a feedback document has been created to gather these issues together for consideration for future surveys.

RH noted that coordinated counts of sea ducks had been taking place in the Baltic, and counts from elsewhere in northwest Europe were also welcome. NEWS could provide a significant contribution. RH said data may not be needed until summer 2017 as it was possible additional counts would be undertaken in winter 2016/17.

Funding Country Agencies require stand-alone reports on NEWS promptly.

AP51.11: Produce a timeline for the NEWS analysis and reports, and online reporting and identify what aspects can be written up early (coverage and change) and what may need more time (population estimates). (GA, DB, TF).

AP51.12: Chase the core counts that will be needed for the NEWS report (HM, TF).

6. Annual Reporting

The Group discussed the plans for the annual report for 2014/15 and TF presented the flat plan and artwork. AM mentioned that Lawrence Way (JNCC) is keen to find a way to implement recommendations from the Méndez et al. (2015) stratification paper; it would be good to expand on the implications of this paper in the report. Other reports to highlight: *Birds of Conservation Concern 4* and *Status of Waterbird populations in the East Atlantic Flyway*. For the country focus, Finland is interesting due to distribution shifts being most noticeable. Possible species for focus: Kingfisher, Crane, suites of species such as scarce wintering waders (Whimbrel, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Ruff), grebes, (Slavonian Grebe, Red-necked Grebe), gulls and terns; BOCC4 red-listed species.

AP51.13: Topics identified for the 2017 report include: for country focus somewhere south along the flyway - Senegal or Gambia perhaps; wet grassland; divers, Golden Plover. (TF).

7. WeBS Alerts

The production of updated WeBS Alerts had been deferred from 2015/16 and the SG agreed that these will not be produced in 2016/17 either in the continued absence of funding.

8. Population Estimates

Production of UK waterbird population estimates had been deferred from 2015/16 and it was agreed that these should be produced in 2016/17. They will be needed for the next UK report under

Article 12 of the Birds Directive as well as for a wide range of other uses. NEWS data will make an important input, although there is no updated gull roost data. The SG agreed to keep the population estimate work apart from the next assessment from the Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP), but close enough that they can be used in APEP 4. The next APEP anticipated to be for 2017/18 (to fit into the Article 12 timeline) if resources allow.

AP51.14: Add to work plan for 2016/17 and incorporate NEWS data (essential) alongside consideration of the findings of the Méndez *et al.* paper and the potential for Bird Atlas 2007-11 to provide context around the estimates. (TF, DB, AM).

9. WeBS newsletter

Suggestions included outcomes of AEWA MOP5 (DAS and WWT); IWC 50th Anniversary; third SPA Network Review Swan Census results; Pochard sex ratio; Golden Plover; site focus Steart? and Rivers/linear sites.

AP51.15: Further ideas for the newsletter to be sent to NC (ALL).

10. WeBS Data Requests & associated allocation

Data requests continue to go well. We should aim to maintain surplus at a similar level.

AP51.16: Check which financial year the previously agreed contribution for NEWS was in (AM, DB).

AP51.17: Think about small incremental increase in data request charges (TF, NC).

11. Progress with On-going WeBS Sub-projects

Stratification: the paper on stratification was published (Méndez et al. 2015).

AP51.18: Add recommendations from Méndez et al. to WeBS developments list (TF).

Historic Waterbird data: TF presented an overview of the task and reported how much had been done and what tasks are still left to do. TF estimates one year full-time work, or two-three years volunteer effort. Inputting is the final stage of the job and we may be able to use volunteers for that; SW – RSPB volunteers may be able to assist. The group suggested there was scope for using some of the data surplus to employ someone part-time to resource the bottle-neck to sorting and checking data.

AP51.19: Put together some costings based on 2.5 days per week for a year to make progress on digitising historic IWC data (TF).

Methods review: CH will hand back to BTO for completion.

AP51.20: Send the most recent draft of the methods review to BTO (CH).

AP51.21: BTO to consider how to complete the methods review paper (TF, DB, AM).

Arctic Indicator: Drafting work, with Dutch co-authors, on the arctic indicators, was nearly complete.

AP51.22: Chas Holt to liaise with co-authors and submit Arctic Indicator paper (CH).

Protected Sites : this paper still needs some work to bring it in line with original concept. DAS offered to redraft introduction to provide a clearer view of the aims of the paper.

AP51.23: TF and Kathryn Ross to meet with DAS to discuss Protected Sites paper (TF, KR, DAS).

International Golden Plovers census: DB reported slow progress in gathering data from other countries. RH suggested we ask the IWC coordinator to help chase data.

AP51.24: Write a note on Golden Plover project for IWC newsletter and produce map of countries that have not yet submitted data (TF, DB).

Sierra Leone: €2000 has been given to the project from WeBS data request surplus in 2015/16. RH presented a proposal for continued support by WeBS of counts in Sierra Leone by developing a relationship with staff from Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) as part of an AEWMP twinning initiative. This could include remote support and advice by WeBS partners coordinated by the WeBS Secretariat and further contributions from data surplus money (in years where resources are adequate) towards costs of annual counts at key sites and ~three-yearly AEWMP censuses.

12. WeBS Agreement

The WeBS Agreement is part of the wider JNCC-BTO Partnership which is being continued for a further year. The Partners will be making the same financial contribution for the next financial year.

AP51.25: Update on continuation of the WeBS Agreement as more information becomes available (AM).

13. Recent Publications

Méndez, V., Austin, G.E., Musgrove, A.J., Ross-Smith, V.H., Hearn, R., Stroud, D.A., Wotton, S.R. & Holt, C.A. (2015). Use of environmental stratification to derive non-breeding population estimates of dispersed waterbirds in Great Britain. *Journal for Nature Conservation* 28: 56-66. [doi:10.1016/j.jnc.2015.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2015.09.001)

14. Conferences / Meetings

Upcoming conferences and meetings include:

African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership Strategic Working Group (AEWMP SWG)
– 18-19 February 2016, The Netherlands

Pan-African Ornithological Conference – 17-21 October 2016, Senegal

EBCC Bird Numbers Conference – 5-9 September 2016, Germany

IWC coordinators workshop – 10 September 2016, Germany

International Wader Study Group – 9-12 September 2016, Ireland

15. 70th Anniversary

We had a discussion about the 70th anniversary of WeBS in 2017 and TF presented a paper of ideas of ways to celebrate the occasion. Other suggestions include:

- Infographics – most counted sites, species most recorded, habitat changes
- Overview papers
- Distribution of stubble, potatoes (geese foraging)
- Historic material
- 70 year information pack
- Media pack for 70 years
- Regional conferences
- Data on binoculars, fieldguides – improved ID of ducks
- Organisational memory project – any merit in producing an index of what we've done, major milestones

AP51.26: DB and TF to produce a plan of what can be achieved.

16. Update on AEWA (including 50th anniversary of International Waterbird Census)

AP51.27: Press release to send out to celebrate 50 years of IWC in mid-January (TF).

AEWA has urged the establishment of a fund to support waterbird monitoring at its recent MOP6¹ – Parties are encouraged to make voluntary contributions towards support of IWC development operations. This fund will be administered by the partnership. IWC are using the whole year used to promote 50th anniversary of IWC.

Review CSN tool – available online for comments.

Develop better colonial waterbirds monitoring (Szabolcs Nagy keen to develop this further).

AOB

Data Request Surplus: We decided we could spend a larger sum at the end of the current agreement period to usefully support WeBS development. We felt this could fall roughly as follows:

- NEWS – additional contribution of £10K (hoped that this would suffice alongside the agencies)
- Historic data – at least £10K towards this, but also noted that Defra had made a challenge to open up 1,000 datasets by June and DAS would look into whether there was any funding behind this; moreover, NBN had previously been able to distribute some money from Cabinet Office around mobilisation of old records.

¹ http://www.unep-awea.org/sites/default/files/document/awea_mop6_res3_mw_monitoring_en.docx

- Another £10K shared between a further contribution to Sierra Leone, plus completion of the SPA paper and the WeBS methods review.

AP51.28: Investigate Cabinet Office fund & register & Defra (DAS, TF).

Minutes: Complete minutes copies held digitally only from SC29 September 2004 on WeBS server.

AP51.29: Find old minutes of Steering Group and send to TF (ALL).

Extra Surveys: there may be a Baltic wide seaduck census this winter – may be gaps next winter that need filling (RH).

Date of next meeting

AP51.30: TF to circulate possible dates for a meeting at end June or early July; SW to organise venue in the CCI David Attenborough Building in Cambridge (TF, SW).