



WeBS Steering Committee – 54th Meeting

Rockhopper Room, The Lodge, Sandy 30th November 2017

Present at meeting:

Dawn Balmer (DB), BTO
Richard Hearn (RH), WWT
David Stroud (DAS), JNCC

Teresa Frost (TF) BTO
Anna Robinson (AR), JNCC
Simon Wotton (SW), RSPB (Chair)

Apologies: Heidi Mellan, BTO.

1. Introduction and adoption of agenda

This meeting was rescheduled from September. The agenda was adopted. SW (RSPB) chaired. DB took minutes.

2. WeBS Agreement and Funding

The WeBS April 2017 – March 2022 Memorandum of Agreement was signed on the 26th September 2017. JNCC expect to meet their financial commitment this year and next.

Country Agencies are to be invited to future steering meetings in a non-voting capacity; JNCC have a list of the country agency representatives who would be routinely sent the agenda and papers. It is expected that they would not routinely attend meetings, but would phone in as appropriate.

The new agreement has more development work in it than previously, so a greater focus on planning is required involving the steering committee and country agencies. In future the work programme should be finalised in December for the following financial year. It was agreed that the current spring and autumn steering committee meetings are supplemented by teleconference meetings in the other two quarters. Ideally the WeBS steering committee meetings will take place before the JNCC-BTO management meetings.

The new agreement specifies the WeBS datasets that are currently on the WeBS Report Online¹ be made available under Open Government Licence (version 3), which means the data can be used for any purpose as long as there is an attribution. It was noted that at the moment it is not possible to download these datasets apart from index and trend values, although they are available via the WeBS office (as well as viewing via the WeBS Report Online).

AP54.1: Forward papers and next steering meeting to country agency representatives who are invited to attend in person or by telephone if they so wish – this should be the case for all future meetings (JNCC)

AP54.2: Add OGL licence condition to WeBS online report footer (BTO)

¹ annual/monthly index values and latest trend values for the UK and for the separate countries; annual peak counts per site/species; latest five-year peak mean values per site/species.

AP54.3: Add explanation of OGL data output licencing conditions to counter support materials and that by submitting data users agree to this licencing (BTO)

AP54.4: Check sign-up wording for new WeBS Online users is sufficient (JNCC)

AP54.5: Consider technical options for making annual peak counts per site/species downloadable from WeBS Report Online (BTO)

AP54.6: Add review of data requests to next Steering Committee agenda (BTO)

The new agreement sets a target for publishing occurrence data (e.g. to the NBN Atlas) within 18 months of submission, but July 2016 data won't be processed and published until the 2016-17 WeBS Report in May 2018, a gap of 22 months.

AP54.7: In the next contract variation, change Section 10.10 of the WeBS agreement from "within 12-18 months following data submission" to "shortly after publication" (JNCC)

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is not expected to result in major changes to structured schemes. JNCC are working with partners to draft privacy notices for scheme data and BTO will be getting explicit permission for fundraising.

3. Strategic Review: Work Programme and Development Priorities

The WeBS work programme for 2017-18, detailed in the WeBS Agreement, was circulated with status (red = not started; amber = in progress; green = completed). Adding a risk column would be useful and whether the project will be completed within the financial year. It would be useful to have three lists: work in progress 1-2 financial years; plans for rest of financial years in agreement; and a wish list for developments. Financial information on estimates, actual costs and milestones would be helpful.

AP54.8: Add more explanation what the colours mean in the WeBS work programme document; consider adding a column for risk of completing (BTO)

The discussion on work programme projects included those funded by WeBS data requests as well as those funded within the main WeBS agreement.

WEBS DATA REQUEST FUNDED PROJECTS

The "**SPA added value**" paper, on the importance of SPAs to all waterbird species and not just SPA species, funded by WeBS data requests, is unfinished but a new member of staff will be working on it.

AP54.9: Circulate draft of SPA added value paper in late February 2018 (BTO)

DAS has looked at the **Arctic Indicator paper**, which has had most of the work done requested by the journal and needs resubmitting.

AP54.10: Complete Arctic Indicator revision and circulate to authors by the end of December 2017 (DAS)

TF is still waiting for significant datasets from Germany and Hungary for the **Golden Plover 2014 survey**. It is planned to publish the results in Wader Study.

AP54.11: Chase outstanding international Golden Plover data (BTO)

The estimate for professionally digitising the remaining **historic NWC data** was given as £60,000. It should also be remembered that detailed BoEE data has already been scanned and could be input. Crowd-sourcing platforms such as zooniverse could be used for both, but also come with staff costs for support. Funding for digitising forms is not easy to find; could the task form part of a long-term climate related study?

AP54.12: Produces estimates for other options (scanning, crowd sourcing) of digitising the remaining historic NWC data (BTO)

AP54.13: Advertise for local volunteers to come to BTO office and the Lodge to digitise historic data (BTO, RSPB)

AP54.14: Research opportunities for funding historic NWC data from charitable trusts (BTO, RSPB)

WORKPLAN 2017-18 PROJECTS

Celebration and promotion of **WeBS 70th anniversary [W1]** has been successful, with a well-received conference, RSPB Nature's Home podcast, articles (BTO News, Volunteer, WeBS) and talk at BTO annual conference.

It is still envisaged that adding **Principal Sites [W2]** and **Low Tide maps [W5]** to the **WeBS Report Online** will be completed this financial year. AR suggested some changes to make WeBS Report Online more user friendly, including hover over help to explain thresholds, "GB max" and "NI max" (Numbers and Trends); units for average density (Low Tide).

AP54.15: Discuss possibilities for making WeBS Report Online more user-friendly by use of hover hints with IS colleagues (BTO)

AP54.16: Rename links on WeBS homepage from "WeBS Online" to "WeBS Online Data Entry" and "WeBS Annual Report" to "WeBS Report and Results" (BTO)

AP54.17: Add OGL licence condition and an index to column headings as a readme tab in the species trends downloadable spreadsheet (BTO)

It was agreed that the start of the proposed multi-year project to look at **roost mapping [W3a]** be delayed to 2018/19. As this is a project Natural England have expressed most interest in, the first step will be to liaise with them and assess requirements.

It is envisaged that the project on **core counts site prioritisation [W4]** – will now take place in 2018-19.

AP54.18: Develop an online survey to gather information on sites with development pressure or casework needs to circulate to RSPB and country agency staff (BTO)

WORKPLAN 2018-19 PROJECTS

One of the main projects scheduled for 2018-19 is **WeBS Alerts**. There are several issues arising from the last report and the needs and requirements of partners and data users, particularly the country agencies. This project will need to be started promptly to enable publication in Spring 2019 with *Waterbirds in the UK 2017/18* and is a higher priority than the roost mapping [w3] project.

AP54.19: Organise WeBS Alerts stakeholder discussion to scope Alerts and following this develop a project specification (BTO)

Collection and use of data on **waterbird age/sex ratios [W6a]** is scheduled for 2018-19. Data has been collected previously for Pochard by encouraging WeBS counters to submit ratios through BirdTrack or a separate online form.

AP54.20: Discuss requirements for collecting and storing waterbird age and sex ratios and the role of WeBS (BTO, WWT)

WORKPLAN 2019-20 PROJECTS

A project to look at analytical approaches to differential site coverage [W8] has been scheduled in the agreement for 2019/20. This project potentially incorporates work on measuring uncertainty. Estimating confidence for WeBS indices could potentially be used to derive confidence limits for the wintering wetland bird indicator. The committee discussed recommendations from the UK & England Biodiversity Indicators Quality Assurance Science Panel (Review of UK biodiversity indicators that provide status and trends for species, January 2016) and comments from David Noble (BTO) on the need for uncertainty measures for the wintering waterbird indicator.

AP54.21: Attend the biodiversity indicators forum on potential approaches for indicators and confidence limits for these (TF, 15/12/17)

AP54.22: Consider if it is feasible to start work on Analytical approaches to differential site coverage [W8] in 2018-19 (BTO)

IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

Given the number of outstanding projects from previous years and the greater urgency of some WeBS core and development tasks, the immediate priorities are:

- Population estimates (needs to be in press by middle of 2018)
- SPA added value paper
- Waterbirds in the UK 2016/17 report
- WeBS Report Online Developments (W2 and W5)
- Begin scoping work for WeBS Alerts

AP54.23: Revise the workplan spreadsheet to show work plan for next couple of years. Break up projects into items and generate plans of when these will be done (BTO)

4. WeBS Operational Report

Income from data services is slightly up on first two quarters in previous year. In the new WeBS agreement the contribution from data services to the core WeBS budget has been increased to £40,000 per annum.

AP54.24: Assess if current allocation for WeBS SPA added value paper is sufficient to finish the paper (BTO)

AP54.25: Pay Sovon €2500 for January 2018 Sierra Leone counts (BTO)

AP54.26: Add assisting with Sierra Leone 2019 counts to RSPB sabbatical list (RSPB)

AP54.27: Discuss interest on the WeBS contingency funds held by BTO (BTO, JNCC)

5. WeBS Annual Report

The date for the release of Waterbirds in the UK 2016-17 is 3rd May 2018. A cover artwork has been arranged. Possible habitat focus could be riverine habitats, marshes or reservoirs. Wet Grassland and marine habitats are possibilities but not well covered by WeBS (and sea ducks covered in last report). Species focus could include Bittern, Common Gull, terns, Teal, Snipe, Whooper Swan, Bewick's Swan or a focus on non-natives. It was suggested the country focus be Iceland. There could be an article on the 70th anniversary, perhaps with a link to the historic data. The data use section could benefit from a more interesting article than the standard text and perhaps include value of volunteer effort in the scheme (AR). There are links to breeding surveys, particularly the anniversary of the heronries census and need to report rare breeders to RBBP (DB) but this is more suitable for a newsletter article rather than report.

AP54.28: Circulate revised JNCC logo file (AR)

AP54.29: Request articles from steering committee members/third parties (TF, Jan 2018)

6. NEWS reporting

The final report has been circulated to the Steering Committee and country agencies. A paper is planned to look at change using a paired sample approach, this should be completed by a research scientist at BTO with support from TF.

AP54.30: Publish the final NEWS report on the BTO website as Research Report 697 (BTO)

7. Population estimates

Estimates will be calculated using the same methodology as last time. For inland widespread species, these should be compared with estimates from the Mendez stratified estimates paper. Progress has been made on scarce species information from bird reports.

AP54.31: Check publication dates for population estimates with British Birds Editorial Board (DEB)

AP54.32: Look in to marine waterbird data sources via WWT and BTO Marine team and possibly SNH published marine SPA data (TF)

8. 70th anniversary

Covered under item 3.

9. Progress on action points

Outstanding Actions from previous meetings that have not been completed or superseded above²:

AP53.5: Revisit the 2012 England proposal for risk-based assessment and prioritisation of data gaps and cost for other countries. Explore potential funding. (BTO/RSPB)

AP52.11: Transfer data from Core Counts to LTC for relevant estuaries (NC).

AP51.17: Think about small incremental increase in costs for April (TF, NC). See also AP50/12/1 Look at our charging structure and recognise it needs to be part of wider discussion between partners. Aim for 15% contribution from data sales to the budget? (DEB, AJM, all). Ongoing, charges are online at <http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/webs/data/data-request-charges>.

AP50/12/8 Come up with a list of top 20 research ideas and promote to universities eg non-natives (UEA post-doc). Have a brainstorm at a future meeting.

10. Minutes of 53rd Meeting

The minutes were adopted.

11. AOB

Following adoption by BOU of the IOC taxonomic list of species, DAS noted that as international legislative frameworks use the HBW taxonomy, JNCC and the agencies thus no longer formally recognise the British List taxonomy.

12. Date of Next Meeting

Suggested that a catch-up meeting in January and the next full meeting in March.

AP54.33: Circulate poll for dates of future meetings (BTO)

² Low tide related actions from the 53rd meeting will form part of the Low Tide Counts review in the work programme.