



WeBS Steering Group – 52nd Meeting

David Attenborough Building, Cambridge 7th July 2016

Present at meeting:

Dawn Balmer (DB), BTO
Teresa Frost (TF) BTO
Simon Wotton (SW), RSPB (Chair)

Richard Hearn (RH), WWT
David Stroud (DAS), JNCC

Referred to in minutes (not present at meeting):

Heidi Mellan (HM), BTO
Graham Austin (GA), BTO

Neil Calbrade (NC), BTO
Chas Holt (CH), ex-BTO

Apologies: Deborah Proctor, JNCC and Andy Musgrove, BTO

Introduction and adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted. SW (RSPB) chaired. DB took minutes.

Minutes of 51st Meeting

Minutes of 51st meeting were approved with the amendment that the next Pan-European Duck Symposium will take place in Spring 2018.

Reports

1. Progress & Deadlines

The proposed timetable for the next newsletter and report was approved. There was discussion over the challenges of reporting earlier, particularly over the implications of late submission of data.

AP52.1: Identify key sites that routinely submit data late in calendar year or January following WeBS year and discuss at LOAC (TF/HM).

AP52.2: Send UK data to IWC as soon as possible (TF).

2. WeBS Counter network

We discussed the challenge of situations where a cohort or team of counters retire simultaneously and promoting the importance of succession planning with counters and local organisers. This could include letting the WeBS Secretariat know retirement and transition plans in advance and creating a pro-forma or online form for larger sites for current counters to fill out with handover information including information on access, contacts and contact details, viewing points etc. For the most complex sites these could be used to create a "How to Count X" guide which would also detail sites and months that are particularly important to cover at the site from the WeBS team.

- AP52.3:** Contact BTO Regional Network to request they suggest candidates for WeBS Local Organiser vacancies (HM).
- AP52.4:** Ask Bird Clubs to advertise gaps in coverage of WeBS sites (HM/Local Organisers).
- AP52.5:** Advertise for completing the Mersea Island (Colne Estuary) counter team (HM).
- AP52.6:** Add counter succession planning to LOAC agenda (HM).

There are several BTO training courses with WeBS included. It was suggested WeBS staff could attend a course to ensure the course is using up-to-date and relevant material. We discussed the possibilities for advanced training for counting complex sites. The BTO plan to increase training video resources and the group suggested videos on how to count a WeBS site and how to count big flocks should build on materials produced by SOVON and for Wetland International's Wings over Wetlands project.

3. WeBS Low Tide Counts

The Low Tide Counts (LTC) strategy has not been recently refreshed. We discussed possibilities for recruiting Low Tide Counters for estuaries where these are needed. Ideas included an article by keen Low Tide Counters for next newsletter and promoting Low Tide Counts to RSPB Conservation Officers, who can encourage RSPB site wardens to organise or take part.

Funds from country agencies or related to commercial projects has enabled professional fieldwork to cover some estuaries where LTC are needed, but not covered by volunteers. We discussed the merits of calculating threat potential for sites to further prioritise sites for Low Tide Counts, for example by RSPB regional staff and Country Agencies submitting information on known pressures on sites or recent planning applications and how this analysis could be funded.

For reporting Low Tide Counts, the biggest cost is the time to produce maps in GIS for WeBS Online Report: development work here would be useful if warranted by the number of sites covered. It was agreed data should be transferred to the LTC database from core counts at sites where Core Counts are carried out at low tide because of local conditions.

- AP52.7:** Circulate proposal that Kate Jennings (RSPB) and CH were working on in 2013 on prioritising Core and Low Tide Counts (SW) in areas where there is, or is likely to be significant conservation casework on the estuaries concerned.
- AP52.8:** Add threat assessment for Low Tide sites to WeBS development ideas spreadsheet (TF).
- AP52.9:** Revisit the Low Tides Counts strategy; as a first step invite NC to the next Steering Committee meeting and possibly a representative of external users such as Natural England (TF).
- AP52.10:** Consider how to make Low Tide Count map production more efficient, e.g. via online mapping or semi-automating the GIS process (TF/NC).
- AP52.11:** Transfer data from Core Counts to LTC for relevant estuaries (NC).

4. WeBS Core Count SPA Coverage

The third review of the UK SPA network by JNCC is due to be released in 2016. The assessment highlights that WeBS and GSMP provide c. 65% of bird data for SPA monitoring. Data was available for 96% of SPAs for the five year period 2005-10. However, there is incomplete coverage of some SPAs by WeBS; with issues around boundary alignment and sector coverage, as well as passage month coverage for network assessments of some species (e.g. lack of Sanderling counts during their peak passage in May). JNCC priority is thus to improve coverage on the SPAs listed, and get counts in core months for specific species; the WeBS newsletter is one avenue for promoting this message. If

WeBS will never be able to deliver volunteer collected data at some sites, responsibility for monitoring some remote sites should be acknowledged as outside the scope of WeBS by formally advising the relevant country agency.

Arable roost sites may be formally incorporated within SPA boundaries in future.

AP52.12: DAS to meet NC re site boundaries after LOAC meeting (DAS/NC).

AP52.13: Add Core Count SPA coverage as an agenda item for LOAC (HM).

AP52.14: Consider formal recommendations from third SPA review once published (TF).

5. Non-Estuarine Waterbird Survey (NEWS)

There is still a shortfall in funding for NEWS, despite contributions from WeBS. NE have agreed a second contribution (now invoiced).

Most data is in the database now, but still to enter data from some Mull paper forms. Received feedback from counters has been collected, but the SG would like to survey all counters whilst the survey is still fresh in peoples' minds.

TF showed graphs on disturbance data collected as part of NEWS, which lead to a wider discussion over WeBS and disturbance data. There is demand for information on waterbird disturbance from country agencies and academia. WeBS Core Counts or Low Tide Counts could collect frequency of activities at sites and how these change over time, but the SG queried what questions we are trying to answer – the SG don't consider that WeBS can provide meaningful data due to biases such as the time of day of WeBS counts often being chosen for when disturbance is at a minimum. This could impact on interpreting what the implications are for birds. If we need to understand disturbance, any method used needs to be fit for purpose, and appropriate to address the question(s) being asked. For NEWS itself, we could report in broad categories, but caution will be needed in using the data collected.

The SG agreed that NEWS would remain a periodic survey with about a 9-10year periodicity, but interested counters can set up WeBS counts at NEWS sectors if they wished to monitor non-estuarine coasts more frequently.

AP52.15: Consider how we can meet the NEWS shortfall, such as additional fundraising or assessing potential cost savings when building the online tab (DB/TF).

AP52.16: Work with country agencies to obtain NEWS funding towards this year's reporting costs (DB).

AP52.17: As part of the WeBS partnership Agreement discussions, consider when next NEWS and WINGS will be carried out and how we can budget for these in advance, possibly partially using data surplus funds accrued over the preceding period (ALL).

AP52.18: Share collated 'Lessons learnt' from NEWS with SG (DB).

AP52.19: Produce an online survey on NEWS to gauge success and inform planning for future surveys (topics to include: wrack; scope of survey (extra species); were habitat descriptions acceptable; sector definitions) (TF/HM).

AP52.20: Chase 2013 Tiree data for NEWS (HM).

6. Annual Reporting

The content of *Waterbirds in the UK* was reviewed. In future *Waterbirds in the UK* reports, given other weather sources are available, it was agreed that there is no need to use more than a paragraph on weather, unless there was a particular weather event that caused an impact on birds. The 'Conditions' section should add context for counts; it could include weather in Europe further

east or summer conditions in Iceland. The Low Tide Count map should be smaller (currently takes up one page).

Contents for WITUK1516 could include an article on the Arctic Indicators paper if published in time. It should also feature NEWS, with a habitat focus on the non-estuarine coast. Articles could include gross changes over time as measured by NEWS surveys and coverage achieved over the four surveys with a timeline graphic. A historical perspective in WITUK, focusing the story of the survey would avoid anticipating the published results.

There was strong support for a peer review paper on NEWS, hopefully at UK and Ireland scale with an Irish co-author(s). There may be a continuing range-shift story; maps showing change in relative abundance could indicate distribution changes.

We discussed where population estimates should appear: the SG suggested not publishing any NEWS county population estimates online, but to include all population estimates in the waterbird population estimates paper and point to that as main source of data. An overall abundance map and online site/county level maps of coverage within reporting page could be created. The NEWS LO regions are a meaningful reporting scale for the online report.

For some, particularly remote sites of interest, country agencies organise targeted surveys outwith WeBS/NEWS. It is important this data is passed on to be included in the WeBS / NEWS databases as appropriate.

AP52.21: Check what resources have been allocated to producing a paper on NEWS, what was published previously and if country agencies are interested in contributing (DB).

AP52.22: Contact Country Agencies to remind them if they are commissioning work data needs to feed into WeBS (DAS).

7. Website & WeBS Online

Priorities for the WeBS website and online reporting were reviewed. It was agreed the WeBS team should work with the BTO IS team to add features as budget allowed, with improving the vacant sites map for potential counters being the top priority.

8. Newsletter

We discussed some of the ideas for articles for the upcoming WeBS newsletter (adding to previous suggestions):

- Importance of WeBS counts on SPAs. Promote the value of counting sites year-round, but highlight option of supplementary counts for certain species in key months if a full WeBS count is not possible. Key SPA sites and table of sites/species where counts are really important. Explain why we work to align counting units to best fit both long-term WeBS site boundaries and SPA boundaries.
- Pochard sex-ratio feedback (in January 100,000 birds were sexed in 27 countries). Full results will be in a paper, but can have brief article with thanks and plans.
- No RSPB casework article likely (Gwent Levels possibility for next year).
- Use of data for offshore windfarms
- SPA news - Dungeness Romney Marsh and Rye Bay is now SPA and a Ramsar Site; WeBS data used as evidence.

- Prompt data submission - call for data for year ending June 2016 to be submitted by November for use in waterbird population estimates and article 12 reporting.
- Autumn 2017 WeBS conference – proposed date and venue
- How long have you been counting? – ask for stories for upcoming anniversary
- Low tide article from an enthusiastic counter

9. State of the UK's Birds

TF and Colette Hall at WWT have been working on the latest State of the UK's birds.

AP52.23: Circulate draft waterbird SUKB 2016 article for comment (TF).

10. Population Estimates

Revised waterbird population estimates are due by the end of March and will use WeBS and NEWS data (as available) up to June 2016. Seaduck could be a key story, so we discussed inviting possible additional authors with seaduck expertise. A more concise paper than last time may be better received by *British Birds*. We questioned whether species by species discussion was the best format for a paper, but decided to return to this and other questions in a planning meeting.

AP52.24: Organise meetings (September, January) to plan the waterbird population estimates analysis and outputs (TF).

AP52.25: Contact *British Birds* to check if interested in publishing waterbird population estimates (DB).

AP52.26: Source additional marine (seaduck, divers, grebes) data and any other pertinent datasets for waterbird population estimates (TF).

AP52.27: Make special efforts to encourage early submission of 2015-16 WeBS data for use in population estimates (HM).

11. Global Waterbird Index Project

The SG were made aware of a possible project within the Cambridge Conservation Initiative on using a global waterbird index for biodiversity indicators which is awaiting the outcome of a funding application.

AP52.28: Circulate the CCI waterbird index project proposal to steering group members (TF).

12. WeBS 70th Anniversary

A timeline of events to celebrate 70 years (in WeBS year July 2017/June 2018) of UK waterbird monitoring schemes was proposed by TF. It was agreed to hold a celebration conference in (late?) September 2017 in north-west England. Tasks in 2016 and 2017 include identifying long-standing counters and sites; producing infographics and a talk that can also be used locally by WeBS Local Organisers or counters. New ideas from the meeting included making sure the conference feels like a celebration, e.g. with cake, and sending a thank you letter to counters from the partnership CEOs (as previously after 10 years of WeBS proper).

AP52.29: Add WeBS 70th anniversary to LOAC agenda (HM).

AP52.30: Start preparations for WeBS70 conference: identify date (avoid clashing with Wader Study Group; Core Count date) and venue for the conference; plan speakers. Budget for travel expenses, accommodation for 10 people (TF).

AP52.31: Speak to BTO Communications about 2017 anniversary featuring on Autumnwatch or Winterwatch (TF).

13. WeBS Data Requests & associated allocation

On the basis of the latest budget figures and projections, the SG agreed to contribute £10,000 for NEWS, as previously agreed, and fund completion of the SPA paper but not to contribute funds for counting in Sierra Leone in 2016. Funding of other developmental projects will depend on revised assessment of finances as the year continues.

AP52.32: Add worksheet to excel “dev-doc” file with spending history for WeBS related projects (TF).

AP52.33: Check if WWT have been invoiced first quarter 2016/17 WeBS funding (DB).

14. Progress with on-going WeBS sub-projects

Options for the WeBS methods paper were discussed; the paper should contain the core methodology with appendices/supplementary material containing the detailed methods. An alternative to a paper could be a peer-reviewed report (BTO or Wetlands International).

AP52.34: Circulate WeBS methods draft for further discussion of how to take forward (TF/all).

15. WeBS Agreement

WWT need to do draft budgets by November and it is likely the Steering Group will need to have a proposal for the JNCC-BTO agreement by winter.

AP52.35: Arrange a meeting in September to discuss WeBS Agreement, preferably sequential to the waterbird populations estimates meeting (TF).

16. Recent publications and media

TF supplied a report of recent WeBS and NEWS publicity and publications.

17. Conferences/meetings

TF attending European Bird Census Council conference in September with poster on NEWS, followed by an International Waterbird Census co-ordinators workshop and a meeting of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership Strategic Working Group. NC and GA are attending the Wader Study Group conference. RH is attending a Velvet Scoter Action Plan workshop in October. The next International Seaduck Conference is in February in San Francisco.

Progress on previous actions points

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

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

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

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

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

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). Not done

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 IS team (TF). Done

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. Possibility of underspend money. Consider asking SNH and NRW if they are interested (TF, AM, DB). Not done

AP51.9: What are the pros and cons of covering some of these big sites as multiple smaller sub-sites? (NC, TF). Not done

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

AP51.11: Produce a timeline for the NEWS analysis and report, and online reporting and identify what aspects can be written up early (coverage and change) and what may need more time (population estimates). Country Agencies likely to want stand-alone reports on NEWS promptly to justify financial support (GA, DB, TF). Done

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

AP51.13: We identified some topics for the 2017 report; for country focus somewhere south along the flyway - make contact with Senegal or Gambia perhaps via Tim Dodman (Papa Westray) – Wetlands International Research Associate; wet grassland; divers, Golden Plover. For artwork, consider asking Carry Akroyd (TF). Ongoing

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). Ongoing

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

AP51.16: Check which financial year the £9000 for NEWS was in (AM, DB). Done

AP51.17: Think about small incremental increase in costs for April (TF, NC). Ongoing

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

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). Ongoing

AP51.20: Chas Holt to send the most recent draft of the methods review to BTO (CH). Done

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

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

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

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). Done

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

AP51.26: DB and TF to produce a plan of what can be achieved. Not done

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

AP51.28: Investigate Cabinet Office fund & register & Defra (DS, TF). Not done

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

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). Done

AP50/2/: Promote list of WeBS training courses. Ongoing.

AP50/3/1. Contact other schemes to ask if they collect disturbance info and what they do eg Dutch. Ongoing.

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>.

AP50/12/3 AP: Look at the sequence of tasks in the lead up to Article 12. Do we do waterbird population estimates first and then APEP? Or do the job all in one? Consider breaking up for publication (breeding vs winter or non-pass vs passerines). (DAS, DEB, AJM). Ongoing.

AP50/12/4 Is there an opportunity for fundraising to raise cash to undertake analysis of historical data? Not done.

AP50/12/5 Suggestion to pilot some work on Pochard, suggestion do every five years. Is there any existing long-term dataset? Ongoing.

AP50/12/6 WeBS was one of the first online applications to be built by BTO and is in need of a refresh to give it a fresh feel. Discuss with BTO IS Team about scheduling this work (DB, AM). Ongoing.

AP50/12/7 Better recording of academic uses of WeBS data. Need copies of paper and report from research. Mostly undergraduates need to chase. Not done.

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. Not done, schedule brainstorm for SG52.

AP50/12/9 Can we make more explicit use of low-tide data? We should look to get a publication out of low-tide data. The big estuaries probably the most important from an agency point of view. Any key estuaries need to be done? The Wash? Very important for rspb case work and agency staff.

Review the key estuaries that still need to be counted. Not done, schedule for SG52. Key estuaries that need counting (probably with professionals) are Humber, north Norfolk coast, Southampton Water, Firth of Forth.

AP50/12/10 Timing of alerts report and annual report. Should they be at the same time or different? Not done.

AP50/12/11: re-draft the WeBS agreement and circulate. Include timing for WiNGS, NEWS, pop estimates, alerts. Include a calendar of episodic events and a gantt chart. Not done.

AP48/6/1: Work on the spec for proposed mapping tool to be sent to Country Agencies. [CH] Not completed (recent communication with NE)

AP48/12/2: Look into establishment of forum for UAV monitoring discussion. [CH] Not completed

AP48/14/3: Check if there is any RSPB volunteer capacity to help with progressing historic dataset. [SW] Not completed?

AP48/14/8: Following the IWC work in Sierra Leone, prepare a short 'next steps' paper re scheme-twinning approach to capacity building and development of monitoring in the flyway. [CH, RH] Not completed (deferred till SG50)

AP49/5/3: Source old disturbance report and provide brief review for SG50. [CH] Not completed; report does not exist

AP48/14/2: Proceed with work on protected sites manuscript. [KR, CH] On-going

AP48/17/1: Initiate consultation with BTO Statistician over issue of Confidence Limits. [GA, CH] On-going

AP48/18/1: Initiate discussions between WeBS Partner organisations [DP, AM] On-going

AP52.36: Remove completed action points and circulate reduced list by email (TF).

AOB

Some tasks in the development worksheet in the "DevDoc" file may no longer be a high priority, such as drones.

AP52.37: Update development worksheet in the "DevDoc" file (TF).

Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday 25th January.