

1st Regional Meeting of the NW European Breeding Range States under the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group

15-16 October 2012, Abcoude, The Netherlands

Final Report of the Meeting



Participants

From left to right on the photo above:

- Bertrand Trolliet, National Focal Point, France
- Gerrit Gerritsen, National Expert, the Netherlands
- Sarah Roggeman, National Focal Point, Belgium
- Hermann Hötter, National Expert, Germany
- Ivo Walsmit, Coordinator, The Netherlands
- Ferrant de Haan, National Focal Point, The Netherlands
- David Kleijn, IWG Expert, The Netherlands
- Geert Spanoghe, National Expert, Belgium
- Nina Mikander, LWFG Coordinator, Finland (not featured)

Welcome and Introduction

The Coordinator for the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit (BtG) International Working Group (IWG), Ivo Walsmit, welcomed the participants to the meeting. Walsmit briefly reviewed the history of the BtG IWG which began with the adoption of the AEWA Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the BtG at the 4th Meeting of the AEWA Parties in Madagascar in 2008. The SSAP foresees that conservation efforts for the species shall be coordinated by an inter-governmental Species Working Group, which the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat convened for the BtG in 2011.

Election of the Chair

Decision: *The BtG regional Working Group Meeting proposed and elected Nina Mikander, Coordinator of the Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group, as the Chair for the meeting.*

Adoption of the agenda

Decision: *The proposed agenda was adopted by the BtG regional Working Group.*

Working Group Terms of Reference

The draft Terms of Reference for the Working Group provided by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat were based on a generic format for Species Working Groups developed and adopted by the AEWA Technical Committee in 2009. This format had been customised to fit the BtG IWG.

Ivo Walsmit briefly presented the draft ToR. The roles set out in the ToR are standard and foresee the election of a Chair country as well as the appointment of a Coordinator to facilitate the day to day work of the group. Currently the Coordinator is situated within DLG - the Dutch Government Service for Land and Water Management – and is funded jointly by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation and Birdlife Netherlands. The Working Group is inter-governmental in nature, i.e. the members to the IWG are the BtG range states represented by appointed national focal points and national experts. Working Group meetings are envisaged to be held every three years dependant on available funding. The ToR also includes a passage on reporting under the Working Group. Funding for the Working Group is the one limiting factor for Working Group work and the implementation of conservation measures. Additional funding will be required for the further operation of this IWG.

Discussion:

There was discussion among the IWG members on how best to deal with the election of a more permanent Chair for the IWG. All range states present agreed with the decision of organising regional IWG meetings and not convening the entire IWG at once. To elect a Chair from the different regions could be a workable solution to guide the decision-making process under the IWG at and in between IWG meetings.

National Reporting

Nina Mikander presented the establishment of national reporting under the IWG as well as the possibility to use the CMS Family Online Reporting System for these reports. The ToR state that the IWG shall closely monitor the implementation of the BtG SSAP. Mikander further explained that the system can be modified to the needs of the IWG and that it can be bi-lingual (English and French).

Discussion:

Germany commented that this national system might be complicated as Germany has delegated these responsibilities to the federal states. But the data needed for this reporting system is already gathered for the most important federal states and can easily be made available for this system. Belgium added that the reporting burden continues to increase – especially for smaller countries with limited resources and inquired whether there is any way to harmonize the national reporting under AEWA as a whole with the reporting under the IWGs.

Mikander added that the countries present at this meeting are monitoring the BtG already, but that this might not be the case for all the range states in the IWG. Establishing national reporting will help in collecting the necessary data from other countries across the range – even those which are not yet Parties to AEWA.

Decision: *The range states present at this meeting will start with the national reporting through CMS Family Online Reporting System. Ivo Walsmit will propose a reporting format.*

IWG website & workspace

Ivo Walsmit and Nina Mikander presented the IWG website and the workspace. This is a useful tool for the IWG, but it has to be further developed. Especially the summaries of scientific articles, written by David Kleijn and his colleague, were found very useful by the regional IWG

Countries update

Trends outside breeding period

David Kleijn presented trends outside the breeding period for the BtG population in NW-Europe. He showed that Godwits spend about two-thirds of each year outside their breeding areas and that individual Godwits are highly flexible in where they stage and overwinter.

Kleijn concluded that adult survival has remained constant the last few decades (0.7-0.95), but that the reproductive output has declined. Apparently, conditions in staging and wintering sites are not (yet) limiting and we really have to focus on the NW European breeding areas.

Belgium

Geert Spanoghe presented the status of the BtG in Belgium. Geert explained that the Black-tailed Godwits only breeds in Flanders, in the lowland areas, generally below 5 meters. The population is fragmented in a series of core-areas with little suitable habitat in between. The BtG population in Belgium was still increasing until recent years, but seems to be showing a decline in the last decade.

A significant part of the Flemish population breeds in agricultural grasslands with no or limited protection against intensive farming. This explains the high losses in some areas, comparable to the Dutch situation. In meadow bird reserves with conservation goals for BtG, high densities have to be maintained. Competition and predation are important parameters in these small areas. Increasing the knowledge on predator avoidance is therefore a high priority.

As the species is not a Natura 2000 or a national Red List species it is not protected on a national level. Persuading the Belgian government to make this species a national priority and accept the tasks that the SSAP bring is a high priority for the IWG.

France

Bertrand Trolliet presented the status of the BtG in France. Bertrand showed that the population of breeding continental BtG in France is rising from less than 20 pairs in the early '70s to 150-180 pairs now. France is carrying out most of the activities from the SSAP; monitoring, studying and conserving the habitats.

France suspended hunting on BtG for 5 years from 2008. Bertrand expects no positive effect of this moratorium on the continental population trends, because the yearly hunting bag was only of tens of individuals before this moratorium, and because the main causes of the decline of this population have been clearly identified as occurring in the breeding grounds: loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitats, agricultural intensification, strong and increasing impact of predation on productivity, and increasing disturbance. The moratorium ends next year and is currently evaluated.

Mikander noted that the inclusion of the category "near-threatened" to the AEWA Action Plan at the 5th Meeting of the AEWA Parties in May 2012 now means that hunting on species listed as near-threatened under the Agreement has to be part of an International Action Plan for the species in question. The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat will be in touch with the French AEWA focal point to further discuss the issue and its possible effects on ending the French moratorium.

Germany

Hermann Hötter presented the status of the BtG in Germany. He estimated that presently there are 3500 pairs of BtG breeding in Germany and steadily declining. The coastal populations are doing better than the inland populations with the exceptions of some core sites like the Dummersee.

The Netherlands

Ferrant de Haan explained that the rapid decline of the BtG in The Netherlands is not halted and still going on with approximately 7% each year. The main reason for this decline is the poor chick survival, because of the intensifying farming practices, low groundwater tables and the encroachment of the landscape. The choice that the Dutch government is thinking to make is to concentrate the conservation efforts in the most favourable areas, to realise a smaller but sustainable population.

Gerrit Gerritsen presented some initiatives from Birdlife Netherlands (VBN) to protect the BtG in The Netherlands. VBN supports the collective AES schemes and works actively together with 100 "meadow-bird farmers" who implement intensive BtG conservation measures on their farms. VBN states that the Dutch government should increase the budget for meadow-bird conservation, improve the quality of the AES and give the core BtG areas a legal conservation status.

Priorities & Recommendations

Ivo Walsmit guided the participants of the regional IWG meeting through the results and activities of table 10 of the SSAP specific for The Netherlands and neighbouring areas in Germany and Belgium. Step-by-step the activities in the SSAP were discussed and appraised to see whether they still are valid or not, if they are still a priority and if there are activities missing.

The session resulted in a revised prioritisation of the activities in the SSAP to be implemented by the North-Western Breeding range states during the next inter-sessional period (Annex 3). In addition the regional IWG drafted and approved recommendations (Annex 2), through which the regional IWG members will ask their relevant governments to take action and to afford full importance to the species within relevant existing national plans and legislation. The regional IWG had quite some discussion on the need to set population goals and to adopt National Action Plans for the species, and decided to establish national population goals for the species by the end 2013 and to establish and implement National Action Plans for the species as appropriate.

Decision: *The regional IWG drafted and adopted recommendations, decided to set population goals for the species and to draft and adopt NAPs as appropriate.*

Funding

Ivo Walsmit explained the present funding structure for the IWG. VBN provides a budget of €10.000 a year for travel, accommodation and other related costs, such as this IWG meeting. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation provide for the time of the Coordinator of the IWG. Walsmit stated that the availability of his time for 2013 was not yet clear at the time of the meeting. This is a risk and makes future planning difficult.

Decision: *Add recommendation to continue providing the time of the Coordinator*

The regional IWG discussed the need for additional funding for small scale projects. The regional IWG concluded that the key activities needed will require the change of national policies and this is not solved with the funding of small scale projects. Mikander proposed to explore the possibility to apply for a joint EU LIFE+ project.

Decision: *Explore the possibility of applying for a joint EU LIFE+ project for the North-Western breeding areas of the Black-tailed Godwit.*

Future steps & next Working Group Meeting

Decision: *The regional IWG agreed that a next meeting with these countries would be desirable and decided that it should take place in spring 2014. In addition to the range states present, it was agreed that Denmark should be invited to participate in the next meeting.*

Annex 1

Decisions and Action Points of the Meeting

Agenda item	Decision	Action Point
Election of Chair	Nina Mikander, Coordinator for of the Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group, was elected to chair this particular meeting.	Discussion to be had will whole IWG on whether to appoint regional country Chairs
Adoption of Agenda	The agenda was adopted with no amendments	-
National Reporting	The range states present at this meeting will start with the national reporting through CMS Family Online Reporting System.	Ivo Walsmit will propose a reporting format.
Priorities & Recommendations	The regional IWG drafted and adopted recommendations, decided to set population goals for the species and to draft and adopt NAPs as appropriate.	Ivo Walsmit & Nina Mikander will communicate the recommendations to the WG members and the AEWA National Focal Points
Funding	Add recommendation to continue providing the time of the Coordinator	Ivo Walsmit will discuss this issue with the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs
Funding	Explore the possibility of applying for a joint EU LIFE+ project for the North-Western breeding areas of the Black-tailed Godwit.	Ivo Walsmit will explore possible LIFE project.
Future steps & next Working Group Meeting	The regional IWG agreed that a next meeting with these countries would be desirable and decided that it should take place in spring 2014. In addition to the range states present, it was agreed that Denmark should be invited to participate in the next meeting.	Ivo Walsmit will invite the WG members, plus Denmark for a 2 nd meeting in 2014

Annex 2

RECOMMENDATION 1.1

Recognising that the Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa limosa*) is Near-Threatened as listed by IUCN, on Annex II of the European Council Birds Directive, in Column A of the AEWA Action Plan, and in Annex III of the Bern Convention;

Recalling that paragraph 2.2.1 of the Action Plan of AEWA states that the Parties shall cooperate with a view to developing and implementing International Single Species Action Plans;

Recognising the positive progress made through several initiatives, for example, the successful close cooperation between the Farmers' Collective and the nature conservation organisation "Noord-Hollands Landschap" in the key Black-tailed Godwit site of "De Ronde Hoep";

The 1st Meeting of the North-Western European Breeding Countries under the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group recommends that the governments of the respective range states:

Afford full importance to the species within relevant existing national plans and legislation;

Establish national population goals for the species by the end 2013;

As a consequence *establish and implement* National Action Plans for the species as appropriate;

Identify, as a matter of priority, the key breeding areas in each range state, by applying scientific criteria such as the percentage of the national Black-tailed Godwit population using each site;

Further ensure that the identified key breeding areas are managed in a site specific manner sufficient to maintain population levels at agreed targets, including the monitoring of impact of management implemented;

Explore the possibility of applying for a joint EU LIFE+ project for the North-Western breeding areas of the Black-tailed Godwit;

The Regional Meeting of the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group *further encourages* the range states of the North-Western breeding population to focus efforts on closing knowledge gaps on chick survival rates in relation to management measures.

Annex 3. Revised Table 10 of the SSAP

Table 10. The Netherlands and neighbouring areas in Germany and Belgium

Results	National activities	Priority	Time Scale	Responsible organisation
Degradation of breeding habitat quality and habitat loss has stopped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent further habitat loss in key breeding area to urbanisation, infrastructure and other planning, and loss of openness of the landscape. Implement this kind of protection in national legislation 	High	Short	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent loss (such as turning wet grassland into maize fields) and degradation of permanent grasslands important to breeding BTG 	High	Medium	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of management of protected areas by taking into account the habitat requirements of the BtG. 	High	Medium	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support site specific activities that maintain the openness of BtG habitats and thereby reduce mortality from predators. Develop actions to restore openness in former breeding areas. 	Medium		National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the identified key breeding areas are managed in a site specific manner sufficient to maintain population levels at agreed targets, including the monitoring of impact of management implemented 			

Results	National activities	Priority	Time Scale	Responsible organisation
<p>Low productivity caused by agricultural practice is significantly reduced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support biodiversity-sensitive management (including appropriate grazing and/or mowing regimes for the BtG) of important breeding habitats through AES in order to promote chick survival. 	Essential/High	Immediate/Short	National Government, National Nature Protection Agency
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take BtG interests into account in the management of grassland nature reserves. 	High	Short	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining/re-introducing grassland areas with optimal groundwater level to secure food availability for adults and chicks 	Essential/High	Immediate/Short	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining/re-introducing the openness of the landscape (and thereby also reduce predation) 	High	Short	National Government, National Nature Protection Agency
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintaining/re-introducing the openness of the landscape (and thereby also reduce predation) 	High	Short	National Government/Local authorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support that the identified key breeding areas are managed in a site specific manner sufficient to maintain population levels at agreed targets, including the monitoring of impact of management implemented 			National Government/Local authorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to late mowing of grasslands to reduce nest destruction and reduce chick mortality in core breeding area, such measures being part of AES. 				

Results	National activities	Priority	Time Scale	Responsible organisation
Knowledge gaps filled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather long-term and representative data on reproduction, survival in relation to breeding habitat quality, migration etc. 	(High)	(Short)	National Government, National Nature Protection Agency, universities, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve estimates of juvenile survival and causes of mortality and implement a model with population dynamics to be able to quantify the significance of threats and measures. 	(High)	(Short)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of the arrival and settling ecology of godwits. 	(High)		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish national population goals for the species by the end 2013 	(High)		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, as a matter of priority, the key breeding areas in each range state, by applying scientific criteria such as the percentage of the national Black-tailed Godwit population using each site 	(High)		