

VIII Spoonbill Workshop

AEWA Eurasian Spoonbill International Expert Group

Tour du Valat, Arles, France

23rd – 29th November 2015

Conclusions

WORKSHOP

1. A total of 35 spoonbill specialists from 17 countries attended the Workshop. The main objective of the Workshop has been achieved: strengthening the spoonbill network towards N African and E Mediterranean countries through the final attendance and involvement of 13 participants from N Africa and 7 from E Mediterranean countries. However, there is still a big gap of important information from Greece and Turkey. Interesting information on the conservation and status of the *P.l.archeri* in Egypt was also presented. We fully acknowledge the participation of Dr. Sergey Kharitonov, who has added critical information from Russian Federation and countries of the former Soviet Union.

TRENDS AND MAIN RESULTS

2. The Atlantic population is growing with an estimation of ca. 6,400 breeding pairs, and increasing numbers at new breeding sites, especially in some new colonies. However, the situation of the other populations is either not known or alarming: for the C & SE Europe population, spoonbills from C Europe flying through the so-called Adriatic Flyway are estimated as ca. 1,400 breeding pairs, with decreasing trends in the short-term (i.e. five years), but a recent estimate of SE European populations breeding around the Black Sea and E Mediterranean countries is currently lacking. Though breeding areas are in countries not yet within the AEWA framework of action, the population in E Europe -and SW Asia- (i.e. former Soviet Union) has been estimated as ca. 5,100 breeding pairs. There were no updated estimations about *P.l.balsaci* and overall the situation of *P.l.archeri* remained unknown.
3. Annual survival of adult birds from the Dutch population wintering in W Africa, south of the Sahara, has dropped up to 0.80 in recent years. Since the majority of the population (still) overwinters there, if survival does not increase in the short-term it could have important population consequences in the mid- and long-term.
4. New research using GPS-satellite and Uva-BiTS transmitters attached to Spoonbill chicks and adults has shown fine-scale individual movements during migration in the East Atlantic Flyway. For unknown reasons, a high proportion failed to cross the Sahara during spring

migration. Next years the main research focus regarding this population will try to better understand the difficulties for spoonbills in this region.

5. New research using GPS/GSM transmitters on Spoonbill chicks have revealed migration routes from Italy to unknown wintering areas for yearlings in N Africa.
6. The discovery of the migration corridor in southwestern Spain where the big majority of spoonbills from the Atlantic population cross from Europe to Africa during autumn allows an accurate population monitoring and the study of migration ecology using the species as a model.

AEWA Action Plan

7. The 'state of the art' of the AEWA Action Plan for the Spoonbill has been updated; many actions are still needed to achieve the objectives already set up by 2018, especially for the (so-called) C & SE European, E European, *P.l.archeri* and *P.l.balsaci*.
8. To allow the updating of the Action Plan, it is now critical to conduct **genetic analysis** at the species level in order (i) to disentangle whether breeding populations of C & SE European population forms a metapopulation or are indeed two separated populations with a low genetic flow; (ii) to assess the cutting point (if any) between E European breeding spoonbill populations and the former; (iii) to develop specific analyses to finally clarify the taxonomic status of the subspecies *P.l.major* (not formally recognized until now); and (iv) to determine the taxonomic status of spoonbills breeding in the northern part of the Red Sea (Egypt). A (chick) blood sampling design involving as much as possible breeding populations and specific DNA-analyses are foreseen to distinguish different populations or subspecies.
9. Recent alarming short-term declines registered in the main breeding population in Hungary reinforce the urgency to identify the migration route(s) used more precisely. By using either UHF/GPS/GSM or UvA-BiTS transmitters attached to chicks on the breeding grounds, it will reveal the overwintering areas where yearlings and immatures probably spent their first years of life.
10. Illegal hunting in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Africa is still (believed to be) a very serious cause of mortality for the Spoonbills belonging to the C & SE European population. Urgent measures should be taken by the authorities concerned with the implementation of actual legislation to reduce this pressure.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

11. Shared knowledge about current management programs and results that have been achieved within the East Atlantic Flyway will drive fishponds managers in Serbia, Croatia and Hungary to embrace good management practices for the conservation of migratory bird populations. In this context Montenegrin authorities must ensure the protection of Ulcinj Salina both as Ramsar site and under national law, and adopt a management plan to

preserve one of the most important breeding, stopover and wintering sites for migratory waterbirds at the Adriatic coasts.

12. In North African countries wintering counts (IWC) and ring-reading have continued. However, developing more research and monitoring are needed, including Algeria and South Saharan countries.
13. We propose to develop a unique system to process spoonbill colour-ring resightings mimicking the successful Flamingo program to share and ease the exchange of resighting data among regions. We encourage responsible of Spanish colour-ring resightings to valorize through analyses the long-term data obtained through ringing programme. It would greatly improve our knowledge about population connectivity. It is also important to build up a common methodology to estimate breeding success.
14. We thank Dr. Tamar Lok to coordinate ringing schemes throughout EURING to avoid double-ringing of spoonbills.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

15. We commit to (re)generate tools to be in contact between workshops: (i) An annual newsletter will be kindly edited by MSc. Geert Spanoghe with contributions from all countries within the species distribution range; (ii) An AEWA Eurasian Spoonbill Facebook account jointly managed by MSc. Camilla Dreef and Dr. Csaba Pigniczki will soon be launched; and (iii) We will explore the possibility to create a social network tool hosted in AEWA website.
16. A traveling exhibition using the deep body of knowledge acquired by wetland management, research and monitoring of the spoonbill population in the East Atlantic Flyway (a successful story of conservation of an endangered waterbird species), will very much improve the social awareness at important wetland areas throughout the species distribution range, especially in North African and Eastern European countries.

NEXT STEP

17. Acknowledging the efforts made by AAO/BirdLife for the organization of the current VIII Spoonbill Workshop, we agree to organize the next workshop in Tunisia. It is important to establish contacts with people engaged in spoonbill monitoring/research in (apart from Greece and Turkey) Romania, Djibouti, Yemen, Sudan and Saudi Arabia, trying to involve them in the next workshop.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

18. We deeply acknowledge Otto Overdijk, Dr. Patrick Triplet, Dr. Martin Schneider-Jacoby and Michael Smart for their past work and leadership of the (current) AEWA ESIEG.

Arles, 27th November 2015

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