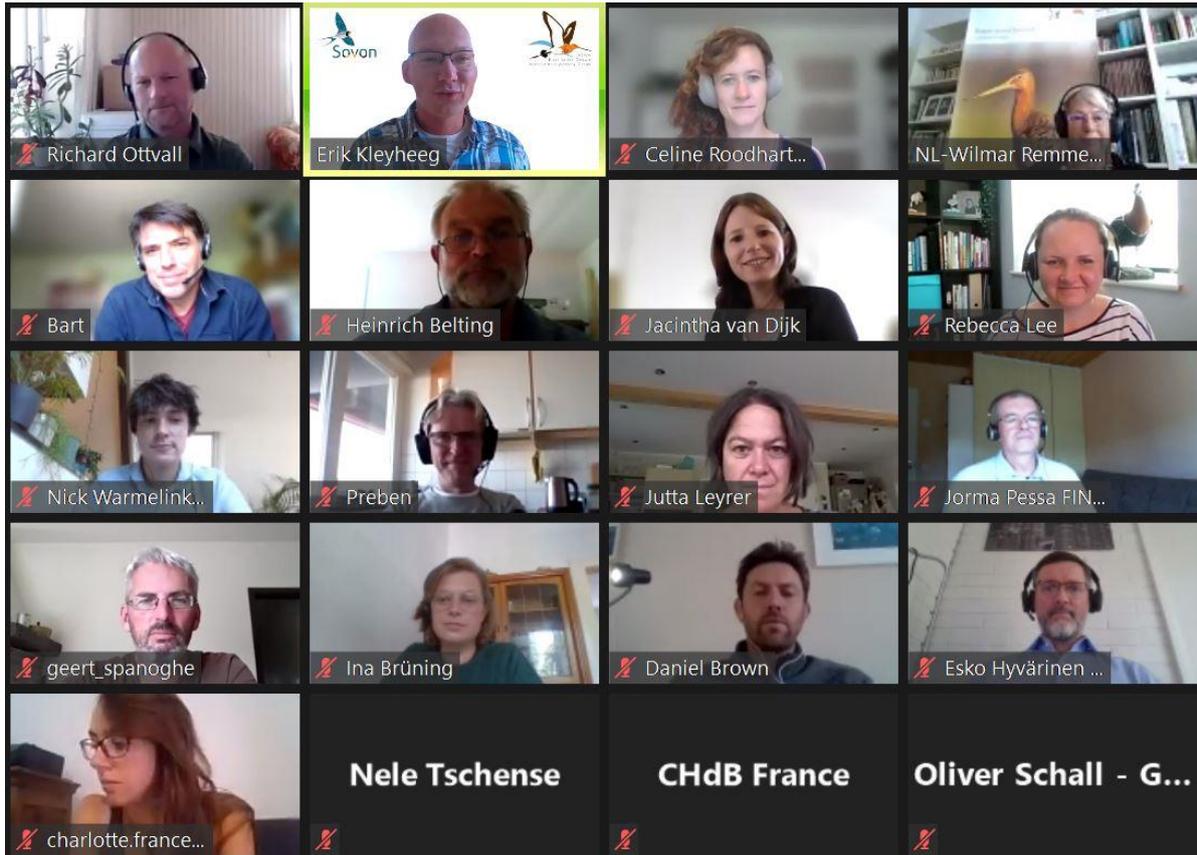


**3rd MEETING OF THE AEW A BLACK-TAILED GODWIT
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP**
2 September 2021, virtual meeting via Zoom

Meeting Report



Opening of the meeting

Opening and welcome

The chair Wilmar Remmelts (Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality) opened the meeting and welcomed the participants to the online 3rd Regional Meeting of the NW-European Breeding Range States under the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group.

Adoption of the agenda

There were no requests to include any other topics to the agenda. The agenda was adopted.

Decision: The agenda (Doc. BtG IWG NW 3.1) was changed adopted without changes.

Admission of observers

All participants agreed that all observers joining the meeting were admitted to the meeting.

Round table introduction of participants

All participants introduced themselves shortly: name, organisation/institute, participation in projects linked to BtG.

Discussion and adoption of changes in Terms of Reference

There were no objections to the suggested changes to the Terms of References in the draft document.

Decision: The suggested changes to the Terms of References (Doc. BtG IWG NW 3.3) were adopted.

Follow-up on decisions 2nd Regional Meeting (2016)

Decision 2016	Status/remarks
<i>1. All presentations will be distributed to the Working Group members in pdf-format by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat following the meeting.</i>	The Coordinator Erik Kleyheeg will ask presenting participants to share their presentations after the meeting. To have a shared working space for this Working Group on the AEWA website would be ideal to share all information. Unfortunately the present workspace is outdated and the AEWA Secretariat has indicated that they could not facilitate an update.
<i>2. Rimmelts will check availability of funding at the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs for the continuation of the coordination of the Working Group</i>	The funding arrangement for the Coordinator Erik Kleyheeg of this Working Group expires in 2022. Wilmar Rimmelts will check availability of funding at the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality for the coming years.
<i>3. The Working Group does not consider a revision necessary and would advise to prolong the ISSAP by another ten years.</i>	At the AEWA MOP 7, 2018 the BtG ISSAP was prolonged for another 10 years without amendments.
<i>4. Draft MSAP grassland breeding waders will be shared with the Working Group members for consultation, to ensure good coordination between ISSAP and MSAP.</i>	There is currently no Working Group around the MSAP. Last year the Dutch organisation BoerenNatuur organised an online meeting on grassland breeding waders for EU member states as a follow up on the N2000 Atlantic seminar. The report can be downloaded using here . One of the actions following this meeting is that BoerenNatuur would have a meeting with the European Commission this autumn.
<i>5. Several participants propose to share relevant documents with IWG members.</i>	Coordinator Erik Kleyheeg invited the participants to share any interesting BtG information for the newsletter.

Decision: Erik Kleyheeg will share presentations with meeting participants.

Decision: Wilmar Rimmelts will check availability of funding at the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality for after 2022.

Decision: Erik Kleyheeg and Wilmar Rimmelts will ask AEWA secretary to (provide the necessary tools to) update the IWG website, so information is available for all participants.

Country updates

Belgium (Geert Spanoghe)

Population size	Breeding population size: ca. 715 bp in 2018 Breeding population trend: decreasing, 30-40% decrease since 2000
Key threats	Habitat loss and degradation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmland: CAP pillar 1: better protection of permanent grasslands by end of 2022 Nature reserves: only a few decades old, vegetation succession in and around many BtG-areas is a major issue, not widely supported to go back to a state pre-Nature reserves Predation (small areas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lanes with poplar trees: present in/near core areas, higher impact due to increased populations of corvidae and birds of prey Electric fencing comes up rapidly, potential to compensate for this less favourable state (in combination with other parameters) Landscape-openness Nest loss due to agriculture (only to small part of the population)
Conservation measures	Species Protection Plan for BtG and Eurasian Curlew was accepted by the Flemish Government in December 2020. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population goal BtG: 1090 bp in 26 clusters from 5 to 120 bp (there is a shift in numbers to the west (polders), where there is more space) Stimulates land purchase and management for BtG List series of 'old' and 'new' instruments to achieve these goals (e.g. weirs, nest protection, electric fencing) Ambition to coordinate meadow bird protection from a local level to a nation level
Key knowledge gaps	Food availability on different soils across the (former) breeding range: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can most acidic soils still hold populations of meadow birds? What should be the focus of restoration measures? Is a huge across borders LIFE project to restore and optimize BtG (and other meadow birds) core areas on a scale from Northern France to Denmark/Germany a possibility? Including local education/communication, monitoring and research.

Germany (Heinrich Belting)

Population size	There is an ongoing decline of 3% per year, total population in Germany: 3000 bp. The situation varies between the states: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bavaria: 5 bp left Mecklenburg: 1 population left of 50 bp, is increasing, there is compensation for the north stream pipe line, well managed, predator control Lower Saxony: contains half of the German population: 1500 bp, a 3% decline per year, distributed 100 km along the Dutch border and 100 km along the North Sea, the rest is empty, 60% of the breeding area is on private property (=declining) and 40% is on conventional grassland (=stable), on the long term not doable to keep bp in normal grasslands, only in reserves, actions taken are nest protection organised and financed by the State, however only nest protection is not the solution, there is more need for public land. Schleswig-Holstein: 1000 bp, majority is in the polders along the Northern Sea, in the inland there are also bp which are stable, the majority breeds in Dümmer which is well protected. North-Rhine Westphalia: 100-200 bp left in a few areas, along the Dutch border and in Lower Saxony, all bp are breeding in nature reserves, there is many private land.
Other remarks	More details in presentations about LIFE project.

UK (Bart Donato)

Population size	<p><i>L. l. limosa</i> population in UK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: ca. 40-50 bp (41-42 in 2018), all sites are in England except for one in SW Scotland, most sites are nature reserves, most sites hold 1-2 pairs except for the Ouse and Nene Washes (holds ca 95% of ▪ Breeding population trend: slow steady decline for many years <p><i>L. l. islandica</i> population in UK:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: ca. 5-10 bp (4-9 in 2018), all sites are in Northern Isles (Shetland/Orkney/Outer Hebrides), most sites hold 1-2 pairs ▪ Breeding population trend: small but stable <p>Large non-breeding population that is dominated by the <i>islandica</i> race, increasing steadily: ca. 41.000 individuals (passing migrants, wintering birds)</p>
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat loss and degradation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inappropriate grazing management: trade-off of nesting and vegetation ▪ Predation (small areas) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Predation of eggs and chicks: predators foxes, widespread issue, productivity is low in the wild ▪ All sites are subject to predator pressure, productivity is poor in all sites in most years ▪ Landscape-openness ▪ Nest loss due to agriculture (only to a small part of the population) and flooding of nests (major issue; all of nothing scenario) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ouse and Nene Washes (hold ca. 95% of breeding population) are designated flood storage areas and can be subject to total inundation ▪ Not going to change in the future ▪ Isolation of individual pairs: major threat
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principal activity is Project Godwit LIFE (breeding) ▪ All breeding sites are overseen by conservation organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>L.l. limosa</i>: all extant sites are subject to conservation management ▪ All non-breeding sites are designated SPA
Other remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-Brexit funding landscape is unclear. Uncertain if there will be replacement for LIFE programme.

Netherlands (Erik Kleyheeg)

Population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 31.000-38.000 bp (2013-2015) based on national Breeding Bird Atlas ▪ 26.000-32.000 bp (2018-2020) based on extrapolation ▪ Breeding population trend: decreasing, 3.4% annual decline over period 2010-2019, the trend is less negative in reserves than in agricultural land.
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agricultural intensification ▪ Mowing of grasslands: mowing was late this spring (2021) which may resulted in a higher reproduction ▪ Trampling loss: minor problem ▪ Loss of breeding habitat: we are loosing agricultural land due to the plan to build a million houses the coming years, lower breeding habitat quality (recreation, intensification of agriculture) ▪ Lowering water tables: this aspect gets a lot of attention currently ▪ Predation: more attention currently, you need to put this issue in relation to agricultural intensification, increase in Red Fox (main chick predator) and Pine Marten (moving west) ▪ Conversion to arable land: for maize ▪ Climate change: less direct

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Food web has been degraded since 1950, there are several nutritional issues, predator-prey issues are more directly visible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vole peaks resulting in an increase of predators in following year ▪ Increase of agricultural intensification resulting in an increase of nest failure (chick survival is too low to sustain the population; 2020 was an especially poor year)
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AES in grassland areas focuses heavily on BtG (in 2016 we started with a collective approach, conservation measures includes late mowing and field inundation, 2016-2020: 59.000-68.000 ha for BtG) ▪ Provincial “meadow bird action plans” ▪ National BtG Attack Plan: goal to create large areas where due to specific management measures the BtG population is promoted, there are several phases: 1) assigning core areas, 2) assigning more areas around these core areas ▪ Reward system for BtG-friendly farming through milk price (supported by BirdLife NL) ▪ Monitoring of population size, reproduction, juvenile and adult survival
Key knowledge gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How to speed up transition to a new agricultural system? ▪ What are the mechanisms behind juvenile recruitment? ▪ What is the ecology of predators? ▪ How is food availability of chicks regulated? (chicks are in poor condition in recent years)

France (Charlotte Francesiaz)

Population size	<p><i>L. l. limosa</i> population in France:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: ca. 134-167 bp in 2019 ▪ Breeding population trend: increase in one site mainly (decrease elsewhere) <p><i>L. l. islandic</i> population in France</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wintering population size: 41.643 individuals in 2020 (2019: 35.838 ind.) ▪ Wintering population trend: slowly increasing, mostly in protected areas
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat loss and degradation (staging areas, not much data): CAP, intensive agricultural practices, change of land use, loss of breeding and staging sites ▪ Predation: lack of scientific data and monitoring ▪ Disturbance: on breeding and staging sites
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ French National Management Plan 2015-2020: not sure whether there is a follow-up ▪ Adaptive Hunting management: state of hunting regulation of BtG in France, BtG is not hunted for 11-12 years, not allowed this year (2021), last 3 years dependent on the Adaptive Hunting Management who decides whether species are hunted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ French Expert board for Adaptive Harvest Management (CEGA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 14 members (Universities, Associations, OFB, CNRS, MNHN)+ chair: have discussions on the initial questions and scientific report, who write a recommendation report which is given to the French Government ○ Secretariat: OFB (data collection, modelling, scientific report)

Denmark (Preben Clausen)

Population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: 550 bp anno 2015, in 2018 complete census of the Wadden Sea area: 96% of the population in SPA's holding 400 bp, in 2020 distribution loss at many places: 22% loss compared to 1993-1996 Atlas II
-----------------	--

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population trend: 30% decline in 2018 since 2015, population in probably reduced in 2020
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Predation: Predation: bigger issue at those sites where they are remaining (decrease in number of bp, increase % of nest predation), Raccoon dog has come into the areas, not a big consensus to kill Foxes to increase meadow bird pop ▪ Cessation of cattle grazing/mowing in marshes/hay cutting: no mowing at breeding sites ▪ Agricultural intensification: nowadays less of a problem
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Handlingsplan for truede engfugle 2005 (Action Plan for threatened meadow birds): species are declining ▪ BtG should be a management focus species, this is currently not the case, most sites where BtG are present Baltic Dunlin and Ruff are also present, since these species are subjected to conservation management for designed habitats and species the BtG will automatically benefit as well.

Sweden (Richard Ottvall)

Population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: 115 (100-130) bp in 2020, mostly found in SPA's, Öland is the most important (holds at least 75% of the population) which is driving the trend. ▪ Breeding population trend: decreasing 60% since the 1970s, but increase 40% since 2008 (from 75 bp to 115 bp in 2020), this is due to the increase at Öland with spill-over to other localities (a maximum of 500 bp was estimated in early 20th century), situation is good at the moment.
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat loss and degradation: key areas are coastal meadows that are grazed or mown, however grazing is often too heavy, meadows are often too dry ▪ Predation: increased predator densities has made small populations more vulnerable ▪ Conflict with agriculture
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Localized measures are carried out to adjust grazing regimes (not too heavy), adapted mowing at some breeding sites. ▪ Increasing wet features at key breeding areas (successful at Öland) ▪ Predator control at key breeding areas are conducted by volunteer hunters on Öland (more than 100 hunters) in cooperation with regional authorities ▪ Fox management on Öland has contributed together with predator control to increase the breeding success
Other remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aims is to carry on with present conservation measures ▪ Would be valuable to increase knowledge on connectivity between key breeding areas

Finland (Jorma Pessa)

Population size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Breeding population size: 250-280 bp (years 2018-2020), annual growth rate of 9% (1965-2020) ▪ Breeding population trend: short term trend (years 2008-2018) increasing (75%), long term trend (years 1980-2018) increasing (1106%) ▪ Breeding distribution: long term trend (years 1980-2018) increasing (300%)
Key threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tillage practices in agriculture: ploughing of cereal fields during breeding season in May, nest loss rate 13-17% at population level ▪ Abandonment of grassland management: cessation of grazing and mowing ▪ Conversion from animal husbandry to cereal production: common trend in Finland

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Predation: both domestic/native and alien species (Hooded Crow, Marsh Harrier, Common Crane, Red Fox, Raccoon Dog), nest loss rate 13% at population level ▪ Climate change: flooding in coastal seashore meadows, significant nest losses, worst case: 30-40% of nests in a population will be lost by flooding
Conservation measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BtG is fully protected by national Nature Conservation Act ▪ Population size inside Natura 2000 network is 37% (92-104 bp) ▪ Management of permanent natural grasslands by grazing and mowing and a wide scale of habitat restoration in core breeding areas since 1990's: 200 ha (1990's) to 4500 ha 2020 ▪ All nests in Oulu region are marked with visible signs on farmlands and coastal pastures since 2014: nest losses reduced significantly ▪ Intensive predator control on wetland SPA's started in 2021 ▪ Population study of the breeding biology and migration of Finnish BtG started in 2014
Other remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colour ringing: ~1000 individuals since 2014, 83 recoveries, 53% Eastern migration route/47% from Western migration route ▪ Geolocators 30 adults: data of 19 adult birds, these birds mainly use Eastern migration route

Presentations on LIFE and CAP funding for BtW conservation

Presentation 1: LIFE and CAP funding opportunities for conservation of Black-tailed Godwit and other breeding waders in NW European range states (Frank Vassen)

See attached document "LIFE and CAP funding for meadow breeders".

Presentation 2: LIFE Blackwit UK (Rebecca Lee)

Project Godwit, to increase population size, increase productivity, increase range, develop conservation long-term plan in UK.

Objectives:

1. Increase productivity
 - Widening of ditches
 - Temporary fencing
 - Fox control and diversionary feeding of Red Kite
2. Enhance habitat
 - Installed eel-friendly pump
 - Created wet features
 - Re-profiled over 60 km ditches
3. Understand movements
 - 50% of population is colour-ringed
 - Use of geolocators
4. Trial headstarting
 - a. Modelling (increase productivity)
 - b. Eggs are collected, hatched indoors, released around 30 days old, 94% of eggs fledge a chick
5. Support & Awareness (e.g. working with community groups, volunteers, local school program)
6. Produce action plan: process just started 2022-2030, draft target 122-132 bp

Headstarting:

- Ouse Wash: 3 in 2017 to 18 bp currently
- Nene Wash: since 2018 releasing 15 birds a year, remains stable

Productivity:

- 2018 gave hope (0.45), last years around 0.2, hopefully predator-fencing works

Conclusion:

- Population has grown, but is still vulnerable
- Population Ouse Wash is currently 6x larger

More information: <https://projectgodwit.org.uk/>

Presentation 3: LIFE Wiesenvögel NRW (Ina Brüning)

Project location: North-Rhine-Westphalia, Germany

Started last October 2020 and runs until 31 December 2027

Objectives to enhance conservation status of meadow nesting and staging birds

- Securing an extensive, meadow-bird-friendly agriculture land use
- Re-establishing a meadow-bird friendly water regime
- Re-establishing an open landscape character
- Land purchase
- Predation management (fencing hatching areas, trapping red fox and raccoon)
- Visitor management
- Outreach (newsletter, website)
- Monitoring (breeding pairs, hatching rate, chick survival, resting and wintering birds, predators via camera trapping)
- Networking (workshops, advisory board)

Expected aims:

- 356 ha agricultural land
- 2000 ha meadows suitable for meadow birds
- 46% increase Curlew, 25% Lapwing, max 1000 NRW BtG
- 20.000 people outreach

More information: <https://www.life-wiesenvoegel.nrw.de/>

Presentation 4: LIFE-IP GrassBird Habitats (Heinrich Belting)

Location: East Atlantic Flyway

11/2020-10/2030

Main objections and actions:

- Improve habitat quality on breeding, stopover and wintering grounds
- Land purchase: 2000 ha in Lower Saxony, "write off" pilots in Friesland (farms transition to meadow bird farms)
- Optimization of water tables: 20.000 ha
- Reduction of predation rate by predation management: no fencing
- Capacity building within an international framework (D-NL-SN)
- Increase ERDF and EAFRD funding for wet grassland management from less than 10 up to 353 million: 50 million for land purchase
- Strategic Plan for the Atlantic Region for grassland bird conservation
- Farming business model for wet grassland bird habitats
- Improve effectiveness of agri-environmental schemes
- West Africa: developing model for sustainable farming (designation biosphere reserve in Gambia/Senegal 350.000 ha)

Participants who are interested in becoming involved in this LIFE-IP are invited to send a message to Heinrich Belting.

More information:

https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=7885

Facilitated discussion on the activities prioritised in the workplan

Quick run through the rolling workplan (Doc. BtG IWG NW 3.2). Participants agreed that there were no important issues or urgent amendments. Erik Kleyheeg proposed to update the workplan based on today's presentations. He will send the workplan to all participants to provide their input, after which the workplan will be revised by Erik. The updated workplan will be discussed during the next meeting in February.

When filling in the national activities, technical experts are urged to involve their national focal point. Contacting the right administrators and technical advisors, the ones who should be involved, will yield a higher chance of success of these activities.

There is 70 million of CAP funding available; Heinrich Belting will take the initiative to come up with ideas to use this as co-funding, this will be a subject during the meeting in February. Working group members are urged to send an email to Erik Kleyheeg if they want to be involved.

Decision: Erik Kleyheeg will contact IWG members separately for input in the workplan and subsequently update the workplan.

Next meeting of the NW-European breeding range states

The 4th Regional Meeting will take place in Papenburg, Germany, from 16-18 February 2022. Invitations will be sent out by Oliver Schall. All participants agree that a face-to-face is preferred over a virtual meeting.

Finland wants to continue taking part in Regional Meetings of the NW-European breeding range states. There were no objections by any of the other participants. Finland will also keep taking part in the meetings of the Eastern European breeding range states.

Decision: Finland will be invited to future Region Meetings of the NW-European breeding range states.

Meeting closure

Any other business

- The Working Group expresses their concerns about the Tagus estuary (Portugal) issue and will be following the situation closely.
- Wilmar Remmelts will retire, if you want to chair these meetings, send an email to Erik Kleyheeg.

Summary and conclusions

- Overall, the BtG is still in decline, however there are some optimistic signs in several areas. In many places BtG are declining faster in agricultural land than in nature reserves. We should continue to take action and implement conservation measures.
- Finland will be part of this subgroup of the IWG
- AEWa Coordination by Erik Kleyheeg secured until 2022
- The workplan will be updated and sent around for comments
- The next meeting will be in February, you will get an invitation soon.
- Special thanks to Wilmar for chairing this Working Group.
- Erik Kleyheeg thanks all participants for their contribution to this meeting.

List of participants

Wilmar Remmelts	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, Food Quality	Netherlands
Nick Warmelink	Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, Food Quality	Netherlands
Erik Kleyheeg	AEWA IWG coordinator	Netherlands
Oliver Schall	Federal Ministry for the Environment	Germany
Nele Tschense	Federal Ministry for the Environment	Germany
Heinz Düttmann	MU Niedersachsen	Germany
Heinrich Belting	NLWKN Niedersachsen	Germany
Ina Brüning	LANUV Nordrhein-Westfalen	Germany
Jutta Leyrer	NABU	Germany
Geert Spanoghe	INBO	Belgium
Preben Clausen	Aarhus University	Denmark
Charles-Henri de Barsac	Ministry of the Ecology	France
Charlotte Francesiaz	Office for Biodiversity	France
Bart Donato	Natural England	United Kingdom
Dan Brown	RSPB	United Kingdom
Richard Ottvall	Birdlife Sweden	Sweden
Esko Hyvärinen	Ministry of the Environment	Finland
Jorma Pessa	ELY Center Oulu	Finland
Frank Vassen	EU Commission	European Commission
Rebecca Lee	RSPB	United Kingdom
Celine Roodhart	Birdlife Netherlands	Netherlands
Willemien Geertsema	BoerenNatuur	Netherlands
Jos Hooijmeijer	University of Groningen	Netherlands
Jacintha van Dijk	Sovon Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology	Netherlands