

2nd Regional Meeting of the Eastern European Breeding Range States under the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group

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1st Regional Meeting of the Eastern European Breeding Countries under the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group

23-25 October 2013, Kiev, Ukraine
Report of the Meeting



Participants

From left to right on the photo above.

- Mr. Ivo Walsmit, Coordinator, The Netherlands
- Mrs. Nina Mikander, LWfG Coordinator, Finland
- Dr. Gleb Gavrys, Ukraine
- Mr. Hannes Pehlak, Estonia
- Mr. Jorma Pessa, Finland
- Dr. David Kleijn, IWG Expert, The Netherlands
- Mr. Pawel Pinchuk, Belarus
- Dr. Alexey Timoshenko, Kazakhstan
- Dr. Grzegorz Rąkowski, Poland
- Mr. Aydar Darbayev, Kazakhstan
- Dr. Ainars Aunins, Latvia
- Mrs. Yuliya Bondarenko, Ukraine

- Dr. Alexander Mishenko, Russian Federation (not featured, photographer)
- Dr. Volodymyr Domashlinets, Ukraine (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.

Election of the Chair

Decision: *The BtG regional Working Group Meeting proposed and elected Volodymyr Domashlinets, National Focal Point to the Working Group from Ukraine, as the Chair for the meeting.*

Adoption of the agenda

Two adaptation to the agenda

- The working group ToR and presentation of the working group logo, website and intranet have been combined in one presentation
- The country update by the Russian delegation was missing in the agenda and was introduced

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

Working Group Terms of Reference

Ivo 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.

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 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 dependent 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.

IWG website & workspace

Ivo Walsmit 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.

Decision: *The representatives of the meeting found that the workspace could be a useful tool to exchange knowledge and experiences.*

Action: *Ivo Walsmit will re-invite the representatives of the regional working group
Ivo Walsmit will upload the presentations with the country updates to the workspace*

National Reporting

Nina Mikander presented the establishment of a 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)

Countries update summaries

Belarus

The Belarussian BtG population is estimated at around 7000 breeding pairs and decreasing, but the data is old and incomplete. The BtG breeds in mires and floodplains. The number of breeding pairs depends strongly on the water level and can change a lot during the year. A number of BtG's were colour-ringed which resulted in

recoveries from Romania, Finland and Scandinavia.

The main threats are loss of habitats (overgrowing of meadows), spring hunting (shooting and disturbing) nest destruction, recreational disturbance and chick mortality. For Belarus it's important to make an estimation of the population, to identify important breeding areas, to stop spring hunting and to develop a management plan for open floodplain meadows.

Finland

Finland was the only country in the working group meeting that could show an increasing trend for the breeding population. The population is currently estimated at approximately 120 pairs. Because the Finnish population is increasing it seems that the documented pressures don't have a significant negative impact on the population, but this is poorly documented.

The BtG is fully protected by law in Finland and most of the breeding pairs are in Natura 2000 sites. Important steps to be taken are to start with the population viability analyses, to better understand the impact of threats and to monitor the nesting success and chick mortality. A national action plan for the BtG is under preparation.

Latvia

In Latvia the BtG population is estimated at 70-100 pairs. It is declining where it's breeding wet grasslands, but secure in the open parts of raised bogs. As a result of the land reform on 1991 the land ownership structure was changed in Latvia resulting in ploughing of grasslands, which is a major threat for the BtG. A second threat is the abandonment of wet meadows and pastures which causes the overgrowing of the BtG habitats.

The BtG is legally protected in Latvia. It is considered a disadvantage though that the BtG isn't an Annex I species, because no sites are specially designated for this species. Conservation in Latvia is done through the rural development programme and its agri-environment schemes, but they are too uniform and lack focus.

Estonia

The Estonian population is estimated at 300-550 pairs, of which 60% breeds in bogs, mires and fens and 40% in wet grasslands. The population in wet grasslands are declining, in the mires though the population was increasing, but are showing a decline now too. This is mainly caused by habitat loss and degradation. Predation is also considered to have a negative impact.

Estonia is working on a national action plan for the BtG; the final draft is waiting for approval. Important conservation and habitat management activities are the restoration of the natural water regime in mires and the management of wet meadows and pastures.

Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan the BtG is a common migrant and breeding species. It breeds in northern Kazakhstan in wet meadows, grassy shores of lakes and rivers, flooded grasslands and wet saline habitats near lakes. The number of breeding pairs is unknown, but during migration large flocks of BtG's are common.

The BtG is under protection only in protected areas, in other areas it is still a legal hunting species. Other threats are the instable hydrological regime of lakes and possibly low power lines. Future action in Kazakhstan should improve the monitoring of the BtG to create a network of protected areas and to raise awareness among stakeholders.

Poland

The BtG is considered a strictly protected species in Poland. It was estimated in 2004 that there were between 5000 and 6000 breeding pairs, but this data is considered incomplete. Based on expert judgement it is probably safer to say there are approximately 2000 pairs of BtG breeding in Poland and this number is still decreasing.

Changes in land use, changes in water profiles and hydrological regimes in combination with predation are considered the strongest threats for the BtG in Poland. There are conservation actions being implemented in National Parks and Natura 2000 sites focussing on the restoration of BtG habitats.

Russian Federation

Nowadays Russia might be the country with the largest population of breeding BtG in Europe, overtaking the Netherlands. But population estimates are difficult in this vast country and date is outdated or incomplete. Because of the deep depression of animal husbandry in Russia in the years 1980-2010 resulting in overgrowing of wet meadows it is expected that the trend of the BtG is negative in Russia. In some areas though with specific management the population is increasing.

In Russia the BtG is included in the Red Data Book, but the species is also listed into the list of hunting species. Future activities in BtG conservation should first, focus on stimulating the national government to take the appropriate legislative actions. Second, more research and monitoring is needed to better understand the trends and dynamics of the BtG in Russia.

Ukraine

The population of the BtG in Ukraine is estimated to be between 1400 and 2000 pairs with a negative trend. Loss of habitat and predation are amongst the biggest threats of the BtG. Besides being an important country for breeding BtG Ukraine is also important for staging BtG during migration as ring-recoveries from Sweden and the Baltic countries show.

To stimulate the conservation of BtG in Ukraine better and more research and monitoring is needed. The establishment and better organisation of reserves and protected areas is needed. And awareness raising by explaining the Black-tailed Godwit conservation activities is important.

Northwestern Black-tailed Population, trends and protection

As part of an intermezzo between the countries updates David Kleijn presented an overview of the trends and research results of the North-western European breeding population. Where the Eastern European populations are suffering from the abandonment traditional management of wet meadows, the North-western population is decreasing because of the intensification of agricultural practices. Another striking difference between Netherlands and the eastern breeding population is that groundwater tables in the Netherlands are being controlled, whereas the BtG in Eastern Europe is mainly breeding in areas with a natural water regime.

Priorities & Recommendations

Ivo Walsmit guided the participants of the regional IWG meeting through the results and activities of table 8 & 9 of the SSAP specific for countries with populations of breeding BtGs, with the exception of 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 Eastern European Breeding range states during the next inter-sessional period.

Proposal for Black-tailed Godwit research

David Kleijn presented a proposal for a PhD-research project with a focus on the Eastern European BtG population. It became even more clear from the countries' updates that the lack of knowledge about the Eastern European BtG population is holding back the conservation of the BtG. Questions as what the environmental variables are, the relation between reproductive success and human land-use and the migration are key.

Decision: *The regional IWG agreed that this research would be desirable
David Kleijn will elaborate the proposal and together with Ivo Walsmit look for the appropriate funding*

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 provide for the time of the Coordinator of the IWG. Ivo Walsmit stated that the availability of his time for 2014 is confirmed.

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	The BtG regional Working Group Meeting proposed and elected Volodymyr Domashlinets, National Focal Point to the Working Group from Ukraine, as the Chair for the meeting.	
Adoption of Agenda	The proposed agenda was adopted by the BtG regional Working Group with the following adaptations to the agenda <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The working group ToR and presentation of the working group logo, website and intranet have been combined in one presentation - The country update by the Russian delegation was missing in the agenda and was introduced 	
IWG website & workspace	The representatives of the meeting decided that the workspace could be a useful tool to exchange knowledge and experiences.	Ivo Walsmit will re-invite the representatives of the regional working group Ivo Walsmit will upload the presentations with the country updates to the workspace
Priority setting	The interactive discussion resulted in a revised prioritisation of the activities in the SSAP to be implemented by the Eastern European Breeding range states during the next inter-sessional period.	Ivo Walsmit prepare an overview of the priority for each country
Proposal for Black-tailed Godwit research	The regional IWG agreed that this research would be desirable	David Kleijn will elaborate the proposal and together with Ivo Walsmit search for the appropriate funding
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 2015, depending on funding	Ivo Walsmit will invite the WG members for the next meeting

Annex II - Actions for the Eastern breeding population (all countries)

Results	National activities	Country Priority							
		Blr	Fin	Lv	Est	Kz	Rus	Pl	Ukr
Degradation of breeding habitat quality and habitat loss has stopped	Identify and protect key breeding sites for the BtG under national legislation	x				x	x		x
	Prevent loss of further breeding habitat when meadows are ploughed for agricultural use and floodplain meadows are reduced								
	Prevent loss of habitats caused by the hydrological regime changes by embankment and canalization of the rivers to avoid floods	x							
	Support haymaking and grazing of important breeding habitat by providing aid to sustainable farming to prevent overgrowth of important breeding habitat	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
	Reverse land abandonment, where appropriate, and restore habitats							x	
	Create site specific management plans for protected and non-protected key sites according to the habitat requirements of the BtG					x			
	Improvement and implementation of management of protected areas by taking into account the habitat requirements of the BtG.			x					
	Prevent human induced disturbance of nesting BtG (including recreational activities, such as fishing in rivers in breeding areas, training game dogs)								
	Prevent the current practice of late spring burning of dry meadow vegetation which leads to loss of BtG nests and decrease in food resources (high priority in some areas)	x							
	Ensure that national legislation requires Environmental Impact Assessments are carried out preceding activities that could lead to breeding habitat degradation or loss.								
	Prevent important breeding areas to be lost through urbanisation, infrastructure and other planning. Implement this kind of protection in national legislation						x		
	Support biodiversity-sensitive management (including appropriate grazing and/or mowing regimes) of important breeding habitats in order to promote chick survival and to prevent overgrowing		x						
Prevent loss and degradation of permanent grasslands and mires important to breeding BtG			x						
Restore natural hydrological regime in the open mire habitats important to the BtG				x					

Results	National activities	Country Priority							
		Blr	Fin	Lv	Est	Kz	Rus	Pl	Ukr
Improved survival and recruitment by reducing mortality and increasing productivity	Provide legal protection of the BtG, as far this is not yet the case								X
	Stop hunting in spring (high priority) and other hunting and prevent illegal hunting.	X							
	Support activities that maintain the openness of BtG habitats and thereby reduce mortality from predators.								
	Develop actions to restore openness in former breeding areas.								
	Support activities for maintaining/re-introducing optimal groundwater levels of grasslands and meadows with artificial water regimes, needed both for an optimal management and to secure food availability for adults and chicks.					X		X	
	Reduce predators' pressure in specific areas with high predation pressure							X	
Knowledge gaps filled	Prepare distribution maps	X				X			X
	Prepare update of the estimates of breeding population	X						X	X
	Carry out inventory of key sites and determine habitat threats						X		X
	Examine habitat requirements		X	X					
	Determine locally relevant management requirements according to the habitat requirements		X	X	X				
	Investigate staging sites, migration routes and wintering areas by expanding marking schemes	X	X		X		X		X
	Estimate survival and causes of mortality	X	X		X	X			
	Research the impact of agricultural activity on the productivity of the BtG		X						