

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

25 August 2020, online Go-To-Meeting

Report of the Meeting



Attendees

- Dr. Erik Kleyheeg, Coordinator, The Netherlands
- Mrs. Nina Mikander, UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, Finland
- Mrs. Wilmar Remmelts, The Netherlands
- Prof. David Kleijn, IWG Expert, The Netherlands
- Dr. Alexander Mishenko, Russian Federation
- Dr. Volodymyr Domashlinets, Ukraine
- Mrs. Tatiana Kuzmenko, Ukraine
- Mr. Jorma Pessa, Finland
- Mr. Hannes Pehlak, Estonia
- Mr. Matej Repel, Slovakia

Welcome and Opening

The Associate Programme Officer for Single Species Action Plans at the AEWA secretariat, Nina Mikander, and Coordinator of the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit (BtG) International Working Group (IWG), Erik Kleyheeg, welcomed the participants to the meeting.

Decision: *No chair will be appointed for this meeting. Nina Mikander and Erik Kleyheeg will be moderators of the meeting.*

Adoption of the agenda

A small change was made to the presentation by David Kleijn to better cover the contents: Habitat requirements of the Black-tailed Godwit in the Eastern European range states – presentation and discussion/questions

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

Round Table Introductions of Participants

All participants briefly introduced themselves, explaining their link to the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group.

Key-note presentation

David Kleijn presented the preliminary results of the research performed by his PhD student Miguel Monteiro, who is co-supervised by Hannes Pehlak and Jorma Pessa. Aim of the project is to identify BtG habitat requirements in natural habitat for a stable population. Highest breeding densities of BtG are found in grasslands that are traditionally managed with medium intensity. Intensification of agricultural practices poses a threat in Western Europe, while extensification (land abandonment) poses a threat in Eastern Europe. There is no marked difference in the role of predation in nest success between Eastern and Western Europe. Site fidelity on breeding grounds may be lower in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe. Lake Chad and the Inner Niger Delta appear important wintering sites for BtG from the Eastern European population/flyway.

Countries update summaries

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has a large breeding range, which is expanding to the north, mostly in peat bogs. Post-breeding concentrations up to 2000 birds (flocks) of unknown origin are observed in the south. The estimated breeding population in 2000-2003 consisted of 13.000-30.000 breeding pairs. The Atlas of Breeding Birds of European Russia (2007-2019) provided more accurate data. This Atlas is based on 50x50km blocks; BtG was present in 525 squares. The current population estimate is 25.000-45.000 breeding pairs; there is no evidence of increase, but higher estimation is due to more precise data. Overall there appears to be a slight decrease; numbers are known to have decreased due to abandonment of farmland. Legal status: BtG not listed in federal Red Data Book (strong hunting lobby); it is listed in 54 out of 85 Red Data Books of federal subjects; in 31 federal subjects it is listed on hunting list, but species is not popular among hunters.

Ukraine

The European Breeding Bird Atlas (EBBA2) has data updated until 2020. Breeding populations are in the northern half of Ukraine. Population estimate in the period 2015-2019 consists of 400-600 breeding pairs. Long-term and short-term trend is decreasing. 40% decrease since 1980. Wintering population consists of 1-10 individuals, trend unknown. Recently there are a few pairs in arable land, perhaps due to drought in dry hay meadows. Important stop-over site in NW-Ukraine, mostly outside of protected areas.

Legal protection: in 2017 parliament has adopted law environmental impact assessment for large-scale developments; investment in Emerald Network; new law drafted (several hundreds of sites); public awareness campaign with the Encyclopaedia of Migratory Species on website of Ministry in Ukrainian, includes BtG; recommendation to include species in Red Data Book, will probably be done by end of the year (currently not listed).

Main threat: low water levels in recent years; lack of pastures as well (fewer cattle). Hunting does not seem to be a big threat. Once it is in the Red Book hunting will also no longer be allowed.

Finland

During the last decade the population has increased and extended its breeding range. Current population estimate of 260 (250-280) breeding pairs with a 7% increase per year (2013-2018). Short term increase 75%, long term >1000% increase. Change in habitat use: in 1960's nearly all BtG were on coastal meadows, now only 40%, while 50% currently on agricultural land (fallow grassland, perennial grasslands) and 10% on peatlands and bogs. Future ranking will be "vulnerable" (down-listed; currently still listed as "endangered"). Threats: Nest destruction and chick mortality due to agricultural operations is the most important threat in future; nest predation by fox, raccoon dog, corvids, gulls, common crane are increasing; global warming is increasing warm winds and rapid rise of sea levels, which are problem for coastal meadow breeding pairs (last year almost all nests destroyed by flooding).

Legal protection: BtG is fully protected by law. 40% of breeding pairs is breeding in protected areas. Agri-environmental schemes have been implemented on agricultural land since 1995. Monitoring scheme started in 2014 is now still going on, also started nest success monitoring in 2014; colour-ringing scheme and geolocator tagging going on since 2014 (>900 tagged birds, 5 geolocators in 2014 and 2018). Predation rate of nests 13% on average. Based on ring recoveries, about 50% of birds appeared to follow the western flyway, other half eastern flyway. This is strongly biased by reporting rate. Geolocator birds almost all have used eastern flyway. Lake Chad is important site (staging duration is approximately 2 months).

Estonia

New national population estimate: 500-700 breeding pairs. This is likely slightly overestimated, 300-550 breeding pairs is more realistic. Long-term and short-term trend both declining. 60% of population breeds in bogs in mires; 40% in wet grasslands. Habitat conditions have improved thanks to large restoration projects, mostly affecting grassland population, subsidised by EU; restoration projects in bogs to improve water regime. Threats: Work by Miguel Monteiro revealed serious problem with predation. Last 4 years 67-88% predation rates of nests, despite good habitat. Floodplain meadows Matsalu Bay mowing regime seems inappropriate, although a few pairs of BtG and Ruff are still present. In general little attention for coastal floodplains despite being important breeding habitat. Tectonic uplift contributes to loss of habitat on long term. Water regulators in rivers may also be a problem. Another problem is vegetation going into the winter too high: conservation management may worsen this situation. Almost no predator control/management in Estonia, perhaps only on some small islands. Priority on relatively isolated breeding sites.

Legal protection: National action plan is still not approved, despite being already prepared and ready in 2013.

Slovakia

Last 20 years outside of breeding range of BtG. Last proven breeding was in 2000. Since then only few breeding attempts in NE and SE parts of the country (border Hungary and Ukraine). For the future: only one site in SE Slovakia where water regimes are being improved (traditional grazing) may be suitable for BtG. For 10 years, no success yet but other wader numbers are increasing (redshank, lapwing). BtG is dream for the future.

Threat: huge destruction of wetlands (50's to 80's), lack of wet meadows/wetlands. Now only few remain, managed by NGO's. Extensive grazing almost disappeared. Almost all arable land is used for growing crops.

Belarus

Please complement.

IWG activities since 2013

ISSAP extended for another 10 years in 2018 (until 2028)

Nina Mikander explained that the ISSAP for the Black-tailed Godwit was extended for another 10 years during the 7th Meeting of the AEWPA Parties in 2018. There was no revision of the plan, but range states were asked to rather focus on implementation of the plan. All major points in the original ISSAP are still valid. The plans and threats listed in the ISSAP are reassessed in rolling workplans. For the Black-tailed Godwit, there are separate workplans for each of the three distinguished regions.

Changes of co-ordinators

There have been regular fluctuations of coordinators of the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group since 2013. In Augustus 2017 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between AEWA, Ministry of Economic Affairs in the Netherlands and Sovon Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology for coordination. The position of the coordinator is funded by the Dutch government.

Overview of coordinators:

- Ivo Walsmit (succeeded by René Alma): until 2016
- Maja Roodbergen (succeeded by Marc van Roomen): 2017-2018
- Erik Kleyheeg: 2019-present

Regional Meetings

After 2013, there have been two regional meetings of the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group:

- Nov 2016, The Hague, Netherlands: 2nd Regional Meeting North-Western European Range States
- Nov 2017, Dakar, Senegal: 1st Regional Meeting West-African Wintering Range States

There has not yet been a meeting for the Eastern winter range states. It is yet unclear if there is a desire to organise a meeting focusing on this region.

Participation in the regional sub-set of the IWG

The AEWA BtG ISSAP foresees implementation in 62 countries (range states). All countries that are parties of AEWA have a legal obligation to conserve and manage the species according to the plan. Since the adoption of the ISSAP, the AEWA Technical Committee has applied a new differentiation of range states to focus conservation effort and resources on key countries. The elements of this new approach are:

- Focus of efforts on Principle Range States (supporting globally-important numbers)
- Identification of Survey Range states: states with currently insufficient data

Range States with a low number of breeding pairs are usually invited to the regional meetings, but from the ISSAP the priority for action in these states is low.

Question to the Meeting: for the next meeting, should all range states within the region be invited, or should the International Working Group focus on the countries with important proportions of the population?

Decision: *It is decided that it is desirable that all range states within the region are invited.*

Decisions 2013

1. *"The representatives of the meeting found that the workspace could be a useful tool to exchange knowledge and experiences."* AEWA Secretariat acknowledges that AEWA BtG IWG's website/workspace requires a facelift. AEWA has a capacity problem for website management (single person responsible). Since the website requires reprogramming, at present it would not make sense to work on current version. AEWA Secretariat would like to know if people are interested in having this workspace/website running. It was stated that the website is for all three regions and that it was decided previously that people from other regions do see benefits of the website/workspace. AEWA Secretariat will try to move

reprogramming up on the priorities list. The website providing public information is most important. In the meantime IWG Members will be updated via the Newsletter.

2. *“revised prioritisation of the activities in the SSAP to be implemented by the Eastern European Breeding range states”* Priorities identified in an interactive discussion during the 2013 Regional Meeting were listed in a new workplan.
3. *“David Kleijn and IWG coordinator will search for funding to set up BtG research in Eastern Europe”* David Kleijn managed to acquire funding himself for a PhD project. Finding external funding is very difficult. More structural ways of funding are needed.
4. *“Next Regional Meeting is desirable and should take place in 2015, depending on funding”* With several years of delay, current Regional Meeting is held in 2020. It was discussed whether Denmark should be part of the Regional Meeting of Eastern European Range States and decided that Denmark should not be invited, but that invitation of additional experts (e.g. Danish expert Ole Thorup) can be invited if relevant for agenda/programme of the Meeting.

Funding

Funding opportunities were discussed to aid implementation of actions from the ISSAP.

The European Commission has developed a Multi-Species Action Plan (MSAP) for grassland-breeding waders. Black-tailed Godwit is one of the focal species. Applications for European Funding for implementation of this MSAP could support the BtG ISSAP.

Applying for a LIFE project is a good option, also for countries outside the European Union. Can also be linked to the MSAP for grassland-breeding waders. Estonia has good experience with previous LIFE projects, can be really fruitful, with a strong practical element. Potentially promising topics could be (1) restoration of abandoned agricultural fields, (2) wader predator management, (3) satellite tagging to find stopover sites and migration routes of the Eastern population. Staff time can be used as co-funding. There may be options to connect with the current LIFE IP project in Western Europe.

It could be worth looking into the German IKI funding instrument for climate and biodiversity protection (<https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/en/about-iki>).

Setting up PhD projects requires people who are willing to invest time in finding funding opportunities.

Next IWG Regional Meeting

Decision: *The regional IWG agreed that a next meeting with the Eastern European Breeding Range States would be desirable and decided that it should take place in 2021. Erik Kleyheeg will identify the available funding and preferred time of year for this meeting.*

Annex 1

Decisions and Action Points of the Meeting

Agenda item	Decision	Action Point
Opening and welcome	Nina Mikander and Erik Kleyheeg will moderate this meeting. No chair is appointed.	
Adoption of Agenda	The proposed agenda was adopted by the BtG regional Working Group with the only adaptation being a change of the title of David Kleijn's presentation.	
Participation in the regional sub-set of the IWG	Attendees of the Meeting agree that all range states within the region should be invited for Regional Meetings, despite focus being on Principle Range States.	The IWG coordinator will invite representatives of all Range States in the Eastern European region for the next Regional Meeting.
Next IWG Regional Meeting	The regional IWG agreed that a next meeting with the Eastern European Breeding Range States would be desirable and decided that it should take place in 2021.	The IWG coordinator will identify the available funding and preferred time of year for this meeting.

Annex 2. Revised regional workplan

Attached as a separate document