



2nd Regional Meeting of the Breeding Range States under the AEWA Eurasian Curlew International Working Group

Tuesday 10 November 2020 (*online via Go-to-Meeting*)

Date: 11.02.2020

MINUTES AND ACTIONS

Present – Nina Mikander (AEWA), Daniel Brown (UK), Danny Hepinstall (UK), Floris Verhaeghe (Belgium), Geert Spanoghe (Belgium), Nicola Crockford (BirdLife), Jaanus Elts (Estonia), Cy Griffin (FACE), Esko Hyvarinen (Finland), Francois Lamarque (France), Charlotte Francesiaz (France), Oliver Shall (Germany), Jutta Leyrer (Germany), Iben Hove Sorensen (CIC), Wilmar Remmelts (Netherlands), Paul Shimmings (Norway), Tatiana Sviridova (Russia), Adriaan “Adjan” de Jong (Sweden), Sean Kelly (Ireland), Samantha Franks (IWSG), Natalia Karlionova (Belarus), Heinz Duttmann (Germany), Geoff Hilton (WWT).

Actions are highlighted in yellow

Agenda item	Minutes and actions
Explore opportunities for new resource at important breeding sites & Increase monitoring or productivity across the range	<p>Norway – 2019 was the year of the EC, much new data gathered (citizen science). A new monitoring programme started in 2019 and continued in 2020. Due to continue into future, depending on funding. 5 new areas included, which has added to 5 existing areas. In time, this should provide better data on trends, habitat use, etc. Management guidance for farmland birds was recently produced and included Eurasian Curlew (EC). Netherlands – 2019 was the Year of EC. Much work was related to better understanding breeding success. Of 600 pairs only 13.6% had chicks – a concerning situation. Mouse population cycle peak was related to increased predation in subsequent years. High nest success was apparent on Waddensea islands where predation is low – but still low chick survival was recorded. Only 2/19 tagged chicks survived, even though nest fencing was successful. Combined effort to colour-mark birds across the Netherlands with white flags is in operation. Also work to count wintering roosts has started. Special issue on EC is due in the journal <i>Limosa</i> which will be released in spring 2021 - Erik will share with IWG. 2021 plans – continue the above and GPS tag adult birds to better understand brood movements. Newish AE scheme has habitat-based approach, with additional management for species. Belgium – Flanders. Species Protection Plan soon to be approved. It is a 5-year framework for action with associated budget. Includes research on feeding behaviour, site fidelity, etc. Also looking at local breeding sites across Flanders – already have a good idea of where to focus effort and how much it will cost. Hope to start implementing plan next year. First year of breeding atlas started this year – in 4 years’ time it will be produced. New population in Flemish Brabant is now being studied by local NGO with colour- marking and transmitters to investigate habitat use. Some predator exclusion measures are being deployed - emerging results suggest that nest success is very low (under 10%) in small nature reserves with normal fox densities, whereas nest success might be better in some agricultural areas. This probably explains why population has declined greatly. 365 pairs is population target in the plan. Floris will share plan once it is</p>

	<p>complete. Finland – 87,000 (80,000-91,000) breeding pairs are widely distributed. Breeding population appears to have recently stabilised. Increased/new funding for nature conservation includes restoration and management of wetlands and surrounding habitats (e.g. meadows and semi-natural grasslands). Focus is to improve 80 IBAs by end of 2023. Also includes removal of invasive species e.g. Raccoon Dog. Targets include 15,000 ha of land into conservation management and to restore 20,000 ha of drained mires and protect 20,000 ha of mire. New bird atlas due soon too. 7 birds were tagged in Finland last summer as part of the French-led collaborative project. Germany – Lower Saxony hosts 60% of national breeding population. Different conservation measures being applied across area. Most common is nest site protection and chick protection measures (e.g. wader-friendly mowing across 27,000 ha). Reproductive success has been measured since 2013 on plots across 6,000 ha. Hatching success is around 40% – almost stable – although lots of variation occurs between years and between sites. 2019 was a very good year, due to vole population peaking, leading to 70% hatching success. In terms of overall reproductive output, again lots of variation exists but across all plots there is sufficient reproductive success to maintain population. Lots of discussion currently taking place on what measures should take place in the future. Heinz has data showing that when grassland cutting starts then predation increases as predators move into areas to search for dead voles. Overall population trend is negative but for 20 years population in core areas has remained stable. Some inland breeding sites have been lost, but some gains have occurred at coastal sites. Started radio-tagging EC in northern Germany this year. Will continue into future in order to investigate habitat use and inform conservation measures. Schleswig-Holstein – a scheme exists working with farmers to protect nests and families when they start mowing and putting out cattle. The focus is on single nest schemes, as EC are so dispersed. All very time consuming – positive progress but still need to increase productivity. Southern Germany – focus is on habitat improvement and fencing. Appears to have stopped decline in Bavaria - in last 10 years they have reached level of breeding success that might sustain population. A success has been to use telemetry on chicks to identify foraging habitats, which can then inform engagement with farmers and hunters and also inform use of large-scale fencing for high levels of protection. If they catch chicks, they are attaching GPS tags. Also, there is evidence emerging of Bavarian-tagged birds going to France and the Tagus Estuary. Still have issues of chicks dying during hatching. The question was asked if anyone else has witnessed this – there have been some cases in Sweden but this has been linked to really late clutches and could be occurring as adults get stressed by migration calls. France – National management plan (2016) is entering its final year. It will now be assessed in terms of implementation and impact. One action to be completed is the national survey which LPO are leading on. A new breeding map will therefore be available soon. New management plan will be drafted after conclusions from 1st plan have been produced - so new plan is expected in 1-2 years. Russia – low levels of progress due to lack of funding. Due to help of German project on EC's migration (leader of EC's research there is Philipp Schwemmer, University of Kiel), which is going on also in close cooperation with group of Pierrick Bocher from University of La Rochelle, France (exchange and analysis of gathered data) – 5 GPS-GSM tags planned to be deployed in central Russia and 5 in SE Russia where we don't know what subspecies exist. In addition, in 2021 a student from La Rochelle University will analyse data from up to 50 tags for birds, which bred in Russia from 2014-2020. Russian birds. The decision to tag central and SE Russian birds is because wintering birds tagged in Europe tend to go to Northern Russia. There are only 2 people working with EC in the field in Russia but they do not have a colour-marking scheme. Birds are already being captured so it would be good to add colour-rings. They are also taking some blood samples to try and understand the boundaries of the nominate subspecies. Estonia -b this information was passed on after the meeting, namely that one nearly fledged chick was tagged with GPS-GSM tag as part of the French-led collaborative project called BirdMan (the same project as in Finland), but then predated by red fox after five days of tagging. Three chicks were colour-marked.</p>
Maintain or extend appropriate protection measures on wintering sites	Nicola raised issue of threat to EC at Tagus Estuary, Portugal. The planned development is the subject of an AEWA Implementation Review Process. Satellite-tagged birds from Germany and Poland have been tracked to the site in recent years. Erik mentioned that recent studies have concluded that the Wadden Sea

	appears to be provided good feeding conditions for wintering EC, and that numbers are increasing.
Produce agreed Rural Development Scheme guidance in context of CAP reform and new UK Policy)	<p>Barry O'Donaghue started this work but it stalled. Nicola asked whether we can use the EU Multi-Species Action Plan (MSAP) as a vehicle to get needs of species into CAP reform discussions. Coordination of MSAP implementation is currently dormant but moves are afoot to improve situation. Wilmar stated she hoped everyone got an invitation to the Dutch wader workshop which has an emphasis on the MSAP and the scope is all countries and stakeholders. The priority list for LIFE support has waders high up on the list. Action - Dan to speak to Barry to find out where we got to and where to go next. Then we will bring together a smaller group of IWG members to consider how this work links to wider MSAP needs. Danny expressed that a key function of the EC IWG is to capture expertise and wisdom in relation to agricultural policy.</p> <p>Oliver – European Commission has just published paper in NADEG committed to improving the conservation status of non-secured taxa. Commission has not listed the CAP issue, but focusses on AHM Article 7. The Commission see CAP more in hands of member states and that LIFE+ is there for national action plans for species. Action – Oliver to find the NADEG document and share amongst IWG.</p> <p>Influencing agri-environment schemes – a window of opportunity to influence agri-policy will be in June 2021. BirdLife are looking to support countries and are producing a toolkit for BirdLife partners and environment ministries to use to demonstrate what is needed. There were discussions around how quickly the toolkit can be produced and whether it could be an output of the Dutch wader workshop. RSPB is also looking to estimate how much suitable wet grassland habitat currently exists for waders - and how much would need to be restored to meet MSAP objectives. This work will also look to estimate how much carbon sequestration and flood alleviation would accrue from such restoration activities. Action – get in touch with Nicola if interested in being involved in this work. The Commission and member states should be looking at ways to implement the MSAP. Questions were asked about whether we need to think about wider land use policies in relation to EC. The Dutch workshop will focus more on CAP matters. It was mentioned that AEWA IWGs have more leverage than outputs from the Dutch workshop, due to government involvement. Action – agreed that we really need the IWG to prioritise this work and need to organise meetings. The AEWA Secretariat will set up a call with the 2 IWG Coordinators to agree a process. We can then discuss who will be involved in this process.</p>
Continue research into fine-scale habitat use (building on BTO work in Wales)	A BTO report is being produced for the Welsh Government and will be available soon. Action - Sam to forward report to the IWG in due course and Dan to circulate. Research has involved GPS tagging adult birds in North Wales and receiving fixed resolutions every 15 minutes. Adult birds were captured before clutches were initiated. 3 major findings have emerged from the data, which has included 22 birds over 3 years: (1) Habitat use varies considerably in response to habitats within territories e.g. at lowland wet grassland sites, home ranges were small and habitat use was focussed within the territory whereas much larger territories and home ranges were associated with upland sites; (2) bird movements vary considerably in relation to breeding stage and this information could be used/ developed to predict breeding success in the future; (3) GPS is vital in providing information on habitat use.
Collate & exchange info regarding predation impact on productivity	FACE organised a conference on predation management for waders in Brussels in 2018. Not much has happened afterwards. Iben is keen to participate in future predation work so please get in touch if looking to collaborate. This area of work also links to the MSAP in relation to forming research/ discussion groups around the topic.
Increase knowledge of food quality on chicks	No progress has been undertaken by the IWG but French researchers have been undertaking research into food availability during the breeding season at 2 sites in western France, and this work was presented at the 2020 International Wader Study Group conference. Lead researcher is Raphaël Leprince (Laboratory Littoral, Environnement et Sociétés) and the work has focussed on assessing food availability for both adults and chicks at 3 key stages of the breeding cycle.

Increase monitoring effort in Russia	A workshop due to take place in Belarus in autumn 2020 was cancelled for obvious reasons. Action – Dan to notify IWG if decision is taken to go ahead in 2021.
Standard guidance on monitoring guidelines	Adjan (Sweden) has produced draft guidelines on monitoring breeding populations and population-level reproduction. The work has become more complex as more experts from across the breeding range have contributed their experiences. A key aspect has been trying to produce guidelines that are suitable to use across the breeding range for a species so variable across its breeding range in terms, habitat use, behaviour, etc. Contributors have included Tatiana Sviridova (Russia), Natalie Meyer (Germany), Samantha Franks, Rachel Taylor (UK), Pierrick Bocher (France), Gerrit Gerritsen (Netherlands) and Dan (UK and in role as Coordinator).
Progress against new resource at breeding sites and monitoring of breeding populations	In addition to some of the updates in agenda item 1 (country updates) there has been a successful application to LIFE in the UK. The project will deliver action to halt the decline of EC in five priority landscapes across the UK. In addition, it will seek to define and catalyse what future action is needed to maintain viable populations of EC within these landscapes and halt the decline of this species at the national level in the longer-term.
Analysis/ assessment of potential curlew management units	This agenda item in the work plan is linked to the below one.
Convene a flyway-level AHM process	<p>A 1-day intergovernmental meeting in Paris at the invitation of the French government took place in September 2019. The Secretariat prepared and presented a proposal for establishing an AHM process to see whether any harvest could be sustainable. However, range states could not reach consensus on the issue. The AEWA Secretariat has encouraged range states to have bilateral discussions in order to progress the issue. All the documents are on AEWA website https://www.unep-aewa.org/en/meeting/aewa-urasian-curlew-meeting . Francois reiterated that France will financially support the AHM process since other range states do not consider it a priority or because they feel funding should be used for other purposes. Francois also reiterated the scientific approach underpinning the process and that AHM could result in a recommendation of no harvesting at all. He also suggested the risks associated with the AHM process not progressing, in that hunting stakeholders might argue that since consensus was not reached, then that hunting should therefore be reinstated. Paul stated that he cannot see a scenario where hunting is sustainable, which was supported by Wilmar/NL. Charlotte has started to look at EURING data in order to look at the origin of birds shot in France, however there are problems with EURING data as it only has coupled data - so help/ assistance is required from all other countries. Action – Charlotte to provide an update on the analysis that has recently been undertaken.</p> <p>Comment from Adjan relating to fact Swedish population is still declining and they are not sure how to stop it. He has concerns about putting lots of effort into the MSAP as it could exclude resources/ focus for countries like Sweden, that have an important EC population.</p> <p>Comment from Ireland that they are looking to GPS tag birds next summer.</p>
Share and collate info on migration studies	A migration workshop was held at the online IWSG conference and will be written up and shared with IWG when complete. Frederic Jiguet has more GPS tags available, so get in touch with Charlotte if interested in receiving some. Action - Dan will update group when the workshop videos are uploaded.
Undertake collation of poorly-known threats	No progress in this area.
Write a summary of the proposal – to be given to external funders across the curlew's range	This was completed – if you want a copy please contact Dan.
Overarching activities	

Discuss frameworks for future delivery	The Black-tailed Godwit AEWA IWG recommenced recently so more link-up between the 2 IWGs will be possible from now on, especially since both species are also a focus of the MSAP.
Launch AEWA IWG website	No progress due to wider problems associated with funding and updating of AEWA website. Nina is not sure if funding will be available in the near future. Discussion followed on whether the Secretariat should be supporting the IWG websites or whether someone else could support a website. However, both UK & NE stated the view that the role of the Secretariat is to support such activities including a website, and that this lack of resource should be discussed at next Standing Committee meeting.
Produce a short video re plight of the curlew in Ireland	A video from Ireland was planned for MOP6. EC was highlighted as a priority species in the run up to MOP6 on the AEWA website. The possibility of a video is something to revisit with that Nina will lead on.
Friends of the Curlew concept to developed	Nicola updated the group and reminded us that this topic is about trying to make wader work more inclusive. A Friends of the Landbirds Action Plan has been developed and there looks to be even more potential for EC. There was a suggestion on whether the already established Curlew Action Group could be extended to provide this function. But the feedback/ consensus was we need our own IWG website first.
Focus on awareness-raising re agricultural products	There was insufficient time to discuss.
Include Curlew in CMS family champions programme	There was insufficient time to discuss.
Support International Curlew Day	There was insufficient time to discuss.
Funding	Danny mentioned that Dan coordinates the IWG and other EC matters with ~10% of his time, and stated that time on IWG matters is well spent as it can secure an outcome greater than the sum of its parts. He suggested people should consider how Dan's time and/or other people and organisation's time could be funded to expand activities. There is some extra funding potentially available to everyone in the form of an extra call for LIFE which has been set up in response to covid. It is principally for NGOs but it could be for joint member state and NGO initiatives and partnerships. The Commission are prioritising funds for species that have action plans. If an application succeeds then they normally bring in additional funding to support activities and coordination. Nina reminder the group that AEWA are on hand for letters of support and endorsements, etc.
Future meetings	Discussion around purpose and frequency of meetings. Adjan noted that we all come at different angles (researchers, conservationists, policy makers) so how can we bring different groups together for more detailed discussions on certain topics? The development of the breeding guidelines was a good example of bringing together expertise to deliver a project. Nicola stated that thematic groups could be useful and if we could get an MSAP Coordinator this would take the burden off from the ECIWG to advocate for agricultural policy change. IWSG annual conferences are always ideal platforms for meetings. Point was raised that the purpose of the ECIWG is to bring together different groups, but an important strength is that governments and decision makers attend. UK will explore some funding options to help support IWG activities. Oliver highlighted that next October is AEWA MOP7. The Technical Committee meeting is in January and a discussion ensued over the possibility of a face-to-face meeting next year in Germany. Action – meeting in Germany agreed for 2021 and Dan, Heinz and Erik will start planning a joint meeting of the EC and BTG IWGs.
AOB	Tagus Estuary – An implementation review process is currently being carried out to see if the proposal is not complying with AEWA. Processes are ongoing. Nicola – has requested data and will send out afterwards.

