



## AEWA EURASIAN CURLEW INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP



Date: 24.9.2018

### 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Eurasian Curlew International Working Group - *N. a. arquata* Breeding Range States – 4-6 September 2018, Aberlady, Scotland (UK)

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## Meeting Report

### Opening of the meeting

#### Opening and welcome

James Main, President of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, welcomed the participants to the meeting. Followed by welcome by Jonathan Tweney from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on behalf of the UK as host government, Nina Mikander on behalf of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and Dan Brown, Coordinator of the Eurasian Curlew International Working Group (IWG).

#### Introduction of the Chair

Nina Mikander (UNEP/AEWA Secretariat) introduced Danny Heptinstall from the UK Government's Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) as Chair of the meeting, noting that the Chair was being provided by the host government as the breeding range states were only meeting as a subset of the wider IWG. Should a meeting of the whole IWG be convened in future, a chair country should be elected amongst the government representatives, to then also serve as Chair in the inter-sessional periods between meetings as is the common practice in AEWA IWGs.

#### Introduction to the meeting and adoption of the agenda

The Chair presented the agenda and highlighted that the main aim of the meeting was to agree on a concrete workplan to facilitate the implementation of the AEWA International Single Species Action Plan (ISSAP) for the period 2018-2021. Slight changes in the timing of various agenda items were suggested by the Chair and the Netherlands. No requests for any other business were made.

*Decision:* The agenda (Doc. EC IWG 1.1 rev.1) was adopted with some minor changes to the timings of various agenda items.

#### Admission of observers

The Chair requested the Working Group to admit the following representatives from the invited permanent observer organizations to the meeting: BirdLife International, FACE, OMPO and Wetlands International. The Chair also requested the Working Group to admit the additional observers to this specific meeting as outlined in the participants list (Doc. EC IWG Inf. 1.3 rev. 1).

*Decision:* All observers present were admitted to the meeting.

### Update on the status of the Eurasian Curlew and the status of implementation of the ISSAP

The Coordinator gave an overview presentation on the current global status of the Eurasian Curlew. This included a reminder of the most up-to-date population estimates and international and European conservation status. The most recent global assessment states that Eurasian Curlew almost qualifies for IUCN Vulnerable

under criteria A2bcd+3bcd+4bcd and these criteria were considered. The presentation also focussed on Eurasian Curlew population data and trends from the East Atlantic Flyway as well as highlighting awareness raising activities including International Curlew Day (which started in 2018) and the first international newsletter for the species from earlier in 2018.

This was followed by country updates from those breeding range states present (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the UK). In addition, the Coordinator presented information provided by Finland in advance of the meeting.

Some **overarching** themes emerging from the presentations: that Eurasian Curlew are confined to protected sites in some countries (e.g. Denmark) but present across large areas of agricultural land in many other countries (Netherlands, Sweden) making ISSAP actions relating to the identification and protection of internationally and national important sites only applicable to certain countries (e.g. the UK); there is a need to better understand migratory connectivity of sub-populations; in many countries (e.g. Norway, Denmark) specific management for Eurasian Curlew does not occur but that they are expected to benefit from management targeting other wader species, in part this is because Eurasian Curlew is not an Annex 1 species and so other species are currently prioritised for conservation activity.

#### *Additional ongoing curlew research and activities*

In addition to ongoing national research and conservation activities, several international processes and projects are linked to work on the Eurasian Curlew. Jutta Leyrer (NABU) presented the EU International Multi-Species Action Plan for the Conservation of Breeding Waders in Wet Grassland Habitats in Europe (2018-2028), which includes the Eurasian Curlew as one of eight species. Marc van Roomen (Sovon) introduced the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative which is undertaking a wide range of monitoring and capacity building work along the entire East-Atlantic Flyway relevant for the Eurasian Curlew. Nicola Crockford (BirdLife International) highlighted the need to link up the various initiatives targeting grassland breeding waders in order to maximise efforts and make the best use of scarce resources. In particular, Nicola encouraged exploring the possibility to use a possible future coordination group to be established under the framework of the EU Multi-Species Action Plan for Waders to deliver on action in relation to EU agriculture policy.

On day two, Dr Rachel Taylor from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) gave a keynote talk regarding ongoing tracking research on Eurasian Curlews. The work has used GPS technology to better understand fine-scale habitat use at a small number of sites in Wales. Some *emerging* results from the work are (1) that curlew territories can be separated on a temporal as opposed to a spatial basis i.e. adult birds from different pairs may visit the same feeding habitats, but do so at different times (2) home range size can vary enormously (3) curlews will undertake long-distance nocturnal flights of several km to favoured feeding areas and (4) due to the large size of some of these home ranges, agri-environment management that focusses on just 1 farm is unlikely to sufficiently cater for curlew (5) curlews in lowland areas may use smaller territories, presumably as a result of greater resource availability in their associated habitats.

On the evening of day two, Mary Colwell provided an evening presentation on her work to raise the profile of the Eurasian Curlew in recent years. This included walking parts of Ireland and the UK to speak to farmers, conservationists, gamekeepers and the public on the cultural significance of curlew. Mary has gone on to organise curlew conferences in each of the 4 UK countries and the Republic of Ireland, with many of these events attracting over 100 people, showing the wide-ranging appeal of the species. She has also launched International Curlew Day early in the year (21<sup>st</sup> April) and her book, *Curlew Moon*, was published earlier in 2018.

No additional requests to present ongoing international research and/or conservation activities were made.

*Decision:* An action for the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat to liaise with the EU Commission, the AEWA Black-tailed Godwit International Working Group and the International Wader Study Group as well as other relevant stakeholders to explore options for collaboration and to avoid duplication was added to the workplan.

#### *Adaptive Harvest Management*

Nina Mikander (UNEP/AEWA Secretariat) outlined the current status of the Eurasian Curlew in terms of provisions for harvest under the Agreement and presented possible next steps to the Working Group for discussion.

The Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius a. arquata*) is currently listed on AEWA Table 1 Column A Category 4. In accordance with the legal text, Contracting Parties with populations listed in Column A of Table 1 shall provide protection to those populations listed in accordance with Article III, paragraph 2(a), of AEWA. By way of exception for those populations listed in Categories 2 and 3 in Column A and which are marked by an asterisk, and those populations listed in Category 4 in Column A, hunting may continue on a sustainable use basis. This sustainable use shall be conducted within the framework of an ISSAP, through which Parties will implement adaptive harvest management (AHM).

The AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Eurasian Curlew was adopted by the AEWA MOP in 2015 and includes the following provisions for the establishment of AHM in the agreed action framework under result 3.1 (Any harvest, if undertaken, is sustainable):

- Action 3.1.1 Launch an adaptive harvest management process for the portion of the *N. a. arquata* population which spends part of the life cycle in France, where hunting is permitted.
- Action 3.1.2 reinstate a complete moratorium of hunting in France until the AHM process has established its recommendations which are to be implemented if and when hunting is re-opened.

As France wishes to continue the harvest of Eurasian Curlew in accordance with these provisions, steps need to be agreed with the other range states concerned on how to proceed with action 3.1.1. AHM cannot be organized by France alone, it has to be done at the flyway level. Even if only one country is hunting, the other range states of the population/management unit have to be involved. AHM does not just involve defining and adjusting the possible quotas – but also all the work linked to reproduction/recruitment, habitat conservation etc. throughout the flyway. Input is also required from the other range states concerned to establish the population estimate and to carry out continued population assessments on a regular basis to inform the iterative AHM process.

The Secretariat recommendation is to establish a separate process under the Working Group to deal with the AHM – together with the range states concerned - with France taking the lead on convening such a process (involving technical experts from all range states, as well as AHM experts), facilitated by the AEWA Secretariat. Until the AHM process is set up - France would in principle have to suspend hunting completely according to the provisions of AEWA.

Nina Mikander presented the following next steps to be added to the workplan as priority actions in relation to AHM: 1) definition of the management unit (i.e. which birds are hunted in France and where do they come from) and 2) convene a flyway level process for AHM with all relevant range states and organize a separate meeting (France and AEWA Secretariat).

#### *Discussion:*

Mathieu Boos (OMPO) highlighted studies had been undertaken by ONCFS and CSIC on maximal sustainable harvest rates and suggested that these can be considered as an introduction for the next steps of the international AHM process. As highlighted during the French country presentation, Francois Lamarque (France), reiterated that a partial hunting moratorium is currently in place in France whereby Eurasian Curlew are only allowed to be harvested along the coast (and at some coastal sites hunting is forbidden). France is ready to establish an AHM process for the Eurasian Curlew and is looking for support from the other relevant range states in this respect. Regarding the timeline, France envisages that the AHM for Eurasian Curlew should be ready to be implemented by the end of 2019.

*Decision:* Actions to establish a separate AHM process will be included in the workplan. The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat will work together with France to set up the process.

It is to be noted in the minutes that the governments of the Netherlands, Norway and the UK oppose the ongoing continued harvest of Eurasian Curlew in France under the partial moratorium in the absence of an international AHM process.

#### *Workplan for the Eurasian Curlew IWG (2018-2021) - Priority Conservation Action and Fundraising*

#### **Report on the AEWA EC IWG coordination and budget**

The Coordinator briefly presented the situation regarding coordination - RSPB currently provides the International Coordinator for the IWG, with ca. 10% of Dan Brown's working time spent on IWG issues. A

Memorandum of Understanding signed between the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and RSPB underpins the coordination and RSPB intend to continue to provide this in-kind support to the IWG into the foreseeable future.

In terms of funding for IWG activities, the Coordinator expects some 2,000€ to be possibly be left over after this IWG meeting and will liaise with the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and the donors on what this funding could be spent on.

### **Establishment of a workplan for the Eurasian Curlew IWG (Breeding range states of *N. a. arquata*)**

The Coordinator presented ideas on initial activities to be included in the workplan. These draft activities were presented under the most appropriate result from the ISSAP (Doc: EC IWG 1.3) and were drafted up based on information from the country presentations and discussions had during the first two meeting days. Then followed a facilitated discussion led by the Chair. The Chair noted that the workplan does not constitute any additional obligations for range states beyond the agreed ISSAP - it should be seen as a focussed tool to help progress activities that will help deliver priority actions in the ISSAP for the period 2018-2021.

*Decision:* General agreement was reached on the main activities to be included in the workplan for 2018-2021, including prioritisation of activities and people/organizations leading on individual tasks. A revised draft workplan based on the discussions will be circulated to the IWG following the meeting for further input and comments.

### **Fundraising priorities for urgent conservation action**

It was agreed it would be useful to share information regarding ongoing and planned project and research ideas. Mathieu Boos (OMPO) suggested using a google sheet and then using the “snowballing technique” to get more information i.e. by everyone forwarding on the spreadsheet. Dan Brown (IWG Coordinator) highlighted that Interreg has supported project officers on the ground in the past as part of cross-border cooperation projects and felt this could be a useful funding instrument to explore for future projects. Wilmar Remmelts (Dutch Ministry of Agriculture and Food Quality) shared with the group the example of a film that was developed in collaboration with Dutch farmers. During the discussions on the benefits of using technology to better understand Eurasian Curlew issues (e.g. satellite tags, nest cameras) it was noted that there are good communication opportunities that arise as a result. Other potential funding sources that were suggested be explored in further detail include Wetlands International – Waterbird Fund (to attract funding for monitoring and to help organize small campaigns), the CMS Family Champions Programme, LIFE Nature, Biodiversity. Conservation action and the Segre Foundation. Geert Spanoghe (INBO) agreed to inform the group further on LIFEWATCH Europe which can provide funding for dataloggers. There was also the suggestion of developing a stable isotope atlas for Eurasian Curlew and Rachel Taylor (BTO) agreed to put together a 1-page proposal on this topic.

### *Next Meeting and AOB*

#### **Next Meeting of the Working Group (regional sub-set)**

*Decision:* Participants agreed that the next meeting of the IWG should be held in approximately two years (autumn 2020), resources permitting and noted the possibility of organizing a meeting back-to-back with other suitable meetings such as the International Wader Study Group conference. Participants also agreed that the format of meeting amongst the breeding range states was useful and should be maintained in future.

#### **Any other business**

*No points were raised under any other business.*

#### **Closing**

Closing remarks were made by the Chair, Coordinator and the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat thanking the participants for their active engagement, the host government of UK and the government of Germany for their support as well as the Scottish Ornithologists' Club for providing the venue and supporting with logistics.