

International Waterbird Census Coordinators Workshop

09:00-13:00 Saturday 13th April 2019, Evora, Portugal

SMALL AUDITORIUM (ROOM 131A)

The coordinators meeting is a regular post-conference event at the EBCC. The workshop addresses various topics relevant for the census in the region and facilitates experience sharing between coordinators. The principle items for discussion are detailed below. Though the meeting is for IWC coordinators or their representatives, other EBCC participants are welcome if the topics are of relevance or they are involved with the IWC in some capacity.

1. Waterbird monitoring in Europe and the African-Eurasian flyway

Progress and outlook, including an update on available online tools (IWC Online with report on the trend analysis, WPE (Waterbird Population Estimates) Portal, CSN (Critical Site Network) Tool 2.0), CSR (Conservation Status Report) 7, AEWA monitoring guidance, waterbird indicator and activities coming up under the EU Birds Directive (3rd Article 12 report) and AEWA (monitoring priorities, site monitoring, site inventory).

Requests were made to have Russian and Arabic versions for the CSN tool. Some of the sites and species are already translated for the previous CSN but these would need to be reviewed. Any volunteers from among the coordinators to undertake this review and translation are welcome, WI can arrange for these translations to be incorporated into the tool if available.

For the Observation and Obsmaps systems, a French guidance was made to use these for West Africa IWC counts. This can be shared through the IWC google group.

2. Improving population estimates of wintering waterbirds

A technical discussion about generating more robust national and flyway estimates of wintering population sizes by the 3rd Article 12 report/ European Red List of Birds (scheduled for 2026) and CSR 9 (scheduled for 2024).

Flyway trends are the composite of national trends weighted by the national wintering population size. Many countries estimate national wintering population sizes based solely on the sum of IWC counts. This might be a reasonable minimum estimate for highly congregatory species in well monitored sites (i.e. with good count coverage) but is very unreliable for dispersed and scarce/cryptic species.

BTO has recently published Great Britain's winter population size estimates, which uses a variety of statistical methods for different species (see Frost et al. Population estimates of wintering waterbirds in Great Britain. *British Birds* 112, March 2019, 130 – 145). Although some efforts were made to review scarce species, for the flyway scale it is recommended to prioritise efforts for species with a high proportion of the entire population in the country. Other talks from Denmark and the Netherlands presented at the Conference have also highlighted the importance of producing estimates of national wintering population sizes.

It is important to estimate national wintering populations in the same year, if these are to be used as weighting factors in flyway-level trend analysis to minimize the impact of year-to-year differences in the distribution of the flyway population.

Action Points:

The Strategic Working Group of the Partnership is requested to review the current practice and produce a short guidance for the most appropriate methods for producing national estimates for different species.

Coordinators are encouraged to share advice or questions through the IWC google group.

3. Developing a cycle for staggered international surveys

Aligning the timing of surveys so that they support reporting cycles and make more efficient uses of resources. A general discussion about this approach, the appropriate principles for grouping populations and a possible cycle.

Whilst the IWC and the PECBMS often provide adequate trend estimations of many populations, they are less adequate to estimate population sizes. Therefore, additional efforts are needed to produce more robust population size estimates. It is vital to design additional survey efforts to be as efficient as possible so as to make best use of limited resources. This means grouping species that can be counted reliably at the same time, with the same method and possibly use the same habitat to organize international surveys in a cycle that does not overstretch the network or available resources.

The Strategic Working Group will start to develop a proposed cycle for staggered international surveys. Issues raised by coordinators to consider in this process include:

- Ensuring that surveys will be feasible to conduct across the entire flyway;
- Recognising that exploratory surveys are required in some countries as a basis for effective staggered surveys (e.g. identifying the location of breeding colonies), although the EBBA2 can play a major role in targeting breeding bird surveys;
- The importance of connecting the organisers of the counts and the relevant government contacts (e.g. AEWA focal points), to ensure there is a clear understanding at the national level for the funding and data requirements (which will be secured through the AEWA Technical Committee proposing the cycle at the next AEWA MOP).
- There are several initiatives already ongoing which are not coordinated internationally or focus on a single species, especially for colonial breeding waterbirds.

Action Points:

The Strategic Working Group is requested to identify existing monitoring programmes and to explore opportunities to synchronise these, in particular WI, BL and EBCC.

The Strategic Working Group is requested to keep coordinators updated and to provide opportunity for further feedback from the network.

4. Overview of waterbird monitoring in different countries and network development challenges

An update from the national coordinator representative to the Strategic Working Group of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership and from additional regional capacity building initiatives.

Recognising that funding remains the most considerable challenge for most coordinators, some experiences were shared of inviting foreign experts to pay and join counting efforts. The problem with this approach is the uncertain quality of the visiting counters and their ability and willingness to

follow the appropriate counting protocols. In some cases, they have also not shared data with national coordinators despite repeated requests. In Europe, winter is not the easiest season to attract 'tourist counters'. Consequently for some countries it would be more appropriate in building national networks and encouraging younger generations to join the counts, especially for a regular sample monitoring programme like the IWC. However bringing external counters can work for less regular, more labour intensive surveys (e.g. atlas work), provided that efforts are made to ensure the quality and reliability of counters is high (e.g. by screening with partner organisations like WIWO) and that coordinators can invest sufficient time in arranging, coordinating and preparing relevant materials.

5. The Waterbird Fund

Discussing further development of the Fund, approaches and lessons learnt from activities so far. Linked to this, we would like to discuss an idea how to use the increased demand for the IWC data to generate funding for the Waterbird Fund that could be used to support counts IWC countries based on the decisions of the Strategic Working Group.

With decreasing support from governments, it is recognized that there is a need to diversify the sources of support for waterbird monitoring. Different groups may be approached depending on the type of work that needs to be funded. Suggestions were made to prioritise private funding, possibly to explore crowd-funding options. Events (e.g. linked to the World Migratory Bird Days) could be used to encourage donations or to approach new partners.

For the new data charging proposal, the following issues were raised:

- Exemptions: it is important not to block important research and to consider how to deal with requests from individuals or organisations that are already making substantial contributions to the IWC (e.g. national coordinators, regional coordinators). Particularly data requests supported by projects should be subjected to some charge, whilst researchers without funds may need an exemption.
- Paying for data: For some countries the data is required to be open access, whilst for others it is private data. This could be addressed by reframing the proposal from a data charge to a data processing charge or similar (i.e. that the fee is not to pay for data but for the work that goes into preparing that data).
- There is particular concern over requests for complete or very large components of a country's data. This costs both NCs and WI a lot of time to check and approve, whilst there is the additional risk that the data is then used for purposes which were not approved and are inappropriate. It is recognised that introducing a charge for data requests would encourage applicants to be more targeted in their requests.
- The importance of this research was emphasized, both to support and grow the IWC network and to feedback and inform our work. Links to research using IWC data could be included on the Waterbird Fund to show the value of the data and encourage donations through this mechanism.

Action Points

WI will continue development of the Waterbird Fund in consultation with the national IWC coordinators.

WI will incorporate input from the meeting, the Strategic Working Group, coordinators of non AEWA regions and the google group into the data charge proposal and share the updated version with coordinators.

The Strategic Working Group is requested to continue promoting the Fund internationally.

National coordinators are requested to promote the Fund in their country (on the understanding that it should not compete with their own fundraising actions) e.g. through newsletters and on websites. NCs are also requested to advise of particular interests for certain species, monitoring efforts or countries their organization or contacts may be interested to fund raise for.

6. Election of the national coordinator representative to the Strategic Working Group of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership

Please note, only national coordinators or their delegated representative can vote for the representative to the Strategic Working Group. Prospective candidates are invited to advise Wetlands International prior to the workshop if they wish to stand.

Danka Uzunova from the Macedonian Ornithological Society was re-elected for the next period.

Useful links:

IWC online: <http://iwc.wetlands.org/> (see also <http://iwc.wetlands.org/index.php/aewatrends> for recent IWC trend calculations)

WPE portal: <http://wpe.wetlands.org/> (see also <http://wpe.wetlands.org/search?form%5Bspecies%5D=&form%5Bpopulation%5D=&form%5Bpublication%5D=10&form%5Bprotection%5D%5B1%5D=1> for the latest trends, estimates and 1% for AEWA populations)

CSN Tool: critical-sites.wetlands.org

CSR7: <https://www.unep-aewa.org/en/document/7th-edition-conservation-status-report-csr7-not-including-annexes>

AEWA monitoring guidance: <https://www.unep-aewa.org/en/document/draft-revised-aewa-conservation-guidelines-waterbird-monitoring-aewa-conservation-0>

Waterbird Fund: www.waterbird.fund

African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership: <https://europe.wetlands.org/our-network/waterbird-monitoring-partnership/>