

## JNCC / WWT / SNH GOOSE & SWAN MONITORING

### Notes of 15<sup>th</sup> Steering Group Meeting

8<sup>th</sup> March 2012: 11:15

JNCC, Peterborough (with tele-conference link to SNH)

1) **Apologies for absence:** None

2) **Update on survey & projects:**

a) Season 2010/11 reporting. An update was provided by WWT. All reporting was completed and *GooseNews* 10 was expected back from the printers on 6 September, and will be sent to the network later that week. Website updates will also be completed by the end of that week. It had been a fairly typical year with no notable highlights. The key issue was the decrease in the number of Pink-footed Geese counted during the IGC; the peak count was c.60k lower than in 2009. WWT covered likely explanations for this, and, it seems that there is some suggestion that, despite the scale of this apparent crash in numbers, the decrease is, largely, believed to be real, rather than the result of large numbers of birds going uncounted. Further details on this are provided in the IGC 2010 report (available on WWT website). There had been modest increases in Svalbard Barnacle Geese and in Greenland Barnacle Geese at those key sites counted. Greenland White-fronted Geese had experienced an excellent breeding season and the census results were therefore eagerly awaited.

b) Feeding distribution mapping project. SNH explained the background to this project, which is to collate and map data on the feeding distribution of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Scotland. The project is being funded approximately equally by SNH and WWT through the GSMP partnership. SNH interest stems from their current need to regularly undertake short term surveys to determine whether proposed onshore wind farms might conflict with feeding geese or geese flighting between roosts and feeding areas. In addition, WWT has a lot of existing data from marked bird resightings and annual breeding success counts, so they will collate these data and those from SNHs various specific studies and produce maps of feeding distribution to identify feeding hotspots and, where possible, flight paths between these areas and roosts.

It had initially been intended to incorporate *Birdtrack* data, but these records (c.18k for Pink-footed Goose) have proven un-useable because they do not detail whether counted birds were feeding or flying over.

Discussion on the mapping options followed. JNCC suggested that a range of graphical interpretations, with guidelines for interpretation, is best. JNCC and WWT thought the 1km square option was the best approach.

Further discussion concerned future uses of these data and the system in general, and how additional data can be collected and incorporated. The key

additional use envisaged is helping to underpin the identification of important feeding areas around existing SPAs with respect to their potential inclusion within SPAs resulting from the ongoing review of the UK SPA suite. WWTs long term plan for this project is to incorporate as much data as possible for all native goose and swan species and develop a web-based presentation that allows users to identify important feeding areas. WWT will also encourage more data collection via the volunteer network, possibly including *Birdtrack*, although it was recognised that improving data availability in relation to potential SPA classification may require methodologies that are beyond the scope of the volunteer network. JNCC suggested that goose guides might also have useful presence/absence data, and WWT confirmed they have already discussed this with BASC (Colin Sheddon).

Biases were also discussed with the current dataset, and it is recognised that the current project will only provide a summation of existing knowledge, and that it will not be able to confidently assume the lack of feeding records means birds are not present. JNCC mentioned the possibility of developing an effort algorithm that may allow an estimation of the completeness of the dataset to be made. WWT also have a dataset of known presence of feeding birds, based on a questionnaire of the GSMP network that may be of use for such validation efforts.

SNH expressed interest in this further work but could not say whether funding might be available beyond this FY/project.

**AP1: JNCC to discuss with BTO whether *Birdtrack* data capture procedures can be modified to record for all geese and swans whether the birds were flying or feeding at the JNCC/BTO partnership meeting in late September 2011, noting that JNCC are not part of the *Birdtrack* consortium.**

**AP2: WWT to send previous correspondence between WWT and BTO regarding *Birdtrack* to JNCC.**

**AP3: WWT to give presentation to SPAR SWG at mid 2012 meeting.**

SNH added that they sit on a Scottish wind farm group and that it would be worthwhile engaging with this group to determine if industry representatives might be interested in funding the further development of this work. A meeting on best practice, with approximately 60 industry representatives attending, was planned for April 2012, and would be a good opportunity to demonstrate the value of this project.

**AP4: WWT to attend meeting in April 2012 and give presentation on the project.**

c) International Swan Census 2010. WWT updated the SG on progress with reporting the results. All data were now collated and a population estimate for Whooper Swan and a UK total count for Bewick's Swan were now available. Further details were provided in an attached paper prepared by WWT.

It is expected that a final draft of the Whooper Swan paper will be completed by the end of the year; some delays have recently been experienced with this due to the departure of a staff member from WWT who was previously leading on this. Some concerns persist with the production of the flyway-wide results for Bewick's Swan as the lead census organiser, Jan Beekman, wants to produce a single paper detailing the results of the 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010 censuses, along with a summation of much other information (e.g. changes in habitat use). The SG agreed there is a strong likelihood this could cause long delays with the completion of the 2010 census results, which were urgently needed for conservation purposes given the status of the species, and that further efforts should be made to encourage the separate and prompt publication of the flyway-wide census results for 2010. JNCC were happy to apply further pressure, in writing if necessary. If this is unsuccessful, it was agreed that a paper detailing the UK results for Bewick's Swan would be drafted in early 2012.

Regarding preparations for the next census in January 2015, JNCC confirmed that all relevant individuals were happy to include a reporting timetable for the international census in the AEWA Species Action Plan, which is due to be finalised in the coming months.

**AP5: WWT to relay concerns of the SG to Jan Beekman and other co-authors in order to encourage prompt publication of the 2010 results for Bewick's Swan.**

**AP6: JNCC to ensure text regarding reporting timetable for future censuses is included into the SAP at the forthcoming AEWA Technical Committee meeting in late September 2011.**

d) IGC spring census 2012. WWT updated the SG on plans for this census, which were going well. Two regions, Caithness and Orkney, need support in order to undertake counts. WWT can provide this staff time, though currently do not have funds to cover the c.£4k T&S costs. SNH suggested that for Caithness it is possible that SNH contractors, who are recording goose feeding areas around the Caithness Lochs SPA this winter, might be able to provide cover. The possibility that they could do other IGC counts in 2011/12 was also highlighted, which could be helpful given the current reliance on one key counter. In Orkney, given that the region is a priority for goose management and that data from outside the autumn period are needed, some funds may be available from the SNH goose research budget.

**AP7: WWT to send costs for Orkney spring IGC survey to SNH.**

**AP8: SNH to explore whether all IGC 2011/12 counts can be done by existing SNH contractors.**

e) Scottish goose policy update. SNH summarised progress since the last SG meeting. Following the publication, in February 2011, of the Scottish Government's response to the goose policy review, the focus has been on approving LGMS budgets and implementing c.20% savings. Some changes to the Islay LGMS were noted; there will now be no scaring or shooting of

Barnacle Geese if Greenland White-fronted Geese are present. SNH have undertaken an analysis of LGMS count frequency and the impact of reducing this on payments. Monitoring will now be reduced from weekly to fortnightly, but the survey period has been lengthened to minimise the risk of underestimating goose use.

Some further discussion of the possible implementation of an adaptive harvest management approach has taken place, particularly at the recent GSAG meeting, however, relevant policy decisions are still needed. GSAG members have a number of relevant actions related to this issue, such as investigating data needs for robust estimation of survival and breeding success. It is likely there will be a greater need for colour marking in the future if AHM is to be implemented. Some assistance from WWT/GSMP is likely to be needed for this review of current data and future needs, and in particular the review of breeding success carried out a few years ago was highlighted.

**AP9: WWT to send ABS review to SNH.**

JNCC highlighted the work on AHM being carried out under AEWA, particularly on Svalbard Pink-footed Geese. An AHM approach is being trialled on that population at the moment and the framework is due to be signed off at the next AEWA MoP.

**AP10: JNCC to send link to AHM framework for Svalbard Pink-footed Geese.**

f) Flyway-wide breeding success data collation and reporting. Following on from action SG13/7, WWT had spoken to Goose Specialist Group committee members plans about their plans, and the development of this is in hand; a funding application will soon be submitted to fund the development of a single GSG database, administered by Aarhus University and SOVON, in conjunction with Wetlands International. An update on this was provided by GSG and circulated to the SG prior to this meeting.

Despite these signs of progress, some frustration was expressed by SG members over the lack of progress, and it was felt that a basic system could be made relatively easily. The SG (WWT) could possibly assist with this if this was welcome to GSG. JNCC still felt it merited highlighting at the next round of AEWA meeting in order to try to get something into a resolution to encourage relevant Specialist Groups to complete the task. This could also help Specialist Groups get funding.

**AP11: WWT to offer support to GSG to assist with the development of a unified system for the collation of ABS data.**

**AP12: JNCC to raise the issue at forthcoming AEWA meetings.**

Currently, the coordination of ABS data collation was patchy. WWT highlighted that many widespread populations, such as European White-fronted Geese, were pretty well coordinated over most of their range, but this population was an

example where UK data were not incorporated, even if the UK contribution to the dataset was likely to be small. It is unclear whether this is because the coordinator is unaware that UK data are collected, or is not interested in them because of the small sample size, but the SG agreed that for completeness they should be.

**AP13: WWT to contact coordinator about EW ABS data from UK.**

Some data collation had recently taken place for the overview of Western Palearctic goose trends published in 2010 in *Ornis Svecica*. However, it was acknowledged by WWT (a co-author) that this had been complex and that until the planned GSG database development was complete this was likely to remain the case.

JNCC suggested that GBIF might be a funding option for GSG database development.

g) Greenland Barnacle Goose site review. WWT has now got datasets from BTO for Islay and thus all he needs to update the draft review. The need for WWT and JNCC to meet has therefore moved on for the time being, so actions SG12/18 and SG13/20 were discharged. Some outstanding data collation issues may remain, such as matching most count data to Steve Percival's count units, but these will be highlighted by WWT when they circulate the next draft.

**AP14: WWT to produce new draft report.**

Discussion moved onto the lack of availability of data on the number of birds shot on Islay since the 1980s, despite the need to report these as hunting of this protected population is a derogation from the Birds Directive. This further highlighted the previously identified importance of collating these data as soon as possible and publishing, ideally on the WWT website, as previously agreed.

WWT mentioned that they had raised this earlier in the year at a NGMRG meeting and that members were happy with the proposal, although some NGMRG members had said they felt it was a government responsibility and it should therefore be published on a government website. Given this, the appropriateness of the proposal to publish these data on the WWT was discussed and SG felt this was still the best option. However, SNH identified that since June 2011 they had taken over licensing responsibilities for geese from the Scottish Government and the publication of licensed shooting bag data had been discussed last week at GSAG. GSAG had agreed problems with historic data are substantial, and discussed where the best place for data publication is, concluding this was probably the SNH website. However, SNH were still happy the WWT website is a good option, particularly from a UK perspective, and that this does not prevent Scottish data also being presented on SNH's website.

**AP15: SNH to determine whether SNH or WWT is best place for Scottish bags; SNH to check for clarification and for relevant people to keep WWT informed.**

**AP16: WWT to set up Dark-bellied Brent Goose licensed shooting bag web page as soon as possible; draft content and send to SG for comment.**

**AP17: JNCC to send Greenland White-fronted Goose data to WWT.**

**AP18: WWT to check whether licences are issued for Light-bellied Brent Geese in Northern Ireland.**

**AP19: WWT to draft an overview of the plans for publication on WWT website on behalf of GSMP for circulation to SCAs in order to ensure they are aware of the plans and happy to support this system. Needed by mid September for prompt circulation to SNH given the agenda there and so JNCC can circulate in advance of a meeting with SCA licensing officers in late September 2011.**

h) British Greylag Goose delineation paper for *British Birds*. WWT confirmed this is now almost done and a final draft for submission will be produced later this month. Final comments from JNCC and SNH were welcome at this stage, plus WWT will also send to RSPB for their information.

**AP20: JNCC and SNH to send any comments to WWT by 16 September 2011.**

**AP21: WWT to produce final draft and circulate to RSPB.**

- 3) Minutes of previous meetings:** The minutes of SG13 were accepted unanimously with no changes.

SG13/1: WWT to draft version of previous minutes for SG approval and then to publish on WWT GSMP website.

*Completed; can be found at [www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/documents.asp](http://www.wwt.org.uk/research/monitoring/documents.asp)*

**SG13/2: JNCC and SNH to check MoA for confidential information and to notify WWT of any required edits.**

***To complete***

**SG13/3: WWT to produce a version of the current MoA suitable for public dissemination on WWT website.**

***To complete – needs prior completion of SG13/2***

SG13/4: ALL to consider other partnership papers that would be useful for inclusion on web.

*To complete. The following items were highlighted at SG14:*

*i) Capacity development of network, Feb05*

*ii) Ranking sites for priority data and information needs, Feb06*

*iii) Priorities for developing improved ABS monitoring in Western Palearctic, Sep06*

*iv) Appraisal of current monitoring and assessment of future needs, undated (c.2007)*

SG13/5: WWT to circulate 2011 reporting timetable.  
*Completed*

SG13/6: JNCC to update SG on their ongoing work on Arctic indicators.  
*No progress to report at SG14.*

SG13/7: WWT/JNCC to develop concept note for AEWA in conjunction with IWSG (and possibly other Specialist Groups).  
*WWT discussed this with members of GSG Committee and this need for this initiative was questioned. Flyway assessments of migratory swan and goose ABS are already being coordinated by Alterra (NL) and GSG – see review paper Fox et al. (2010) *Ornis Svecica* 20:115-127 and further comments above. Although in neither case are summary results being published on the web. Nothing further has been done. Raised on agenda at SG14 for further discussion.*

SG13/8: JNCC to clarify timetable for submitting to AEWA.  
*Not completed, but given response to SG13/7 this may now no longer be required. See further comments and SG14/12.*

SG13/9: WWT to discuss with Goose and Swan SGs, and other key stakeholders, the idea of a single system for ABS recording.  
*As SG13/7.*

SG13/10: CM to assess likely coverage needs [for spring IGC] and circulated a costed plan for filling these.  
*WWT has contacted the IGC network and further information has been provided in the autumn mailing that has just gone out. There will be a need to assist with fieldwork, notably in Orkney and Caithness, and this is expected to take approximately 15 days of WWT staff time, costing (with associated T&S) around £4,000. Options for securing this funding to be discussed at SG14 given the previously mooted possibility of SNH support.*

SG13/11: WWT and JNCC to liaise over formalising census, including reporting, in the BS Action Plan.  
*Completed*

**SG13/12: JNCC to ask their data team about possible input they may be able to provide [to WWT database development with Indicia].**  
***To complete***

SG13/13: WWT to document data flows and responsibilities for GSMP and other waterbird count data with WeBS secretariat and relevant others.  
*A summary paper was circulated prior to SG14 and identified the following actions. All SG members were asked to consider this paper further and send suggestions for further actions to WWT.*

**AP22: WWT to clarify what GSMP data are stored by WeBS, and how are these flagged.**

**AP23: WWT to clarify what GSMP data are passed to IWC by WeBS.**

**AP24: WWT to clarify whether the IWC database or the GSG database is the most appropriate place for flyway scale data collation.**

**AP25: WWT to clarify how GWGS and IBGRG datasets are managed and backed-up, and what availability there is currently for these data.**

**AP26: ALL SG members to send further actions on this subject to WWT.**

SG13/14: WWT to incorporate an appendix into future IGC reports that provides data for all sites. This to eventually be available on WWT website as part of updated and searchable waterbird reviews.

*On reflection, when producing latest IGC report, it was decided not to proceed with this as, given IGC is designed for population size estimation, this census alone does not provide the best data for this purpose (i.e. a compilation of other data sources is required). WWT suggest we discuss this further at SG14. See example at: <http://wbms-ea.k-hosting.co.uk/carl/roosts/solw.htm> for example of data availability.*

SG13/15: ALL to send further thoughts on GSMP web pages to WWT, ideally by 15 April 2011.

*Nothing received; see below (SG14/27).*

SG13/16: WWT to send website development ideas to SG for comments.

*A paper was circulated prior to SG14, and the suggestions met with SG approval, though additions were welcomed.*

**AP27: ALL to send further suggestions for GSMP website development to WWT.**

SG13/17: CM to forward link to SG for preliminary maps on Pink-footed Goose feeding distribution.

*Completed. See example at:*

*<http://wbms-ea.k-hosting.co.uk/carl/feeding/dagfeed.htm>*

SG13/18: WWT and SNH to assess ways of working together to deliver all needs for these data.

*Completed*

SG13/19: SNH to keep the SG up-to-date with further developments [on the development of Scottish Government goose policy].

*Completed during SG14; see text above.*

SG13/20: WWT/JNCC to fix meeting date [for Greenland Barnacle Goose site review planning] for approx. May 2011.

*WWT feel meeting not currently needed. Some progress being made; update to be provided at SG14. Action discharged at SG14.*

SG13/21: Lawrence Way to contact Debbie Pain to arrange meeting (approx June/July 2011).

*Completed*

SG12/2: WWT to summarise existing data for this population [Greenland Barnacle Goose] and determine whether demographic explanation for Islay decline is possible.

*Completed, and paper circulated prior to SG14. Existing evidence suggests there are demographic explanations for the decrease on Islay, indicating that it seems unlikely the management actions being implemented there are the direct cause of this.*

**AP28: WWT to post this paper on GSMP website.**

SG12/3: WWT to draft short paper proposing the archiving of licence returns on the web, for circulation to the group for comment.

*Now superseded by above actions SG14/15 - SG14/19.*

SG12/4: SNH to take paper to GSAG, hopefully for forward transmission to NGMRG.

*Discussion held at GSAG in August 2011; see above.*

SG12/5: JNCC to pursue the publishing of licence returns in England and Wales.

*Now superseded by above actions SG14/15 - SG14/19.*

**SG12/7: WWT to draft a paper for SPARSWG (identifying level of data required), and disseminate to group**

***To complete; new deadline is mid October 2011 in time for SPAR SWG meeting in November 2011.***

**SG12/8: JNCC to take paper to December meeting of SPARSWG**

***Now deferred until November 2011 meeting.***

SG12/9: WWT to provide JNCC with assessment of volunteer time in GSMP.

*Completed; now forward to new JNCC representative.*

SG13/22: WWT to resend assessment of volunteer time to new JNCC representative.

*Completed.*

SG12/13: JNCC to check whether alterations to the MoA are required.

*To complete*

**SG13/23: JNCC to check whether alterations to the MoA are required in the light of changes to the rate of VAT**

***To complete.***

**SG12/16: JNCC to find a list of actions following a meeting [about Greenland Barnacle Goose site review] with JNCC, Malcolm Ogilvie and SNH staff some time back and forward to WWT.**

***To complete in time for production of final draft by WWT (see SG14/14).***

SG12/17: SNH to request that BTO provide the Islay database to WWT.

*Completed.*

SG12/18: DS, RH & CM to meet in 3<sup>rd</sup> week of December to audit data from Islay.

*Action discharged at SG14.*

#### **4) AoB**

Greenland Barnacle Goose international census 2013. There is a need for SNH to bid for this funding in January 2012 so a brief outline and costings are needed in time for this.

**AP29: WWT to send project outline and costings to SNH by mid December 2011.**

GSMP data security. JNCC highlighted that they need to document how data are physically protected (against fire, computer viruses, etc).

**AP30: JNCC to send note about this to WWT.**

A request from JNCC's procurement department concerning WWT environmental standards was highlighted as needing to be finalised.

**AP31: WWT to follow up the environmental standards issue and reply to JNCC.**

GSMP press releases. Following discussion of this at earlier SG meetings, WWT recently discussed options for this year and concluded there was nothing worthy of a press release and therefore it was better not to issue one with the annual reporting this year. Approval for this approach was sought from SG and received, and it was agreed that in future the decision to issue a press release with the release of annual reporting would be decided on a case by case basis. The next opportunity for a GSMP press release will be release of the results from the 2010 International Whooper Swan Census, due before the end of 2011.

**5) Date of next meeting:** Agreed as 7 March 2012, held at JNCC Peterborough with video link to SNH.