



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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17TH MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL
Bergen, 17-18 November 2011

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON BIRDS Bergen, 18 November 2011

The Birds Working Group met on Thursday 18 November 2011, from 2.30pm till 7.30pm. As agreed by the participants, a small sub-group continued to work on amendments to the Resolution on Flyways until 11pm. Several delegates commented that the two days provided for this Meeting of the Scientific Council were not enough to deal with the vital work requiring to be done.

The Appointed Councillor for Birds, in the Chair, noted that this Meeting would be very different to past Birds Working Group meetings. Because of the large amount of overarching policy work, and the lack of time available, there would be, for instance, no reporting on individual Concerted and Cooperative Action species. He asked the Focal Points who had prepared such reports, kindly to pass them to him, so that they could be attached to the report of the meeting. Also on the matter of Focal Points, it was noted that Scientific Councillor Mr. Omar Rocha (Bolivia) had offered to become the Focal Point for Andean Flamingos: this offer was accepted with thanks. A paper showing the remaining vacancies for Focal Points was circulated at the meeting, but the matter was not further pursued this time.

The notes below follow the order of the Annotated Agenda.

8. Review and Guidelines on mitigating the conflict between migratory birds and electricity power grids. This item was introduced by Mr. Sergey Dereliev (AEWA). He explained the background of the document, which traced its origins back to 2009 and the AEWA slogan “Barriers to migration”. Project Consultant Mr. Hein Prinsen gave an illustrated presentation of the project’s findings, with particular emphasis on the guidelines. Several comments were made. The problem was not of course only confined to the most developed countries, and the Scientific Councillor for India noted that in his country, collision with power transmission lines was a serious problem for migratory birds. The Scientific Councillor for France commented that, because bird-collisions often caused expensive disruption to power supplies, funds should be more readily obtainable to combat the problem. He also pointed out that some structures were helpful to migratory birds, for instance as nesting sites: comparative studies of this, and distribution of information about it, could certainly be valuable. The meeting took note of the Review and Guidelines. It discussed the relevant Resolution (Res.10.11). Changes to the wording of the Resolution were proposed: all were accepted and the Resolution commended to the COP.

11. Global bird flyways. After a short introduction from Professor Colin Galbraith who commented, for instance, on the importance of defining priorities, Dr. Taej Mundkur, as the Chairman of the Flyways Working Group, gave a presentation on the work of the Group, and its products.

Several delegates thanked and congratulated the WG for the work done. The Scientific Councillor for France suggested that the Antarctic region should also be taken into consideration, and this was agreed.

The Scientific Councillor for Paraguay suggested the concept of formally designating CMS Sites as a tool to protect key locations for migratory species, in addition to any designation as Ramsar sites or Important Bird Areas. She stressed the importance of identifying corridors at the national level to help in local land-use decision-making and management. She proposed that such initiatives should be funded with the help of the Small Grants Fund.

There was extensive and detailed discussion of related issues, and the meeting gave guidance on various policy options, as well as supporting the proposed continuation of the work of the Flyways Working Group until COP11. There was considerable debate on the associated Resolution (Res.10.10), with the need for further work after the meeting until late at night. This resulted in a considerably revised draft resolution which would be presented to the COP.

11.1 Conservation of long distance migratory landbirds. The Appointed Councillor for African Fauna introduced the document, which highlighted the need for the development of an Action Plan for the conservation of these migratory birds. Trans-Saharan migrants were in clear need of conservation action down the African-Eurasian flyway. The meeting supported the concept, and made various amendments to the draft Resolution (Res.10.27), recommending it to the COP.

11.2 Minimizing the Risk of Poisoning to Migratory Birds. The Scientific Councillor for Switzerland began the discussion by asking BirdLife International to introduce the relevant document, as BirdLife had done most of the associated work. The BirdLife delegate referred to the unique position of CMS in being able to provide guidelines on this issue, and take matters forward. The most effective way would be by means of a working group to coordinate the implementation of guidelines. Various comments were made on the paper, and much support was lent with regard to this emotive issue. With a few amendments, Resolution 10.26 was recommended to the COP.

11.3 Draft Action Plan for the Sociable Lapwing. Mr. Sergey Dereliev (AEWA) presented the new document, which after a necessarily brief discussion was welcomed and endorsed by the working group.

17.3.3 Implementation of Res.9.9 on Migratory Marine Species/Conservation status of Arctic marine species. There was little time to discuss this issue, and no suggestions were advanced on how best to take forward the Convention's work on this issue, which, it had to be said, had been somewhat neglected. The hopeful suggestion was made that we might get some further guidance from this from at least one of the other working groups.

17.3.5 Implementation of Res.9.20 on the Saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*). The Secretariat briefly introduced this item, the purpose of which was to review activity relating to the Resolution from Rome. The associated papers, particularly those produced by

BirdLifeInternational, were briefly discussed. Debate on this item quickly led on to the next item on the Agenda.

18. Proposals for amendments to Appendices I and II of the Convention. The Saker was the first species to be discussed. Its listing on Appendix I had been proposed by the European Union. The appointed Councillor for Birds, on behalf of Mr. Pierre Devillers (who was needed in another working group), gave a brief introduction, after which the Scientific Councillor for Italy clarified the important point that “Mongolian population” must refer to the birds in Mongolia; it was not possible to identify birds of Mongolian origins once they had crossed the border. A number of issues were raised, and some Councillors were in favour of listing and some against. In these well-recognized circumstances, it did not seem appropriate for the working group to make a recommendation to the COP.

As to the remaining listing proposals, these were debated and agreed comparatively quickly.

For Appendix I:

Falco vespertinus, the Red-footed Falcon, proposed by the European Union
Numenius madagascariensis, the Far Eastern Curlew, proposed by Philippines
Numenius tahitiensis, the Bristle-thighed Curlew, proposed by Cook Islands

And for Appendix II:

Dolichonyx oryzivorus, the Bobolink, proposed by Bolivia

19.3 Taxonomy and nomenclature of birds. An Intersessional Working Group on this issue had produced a majority, not unanimous, report which recommended that CMS adopt Dickinson (2003) as its authority on these matters. After the report had been submitted, a meeting of the AEWA Technical Committee had pointed out some difficulties and other implications that this decision would have for its work. The alternative, of using the nomenclature and taxonomy of BirdLife International, had received support from some Councillors; others continued to prefer Dickinson. After considerable discussion, it was agreed, before adopting a new nomenclature and taxonomic reference, to wait until the new version of Dickinson was published, which was expected to be in 2012, as also were developments with relevant new BirdLife initiatives. Thus, we proposed to maintain the use of the *existing* CMS nomenclature for the time being, and that the matter be discussed at the 18th Meeting of the Scientific Council.

Working Group on Birds – Attendance	
Jelena Kralj	Scientific Councillor, Croatia
Jiri Flousek	Scientific Councillor, Czech Republic
Ivar Ojaste	Scientific Councillor, Estonia
Jean-Philippe Sibley	Scientific Councillor, France
Juha Tiainen	Scientific Councillor, Finland
Andreas Krüess	Scientific Councillor, Germany
Attila Bankovics	Scientific Councillor, Hungary
Alfred Oteng-Yeboah	Scientific Councillor, Ghana & Standing Committee
Fernando Spina	Scientific Councillor, Italy
Darko Saveyic	Scientific Councillor, Montenegro
Øystein Størkersen	Scientific Councillor, Norway
Cristina Morales	Scientific Councillor, Paraguay

GrzegorzRakowski	Scientific Councillor, Poland
DaliborkaStankovic	Scientific Councillor, Serbia
Peter Puchala	Scientific Councillor, Slovakia
Barbara Soto-Largo	Scientific Councillor, Spain
Olivier Biber	Scientific Councillor, Switzerland
Colin Galbraith	UK, Vice-Chair Scientific Council
TaejMundkur	CMS Appointed Scientific Councillor, for Asiatic Fauna Wetlands International
Nigel Routh	Australia, Environment Department
Narelle Montgomery	Australia, Environment Department
Paolo Paixao	European Union
Marianne Courouble	France, Ministry of Environment
K. Sivakumar	India, Wildlife Institute of India. kaivakuma@wii.gov.in
Abdul MunafQaimkhani	Pakistan, P & D Division, GoP
Malta Qwathekama	South Africa (Environmental Affairs)
PoludaAnatoliy	Ukraine, Institute of Zoology
Alexander Kozulin	Academy of Science of Belarus
Ana Apruda	Aves & Conservación – BirdLife Partner in Ecuador
Nicola Crockford	BirdLife
Hein Prinsen	Bureau Waardenburg, Consultant
David H. WMorgan	CITES Secretariat
Lindsey McCrickard	FAO
Dr Sergey Yerokhov	KAPE Kazakhstan
Jose Yeñez	Museum of Natural History of Chile
James Williams	UK, Joint Nature Cosneravtion Committee
Sergey Dereliev	AEWA Secretariat
Borja Heredia	CMS Secretariat
Bert Lenten	CMS Secretariat
Nick P. Williams	CMS Secretariat

Annex A
Report of the Focal Point on the Aquatic Warbler for the 17th meeting of the Scientific
Council, Bergen, November 2011

Aquatic Warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*)

General note

- Leading role of the *Aquatic Warbler Conservation Team* (under the BirdLife International) in research and conservation efforts on the Aquatic Warbler (AW)

Conservation level

- Population estimate max. 12,100–13,800 singing males, nearly 95 % in three countries only (Belarus, Poland, Ukraine) (see the AWCT website www.aquaticwarbler.net)
- Major threats continue in breeding localities (especially habitat destruction due to changing hydrology, loss of traditional use etc.) and in wintering sites (especially habitat destruction)
- Central European core populations (Belarus, Poland, Ukraine) seem to be stable thanks to comprehensive conservation efforts
- Continuing decline of small peripheral populations (Pomerania (Germany/Poland), Hungary, Lithuania); most likely extinct in West Siberia
- Situation in wintering sites in Africa still potentially critical
- Four wintering sites discovered at present (Senegal, Mali, Mauritania), all of them potentially threatened by rapid development in the respective parts of Sahel (e.g. major wintering sites in Djoudj, Senegal, possibly threatened through expansion of rice fields)
- Several new projects started, submitted or developed to conserve AW breeding populations and manage their habitats in Europe (Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine) and stopovers in Africa (Morocco)

Scientific level

- First confirmation of a connection between wintering sites and breeding populations: (1) AW ringed in the Inner Niger Delta, Mali (out of 12 birds ringed in February 2011) recaptured in the Supoy mire (Ukraine, distance 5100 km); (2) AW colour-ringed in the Djoudj National Park, Senegal (198 birds ringed in 2007–11, 69 of them also with colour rings) observed in the Biebrza marshes (Poland, distance 5300 km)
- Geodata-logger project not fully successful up till now (30 birds equipped in 2010 and 6 recaptured in 2011 in Supoy, Ukraine; return probability reduced by up to 20 %; obvious migration of central Ukrainian AWs south of the Alps to the W to the Atlantic coast); project continuation under discussion now
- Several scientific papers improving knowledge on AW published by the AWCT members especially, e.g. *Ekologija* 2009 (status in Ukraine), *Animal Conserv.* 2010 (diet and fuelling at stopovers), *Ibis* 2010 (habitat selection), *Acta Ornithol.* 2010 (foraging and habitat use at stopovers) and 2011 (reproductive biology), *Conservation Genet. Resour.* 2011 (microsatellite markers), *J. Avian Biol.* 2011 (feather stable isotopes), *J. Ornithol.* 2011 (threat status in Africa), *Ostrich* 2011 (potential wintering sites)
- Proper allocation of further research and conservation activities necessary
Gaps in knowledge: What are the major staging and moulting sites of AW in West Africa and which breeding population is going where? Are different population developments of different breeding populations related to different conditions in specific African staging sites? etc. etc.

Administrative level

- AW MoU signed by 15 countries out of 22 Range States identified (2nd Meeting of Signatories held in May 2010 in Poland)
- International Species Action Plan approved in May 2010 (prepared by BirdLife International)
- Position of the International Aquatic Warbler Conservation Officer (AWCO) established under the APB-BirdLife Belarus in Minsk and coordinating the AW MoU activities
- GIS database of AW breeding sites finalised in February 2011

Summary

Focus should be to save declining peripheral populations, to improve habitat management in breeding sites in Belarus and Ukraine (including by encouraging biomass use) and to prevent habitat losses in wintering sites in Senegal (including attempts to create a new protected area in Djoudj)

Further research is needed to clarify the connectivity between breeding populations and African staging sites

Status of the AW in individual countries (prepared by Martin Flade, AWCT)

Hungary: Population nearly disappeared from 700 males to close to zero within less than one decade (only 3–5 singing males in the early breeding season 2011, probably no breeding attempts anymore). Reasons of the latest **crash** completely unknown – possibly linked with changes in wintering grounds. The speed of crashes and recoveries of the population suggests that it is part of a metapopulation (maybe the Ukrainian), since the dimension of changes cannot be explained by population dynamics of an isolated breeding population.

Pomerania (NE Germany and NW Poland): After long-term decline, the population stagnated at a low level of 51–57 males since 2007 (in 2009 and 2011 no singing males on the German side of the border; in 2010 3–5 males only). The **stagnation** is worrying, because it has happened in spite of comprehensive conservation and management measures in the region (a German-Polish EU-LIFE Project will finish in 2011, an AW Conservation Handbook will be issued at the end).

NE Poland: Large-scale habitat management developed by the Polish-German EU-LIFE Project for Biebrza marshes was a break-through. Habitat conditions there are excellent now, and still improving and expanding through expansion of the management area (including biomass use for fuel production). A new LIFE+ project started (run by the Polish organisation OTOP) to further develop and establish a large-scale biomass use on fen mires in the region. The AW population is **stable or increasing**. Proper and sophisticated monitoring established in Biebrza and whole Poland; comparative study on breeding success in managed and unmanaged habitats started (in Bagno Lawki marshes), coached by RSPB experts.

Lithuania: The AW population further in **decline**. A new Baltic LIFE+ project started to conserve the Lithuanian (and former Latvian) AW population, but brought no measurable success yet. The AWCT meeting in Nemunas delta held in November 2011 to discuss the status and further work of the project (however, missing personal expertise in the region probably limits ability to turn the negative trend).

Belarus: Biomass use started in autumn 2011 for vegetation management in the Sporovski Reserve, the second most important AW breeding site in Belarus (500–1000 males).

The world's largest breeding site – Zvaniets (3000–7000 males) has increasing problems with vegetation succession. Water management has largely improved (big measures implemented) but problem with large-scale vegetation management other than burning remains. APB-BirdLife Belarus submitted a new cross-border project together with Poland (Chelm marshes) in September 2011 to tackle this problem. If the project application fails, there are **serious problems** with the most important AW site!

Through initial conservation activities for AW, large-scale rewetting and restoration projects for mires started in Belarus (see a book by Tanneberger & Wichtmann 2011: Carbon credits from peatland rewetting. Climate-biodiversity-land use. Schweizerbarth, Stuttgart), covering nearly 40,000 hectares. However, AW is not directly supported by these activities, since mires need several decades or more after restoration to develop suitable sedge fen mire habitat features. Thus, these huge projects are **big progress for wetland conservation** and climate change mitigation but not yet for AW.

Ukraine: The biggest problem connected with missing sound monitoring (and no improvement expected due to lack of experts). Data from small permanent plots indicate population increase (however, representativity of plots is unknown and the results could be an artefact). Floodplain drainage, river channel regulation and rapid vegetation succession remain **big problems** in the upper Pripyat region. Fortunately, the central Ukrainian populations (E Kiev) and their habitats (Uday and Supoy valleys) seem to be stable. Some projects started in the upper Pripyat that could be beneficial for AW habitats (no clear results yet).

Stopovers on migration: It is almost clear now that the whole global AW population passes through **France** in autumn (with one or two stopovers there) and France is the key country for the species. Systematic ringing activities improved and increased enormously in the last years (from 200–300 to more than 800 captures per year). Other ringing activities have also started in **Morocco** now.

Senegal: The only known wintering site (and probably the most important) is Djoudj in the Senegal Delta. Habitat and threat status analysis (by C. Tegetmeyer, Univ. Greifswald, October 2011) shows rather **stable and suitable habitat** conditions in Djoudj, but with **potentially very dangerous expansion** of rice fields north of the Djoudj National Park. Major wintering sites there (i.e. north of the NP) with the highest density of AW are situated outside the NP and its buffer zone and thus are **not protected** (the analysis mentioned above suggests the need to enlarge the buffer zone of the NP or to create a regional nature reserve to protect the entire inundation zone of Djoudj)! AWCT ordered a study on the threat status of AW in Djoudj and asked the CMS Secretariat to send a letter to the Senegalese government to give special attention to this problem.

Mauritania: French ringers (J. Foucher et al., group ACROLA) found two more **small wintering sites** in the south (wetlands in a desert). It is unclear now, whether there are more wintering sites there and how they are threatened.

Mali: The AWCT expedition 2011 to the Inner Niger Delta (IND) in Mali was cancelled because of the problematic security situation. Despite all warnings, four ACROLA people visited the IND and succeeded in capturing 12 AWs at Mayo Dembé south of Timbuktu (February 2011). Thus, the IND is confirmed as the second biggest/most important wintering site.

However, there is not enough knowledge on AW population size and on extent of AW habitats in the IND, there is no substantial information on threat status of these habitats (it is

impossible to work there because of the security situation, thus impossible to send an expedition or PhD students). However, the knowledge is of *crucial importance* to assess the threat situation of AW there!

Compiled by Jiri Flousek, Scientific Councillor for the Czech Republic, November 2011

Annex B

Report of the Focal Point on the Middle-European population of Great Bustard for the 17th meeting of the Scientific Council, Bergen, November 2011

Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*)

The Middle-European population of the Great Bustard is partially migratory; in severe winters, birds migrate from their breeding grounds in the lowlands of the Carpathian Basin to the Balkan peninsula, or sometimes to Italy. In such winters, the German population may fly westwards, reaching Belgium or Northern France.

With its migratory nature, and because of a population decline, the Middle-European Great Bustard population was made the subject of a MoU under the Bonn Convention, and this was opened for signature in the year 2000.

Thirteen of the sixteen or more Range States of this population have signed the instrument up to the present. Besides them, three participating organisations, BirdLife International, CIC and IUCN have also signed it.

This Great Bustard population, at least in Hungary, Austria and Germany, has grown slightly in the past decade. This is believed to be a consequence of the management methods employed in these countries. However, it seems that this growth has slowed down in recent years.

A short overview on the recent situation of the Great Bustard in Range States:

ALBANIA - Status: the Great Bustard is not a breeding bird, only a very rare wintering species.

AUSTRIA - Status: the bird has regularly used breeding grounds in two areas, wintering there as well. The population has stabilised in the last few years. There are about 200 birds in the breeding season. In winter, sometimes more than 200 birds are counted, even approaching 300 individuals, believed to be due to short-distance migrants moving across Slovakian - Hungarian - Austrian borders.

BULGARIA - Status: disappeared as a breeding bird about two decades ago. Might re-establish naturally in the future.

CROATIA - Status: extinct as a breeding bird long ago. There are some wintering or passage migration records.

CZECH REPUBLIC - Status: disappeared recently as a breeding bird, but in South Moravia, one or two individuals still occur.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA – Status: no breeding population. No data, but potentially might winter there.

GERMANY - Status: a regular breeding bird, which dropped to a population of about 60 birds in the late 1980s, but in the past decade has increased again. Recently, the population exceeded 100 individuals, and in the year 2009 there were 112-114 birds.

GREECE - No data.

MONTENEGRO – Status: reports suggest that one or two passage or wintering birds occur in the country (which is not yet a signatory to the MoU).

ROMANIA - Status: we have no exact data. It might still breed somewhere near the Hungarian and Serbian borders. From that area there is some historical and recent information about its occurrence.

SERBIA – Status: according to recent information received from the Scientific Councillor for Serbia, in the Mokrin area in NE Serbia, where in the recent years about 30 birds have been counted, in 2011 only about 10-12 individuals were found. (Serbia is not yet a signatory to the MoU.)

SLOVAKIA – Status: there is a breeding site close to the Austrian-Hungarian borders. Two SPA area have been created, which are potential Great Bustard habitats. In recent years, no information confirming successful breeding has been published. In 2009, one female was seen regularly on the “Dunajska Sreda SPA” (information from the Scientific Councillor of Slovakia).

SLOVENIA - Status: has never bred in the country; a very rare passage migrant historically.

UKRAINE – Status: Ukraine has an important role for the Great Bustard, both as a breeding area and also as a wintering ground. The wintering birds originate from the Russian breeding area along the Volga river. The breeding population is around 700 birds; the number of wintering birds sometimes exceeds 1500 individuals.

HUNGARY - Status: Regular breeding bird, partial migrant. There are eight areas in Hungary important for Great Bustard protection. Most of these areas are protected. The two most important breeding grounds are in the Kiskunság NP and in the Körös-Maros NP. These two national parks have 1200 birds out of the total of 1500 birds in Hungary. Breeding success in the rainy spring of 2010 was very low. This year, in 2011, conditions were unhelpful for both the winter census (in February) and the spring census (in early April): thus not all the birds could be found. The results of winter census was less than 1300 birds counted, and the spring census gave a similar result.

A successful 4-year LIFE project ran in Hungary between 2004 and 2008. Due to this programme, a number of costly management activities could be implemented, such as burying electricity lines underground in the most important areas for Great Bustard, buying habitats that provided optimal breeding sites, and buying machines for removing snow-cover in rape-fields in order to provide access to winter food for Great Bustards.

In 2011, the Hungarian Working Group on the Great Bustard was re-launched. The leader of the group is Miklós Lóránt, who works for the Kiskunság National Park.

The two most-serious threats to this bird are still present in Hungary, namely “*cutting the alfalfa fields and other agricultural plants during the incubation and breeding time*” and thus destroying the nests, and also the “*numbers of predators, like Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*) are too high*”.

Comparing the total *Otis tarda* population in Hungary during the most recent ten years, an increase can be seen of about 30 %.

Year Total number of birds

2000		1106 individuals
2002		1192
2004		1303
2009	around	1500
2010	around	1500
2011	around	1300

In the year 2010, due to the unusually cold and rainy weather, breeding success is believed to have been very low. Due to more suitable weather conditions, the breeding success in 2011 was much better.

Enlarging the Great Bustard MoU geographically

At the 1st Meeting of the Signatories to the MoU in Illmitz, Austria, in 2004, Parties discussed the geographical expansion of the MoU.

- There would be several possible steps in such an enlargement. Serbia and Italy should be named as Range States for the Middle-European population of the Great Bustard.
- Further enlargement might include Russia, and other countries from Central Asia and/or the Middle East.
- Furthermore, the eastern sub-species (*Otis tarda dybowski*), living in Russia, Mongolia and China could also be included.
- In case of a more wide-ranging MoU, designed to include all populations of the Great Bustard, Spain, Portugal, and also the UK (with the recent success in introducing the species), and possibly other countries, should be invited to join.

Compiled by Attila Bankovics, Scientific Councillor for Hungary, November, 2011

Annex C
Report of the Focal Point on the Ferruginous Duck for the 17th meeting of the Scientific Council, Bergen, November 2011

Status of Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*)

Four populations are recognised:

- E European, E Mediterranean, Black Sea (breeding) – wintering in Sahelian Africa > 50.000 birds INCREASING
- W Mediterranean/ N & W Africa (non-breeding) 2.400 – 2.600 birds DECREASING
- Western Asia/SW Asia & NE Africa – 5.000 DECREASING
- Central Asia- India

E European, E Mediterranean, Black Sea population

Countries mostly reported stable, slowly increasing or slowly decreasing populations, but population size overall is small.

Several projects are currently in place:

- Bulgaria and Romania: “Cross-border Conservation of Pygmy Cormorant and Ferruginous Duck”, launched in January 2009.
- Slovakia: LIFE+ project “Protection of Great Bittern and Ferruginous Pochard in SPA Medzibrodzie”, implemented by the Slovak Ornithological Society/BirdLife Slovakia since the beginning of 2011. The activities include national action plans for both species, restoration of the hydrological regime in the site on at least 50 ha, restoration of habitats of the species on 90 ha, management measures on breeding sites of the species on 50 ha, protection measures, and public awareness activities.
- Italy reported a decrease in the north of the country, due to habitat destruction, and an increase in the south. The restoration of habitats took place and a hunting ban was introduced in Sicily in areas where higher numbers of Ferruginous Duck were wintering.

W Mediterranean/ N & W Africa

The only available data came from Spain, where a marked decrease in number (from 500 to 50 pairs) was identified.

SW Asia & NE Africa

The most optimistic data come from Iraq. Nature Iraq discovered in the Mesopotamian marshlands a breeding population of 800-1200, pairs as well as wintering population of 3000-6000 birds. An increase of the wintering population was reported from Iran, with a recent population estimate of c. 600 birds.

No data were available for the **Central Asian** population.

Compiled by Jelena Kralj, Scientific Councillor for Croatia, November 2011

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* in Iraq: The Current Status and Conservation Potentials

By: Mudhafar A. Salim, Ornithologist.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* is globally-threatened (NT) bird species with decreasing population trend according to the IUCN redlist and evidence of rapid declines in Asia would qualify the species for uplisting to Vulnerable due to various kinds of threats. The geographic distribution of this threatened species is widespread over scattered patches in West Asia from western China to northern India, through east and central Europe.



Ferruginous Duck, by M. A. Salim



Ferruginous Duck nest, by M. A. Salim

In Iraq, ferruginous Duck is an uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor mainly to southern Iraq. It was discovered breeding in considerable numbers in some locations in the Mesopotamian marshlands during the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) surveys. Apparently, this bird has established new breeding grounds in Iraq where it bred successfully over a relatively short period. The old locals and hunters reported that “they were seeing this bird only in winter in few numbers as well as before and after the cool days”; and some of them added that “the *Ghoosi* (its local name) bred recently over about less than the past two decades, so it is new breeding duck”. The known breeding duck in the Iraqi marshes was only the Marbled Duck/Teal until the researcher documented the breeding of the

ferruginous Duck and the Red-crested Duck in considerable numbers. Further observations showed that the Ferruginous Duck and Red-crested Duck use similar breeding habitat and that’s why they are found mostly at the same locations in the marshlands. Based on the availability of the suitable habitat and the results of the current counts, the estimated wintering population of Ferruginous Duck in Iraq might range between 3000-6000 individuals, and the breeding pairs ranges between 800-1200 pair.

The breeding habitat of the Ferruginous Duck varies from rather-shallow marsh (more than 0.5m) up to rather-deep waters (up to 1.5m), but generally, requires dense reedbeds attached to open-water 'theatres' to form good landscape for breeding. All of the nests were found inside dense reedbed of *Phragmites* in very well-camouflaged shelters. The average height of the nests was 25cm above the water-level. The mean number of the eggs per nest was 8, but apparently the mortality during hatching is high as the number of the fledgling chicks was low in comparison with the observed eggs. No dedicated studies on the breeding of the Ferruginous Duck were made (however it is recommended), but it was based on our observations and after collecting the information from the locals and hunters.

The Ferruginous Duck faces serious threats in Iraq that can be summarized by the serious lack of water that caused by the upstream damming works in Turkey and Syria as well as the continuous fluctuation of water-table in the marshlands and the lack of water management over these vast areas. Hunting is a serious threat that faces this duck, and the most serious and dangerous threat than hunting are the trap-nets that enable the hunters to harvest quite large numbers of Ferruginous Duck each year, and this effects the population on the national level dramatically.

Crucial action is needed to reduce the threats that are facing this threatened duck in Iraq in order to reach a 'healthy' population that might compensate the declining in the national and local distribution, and to encourage the growth of the newly-established breeding population in Iraq due to the availability of the suitable habitat for breeding. This should be achieved through the education and environmental-awareness campaigns and by developing plans for the restoration of the marshlands of Mesopotamia; also, by writing the species national action plan to let the stakeholders and decision-maker aware of the seriousness of the current status of this threatened bird in Iraq.



Ferruginous Duck with chicks, by M. A. Salim



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