

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP MEETING

5 February 2013

10:30 – 16:00, JNCC, Peterborough

Final minutes

Present:

Ian Bainbridge, SNH (Chair)
Sarah Anthony, NE
Nigel Buxton, SNH
Richard Hearn, WWT
Ian Enlander, NIEA
David Stroud, JNCC
Ant Maddock, JNCC
Louise Leighton, Defra
Jeremy Wilson, RSPB
Kate Jennings, RSPB
Cherry-Ann Vickery, JNCC (minutes)

By video:

Steven Dora, Scottish Government
Daniel Hall, Scottish Government
Sian Whitehead, CCW
Andy Tully, Defra

Introduction and general matters

1. Welcome and apologies; matters for AOB; membership changes

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Introductions were given and apologies received from Sallie Bailey and Matt Parsons.

Louise Leighton, Defra was welcomed as the replacement for Simon Hopkinson, Defra. Daniel Hall, Scottish Government was also introduced as a new member to the group.

IB explained that some of the routine agenda items had been removed from this agenda in order to enable more time to be spent discussing the species accounts and other technical aspects of the SPA Review.

2. Minutes of last meeting; amendments and approval

The minutes of the 20 September 2012 were agreed subject to;

- p3 , Action 14 to be moved to the top of the paragraph.
- Action 21 to include the wording 'in line with past practice' at the end of the action.

It was agreed that the current format of minutes should continue to be produced in future.

SPA Review

3. Overall progress with the Decision Framework and update (paper)

DAS circulated the paper 'SPA SWG Feb 2013 - assessment lists v6.doc' and explained the content:

- Annex 1 gave recommendations from the sub-group to the SWG;
- Annex 2 outlined four issues for discussion and resolution by SWG; and
- Annex 3 listed of species for which no SPAs had been selected in 2001 and any subsequent change of status for these species.

DAS advised that the species listed in Table 1 had been assessed by the sub-group through the decision framework previously developed by the SWG. The table summarised the outcomes into a small number of categories with respect to slightly more than a two thirds subset of the total review. A total of 18 species still need evaluation to complete Tranche 1.

Following discussion, it was agreed that an audit trail will be necessary to explain the decision making processes and that appropriate documentation should be compiled. The step-wise nature of the considerations was currently being captured in the proforma spreadsheet (Combined Proforma for Feb SWG (v4).xlsx).

Action 1. DAS asked SWG for comments on assessments made to date so these could be considered by the sub-group at their meeting on 26 Feb.

The SPA review is being undertaken on a progressive basis and it will be important to cross-check the recommendations at completion to ensure consistency of assessments between species. There was appreciation that this may result in minor changes at the final stage.

There was discussion as to the definition of terms used in the recommendations to the SWG, in particular related to the implications of the word "boundary" and the need for standard terminology related to species also included in the marine SPA review.

Accordingly, in developing formal recommendations in relation to the sufficiency of SPA suites for each species, the sub-group were asked to develop standard (defined) terminology for the various different scenarios arising.

Action 2. Sub-group to develop standard terminology for the types of recommendations being made, to ensure they are clear and unambiguous.

Other issues raised included asking the sub-group to revisit the logic of recommendations for the following species:

- Shoveler (non-breeding);
- Oystercatcher (breeding); and
- Whimbrel (non-breeding).

KJ explained details of an initiative by BTO, NE and RSPB to review current gaps in monitoring non-breeding waterbirds at SSSIs and SPAs and assess the coincidence with sites being actual or potential case-work 'hotspots'. This will help prioritise the future targeting of counter effort. Although currently being undertaken just in England, with funding, there is scope to expand the project to other parts of the UK and KJ agreed to circulate further information to the SWG.

Action 3. K.J to report back on progress on the assessment of WeBS monitoring at sites where there that are conservation case-work 'hotspots' and to circulate further information to the SWG.

DAS introduced Annex B which outlined four issues where the sub-group were seeking advice from the SWG. These were as follows:

Red Kite

With respect to whether high-density roost sites in the non-breeding season should be considered under Phase 2, IE noted it would be premature in Northern Ireland to select any sites for the species. For the rest of Great Britain, whether or not to classify roost sites would be a policy decision and so accordingly the various issues arising (including the fidelity of Red Kites to particular roosts and likely consequences of the loss of those sites) would need to be carefully outlined in the advice provided by the SWG.

Action 4. Ensure species account includes clear information related to policy options with regard to the selection of non-breeding roost sites in GB for Red Kites as possible SPAs.

Sanderling

Assessment of the whole SPA suite for Sanderling depends on two counts at the key site (Ribble & Alt). It was agreed that suite assessment in August would be useful, and that there should be a recommendation to WeBS as to the need to promote monitoring of the species on the Ribble & Alt as well as other relevant SPAs, in the periods of peak migratory occurrence in the UK (May and August). This would aid future assessments. For the current review however, it is clear that, on present knowledge all the key sites are included in the SPA suite which is well spread across the UK distributional range.

Action 5. JNCC to include recommendation in species account regarding monitoring needs at key Sanderling sites in migration periods, and promote such needs with the WeBS Secretariat for this and other relevant species.

Action 5a. Revisit Sanderling to consider whether there are key sites which would raise SPA provision in line with the SPI.

Red-necked Phalarope

Whilst a number of other sites are used by Red-necked Phalarope in northern and western Scotland, there are doubts as to the viability of these sites – in terms on long-term regularity of use. However, such issues would in any case be considered as part of any Phase 2 assessments. It was recommended to consider the species in Phase 2.

Action 6. Include Red-necked Phalarope in Phase 2.

Ring Ouzel

The 2012 national survey showed an overall population decline of a third. A new estimate and draft manuscript for publication would be available in less than six months. There was scope to use the survey results to generate 'site' estimates and RSPB were asked to explore the potential for generating these as well as advice which could be included on appropriate non-site-based land-management measures which would benefit the species.

Action 7. RSPB to explore the potential for generating site estimates from the results of the 2012 national survey, as well as advice on desirable non-site based land management measures.

DAS presented Annex C which had previously been discussed in May 2012. No comments had been received following that meeting, and DAS requested that the SWG send any comments to JNCC as soon as possible to allow the finalisation of that list of species for which no SPAs are selected.

Action 8. Group to send comments on Annex C to DAS by 22 Feb 2013.

4. **Example of the Species accounts (paper)**
5. **Evaluation of draft species recommendations (paper)**

These two items were covered together. DAS described the content of the two papers and explained that there was now a framework for all species which would be finalised over the next few months. Batches of about 25 species accounts at a time would be uploaded onto Huddle for comments. After each three-week consultation period, the text would be amended accordingly. There would be an opportunity at the end of the process to comment on a consolidated version of the whole document.

DAS presented an initial start at developing recommendations related to monitoring and conservation needs for each species. It was agreed that these would be further developed by the sub-group – drawing also in the input of relevant experts on the species concerned. The recommendations and/or advice would be incorporated into the species accounts in due course.

In developing recommendations (with respect to monitoring needs) and advice for other issues in relation to needs of species identified, the sub-group were asked to develop standard terminology for the various different scenarios arising (see Action 2 above).

Action 9. Sub-group to consider the recommendations and/or advice related to relevant monitoring, conservation and management needs seeking input from specialist colleagues.

DAS presented a paper summarising the GB, All-Ireland and international population estimates to be used in the review. This comprehensively updated Appendix 4 of the 2001 SPA Review. It has been developed with a range of most recent estimates, including the third assessment of the Avian Population Estimates Panel for GB/UK and the fifth edition of Wetlands International's Waterbird Population Estimates which is now available as an on-line database (<http://wpe.wetlands.org>).

Passage Whimbrel

SWG discussed the issue that has been raised with respect to determining the most appropriate estimate against which to assess Whimbrel in the passage period. Noting that none of the four options presented reflected reality very well, it was agreed that the 'least worst' option was to use an estimate which reflected the likely total volume of birds in the Icelandic birds passing down the east Atlantic seaboard in autumn, *i.e.* 225,000 prs x 3 = 675,000 individuals. It was also noted that – as for other passage migrants – the issue of rapid population turnover at monitored sites added further complexity to the assessment of status at key sites.

A key recommendation from the review should be the need to sustain the long-term monitoring and survey programmes which are critical to the assessment of the UK's SPA network.

Action 10. Group to provide comments on the summary table outlining national and international population estimates for use in the review to DAS by 22 February 2013.

6. **Huddle demonstration**

AM demonstrated how the Huddle web-site would be used to support the review process. DAS would upload the species accounts in batches onto the Huddle website where they could be accessed and edited as necessary. This would ensure all comments are contained in one place. IB requested that all amendments be made in tracked-changes for clarity. Users were reminded to download the files for editing and

upload them back onto Huddle as soon as they finished editing so they were not blocked for other users for too long.

7. Overall progress with the review (paper)

AM updated the group on progress of publication of the Phase 1 SPA Review and explained that the format and house-style would be decided once the report was finalised. AM briefly explained that the 'Historical Perspective' requires tweaking, the data section still needs additional work and the heading for Chapter 7 should now read 'Scientific Advice.' Elements of the appendices had been completed and AM and DAS would decide what would be included in this section.

Action 11. IB to rewrite the section on 'Progress since 2001' Chapter 2.

Action 12. A.M to produce a first draft of the acknowledgements and SWG members to add to it.

8. Discussion of work plan for 2013

IB explained that he will Chair the editorial group to oversee the production of the final report of Phase 1 of the review. The SWG then discussed workload and it was recognised that DAS held responsibility for delivery of large much of the technical aspects of the review, although this was just one of a number of areas of his work. There is currently no other technical support for these elements of the review within JNCC. LL asked whether further resources were needed from outside, or if the work could be delegated within the SWG. She also stressed the importance of delivery to time such that implementation of the next phase could be progressed, ensuring that there was actual implementation of decisions reached.

DAS outlined current progress related to technical aspects of the review and outlined key dates proposed through 2013. These were as follows:

Date	Species recommendations and advice	Species accounts
February '13	Tranche 1a - 90 spp to SWG (5/2/13) Tranche 1b to be considered by sub-group (26/2/13)	
March '13	Peer review Tranche 1a 18 spp SWG by email (→ issues arising)	Peer review completed Available information included in species accounts by contractor
April '13	Tranche 1 & e.g. of spp accounts CSG/ESG (→ issues arising)	Comments on species accounts batch 1
May '13	Tranche 2 considered by sub-group	Comments on species accounts batch 2
June '13	Tranche 2 SWG (→ issues arising)	Comments on species accounts batch 3
July '13	Tranche 2 CSG/ESG (→ issues arising)	Comments on species accounts batch 4
August '13		Comments on species accounts batch 5
September '13		Comments on species

Date	Species recommendations and advice	Species accounts
		accounts batch 6
October '13	CSG? Resolve any outstanding issues	Comments on species accounts batch 7
November '13	Resolve any outstanding issues	Completed
December '13	Write up paper to EMB	
January '14	Advice to CSG & technical sign off	
February '14		
March '14	Agreement of recommendations by Joint Committee as formal advice to government	

Action 13. AM to produce a clear production timeline before the next Executive Steering Group (ESG) meeting.

Action 14. JNCC to set a date for an ESG meeting probably in April to review progress, discuss process, consider the advice and the risks with delivery of advice and the final report.

Other items

9. Verbal update on Northern Ireland's marine SPA position

10. N2K updates on how the marine environment will be addressed in Phase 1

The group covered item 9 and 10 together and SA asked the group for their advice on a Natural England marine SPA implementation boundary issue concerning how to account for SPA extensions to an already existing site. This was discussed and it was agreed that it was not a scientific issue for the SWG, but rather a policy issue for discussion and agreement with the devolved administrations and agencies.

Action 15. LL to liaise with colleagues in the devolved administrations and statutory agencies about the development of guidance on policy related to over-lapping sites with different lists of qualifying species.

IE gave a brief verbal update on Northern Ireland's marine SPA position which raised similar issues to SA's questions concerning overlapping boundaries of multiple SPAs.

11. Progress with other matters, review of APs from last meeting

Action 4 from the minutes of 20 September 2012 to be carried forward.

12. Any other business

No other business was discussed.

13. Date and venue for next meeting

Action 16. Secretariat to trawl for dates as soon as possible and organise the next SWG meeting in June.