

UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP MEETING

23 June 2014

10:30 – 14:40, JNCC Offices, Peterborough

Final minutes

Attending in person;

Ian Bainbridge, SNH, (Chair)
David Stroud, JNCC
Ant Maddock, JNCC
Dave Chambers, JNCC
Jessa Battersby, JNCC
Nigel Buxton, SNH
Sarah Anthony, NE
Kate Jennings, RSPB
Richard Hearn, WWT
Cherry- Ann Vickery, JNCC, (minutes)

Video conferencing;

Sian Whitehead, CCW
Steven Dora, SG

Telephone conferencing;

Ian Enlander, NI
Miranda Cooper, NWL
Andy Tully, Defra
Jason Hubert, FC
Kerstin Kober, JNCC

Introduction and general matters

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

The Chair welcomed attendees and introductions were given. Apologies were received from Jeremy Wilson, RSPB and Charlotte Lay, CLA.

2. Minutes of last meeting; amendments & approval

I.B asked the group for any comments on the minutes of the previous meeting (12 November 2013). K.J proposed revised wording to the section on SSSI guidelines.

Action 1. K.J to supply CAV with revised text.

No further comments were expressed and the minutes were signed off subject to the above amendment.

SPA Review

3. Phase 1 completion, species accounts and the main report

D.S informed the group that the first draft of the species accounts had been completed and comments had been received. These comments had been incorporated into the second edit of species accounts. D.S presented the paper and explained that it covered issues arising from the second edits.

SWG was asked to advise on appropriate caveats for Huntley et al and CHAINSPAN reports related to implications of climate change projections. Following discussions it was agreed that the readers should refer to the caveats which should provide further details and explanation.

Action 2. D.S to provide an introductory paragraph and circulate to SWG for approval.

1% threshold for non-breeding Spoonbill and minimum of 50 rule

Spoonbill is a colonising Annex I species for which UK currently has no SPA provision. As one of the 'ECJ 7' it is a species for which potential SPA provision will be considered in Phase 2.

The nominal wintering population of Spoonbill is 20 individuals - although numbers are increasing annually (WeBS reported a maximum of 58 in 2011/12). As a non-breeding waterbird, the 'minimum of 50' rule potentially applies, but would constrain any site from potential selection since none holds this number. Accordingly a threshold of 1 has been used as the basis on which Phase 2 considerations will be made and to avoid a logical position where no site can be considered under Stage 1 of the SPA Guidelines.

The same situation arises with non-breeding Crane (population = 52).

Some further annex I and regularly occurring migratory species have been identified where this rule will constrain SPA selection either because the SPA review indicates there is currently an insufficiency in the network or (as for Spoonbill) there are as yet no SPA classified for said species, thus leading to a risk of legal challenge.

SA cited a recent recommendation for the inclusion of Slavonian grebe as a feature of the Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay pSPA where the species (albeit present in numbers less than 50) met Stage 1.1 of the selection guidelines and where the current review cited an insufficiency in provision within the network for this species. Stage 2 judgements also supported site selection for this species.

Rather than needing to seek ESG/Gov consent every time such a species is identified, the SWG suggested that it may be appropriate to incorporate guidance on the relaxation of the 'rule' into the selection guidance process (ie where the rule results in a perverse judgement, agencies are able to relax the rule, noting that SPA selection in such cases would still need to pass the stage 2 assessment and therefore should not lead to inappropriate SPA selection). SPAR SWG will provide a submission to the ESG outlining the issue and proposal.

Action 3. D.S to circulate to ESG a list of species to which the rule does not apply.

Presentation of SPI values in species accounts

It had been suggested that the Site Provision Index values should be presented in each species account. The group discussed this issue and D.S explained that the current position is that specific SPI values will not be presented in the species accounts themselves (the accounts will give one of four broad categories) , but they will be presented in an Annex to the report (alongside a discussion of the methodology from which they are derived) – so they will clearly be ‘on-the-record’.

Action 4. D.S to produce standard text for each species account.

Cropped habitats section

A number of comments have been received generally expressing some concern over the wording of the section on cropped habitats. D.S explained the background to this section and the group discussed what should be included. It was agreed that the CHIP check box needed to be included in the proforma and the report.

Action 5. D.S to produce a concluding paragraph for Section 6 of the species accounts and circulate to ESG.

Non-breeding Gadwall on the Stour & Orwell

SWG discussed the fact that the 2001 Review had erroneously omitted the Stour & Orwell Estuary as a classified site for non-breeding Gadwall from the relevant species suite. This has now been added as a 20th site. As the SPA suite had already been assessed as sufficient it was agreed that this would have no further implications.

Action.6. D.S to provide wording to explain omission and include in the text.

Action 7. D.S to arrange for the second drafts to be added to the JNCC website.

Action 8. CAV to circulate the web link to the group requesting comments by the end of August 2014. <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-6680>

Point 5 in the paper regarding Gadwall and Scaup needs some editing. For example the 2001 Review seems to have erroneously omitted the Stour & Orwell Estuary as a classified site for non-breeding Gadwall from the relevant species suite. Both species are assessed as adequate. Insert number into this revision. Existing SPA feature omitted from 2001 review. Legend to be edited as suggested by NB.

SPI paper

D.S explained that the SPI paper had been submitted to the journal *Bird Study* and had been accepted for publication. Editors comments had been received and these

would need addressing before being resubmitted later in the year. Referees asked for an improved description of the rationale and to better describe the use of old SPI data in the paper and newer data in the analysis. Authors and Ian to consider how to deal with the referee's comments.

Defra queried the risk of someone challenging the Review findings in view of the fact that the Review may be published in advance of submitting the redrafted SPI paper. However, the group indicated that any challenge was unlikely noting that *Bird Study* had in its summary indicated broad endorsement of the SPI approach.

Action 9. I.B to discuss with J.W. how to proceed with addressing the comments.

Main report

I.B updated the group on progress on editing the final report. He explained that the sections on SPI and decision framework needed further work and that I.B and A.M had already worked on the content and structure of the main report. I.B proposed that D.S should be cited as the main author of the report followed by an alphabetical list of the other contributors.

Action 10. All to advise A.M if they do not wish to be acknowledged in the final report.

D.S advised SWG that a final copy of the report should be available for ESG to view by the end of 2014, before publication in early 2015.

4. Timetable for the review

A.M explained that the writing stage was now fully underway and following peer review the report would be sent to Chief Scientists before seeking approval by JNCC Committee. A.M would liaise with Communications team to progress the style and design elements of the final product.

Action 11. A.M to circulate an updated timetable to the group.

5. International population estimates for seabirds (paper)

D.S presented this paper and explained the background. Following lengthy discussions the following conclusions were agreed.

Gannet

Action 12. Follow CSR5 estimate (renamed as NE Atlantic).

Action 13. Advise Wetlands International re incorrect population name.

Shag

Action 14. Follow Wanless & Harris estimate (using geometric mean instead of mid-point).

Action 15. Advise Wetlands International of the available more recent UK and Irish data.

Herring Gull

Action 16. Follow CSR5 estimate for *L. a. argenteus* (using geometric mean instead of mid-point).

Action 17. I.B. to request Wetlands International to provide supporting country totals for *argenteus* and *argentatus*, and to comment on the use of unsourced data in producing population estimates.

Action 18. Adopt combined CSR5 estimates for *L. a. argenteus* (on the basis that this is the same source as breeding season).

Action 19. Use geometric mean rather than mid-point for estimate.

Kittiwake

Action 20. Follow CSR5/WPE5 estimate (renamed as N Atlantic).

Action 21. Advise Wetlands International re incorrect WPE5 population name.

Guillemot

Action 21. Continue to use NE Atlantic population as above rather than CSR estimate.

Action 22. Advise Wetlands International re separate NW & NE Atlantic populations re CSR.

Action 23. JNCC Seabirds Team to take forward synthesis of information on population mixing in winter as a future research need.

Razorbill

Action 24. Request national totals from Wetlands International to better understand difference from Merne & Mitchell estimate given the scale of difference between the two estimates.

Action 25. Provisionally follow CSR5 estimate for reasons outlined above and review in the light of data from W1 (above).

Action 26. JNCC Seabirds Team to take forward synthesis of information on population mixing in winter as a future research need.

Puffin

Action 27. Follow CSR5 estimate for *F. A. arctica sensu.lat.*

Action 28. JNCC Seabirds Team (K.K) to provide SWG with published papers related to Puffin taxonomy.(see Annex A)

Action 29. Request national totals from Wetlands International to better understand difference from Harris & Wanless estimate.

Other items

- 6. Phase 2 process update (work programme re-circulated for info)**

D.S explained progress to date and introduced Dave Chambers as taking on the lead role on the Phase 2 project. He explained that several meetings had already taken place and others were scheduled. I.B explained that SWG would not be driving the Phase 2 work, but would provide advice if necessary.

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

D.S reminded the group that the new WeBs interactive website was now live and accessible.

I.B went through the actions from the 12 November 2013 meeting and there remained outstanding;

Action 30. DAS to further develop a timetable (with indication of costs) for the 2019 Article 12 report and present to SWG for further discussion.

Action 31. I.B to present the current discussion paper to ESG in December.

Action 32. CAV to upload the report to the SWG website in 2014 following finalisation by RH.

8. Progress from bilateral discussions – brief updates

I.E (NI) updated the group on N.I progress and explained that NIEA had just appointed a N.I Seabird Officer and that Ramsar consultations on two sites were currently underway.

S.W (NRW) explained that consultations on three marine extensions had now been finalised. A Phase 2 assessment of heathland species (nightjar and Dartford Warbler) had not identified any site in Wales that support 1% of the population: further consideration of sites in Wales would need to be progressed as part of between-country discussions about adequacy of range provision.

N.B (SNH) advised that advice on 14 marine sites was being sent to Scottish Government today and a formal letter from SG requesting SNH to progress the outcomes of the SPA Review had been received.

S. A (NE) explained that the consultation on Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay pSPA was continuing until 21 July 2014 and the consultation on Flamborough to Filey Coast pSPA had now completed. NE is still awaiting a decision on the classification of Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay pSPA and the designation of Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Ramsar site. A RIS report on the consultation to add lesser black-backed gull to the citation of the Bowland Fells SPA was currently being compiled.

9. Any other business

R.H raised the issue of seabird monitoring and asked SWG if it could be discussed at a future meeting.

Action 33. M.P to produce a paper on marine monitoring recommendations to discuss at a future SWG meeting.

10. Date and venue for next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, 1 October 2014 at JNCC, Monkstone House.

Annex A

Information on puffins supplied by KK

- British Ornithologists Union advised in 2005 that the differentiation is arbitrary and should be disregarded:

Sangster, G., Collinson, J.M., Hellbig, A.M., Knox, A.G., & Parkin, D.T. 2005. Taxonomic recommendations for British Birds: Third Report. *Ibis* **147**: 821-826. [LINK](#)

- Harris and Wanless describe the dispute about the differentiation between *arctica* and *grabae* in detail. They suggest to discard the differentiation because of no morphological differences between the species, and because protein analysis does not support a separation either.

Harris, M.P. & Wanless, S. 2011. *The Puffin*. T & AD Poyser, London, UK, pp 20 – 21.

- The protein analyses they are referring to are here:

Moen, S.M. 1991. Morphologic and genetic variation among breeding colonies of the Atlantic puffin (*Fratercula arctica*). *Auk* **108**: 755-763. [link](#)

Lowther, P.E., Diamond, A.W., Kress, S.W., Robertson, G.J. & Russell, K. 2002. Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*). In: Poole, A & Gill, F. (eds) *The Birds of North America*. The Birds of North America Inc., Philadelphia, PA.