

# UK SPAR SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

## MEETING 3 November

11:00 – 16:00, JNCC Offices, Peterborough  
Draft Minutes

### 1. Attendance and apologies

Ian Bainbridge	Chair
Ant Maddock (minutes)	JNCC
Sarah Anthony attending for Allan Drewitt	Natural England (NE)
Jessa Battersby	JNCC
Richard Hearn	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
Kate Jennings	RSPB
David Stroud	JNCC
Dave Chambers	JNCC
Matt Parsons	JNCC
Andy Tully	Department for the Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
Nigel Buxton	Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)
Richard Evans attending for Jeremy Wilson	Scottish Environment Link
Sian Whitehead	Natural Resources Wales
Daniel Hall attending for Steven Dora	Scottish Government (Steven attended for part of the meeting)

#### Apologies

Allan Drewitt	Natural England
Cherry-Ann Vickery	JNCC
Claire Robinson	NFU
Ian Enlander	Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Jeremy Wilson	Scottish Environment Link
Leasa Fielding	Welsh Government
Michael McLeod	Scottish Government
Miranda Cooper	NWL

Ian Enlander announced that he was taking early retirement. He has worked with the SWG for many years and was thanked for his contributions sincerely and was wished well for the future and thanked for his multiple contributions. There was no information on his replacement.

Ian Bainbridge announced that he would be retiring from SNH at Christmas. Arrangements for future SWG chairing were unclear

Ant Maddock handed over the project management role of the group to Matt Parsons and was thanked for his hard work over the last six years.

Concern was raised about declining attendance at SWG meetings. The Chair stressed the importance that members - representing the wide scope of organisations within SWG - were fully content with the recommendations arising from the final Review.

**ACTION 1:** Ian B to draft an email to encourage attendance at SWG meetings in the light of the preparation of the final report and its recommendations.

## **2. Minutes of last meeting; amendments & approval**

The draft minutes of the meeting held in July 2015 were accepted subject to several minor changes agreed.

## **3. Phase 1 – progress report**

### **3.1 Species accounts**

All 150 species accounts are now at third draft stage. All accounts have been made available on JNCC's website Dropbox ([https://jncc.iweb-storage.com/s/ljU2MzM4NTU0NmExODkyNjVjYzA3Mjk3ZCI.cs8DNoN9s07YqiBu\\_fAFKNLm2f\\_s](https://jncc.iweb-storage.com/s/ljU2MzM4NTU0NmExODkyNjVjYzA3Mjk3ZCI.cs8DNoN9s07YqiBu_fAFKNLm2f_s)). The Chair stressed that members should confirm they are happy with these accounts as no further consultations on these are planned.

A final proof read of the species accounts will be done a group of volunteers. There should be no changes unless absolutely necessary and no changes to format or layout. The main tasks are to check grammar and spelling and checking of detail. DAS noted that some of the cropped habitat information in the accounts is new, so reviewers need to check this information is correct, and to cross check the cropped habitat spreadsheet to cropped habitat information in the species accounts.

**ACTION 2:** Matt P to send the accounts in blocks of about 20 species to the volunteers for review by the end of November.

**ACTION 3:** David S and Dave C to finalise the species account maps by Christmas.

### **3.2 Phase 1 methodological chapters**

To help reviewers, the detailed Contents of the report should be sent with the chapters for review.

**ACTION 4:** All eight volunteers to check chapters 1 and 2 by the end of November.

**ACTION 5:** David S to write methodological chapters for Phase 1 and check the technical details of the annexes.

**ACTION 6:** David S with Ian B as first reviewer to draft these chapters by Christmas. Finished chapters will go onto JNCC Dropbox for others to review.

A decision is needed about what information will go into the appendices. However, as most of the information is ready, preparing the appendices will be a simple compilation.

### **3.3 Decision Framework**

David S has three more days work to finalise the editing of the decision framework spreadsheet, which audits the sufficiency assessments made for each of the 150 species considered by the Review. This will be made available on JNCC's website at the time of publication of the Review as supplementary information.

### **3.4 Site Provision Index paper revision**

Non-statistical consideration of referees comments and appropriate editing were completed by David S in August and paper is now with Jerry Wilson to consider statistical points. Once this has been done, the paper will be resubmitted to *Bird Study* with the aim to complete this by January 2016. It was considered that - as a potential backup - the SPI paper could be signed

off by CSG rather than in a peer reviewed journal. The revised paper will anyway go to CSG for information.

#### 4. Timetable

The next steps were agreed as follows:

End November 2015      Chapters 1 & 2 and species accounts reviewed by the group

Mid December 2015      David S to send out Chapter 3 for review by end December

**ACTION 7:** Send out Chapter 3 in mid December with comments due by end of December;

Early January 2016      Remaining chapters to go out with comments by end of January

**ACTION 8:** Remainder of the chapters to go out by early January with comments by end of January

End January 2016      First complete draft sent to Executive Steering Group members and Chief Scientists Group

**ACTION 9:** Jessa Battersby to aim to send the early, albeit unfinished, complete draft to Chief Scientists Group and to the devolved administrations (so that the Executive Steering Group members can see what will be in the final report), at the end of January for the February CSG meeting.

Mid Feb / mid March      Final edits.

End May 2016      Final version of the report to be ready to go to Joint Committee.

June 2016      Deadline for the Joint Committee meeting sign off

The same cover note should be used for ESG, CSG and Joint Committee.

#### 5. Phase 2 – progress report

##### 5.1 Draft Phase 2 recommendations from sub-group

The aim is to produce a set of indicative site level proposals for each species.

The first site list was based on data collations done by JNCC on behalf of the country agencies. Further synthesis and analysis was undertaken for some species' groups. Recommendations with respect to the six species being considered by the current meeting were high priority because of the need to plan national SCARABBS or other surveys for the 2016 field season.

The outstanding work priorities of the Phase 2 group are to consider a number of groups including non-breeding waterbirds, non-breeding gulls, heathland species; raptors breeding seabirds. Indicative proposals were expected to have been developed by March / April 2016.

Issues for the sub group:

- a) Range insufficiencies
- b) How to apply Criterion 1.4?

- c) CHIP species
- d) Application of the minimum of 50 threshold
- e) How far do we try to meet the SPI results? For some species like Snipe, Purple Sandpiper and Kingfisher this will be challenging.
- f) Need for further survey or how much evidence is good enough?
- g) Overlap with marine species

Six species proposals were tabled at the meeting (Montagu's Harrier (Br), Kingfisher (Br), Woodlark, Dartford Warbler, Nightjar (Br & NB) and Chough (Br & NB). SWG agreed with the recommendations made by the sub-group in the papers.

Some comments on the Kingfisher paper were made. It was felt that there was need for greater clarity regarding the status of the identified sites of importance for Kingfisher in the context of their potential for possible SPA classification. It was suggested that there should be a more robust recommendation concerning a few priority sites, because for this species the attainment of the SPI 'target' was unlikely.

Overall the Phase 2 process will result in 91 species/populations with scientifically based recommendations to be considered by government, in consultation with their respective Statutory Nature Conservation Body.

**ACTION 10:** Comments on the species papers should be sent to Dave C within two weeks.

**ACTION 11:** Dave C to forward these recommendations to ESG once comments are received and papers revised accordingly.

## 5.2 Treatment of range in the context of the selection guidelines

The Review had identified three forms of network insufficiencies: range, ecological and numerical. The SWG discussed a table paper summarising the thinking undertaken by the sub-group with respect to issues of range sufficiency. The paper was primarily for information and it is planned to go in the SWG's webpage for the record and to stimulate further consideration. The paper notes the importance of consistency in decisions and actions regarding completing the insufficiencies found for any species. It was considered that different approaches were useful for different species and that overall, numerical insufficiency is probably a higher priority issue to address than that of range.

**ACTION 12:** Written comments on this paper to David S by end of November.

## 6. Minimum of 50 guidance

The paper dealt with the merging of two qualifying sites such that Mediterranean Gull and non-breeding Ruff will be listed on one site under the minimum of 50 guideline.

It was agreed to delete the word "rule" from the paper and replace with "guidance" in line with previous decisions

It was noted that the counts of birds at these two sites appear fewer than sites elsewhere in England, and that setting aside those other sites on the basis of small numbers may send the wrong message about what sites can be classified.

David S noted that Ruff was one of the species for which the minimum of 50 guideline was originally formulated (on the basis of huge numbers wintering to the south of the UK).

It was considered helpful if the paper contained more information regarding the context of Morecambe Bay with other sites within England and the UK *i.e.* include some information about the plans for these sites in terms of the results of the decision framework.

Nonetheless, it was considered that when SPAs are being reviewed for other reasons, it is sensible to take the opportunity to reconsider all the qualifying features again.

It was agreed that, for those species listed in the SWG's guidance on this issue<sup>1</sup> there is no need to refer to SWG each time these guidelines are used, although this should occur if further exceptions are proposed.

## **7. Country reports**

### **7.1 Northern Ireland**

Main activity is preparation for consultation on two SPAs scheduled for renotification (additional features/2001 feature alignment) and one renotification with marine extension plus one new fully marine site. The intention is to start public consultation through late 2015.

### **7.2 England**

Marine:

- Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay and Flamborough & Filey Coast. NE is awaiting decision on classification from DEFRA.
- Northumberland Marine, Poole Harbour and Solent & Dorset Coast – following submission of Departmental Briefs to DEFRA, NE are waiting to hear whether formal consultation can commence..
- Liverpool Bay, Morecambe Bay & Duddon Estuary, Teesmouth & Cleveland Coast, Hamford Water, Outer Thames Estuary, and Greater Wash. Proposals have now completed informal dialogue. Departmental Briefs have yet to be submitted to DEFRA.

Terrestrial:

- Dungeness Romney Marsh and Rye Bay. NE is awaiting decision on classification from DEFRA.

### **7.3 Wales**

Nothing to report

### **7.4 Scotland**

Nothing to report

## **8. Any other business**

### **8.1 Marine sufficiency assessment**

Resource strictures in the agencies, resulting from delays to SPA consultation, have prevented sufficient time for them to consider the methodological proposals. This meant that this work has been delayed. . Defra and others in Government are helping to address this problem. A paper

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<sup>1</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/Minimum%20threshold%20guidance%202014%20update%20v3.pdf>

outlining the method options is ready for consideration. JNCC has considered these methods internally and now needs to involve the agencies, in advance of wider consultation.

IB noted the suitability of SPAR SWG for a role in achieving scientific peer review of options and outputs of the marine sufficiency work and urged Defra to identify a role for SPAR SWG as a means of achieving this, particularly outwith the Government/SNCB sphere.

Discussions about applying an amended SPI assessment into the marine environment are taking place. SWG members can help by liaising with their colleagues regarding the value of coordinating the methods used between terrestrial and marine assessments of sufficiency.

## **8.2 Whooper Swan**

SNH introduced the paper on the status of Whooper Swans at Loch of Skene. It is assumed that count methods during the period did not change and that the counts are real. Therefore, Loch Skene is probably not the best site for Whoopers but there is insufficiency for this species and a recommendation to address the insufficiency is required.

A question was asked as to whether this is a legal issue. Loch of Skene was identified as a qualifying site but SNH contests this.

It was agreed to maintain the *status quo* – *i.e.* that Whooper Swans should be a qualifying feature at Loch of Skene.

## **9. Date and venue of next meeting**

End of January 2016 seems best.

**ACTION 13:** David S, Matt P and Jessa B to establish a best date. Subject matter will be comments on drafts sent out. Secretariat to establish dates for meetings in 2016.