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# Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group Bulletin

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No 8, September 1999

## **The Seaduck Specialist Group under Wetlands International and IUCN**

The Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group (SeSG) aims to enhance international cooperation among seaduck scientist, form a link to international organisations, and disseminate information about seaduck research particularly the results of national and international monitoring schemes. The SeSG is also recognised as a specialist group under IUCN.

The SeSG has an overall coordinator who is also the coordinator of the region of Africa-Europe-Middle East. The aim of the group is to become global. So far, a coordinator for North America has been appointed but a coordinator for East Asia is yet to be found. Each major region is divided in subregions. Currently, a regional coordinator is in place for the Baltic Area and the east and west coasts of North America.

Linked to the SeSG is a decentralised database which covers Africa-Europe-Middle East. The aim of the database is to collate and store results from the International Waterbird Census (IWC) coordinated by Wetlands International. The database aims to provide reliable population estimates and information on seaduck trends and distribution.

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**Vignettes:**

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## Editorial

### Dear colleagues and readers

Welcome to this issue of the Seaduck Bulletin. We apologise for the late distribution of this issue caused by heavy work loads. Simultaneously with the distribution of this issue we launch the Seaduck SG web site at

<http://www.dmu.dk/CoastalZoneEcology/seaduck/index.html>

including in the first instance the latest Seaduck Bulletin, contents of previous issues and an address list. The web site will be developed over the years to come. Do let us have your ideas about how you would like to see it develop in the future.

The need for comprehensive, simultaneous seaduck surveys in the whole of the Western Palearctic was flagged up in previous issues. Though still a high priority for Wetlands International it may take a while a while before such surveys are launched. In the meantime seaduck work continues and we present in this issue articles and progress reports from Latvia, Lithuania, Belgium and France.

In the course of 1998 and 1999, we have noted with some satisfaction that seaducks are moving up the agenda in North America and East Asia. The Seaduck Joint Venture in North America was recently launched and will undoubtedly increase research, monitoring and conservation measures relating to seaducks in this part of the world. Hopefully, the developing North American branch of the Seaduck SG will play an important role in that process. We are specially pleased to present progress reports about the use of satellite telemetry on Barrow's goldeneye and harlequin duck in Canada and an article about eider and scoter spring staging and moulting in the St. Lawrence. In East Asia, an attempt to gather information about all *Anatidae* was recently launched. The hope is to collate sufficient information for an *Anatidae* atlas similar to the atlas published for Western Palearctic.

We would like to encourage papers, progress reports, notes, news, and announcements for the next issue of the Bulletin. Deadline will be 1 August 2000 and we will aim to finalise and distribute it in November 2000.

Please let us know if you know someone who might be interested in being added to our mailing list and please encourage friends and colleagues to send in contributions to the Seaduck Bulletin.

**Stefan Pihl & Tony Fox**

*Status report***Wetlands International Western Palearctic Seaduck Database**

We wish to thank the National Coordinators for submitting seaduck data to the database (Table 1a-1e). We have included a new table (Table 1e) covering non-coastal central European countries, as we have realised that lakes and rivers in these countries contain large numbers of seaducks, particularly goldeneye, smew and goosander. So far, the database has received relatively few data for 1998. We realise that part of the reason could be irregular feedback from both the Seaduck Database and Wetlands International HQ. The next annual report covering 1995 and 1996 has been delayed but will soon be finalised and distributed. Immediately after, initial steps will be taken to prepare the next triennial report which will cover 1997, 1998 and 1999. Thus, it is still important that the deadline of 1 December in the year of the count is followed for sending in data which are to be included in the next annual

*Table 1a.* Status of mid-winter seaduck count data in Western Palearctic countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean 1992-1998. Data from the Seaduck Database (site-based records) are marked with an asterisk (\*); data from other sources are marked +; parentheses indicate incomplete coverage of sites or species; a hyphen (-) indicates that no data are available; zero (0) indicates that no counts were performed.

	National Coordinators	Number of sites	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Belgium	+		+	+	+	+	+	-	-
Denmark west	+	7	*	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)
France	+	36	*	*	*	*	*	*	-
Germany	+	4	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Great Britain	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ireland	+	0	(+)	(+)	+	+	+	-	-
Morocco	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
The Netherlands	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
Norway	+	0	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Portugal	+	13	*	*	*	*	*	*	-
Rio de Oro	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Russia north	-	-	(+)	(+)	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-	-

*Table 1b.* Status of mid-winter seaduck count data in Western Palearctic countries bordering the Baltic Sea 1992-1998. Data from the Seaduck Database (site-based records) are marked with an asterisk (\*); data from other sources are marked +; parentheses indicate incomplete coverage of sites or species; a hyphen (-) indicates that no data are available; zero (0) indicates that no counts were performed.

	National coordinator	Number of sites	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Denmark east	+	38	*	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)
Estonia	+	33	*	*	+	*	+	-	-
Finland	+	0	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Germany (Kiel)	+	11	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Germany (Rostock)	+	17	*	*	*	*	*	-	-
Kaliningrad	-	5	*	*	-	-	-	-	-
Latvia	+	17	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Lithuania	+	3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Poland	+	6	*	*	(*)	(*)	(*)	-	-
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	+	0	-	+	+	+	+	+	-

report or the newsletter which will be printed in years with no IWC report. If no counts have been conducted, the database would appreciate a short note saying: "No counts this year".

*Table 1c.* Status of mid-winter seaduck count data in Western Palearctic countries bordering the Black Sea 1992-1998. Data from the Seaduck Database (site-based records) are marked with an asterisk (\*); data from other sources are marked +; parentheses indicate incomplete coverage of sites or species; a hyphen (-) indicates that no data are available; zero (0) indicates that no counts were performed.

	National Coordinator	Number of sites	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Bulgaria	+	-	(+)	(+)	+	+	+	-	-
Georgia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rumania	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Russia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Turkey	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Ukraine	+	-	(+)	(+)	+	+	(+)	-	-

*Table 1d.* Status of mid-winter seaduck count data in Western Palearctic countries bordering the Mediterranean 1992-1998. Data from the Seaduck Database (site-based records) are marked with an asterisk (\*); data from other sources are marked +; parentheses indicate incomplete coverage of sites or species; a hyphen (-) indicates that no data are available; zero (0) indicates that no counts were performed.

	National Coordinators	Number of sites	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Albania	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
Algeria	+	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-	-
Croatia	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Cyprus	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-	-	-
France	+	6	*	*	*	*	*	*	-
Greece	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	+	+	-	-
Israel			-	-	-	(+)	-	-	-
Italy	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
Jordan									
Morocco	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Slovenia	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	+	+	-	-
Spain	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-	-
Tunisia	+	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-	-
Turkey	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-

From a number of countries we have received data from counts following the 'reduced site system'. These data will be stored in the database, but due to the extensive movements of seaducks in offshore areas in winter, it is clear that the reduced site data are not representative of the whole situation.

Seaduck data included in count data submitted to Wetlands International will eventually reach the Seaduck Database, however, this may take a long time. The database regularly receives national midwinter count reports. Although often in languages unreadable to us we are in most cases able to extract summarised data, thus the database is always eager to receive such local reports.

### Task Forces

To obtain reliable figures for the seaduck numbers in a country complete surveys must be carried out. Because such surveys are expensive, Wetlands International aims to achieve complete surveys only in a few specific years. Cur-

*Table 1e.* Status of mid-winter seaduck count data in Western Palearctic non-coastal countries of Central Europe 1992-1998. Data from the Seaduck Database (site-based records) are marked with an asterisk (\*); data from other sources are marked +; parentheses indicate incomplete coverage of sites or species; a hyphen (-) indicates that no data are available; zero (0) indicates that no counts were performed.

	National Coordinators	Number of sites	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Austria	0	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
Belarus	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bosnia- Herzegov.	-	-	(+)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czechoslovakia	0	-	(+)						
Czech Republic	0	-		(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Hungary	0	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Macedonia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moldova	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	0	-		(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-
Switzerland	0	-	+	(+)	+	+	+	-	-
Yugoslavia	-	-	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-	-

rently Wetlands International is planning one (or more) meeting(s) for national coordinators and subsequently comprehensive waterbird surveys in the Western Palearctic in the beginning of the new millennium.

The Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group recommends aerial surveys of coastal waters combined with ground counts of near-coast areas where birds are concentrated. Such surveys will not only obtain good results for seaducks but also for other waterbirds, e.g. cormorant, mute swan, mallard, tufted duck, coot etc. However, it is important to remember that the results of aerial surveys for waterbirds depend on experienced observers, thus initial surveys to gain experience are highly recommended before the task force, especially if you are attempting aerial surveys for the first time.

### **Western Palearctic and South-West Asia Waterfowl Census 1995 and 1996**

Simon Delany, who replaced Paul Rose, has been busy finalising the third edition of the Population Estimates and preparing for the First Board Meeting of Wetlands International (November 1998). In addition, Wetlands International has moved to new quarters within Wageningen. Hence, the annual report of waterfowl counts carried out in January 1995 and 1996 was post-

poned until autumn 1999 following the concept of the annual report of 1994 (Rose 1995).

Given the timetable for reporting, it is imperative that data from the counts in January which are to be included in the IWC report from Wetlands International or in newsletters, are submitted to the Seaduck Database before 1 December.

### **Database**

Wetlands International HQ is currently working on changing their database system to Access. In connection with that the entire database structure will be revised. The Seaduck Database wishes to change to Access simultaneously and follow any changes in structure developed by the HQ.

### **Funding**

The Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group is grateful to the Department of Coastal Zone Ecology, National Environmental Research Institute (Denmark) for their support to the Seaduck Database in 1998.

**Stefan Pihl**  
*Database coordinator*

### *Status reports*

## **Increasing conflict between gill-net fishery and Steller's eiders wintering along the Lithuanian coast**

The Lithuanian coast around the city of Palanga is the second most important wintering site for Steller's eider in the Baltic Sea. Since the first record of this globally threatened waterbird species in 1969 (Petraitis 1991), Steller's eiders have been observed annually and their numbers have gradually increased from 11 individuals in 1969 to some 2,000 birds in the 1990s. Steller's eiders exploit narrow in-shore areas restricted to one specific 15 km stretch of coast-line. They are highly gregarious by nature and usually occur in large dense flocks.

Before the 1990s, Steller's eiders wintering along the Lithuanian coast were been relatively undisturbed and safe. Until 1992, the eastern Baltic shoreline was controlled by Soviet military forces and human activities were restricted there. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the eastern Baltic countries switched to a market economy and as a consequence of that, exploitation of the marine environment increased markedly. Together with other new activities at the coast, an in-shore gill-net fishery started and has been increasing rapidly ever since. In 1992, the Lithuanian Ministry of Environmental Protection started to permit private fishing enterprises and fishing stock companies to fish in certain designated in-shore fishing sectors. Eight of these fishing sectors overlap with the wintering area of Steller's eider. This overlap is very rich in biological resources, and the fishing effort in this area is very intense. In winter 1997, 41 fishing companies were allowed to set up to 100 km of gill-nets altogether in that region. The gill-net fishery has shown an increasing trend from the moment it started (Dagys 1997).

### **Recoveries of dead Steller's eiders**

Beached bird surveys have been performed in Lithuania since 1991. Until 1998, dead Steller's eiders were very rarely reported. Of 1,048 beached birds found during 1991-1997, only 12 were Steller's eiders; this corresponds to 1.1% of all birds found. However, 26 dead individuals of this species were found during January - April 1998 and that made up 24.5% of all beached birds (106) found during that period. The majority (25 individuals) of Steller's eiders recovered in 1998 were considered to be victims of gill-net fishery, while the cause of death of the 12 previously (1991-1997) recorded Steller's eiders was listed as oil pollution and none of these were suspected of having drowned in gill-nets.

It can be assumed that the real number of Steller's eiders drowning in gill-nets is higher than that detected. Bodies of beached birds are often destroyed or removed very rapidly by crows, gulls, foxes and wandering dogs, and not all dead birds are washed ashore. This is especially true following southerly winds, when fishing activities are particularly high. Such a case was observed by F. Falkenberg and R. Zydalis when 7 Steller's eiders had become entangled in a drifting gill-net. When the fisherman approached the net with the entangled birds, 2 Steller's eiders were dead and 5 birds were still alive. The fisherman carefully released the live birds and threw away the dead ones. The dead Steller's eiders were carried away from the shore by the southerly wind and currents.

### **X-ray body analysis**

Twelve Steller's eider individuals which had drowned in a single gill-net were x-rayed later, for evidence of shot-gun lead pellets. Waterfowl are not hunted at the Lithuanian seashore, but they might be hunted on migration or on their breeding grounds in northwest Russia and Siberia. Since the breeding grounds of the Steller's eiders wintering in the Baltic Sea are unknown, we attempted to search for hunting evidence which could give us an idea about threats in non-wintering areas. None of 12 x-rayed Steller's eiders were carrying lead pellets.

### **Conservation**

The conflict between Steller's eiders wintering at the Lithuanian coast and gill-net fishery was predicted before it started (Svazas 1997, Zydalis 1997, Dagys 1997). However, at present the Steller's eider has not been officially protected in Lithuania, it has merely been removed from the list of legal quarry. At present there is no protection for this species in its wintering habitat.

The first step which should be taken is to give Steller's eider official national protection. The species has international protection under the Ramsar, Bern and Bonn Conventions. Even though these Conventions are adopted in Lithuania, they do not seem to be really working in practice. Thus, national protection would make real conservation measures possible. The next thing which should be done is to carry out a detailed environmental impact assessment of the in-shore fishery on the wintering population of Steller's eider. The impact of different types of fishing gear at different locations and during different periods should be determined. Once legal species protection status has been

granted and the in-shore fishery impact assessment has been made, fishery management could ensure the safety of the Steller's eider population.

All the actions mentioned above are urgent and necessary. Constant losses of adult Steller's eider individuals to gill-net fishery might affect the viability of the population. Moreover, the highly gregarious nature of this species and the small regional population size, greatly increase the risk that it might be seriously affected by any stochastic event. The latter assumption should increase conservation concerns about wintering populations.

Urgent actions for fishery management, would make this task easier to accomplish. As in-shore fishery started only a few years ago, it has not begun to play a very important socio-economical role until now. However, increasing fishing activity will lead to the formation of fishery infrastructure and increase in investment. This means that in the future the conflict between conservation and economics may potentially become larger than it is now.

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*Status report***The decline of common and velvet scoters as autumn migrants in the English Channel**

The common scoter has declined dramatically as an autumn migrant past Cap Gris Nez, Pas de Calais, northwest France. Thirty years ago it was the characteristic species of almost any autumn sea watch at Cap Gris Nez and on my first visit there in September 1962 we witnessed a substantial passage totalling at least 5,000 streaming southwest down the English Channel on the afternoon that we arrived. Gibbs (1968) produced a valuable summary of the data down to 1967 on the basis of which he estimated an autumn passage of 190,000 common scoters and 10,000 velvet scoters past Cap Gris Nez. Today passage is but a shadow of those numbers, the decline having been recognised first by Redman (1977 a,b). This note reviews the available data and attempts to quantify the decline. For this purpose data from Cap Gris Nez Bird Observatory Reports for the 1960s and 1970s have been compared with those in the *Rapports Ornithologiques littoral Flandres - Boulonnais* for 1994 and 1995. Data included in this note are from these sources unless otherwise attributed.

The evidence can be assessed by comparing the total unadjusted counts for each season, the larger individual movements recorded and, more accurately, by comparing Gibbs's estimates for the total movement in an autumn with later similar estimates. Over this period the time spent sea-watching increased sharply. Thus in the autumns of 1965 and 1966 totals of 99 and 188 hours, respectively, were spent making timed counts, whereas the comparable

*Table 1.* Total number of common scoters counted at Cap Gris Nez in autumn.

	Year	Period	Number counted	Average per hour
<b>1960s</b>	1965	Aug-Nov	21,198	213
	1966	July-Dec	29,711	158
	1967	Aug-Nov	25,520	172
<b>1970s</b>	1974	Sept-Oct	19,280	134
	1976	Sept-Nov	24,618	n/a
	1977	July-Dec	34,826	119
	1978	July-Dec	38,337	n/a
	1979	July-Dec	27,093	n/a
<b>1990s</b>	1994	July-Dec	13,820	n/a
	1995	July-Dec	9,225	n/a

**Table 2.** Peak counts of common scoters passing Cap Gris Nez or Dunkerque each autumn.

	Date	Number	Hours
1960s	19 Sept 1965	4,050	1025
	14 Aug 1966	4,900	4
	18 Oct 1967	5,140	63
	27 Sept 1968	4,440	375
	6 Oct 1969	8,900	6
1970s	26 Sept 1976	4,050	n/a
	17 Sept 1977	5,490	n/a
	1 Oct 1978	8,023	10
	23 Sept 1979	2,342	n/a
<b>1990s</b>	17 Sept 1994	2,780*	4
	21 Sept 1995	658	2

figures for July to December 1994 and 1995 were 284 and 344 hours, respectively. Unadjusted seasonal counts and the largest annual movements are given in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Substantial movements were still being recorded in the mid-1970s but by the time of the next available observations in the 1990s the severe scale of the reduction is apparent.

Redman (1997a) estimated the total passing in September and October 1974 and 1976 on a basis consistent with Gibbs. The Cap Gris Nez Observatory report for 1977 gives similar estimates for that year. These estimates are shown in Table 3 together with those from Gibbs and figures derived from the 1994 and 1995 reports. The figures for 1994 and 1995 have been calculated by taking the average rate per hour described in the Rapport Ornithologique for each ten-day period and assuming that this rate applied for ten hours per day for the whole of that period. In 1994 there were no observations in the last ten days of September and the mean hourly rate of the preceding and subsequent ten day periods has therefore been assumed for this interval. The assumptions made are broadly as used by Gibbs, except that he made a further adjustment to allow for higher rates of passage than those actually observed. It is not possible to make a comparable adjustment from the information given in the 1994 and 1995 Rappports. Instead, for comparability, Gibbs's figures can be recalculated excluding this adjustment, but the effect is to reduce his estimate for the autumn of 1966 by only 9,000 to 181,000.

It is obvious that the estimates included in Table 3 are very approximate and not wholly consistent. But it is equally obvious that many fewer common

Table 3. Estimates of numbers of common scoters passing Cap Gris Nez in autumn.

Year	Estimate	Period	Authority
1966	190000	July to Dec.	Gibbs (1968)
	91-1	Sept and Oct	Redman (1977a)
1967	115,900	Sept and Oct	Redman (1977a)
1974	91500	Sept and Oct	Redman (1977a)
1976	96000	Aug to Nov	CGN report, 1977
	73810	Sept and Oct	Redman (1977a)
1977	157,000-161,000	Aug to Nov	CGN report, 1977
1994	56000	July to Dec	See text
1995	57	July to Dec	See text

scoters were seen in 1994 and 1995 than in the 1960s and 1970s, notwithstanding the greater number of hours spent sea-watching in recent years. Indeed, the total counted in the whole of the second six months of 1995 is less than the numbers counted in a single month in each of the five years in the 1960s and 1970s included in Table 1 and barely more than the two highest day counts in those years. It should be noted, however, that although there was evidence of decline in the mid-70s, there was a sharp recovery in 1977 (Table 3) albeit to lower levels than in the 1960s, so it may be unwise to base too detailed a conclusion on just two years in the 1990s. Nevertheless, it seems safe to conclude that there has been a massive decline. Accepting the data in Table 3, the reduction between the mid-sixties and the mid-nineties could have been as much as 70%, equivalent to an average of about 3.5% per annum.

The causes of the decline have not been identified. These could be a reduction in the flyway population, a change in migration route or a change in the wintering area resulting in fewer birds moving south past Cap Gris Nez. There is apparently rather little up-to-date information about population trends in the Western Palearctic. Perrins & Snow (in press) refer to a stable breeding population in Russia and Norway and probably also in Finland, with no known trend in Sweden. A decline in Ireland, while sharp, is insufficient in absolute numbers to have a bearing on the flyway population (Gittings & Delany 1996) and in any case it seems unlikely that Irish birds would pass through the English Channel.

The immediate origin of the birds passing Cap Gris Nez is presumed to be the moulting grounds on the North Sea coast of Denmark (Salomonsen, 1968) where Joensen (1964) - quoted by Salomonsen - refers to 150,000 individuals

*Table 4. Peak counts of velvet scoter passing Cap Gris Nez each autumn.*

	Date	Number	Hours
1960s	3 Nov 1965	275	3.5
	24 Oct 1966	330	1
	18 Oct 1967	78	6.3
	14 Nov 1968	89	3
	8 Nov 1969	516	4
1970s	11-14 Nov 1976	541	n/a
	19 Nov 1977	335	n/a
	26 Nov 1978	187	n/a
	10-12 Nov 1979	389	n/a
1990s	18 Nov 1994	76	4
	14 Oct 1995	38	5

off the southwest Jutland island of Rømø. I am unaware of any current estimates of this moulting population. Perrins & Snow (in press) refer to a current winter population in the Baltic of 1,200,000, but it is not clear whether this represents a change from earlier years.

No data were published in the Observatory reports or the *Rapports Ornithologiques* on sex ratios, but in 1961, in the five week period 16 August to 18 September, Campbell & Harper noted that the proportion of adult males appeared to drop from about 50 to 25%.

The number of velvet scoters passing Cap Gris Nez has always been a tiny fraction of those of common scoter, but this species too appears to be much less numerous than in the past. Table 4 gives the peak count each year for which data are available and shows a similar marked reduction in the 1990s compared with the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the estimated total of ca 300 for the whole autumn in 1994 is not only insignificant compared with Gibbs's (1968) estimate of 10,000 for the autumn of 1966 but is less than several of the peak day counts in earlier years.

Without further research, no firm conclusion can be drawn on the reasons for the decline in either species, but the hope must be that it is the result of more scoters wintering off the Danish coasts rather than a decline in the populations.

## Acknowledgements

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### **P.J. Oliver**

*The Briar Patch, Limpsfield Chart, Oxted, Surrey, RH8 0TL, UK*

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*Status report*

**Monitoring seaducks in Belgian offshore waters**

**Introduction**

*History of waterfowl counts in Flanders*

Large-scale waterfowl censuses in Flanders were launched by H. van der Vloet in 1967. Initially, only one count was planned in mid-January, as part of the International Wildfowl Census (now International Waterbird Census), coordinated by IWRB (now Wetlands International). The organisation of the censuses was taken over by G. Burggraeve in the following years (1968-80). From 1970 and onwards, the effort of the annual monitoring programme was doubled with the introduction of a count in November. In 1976, another count was added to the scheme (March) and from 1977 it was decided to do the counts on a monthly basis during November-March. In 1981, the organisation of the counts was taken over by a working group called 'Anas', founded by J. Royaerd and D. Draulans from the University of Gent and the University of Leuven, respectively. The University of Gent coordinated the counts for 6 years, until this responsibility was taken over by the newly founded Institute of Nature Conservation, under the auspices of E. Kuijken.

Ducks at sea were first counted from elevated platforms on the coast, but it was soon realised that a heavy underestimation of the number of ducks at sea was likely. The pioneers van der Vloet and Burggraeve immediately set out to solve the problem, and initiated the first aerial counts. Almost every month during 1967-1972, they covered a large part of the northern French and western Belgian littoral zones by aircraft. From 1973 onwards, they covered the entire Flemish coast. Unfortunately, the programme was stopped in 1977. After an interruption of 9 years, the Institute of Nature Conservation resumed the aerial counts. L. Maertens volunteered for the job, and he has been doing the monthly counts during November-April since then. Between 1986 and 1989, he concentrated on the western coast, including the French part, but from 1990 he has focused primarily on the Belgian Continental Shelf.

In the meantime, K. Devos (Institute of Nature Conservation, 1989-now) extended the counts at the west coast (De Panne-Nieuwpoort). His results appeared to be quite valuable, for his intermediate counts filled up some important gaps in the aerial surveys.

*Current activity*

Both aerial and land-based counts are still being conducted on a monthly basis. The frequency is dependent on weather conditions (visibility) and the occurrence of excessive numbers of birds (extra counts are added, when large numbers are seen).

The aerial counts start in November, and the last count usually takes place in March or April. Two observers man a small aircraft that flies at an altitude of 500 feet. Parallel transects, perpendicular to the coastline, are travelled between the French-Belgian border and Nieuwpoort. East of Nieuwpoort, the transects follow the coast line. The effort has changed a little over time, counts were initially concentrated on the west coast, now we aim at covering the entire coastline. The duration of a flight is ca 2.5 hours. No flights are made unless there is a visibility of more than 5 kilometres.

K. Devos (IN) performs the land-based counts between De Panne and Nieuwpoort. Observations are carried out from several points on dunes or piers, using a telescope. A minimum visibility of 10 kilometres is required.

In addition, the Institute of Nature Conservation initiated ship-based counts in October 1992. Most of the transects travelled lie near or on the Flemish Banks, at some distance from the coast. The ship-based counts are not the optimal way to assess seaduck numbers, as scoters and eiders normally stay close to the west coast. However, they give us a reasonably good idea about numbers in more remote areas. A standard strip-transect method is used to count seabirds but scoter densities cannot be used to calculate total numbers.

*Table 1.* Number of counts per year.

Year	Aerial counts	Land-based counts	Km travelled by ship on BCP
86	2	-	-
87	6	-	-
88	6	10	-
89	4	11	-
90	2	19	-
91	4	9	-
92	3	8	862,97
93	2	3	2607,53
94	6	4	1671,73
95	4	1	1652,51

Scoters are, however, commonly recorded as whole groups. The observers travel with research vessels and ferries. So far, no dedicated seaduck surveys have been carried out by ship. The Belgian database is integrated in the European Seabirds at Sea database (ESAS) in Aberdeen.

## Results

In the past 8 winters, a number of 'key' species have been monitored. Results of the counts by aircraft are summarised in Table 2. The most numerous duck is the common scoter with more than 8,000 birds in the winters of 1989, 1991 and 1994. Other species were less numerous, and numbers of wintering ducks were rather insignificant at the population level. Quite remarkable is the peak of eiders in 1991, which probably was caused by food shortage in the Wadden Sea at that time.

## Anticipated future activities

The current surveys have demonstrated the need for a more intensive approach, in order to get an accurate figure of the number of seaducks present in the in-shore waters. Common scoters are most numerous in our waters, and they fly easily between nearby well-known areas (for instance Voordelta, Baie de la Seine). Dedicated ship-based surveys can be helpful in this, and we hope to be able to carry out a survey in winter 1996/97.

Table 2. Maximum number of all counts per winter in Belgian aerial surveys.

	Scaup	Eider	Long-tailed duck	Common scoter	Velvet scoter	Golden-eye	Mergus Sp.
1986/87	25	247	0	6287	30	2	3
1987/88	57	64	2	5003	8	5	2
1988/89	188	1296	9	11908	101	1	0
1990/91	402	4953	16	10010	396	0	24
1991/92	70	775	2	7128	77	0	2
1992/93	3	528	0	4689	0	0	0
1993/94	7	58	0	15528	70	0	0
1994/95	16	62	5	1417	0	1	0

**Costs**

Total costs, including man hours and material, amount to approximately BEF 150,000 per year.

**Henk Offringa & Patrick Meire**

*Status report*

**Results of waterfowl counts along the Latvian sea coast, January 1997**

**Introduction**

Mid-winter waterfowl counts in Latvia have been conducted since 1967, yet comparable data for the sea coast sites (total length 500 km) are scarce. Various - political and financial - reasons have often prevented complete observations. Previous coastal counts covering the entire coastline took place in 1968 (Viksne 1972) and in 1993 (Stipniece 1994), in both cases by aircraft.

Now nearly all coastal sites are on the Wetlands International IWC reduced site list and are to be visited every year. In January 1997, it was possible to cover the entire ice-free coastline by aircraft thanks to the support given by the Latvian Fund for Environment Protection (Latvijas Vides Aizsardzibas Fonds).

The aim of this presentation is to report the results of this count and to compare it with the previous complete counts. The success of the count was ensured by the dedicated work of Edmunds Racinskis, Maris Maskalans and pilot Michail Morozov as well as all the IWC network correspondents to whom I am deeply thankful.

**Weather conditions**

Based on the data of the Latvian State Hydrometeorological Department, the winter of 1996/97 was of moderate severity in comparison with the winters of the previous counts (Fig. 1). The sum of negative average daily temperatures from the beginning of November until the count day in mid-January was -212 in 1997, -75 in 1993 and -398 in 1968. In 1997, 61 inland IWC sites (40%) were reported as being without birds and completely ice-covered. Also the majority of the inland observation points of the Latvian State Hydrometeorological Department were reported as being completely covered with ice. The Baltic coast and the western coast of the Riga Gulf were free of ice on the count day. There were sectors of thin solid ice along the east coast of the Riga Gulf northwards from the Gauja mouth followed by a 1-3 km wide belt of open and closed new ice.

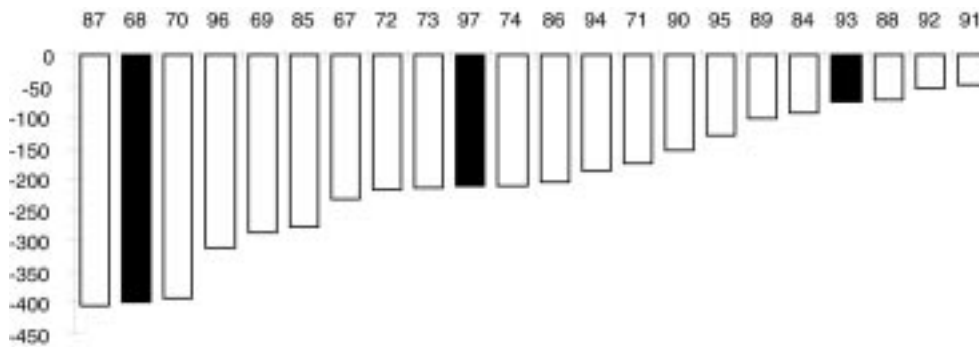


Figure 1. Sum of negative average daily temperatures in Latvia in winter till the count day. Filled histograms indicate census years.

In 1993, the majority of both the inland sites and the sea coast were ice-free or only partially covered with ice. Only 6% of the IWC sites visited were reported as being completely ice covered.

On the count day in 1968 both sides of the Riga Gulf had belts of solid ice up to 3 km wide followed by open ice. Also the Irbe Strait was covered with open ice (Viksne 1972).

## Methods and material

The main dates of the count were 11 and 12 January. On these days inland sites as well as ports, estuaries and some coastal routes were covered by land-based counts. The aerial counts took place on 22 January (Riga Gulf east), 26 January (Riga Gulf west, Ventspils-Kolka, Liepaja-Ventspils) and 27 January (Liepaja-Lithuanian border). The counts were performed by two observers in a single-engine Wilga 35N aircraft. To make the results more comparable, the aircraft type and the charter company chosen were the same as in 1993. The low capacity of the fuel tanks of the aircraft and the variable weather conditions caused the delay between the land-based and aerial counts and between the counts on both sides of the Riga Gulf. The flight height was ca 60 m. The flight was performed at a distance of 200-300 m from and parallel to the coast. The weather conditions were good on 22 and 26 January except for a little fog near Cape Kolka and excellent on 27 January.

Although there was a considerable delay between land-based and aerial counts, the land-based counts in the ports and estuaries were taken into account, as only the port of Liepaja was carefully inspected from the plane. Also species known to be easily missed from the plane (divers, a single Steller's

eider female) were included in the totals from the land-based count on 11 and 12 January.

The data were grouped in sections of small stretches of 10-20 km, so that they could be regrouped later for comparisons with any of the previous counts. The data from 1997, 1993 (Stipniece 1994) and 1968 (Viksne 1972) were grouped in 3 major stretches: 1) Nida-Kolka, 2) Riga Gulf west and 3) Riga Gulf east (Fig. 2).

No gulls were counted in order to devote all attention to other seabirds.

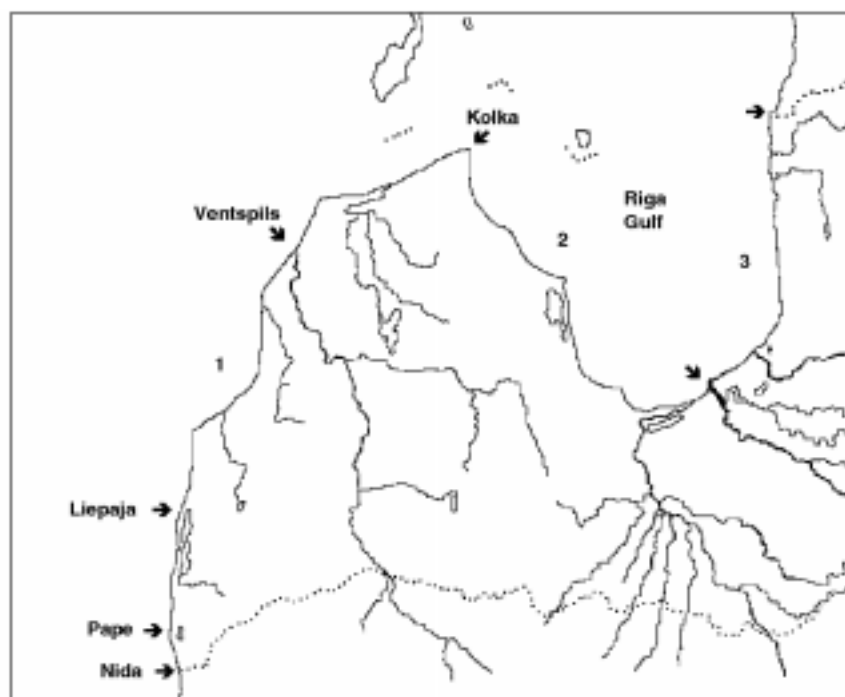


Figure 2. Coastal division used for data grouping.

## Results

### *Total numbers*

Table 1 presents the total number of waterbirds registered at the sea coast in 1997 in comparison with the corresponding numbers of these species at the inland sites.

In total, 18 waterbird species were observed along the coast ( Riga Gulf east: 8 species, Riga Gulf west: 10 species, Baltic coast and Irbe Strait: 13 species). Divers, grebes, cormorant, scaup, goosander and red-breasted merganser, goldeneye, long-tailed duck and scoters were more abundant at sea, in ports and in river mouths or were only encountered there. Eleven of the species are also present in inland water areas, while swans and mallard are mainly pres-

*Table 1. Waterfowl numbers in Latvia, January 1997.*

Species	Sea Coast	Inland	Total
Red-throated Diver	18	0	18
Divers	46	0	46
Grebes	3	0	3
Cormorant	2	0	2
Grey Heron	1	4	5
Mute Swan	80	258	338
Whooper Swan	1	12	13
Mallard	123	5354	5477
Pochard	2	2	4
Tufted Duck	10	5	15
Scaup	67	0	67
Smew	19	12	31
Goosander	11169	651	11820
Red-breasted Merganser	66	0	66
Sawbills	43	0	43
Goldeneye	1152	206	1358
Long-tailed Duck	5445	13	5458
Common Scoter	9	0	9
Velvet Scoter	130	19	149
Scoters	18	0	18
Steller's Eider	1	0	1
Unidentified ducks	7020	260	7280
<b>Total</b>	<b>25425</b>	<b>6796</b>	<b>32221</b>

ent at inland water sites. The 13 long-tailed ducks and 19 velvet scoters reported from inland sites come from a river stretch close to an estuary, which conventionally is considered inland.

In 1997, as in 1968 and 1993, the main species in the coastal zone, constituting up to 98% of all birds counted, were long-tailed duck, goldeneye and goosander.

*Long-tailed duck*

Long-tailed duck constituted 30% of the birds counted at the coast in 1997, 55% in 1993, and 60% in 1968. The total number in 1997 (5,445) is slightly lower than in 1993 (Table 2). On the Nida-Kolka stretch, long-tailed duck was twice as numerous as in the mild January of 1993, but in the Riga Gulf considerably fewer were present. For Riga Gulf West, we compare a mainly land-based count in 1993 with a mainly aerial count in 1997. However, for the Nida-Kolka coast stretch we compared an aerial count with an aerial count and the difference is therefore representative. Comparisons with 1968 should be viewed with caution as a different aircraft was used at higher altitude (Viksne 1972).

*Goldeneye*

Goldeneye constituted 6% of the birds counted in 1997, 25% in 1993, and 1% in 1968. Goldeneyes are easily detectable from plane, they usually occur close to the coast and their numbers were about 3 times lower than in the mild winter of 1993. Numbers in the Riga Gulf had decreased most markedly in comparison with 1993. At the Baltic coast and the Irbe Strait, goldeneye were present in small groups and only the Liepaja and Ventspils harbours sheltered more than 50 birds. Yet the total for this stretch was many times larger than in 1993 when the majority of birds were in the Riga Gulf. The inland totals for both winters were comparatively low, 206 in 1997 and 294 in 1993.

*Goosander*

Goosander constituted 62% of the birds counted in 1997, 6% in 1993 and 36% in 1968. The difference between 1993 and 1997 was most marked amongst goosander which constituted the bulk of the birds counted. Of these, 10,044 were present in the Nida-Liepaja coastal stretch. Within that region the 16-km stretch of Pape-Jurmalciems sheltered more than 9,200 goosanders. The site also sheltered 1,624 long-tailed ducks and about 6,000 unidentified ducks. The total bird density at the site was 1,095 birds/km coastline.

Table 2. Results of mid-winter waterfowl aerial counts along the whole Latvian coast performed in 1997, 1993 (Stipniece 1994) and 1968 (Viksne 1972).

Coast region	1997			1996			1968			Total	Total	Total
	0,04	2 <sup>b</sup>	3 <sup>c</sup>	1	2	3	1	2	3	1997	1993	1968
Divers	60	4	0	74	4	2	0	0	0	64	80	0
Cormorant	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Grebes	3	0	0	1	3	4	0	0	0	3	8	0
Grey Heron	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Mute Swan	1	79	0	5	528	15	0	0	0	80	548	0
Whooper Swan	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	1	0	1	6	1
Mallard	95	6	22	232	288	282	0	0	0	123	802	0
Pochard	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0
Tufted Duck	0	0	10	0	2	0	7	0	0	10	2	7
Scaup	67	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	67	0	0
Eider	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Steller's Eider	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Long-tailed Duck	4174	1254	17	1519	4192	1512	1014	212	14	5445	7223	1240
Common Scoter	7	1	1	91	2	2	0	0	0	9	95	0
Velvet Scoter	9	116	5	6	58	1	0	0	0	130	65	0
Scoters	1	15	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	0
Goldeneye	359	598	195	6	2078	1127	5	1	9	1152	3211	15
Smew	2	0	17	0	0	11	0	0	0	19	11	0
Red-breasted Merganser	54	12	0	6	75	11	0	0	0	66	92	0
Goosander	10506	503	160	55	276	484	233	507	59	11169	815	799
Sawbills	20	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	43	0	0
Unidentified ducks	6946	74	0	217	157	195	0	0	0	7020	569	0
Coot	0	0	0	15	8	15	0	0	0	0	38	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22309</b>	<b>2686</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>2227</b>	<b>7681</b>	<b>3661</b>	<b>1259</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>25425</b>	<b>13569</b>	<b>2062</b>

<sup>a</sup>1: Nida-Kolka; <sup>b</sup>2: Riga Gulf west; <sup>c</sup>3: Riga Gulf east

High concentrations of Goosander were detected in the Pape-Liepaja stretch also in previous years (Table 3). In 1997, goosander numbers counted in inland waterbodies were two times lower than in 1993 and 3 times higher than in 1968.

*Red-breasted merganser*

Red-breasted Mergansers were recorded in small groups of up to 8 birds in the coastal zone of the Riga Gulf and the Irbe Strait. The species is known to

Table 3. Bird numbers at Nida-Liepaja.

Year	Count type	Coverage km / %	Goosander	% NW European population	Other waterfowl except gulls
1968	Aerial	58 / 100	111		181
1993	Aerial	58 / 100	22		483
1995	Land based	53 / 91	6305	3.1	1883
1996	Land based	36 / 61	12115	6.0	2258
1997	Aerial	58 / 100	10044	5.0	8744

have been present among the unidentified ducks in the Nida-Liepaja stretch, yet the skill and experience of the observers were insufficient to determine the species composition of the large mixed flocks properly. Hence, the real number in 1997 in Latvian waters are probably much larger. In 1993, the majority of the species could be found along the west coast of the Riga Gulf while in 1997 the majority could be found along the Baltic coast.

#### *Scoters*

Scoters are known to be mostly present in offshore areas (Durinck et al. 1994) and therefore numbers obtained by coastal aerial count are not representative. In 1997 all the scoters, predominantly velvet scoter, were registered in the northwestern part of the Riga Gulf near Cape Kolka. In 1993, scoters were also mainly present in that area, i.e. in the eastern part of the Irbe Strait.

#### *Swans*

In 1997, 79 mute swans were present in the western part of the Riga Gulf; one mute swan and one whooper swan were present in the Ventspils harbour. In 1993 after several sequential mild winters, the swan populations had increased and the 548 mute swans counted constituted 4% of the birds counted at the sea coast. Numbers of swans registered in 1968 were low (1 whooper swan in the Riga Gulf, and 6 swans inland (Viksne 1972)).

#### *Mallard*

Only in the Daugava mouth (20) and Ventspils harbour (92) were more than 5 birds registered. The decrease in comparison with 1993 is considerable. No mallards were observed in the coastal zone in 1968.

*Steller's Eider*

On 12 January one bird in female-like plumage was sighted at the Daugava mouth. This report has not been accepted by the Latvian Ornithofaunistic Commission yet.

*Divers*

Small groups of divers were seen along the Baltic coast, but only two birds were seen in the Riga Gulf.

*Distribution patterns*

The birds were not equally abundant at different parts of the coast. In 1997, 87% of the total birds counted in the coastal zone resided outside the Riga Gulf. The west coast of the Riga Gulf sheltered 11% of the total. The east coast of the Riga Gulf held fewest birds, i.e. 2%, as part of it was ice-covered. In the severe winter of 1968 more birds were also present outside the Gulf, 61%, fewer at the western coast of the Riga Gulf, 35%, and only 4% near the east coast of the Riga Gulf. In 1993, it was quite the opposite; only 16% of the coastal waterbirds were at the Baltic coast, while the west and east coasts of the Riga Gulf sheltered 57 and 27% of the coastal total, respectively (see Table 2).

Although the west coast of the Riga Gulf was ice-free on the days of the count, there had been cold spells before the count (new ice on January 7 according to data from the Latvian State Hydrometeorological Department), and the total number of the birds present was 3 times less than in the mild winter of 1993.

## **Discussion**

The species diversity and bird totals registered in the coastal zone were much lower in 1968 than in 1997. Three reasons may account for this. First, some species had no wintering populations in the Eastern Baltic in 1968 (cormorant - first seen in winter in Latvia in 1984 (Viksne 1984), in Lithuania in the early 1990s (Svazas 1995); mute swan - in 1968 the wintering population was just beginning to establish, the total number of birds was low (Jogi 1965, 1969) and birds were confined mainly to inland waterbodies (Petraitis 1975, 1976). Mute swan was first registered wintering on the west coast of the Riga Gulf in 1973 (Jogi et al. 1976). For the common species (goldeneye and goosander) the mid-winter numbers were lower at that time, also in the neighbouring countries (Kuresoo 1992, Petraitis 1976, Svazas 1995, Nilsson 1993). Secondly, the aerial count in 1968 was performed using a different plane type, flying at a slightly higher altitude and the counters had never been specially trained for aerial

counts. The port areas were covered less carefully (J. Viksne, pers. comm.), which could have influenced totals for species that prefer these habitats. And last, the winter of 1967/68 was considerably colder than the winter of 1996/97 with more extensive ice cover and less habitat available for birds in the coastal zone. Yet the distribution patterns in the cold winters of 1968 and 1997 were similar - most birds were seen on the open sea coast, fewer in the western part of the Riga Gulf and very few in the eastern part of the Riga Gulf.

If compared with the totals of the mild winter of 1993, numbers in the coastal zone and the national totals in 1997 were lower for goldeneye, mallard, swans and long-tailed duck, but considerably higher for goosander. Lower numbers of the first three species could be due to both movements to more suitable habitats as well as impact of the cold weather on survival. The two previous winters were severe or normal, and mallard and mute swan numbers had decreased in inland sites, too. Negative impact of hard winters on the population size in following years has been reported by Leif Nilsson for mute swan, coot, goldeneye, goosander. Long-tailed duck was less affected, evidently, due to its better diving ability (Nilsson, 1984). Long-tailed ducks are known to occur in large numbers in their most preferred habitats in the offshore part of the Riga Gulf (Stipniece 1992, Durinck et al. 1994, Vaitkus 1994). So, the differences in their numbers could depend on whether they approach the beach or move away. Also A. Jogi has found that long-tailed ducks prefer offshore waters, and in the 1960s they were found close to the Estonian coast in mild winters only. He also describes mass movements of long-tailed duck in the severe winter of 1962/63 (Jogi 1965). The large difference in goosander numbers is due to movements caused by cold weather. Goosanders' preference towards inland sites and their high mobility in response to changes in weather conditions and resulting higher numbers in the coastal zone during cold winters has been stressed by several authors (Petraitis 1976, Svazas 1995, Opermanis & Aunins 1996, Laursen et al. 1997). In the mild winter of 1993, when the number of goosanders at the Nida-Liepaja stretch was negligible, high numbers of goosander were present at the Kursiu lagoon. In 1995, when 6,000 Goosander were first marked in the Nida-Liepaja region, there was some decrease in goosander numbers in Lithuanian coastal waters (Svazas 1995), which suggests that the birds could have shifted to more northerly areas.

The goosander numbers counted at the Nida-Liepaja coastal stretch for the last three years exceed 1% of the total northwest European population (2,000 birds, according to Scott & Rose 1996) and correspond to Criterion 3c of the Ramsar Convention (see Table 3). Internationally important bird numbers (4.1% of the northwest European diver population) near that coast in the offshore part were registered also in the mild winters of 1993 and 1992 (Durinck

et al. 1994). Although the region of Pape to Perkone is included on the list of Baltic Sea protected sites under the Helcom Convention, the protection of the site is threatened by planned oil drilling activities in the area and the associated construction of the oil terminal at Butinge.

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*Status report*

**First Board Meeting of Wetlands International,  
Dakar, November 1998**

During 9, 10 and 14 November 1998 Wetlands International held its first Board Meeting in Dakar, Senegal. More than 100 board members were assembled and the meeting was in every way successful. It was particularly pleasing to the Seaduck SG that the Board strongly emphasised the importance of the scientific work carried out by the specialist groups and the need for a strong basis of data. Wetlands International has created a special niche for itself involving both NGO and GO as members of the board. But the activities of Wetlands International are also firmly founded on a wealth of hard data derived from the international mid-winter counts of waterbirds (IWC). It was the clear recommendation from the board that these mid-winter counts should be extended in coverage, and the aim should be to include of all parts of the world, but also extended in time so that areas where mid-winter is not the optimal time of year for counting waterbirds are also included.

Nick Davidson has been stationed in Wetlands International-International Coordination Unit (ICU) on a two-year secondment as Scientific Officer from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in UK. To strengthen the scientific work and the network of specialist groups the Board decided to make that a permanent position and subsequently found money for the next triennial budget. Nick will continue permanently from 1 January 2000 and judging from his two years of work major achievements in the progress of International Waterbird Counts and the development of the specialist group network are to be expected.

In connection with the Board Meeting the present SG coordinators met to discuss the current situation and the future. The coordinators expressed their wish to see their role extended in Wetlands International. It was suggested that in the future the coordinators should to a much higher degree take part in the planning process of the international conference on wetlands which as least for the last two board meetings (the last of IWRB and the first of Wetlands International) has been held in connection with the board meetings. On the other hand Wetlands International is facing increasing demands for scientific and conservation advice and this obviously reflects the demands on the specialist groups. This will again increase the level of communication from the SG coordinators to the networks.

The Second International Conference on Wetlands and Development which took place on 11,12 and 13 November was a major achievement for Wetlands

International. More than 500 participants discussed wetland issues in five workshops reaching from Strategies for Conserving Migratory Waterbirds (Workshop 2) to Mechanisms for Financing Wise Use of Wetlands (Workshop 5). It is still too early to assess the outcome and the value of the workshops, but to judge from the enthusiasm and the engagement of the participants we should expect quite a lot.

My personally greatest adventure during the conference was to hear Youssou N'Dour playing African music on the banquet night. If good arguments are not able to convince the world of the necessity of wise use of wetlands Youssou N'Dours music ought to be.

**Stefan Pihl**

*Progress report*

**Satellite telemetry locates breeding and moulting grounds of Barrow's goldeneye in eastern North America**

In February and March 1998, seven Barrow's Goldeneye drakes were captured in the St. Lawrence estuary and implanted with radio satellite transmitters. Marked birds moved up to 120 km distances within the estuary prior to spring migration. Five birds migrated to their breeding area. Barrow's goldeneye used lakes on high plateaus (>700m) about 100 km inland from the St. Lawrence estuary and gulf from the Saguenay River east to Mingan. Breeding males spent an average  $44 \pm 2.9$  days with their mate before their departure for their moulting sites. Breeding was confirmed in eastern North America by the sighting of a brood on the high plateaus east of the Saguenay River. One male left its breeding area on 29 May and another on 28 June. Movements to moulting areas were fast with the birds covering 800-1,160 km in less than 5 days. One male did not breed and stayed within the St. Lawrence estuary until early June before flying to its moulting area. Six males were followed to their moulting site. Two moulted between Belcher's Island and the eastern shore of Hudson Bay, three moulted along the southern shores of the Ungava Bay and one near Nain on the Labrador coast. Males remained on their moulting sites until late October. One male returned to the St. Lawrence estuary in late October, covering the 1,200 km distance from the Ungava Bay in less than 2 days. Studies on the wintering distribution and ecology of Barrow's goldeneye are continuing this winter within the St. Lawrence estuary. Studies on the breeding ecology will start in the spring of 1999.

The research on Barrow's goldeneye can be followed at the web site of the Canadian Wildlife Service at:

[http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/sauvagine/html/barrows\\_goldeneye.html](http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/sauvagine/html/barrows_goldeneye.html)

**Michel Robert & Jean-Pierre L. Savard**

*Canadian Wildlife Service*

**Guy Fitzgérald**

*Union québécoise de réhabilitation des oiseaux de proie*

*Progress report*

**Satellite telemetry confirms the existence of two separate populations of Harlequin ducks in eastern North America**

Four Harlequin duck drakes implanted with radio-satellites in 1997 in the northern portion of Hudson Bay caused quite a surprise by migrating to Greenland to moult. This observation helped explain the origin of the high number of Harlequin ducks that had been observed on the rivers of Northern Quebec and which could not be accounted for on the U.S. wintering sites. To confirm the existence of a Greenland population, 12 Harlequin duck drakes were implanted in June 1998 with radio satellites in three sectors of Northern Quebec and Labrador. Four birds were captured in southern Hudson Bay, four on the rivers of the Ungava Bay watershed and four on the rivers of the northern Labrador coast. Results were clear : all birds but one (which probably died in the days following surgery) left their breeding river for the northern Labrador coast where they stayed for a period of one to four weeks before moving to southwestern Greenland to moult. These observations confirm the existence of two distinct populations of Harlequin ducks breeding in Quebec and Labrador: one population winters in Maine, USA, and moult mostly along the eastern Labrador coast; the other population moults in Greenland and likely winters there. The exact limit of the two breeding populations remains to be determined and it is possible that they overlap on the breeding areas. Blood samples from birds breeding in different rivers may help better determine the boundaries of the two populations. The U.S. wintering population is estimated at less than 1,500 birds and that of Greenland is unknown but may be of a similar size.

The research on Harlequin duck can be followed at the web site of the Canadian Wildlife Service at:

[http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/sauvagine/html/harlequin\\_duck.html](http://www.qc.ec.gc.ca/faune/sauvagine/html/harlequin_duck.html)

**Serge Brodeur**

*Héritage Canada*

**Jean-Pierre L. Savard & Michel Robert**

*Canadian Wildlife Service*

**Guy Fitzgerald**

*Union québécoise de réhabilitation des oiseaux de proie*

*Progress report*

**Spring staging and moulting scoters and eiders in the St. Lawrence estuary**

Aerial waterfowl surveys targeted towards scoters and eiders were done in the St. Lawrence estuary in the spring and summer of 1998. In the spring survey, most scoters were found along the north shore of the St. Lawrence. A total of nearly 218,000 scoters were estimated, mostly black scoters and surf scoters with a few white-winged scoters. Common eiders were not counted in that survey as they congregate around their nesting island at that time of the year. Two summer surveys (21-23 July and 4-6 August) for moulting scoters and eiders indicated a more clumped distribution in summer than spring and identified important moulting areas. The July and August surveys yielded respectively 24,000 and 36,000 moulting scoters and 37,000 and 61,000 moulting eiders. By combining the results of the two surveys, taking the maximum number of birds estimated at each location, we obtain for the St. Lawrence estuary and Gulf an estimate of 50,000 moulting scoters mostly surf scoters and white-winged scoters with a few black scoters and of 66,000 common eiders. About 50% of the moulting eiders were along the south west coast of Anticosti Island whereas most of the moulting scoters were within the St. Lawrence estuary itself. These surveys indicated that a larger number of scoters staged in the spring in the St. Lawrence estuary and gulf, than previously thought, and that an impressive number of scoters and eiders moulted there.

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*Announcement*

**Seaduck symposium**

In the year 2000, the American Ornithologist Union, the British Ornithological Union and the Canadian Ornithological Society will meet jointly in Newfoundland Canada. The SCO is exploring the idea of a special symposium on seaducks at that meeting. I would like to get an idea of the amount of interest in such a symposium.

- 1) Will you consider presenting a paper ?
- 2) On what topic ?
- 3) Should the proceedings be published ?

This is not a formal call for papers but rather an attempt to evaluate the interest so that the proper scale of the symposia could be evaluated. I would appreciate your comments.

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## Appendix

List of English names of waterbirds mentioned in this issue and the corresponding Latin names:

Barrow's goldeneye	<i>Bucephala islandica</i>
Black scoter (North America)	<i>Melanitta nigra americana</i>
Common scoter (Europe)	<i>Melanitta nigra nigra</i>
Common eider (North America)	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Harlequin duck	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>
Long-tailed duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Mute swans	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>
Smew	<i>Mergallus alballus</i>
Steller's eider	<i>Polysticta stelleri</i>
Surf scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>
Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Velvet scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>
White-winged scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandii</i>
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>

**The Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group Bulletin** is an annual publication which aims to improve communication and information exchange amongst seaduck researchers throughout the world.

The Bulletin is produced by the Wetlands International Seaduck Specialist Group with support from various sources. The bulletin publishes contributions covering seaduck research and monitoring projects, project proposals, status and progress reports, as well as regular reports from the Seaduck Database.

The Editors welcome potential contributions to the Bulletin and will be pleased to advise on presentation. Manuscripts sent on diskette as Word, WordPerfect files are welcomed; a hard copy printout should also be enclosed.

