



**Nationalpark
Wattenmeer**



NIEDERSACHSEN

Experts' Workshop in Wilhelmshaven

Development Trends in Migratory Birds of the Wadden Sea – Slight Lifting of the Alert

On invitation of the Nationalparkverwaltung (the Lower Saxony Wadden Sea National Park Authority), the Institute of Avian Research and the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, leading experts from all Wadden Sea countries met at a workshop in the Wattenmeerhaus on Thursday, 31 August 2006 in Wilhelmshaven, the residence of all three organisations. Peter Südbeck, Director of the Nationalparkverwaltung, Frau Dr. Nickel from the Federal Ministry of Environment, currently being the chair of the trilateral cooperation between Germany, The Netherlands and Denmark and the Director of the Institute of Avian Research, Prof. Dr. Bairlein welcomed the participants at the workshop.

Since the beginning of the eighties, water birds have been monitored in the entire Wadden Sea, in a close spatial and temporal pattern, mostly by hundreds of voluntary counters.

Only this long-term and successful way of monitoring has facilitated the identification of development trends.

The evaluation of the data gathered in the period from 1980 to 2000, in the framework of the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP) between Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands, which has been coordinated by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, had alerted the scientists and was the cause for the workshop held in Wilhelmshaven:

Of the 34 species, for which the Wadden Sea is an essential stepping stone on their migration route, 15 species, i. e. 44% showed significant declining trends, whereas seven other species did not show any significant declining trends.

After an analysis of the latest data, a slight relief of the situation was observed according to Jan Blew from Hanover, on behalf of the Joint Monitoring group for Migratory Birds in the Wadden Sea (JMMB). However, negative trends are still observed for a few species, amongst which are those feeding on mussels such as the oystercatcher. Looking at longer periods of time series, all in all, negative trends have turned out to be less pronounced. Thus the great significance of the continuation of coordinated counting in the whole Wadden Sea area was once again impressively underlined.

For many important migratory birds species of the Wadden Sea, cause of concern continues to persist. Christoph Zöckler from the World Conservation Monitoring Center in Cambridge, gave examples for the latest changes in arctic breeding areas and along migration routes. Developing sites for the exploitation of oil, unregulated hunting practises, global warming and alterations in the average annual rainfall, were only a few factors amongst others, he could mention, which affect the breeding success.

Also Prof. Dr. Franz Bairlein from the Institute of Avian Research in Wilhelmshaven, especially commented on the influence of climate change. From his point of view, an increasing sea level could reduce the time span available for the birds to feed at low tide. Increasing temperatures in the winter season were increasing the metabolic rate of mussels, and subsequently their nutritional value for the birds species that feed on them would decrease. All of these factors affect the fitness of migratory birds and therefore the total stock. Bairlein: "The climate change affects many key elements. Against this background, an investigation of these factors, in the framework of a multidisciplinary cooperation comprising a multitude of factors, is becoming especially important."

Theunis Piersma, from the University of Groningen, could at least report about one case in which he could demonstrate a clear cause and effect chain. For a large study area in the Dutch Wadden Sea he could prove, that industrial fishery of cockles has led to a food shortage for birds and subsequently to decreases in stocks. In The Netherlands, cockle fishery has stopped for almost two years, whereas in the National Park of Lower Saxony, it was discontinued almost 20 years ago.

Similarly evident were the cause- effect chains, presented by Jesper Madsen from the National Environmental Research Institute NERI in Denmark, regarding hunting practices from boats and Norwegian farmers using flushing actions against geese on their migratory routes. In this case, it could be demonstrated that large areas on the migratory route are left out or are not able to fulfil their function sufficiently any longer, subsequently having negative consequences for stock and breeding success of the birds.

However, in the light of a functioning protection system, the participants of the workshop agreed that massive disturbances of that kind in the three Wadden Sea countries Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands could not account for the development, at least not for that of the Wadden Sea region. Südbeck: “ In Lower Saxony, there are surely still other possibilities to protect migratory birds from disturbances more effectively. Though, there is no indication that disturbances in our area have a significant influence on the stocks of birds that roost here on their migratory route.”

In a concluding discussion, the experts’ agreed that studies about the causes of the changes in stock have to include the complete migration route. The breeding areas, up in the north as well as in the roosting sites in Africa, during winter season, are undergoing many changes in land use, which could have an effect on our migratory birds. In addition, other changes are caused by the climate change. Concentrating on several species, existing knowledge should be gathered also by expert colleagues in countries along the migratory route. On this basis, clarification should be reached, on short notice, on what kind of investigations are necessary to bridge the gap of knowledge.

In this regard Jens Enemark offered further support by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. “The trilateral cooperation has contributed towards the establishment of a functioning protection regime in the whole Wadden Sea region. Against the background of the results of this workshop, we will endeavour to further the development of the joint monitoring system TMAP and also make a trans-regional contribution towards the survival of our migratory birds. Each spring and autumn season, their fantastic beauty also reminds us of our global responsibility.”

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