



Waterbird Conservation for the Americas

Executive Committee of the Waterbird Conservation Council Conference Call September 25, 2007

Participants

Executive Committee: Paul Kluckner, Paul Schmidt, Don Paul, Lisa Sorenson, Eric Mellink, Rob Clay (for Ian Davidson) Also: Jennifer Wheeler, Garry Donaldson, Jennifer Arnold.
Unable to participate: Ian Davidson, Paul Baicich, Kathy Parsons.

Next Call: Friday, October 26, 2 p.m. Eastern.

Discussion and Decisions

Report from the Integration Task Force that met in Panama

On the last conference call, the Executive Committee expressed concerns about the Integration Task Force's recommendations. On this call, Garry, with Rob, spoke on behalf of the task force, reviewing their charge, clarifying the recommendations for collaboration with WHSRN and beyond that, formation of a hemispheric alliance. A key clarification was that the task force did not intend to say that a hemispheric alliance be *led* from the South, but rather that participation from the southern regions (or any region for that matter) be led and shaped by partners indigenous to that region. Additionally, the task force intentionally avoided being overly prescriptive in its recommendations about structuring an alliance.

Decisions: The recommendations involve short-term (collaboration with WHSRN) and longer term (feasibility of the alliance) components that need to be pursued somewhat separately. In the short term, the Council will pursue greater collaboration with WHSRN's Hemispheric Council (specifically, Jennifer will work with Charles Duncan and others to increase cross-council coordination prior to and at the joint Council and WHSRN meeting in January). Otherwise, Council committee and working group chairs are to continue on with their tasks as planned in Quito, noting the task force recommendations are draft. This includes attempting to increase participation from Latin America and the Caribbean in Council activities.

Future conference calls and the agenda at the January meeting will include additional discussion of how to act on the task force's recommendations for an alliance. The task force is requested (via Garry) to edit the documents to capture the comments made during the call and to provide some additional detail on the thoughts regarding an alliance coordinator.

Updates on Planning for Annual Meeting 2008

Jennifer will begin drafting an agenda with others in the next month. As for logistics, Don described the formation of a local planning committee, briefly discussed the advantages and

challenges of the hotel that has been selected (some distance from major airports but pleasant with few distractions) and reminded the group of the meeting's timing with relation to the San Blas Bird Festival. Paul K. commented that he would like to see the meeting be an opportunity for in-depth exposure to how conservation proceeds in Latin America (that is, local presentations or field trips should add to the Council's understanding in such a way that it informs the discussion of a hemispheric alliance).

Decision: The planning committee will keep the Council apprised of meeting developments as appropriate.

Reports from Committees/Working Groups

Policy and Critical Issues working group: Jennifer A. described how activities are proceeding as discussed on the August 10 conference call. Jennifer expressed her willingness to continue in her role as coordinator for seabird policy related activities – an offer gladly accepted by the Executive.

Regional Planning and Implementation: Don Paul reports that the committee will proceed as discussed in Quito.

Technical Services: Jennifer W. reported on behalf of Kathy that the tasks involving funding by Canadian Wildlife Service (fund-raising for Rice and Waterbirds Proceedings and to hire a contractor to work on a monitoring framework) may be negatively affected. Manomet has identified an intern to work on assembling research needs from regional plans.

Communications: Jennifer w. announced the availability for review of the initiative update (the Communications Piece), entitled “Fostering Waterbird Conservation.” Initial comments from the Executive were positive.

Membership:

Class of 2007 -- Jennifer W. reported that Class of 2007 member decisions have been resolved: Ghisselle Alvarado, Stephen Brown, Ian Davidson, Jim Kushlan, Lourdes Mugica, & Don Paul will be invited to serve another term. Kent Wohl, Beth Flint and Melanie Steinkamp will be stepping down. Jennifer will attend to invitations and letters of acknowledgement as appropriate.

Recruitment -- On the last call, the Membership committee was approved to focus on three priorities: seabird expertise, fund-raising ability, and experience in local-scale project implementation. Doubt about reaching out to Latin American nominees was clarified based on the discussion of task force recommendations (above). Jennifer will circulate the request for nominations to the full Council.

Other -- Ideally, a Chair Elect should be identified as soon as possible, although he/she would not begin as Chair until 2009. Ghisselle Alvarado has stepped down as the Geographic Representative for Central America; Rosa Montañez will take on this roll. Discussions are underway about the Mexico representative on Executive.

Other Business

Report from UNEP/CMS/CREHO-Ramsar Meeting: see attachment.

World Bird Festival will focus on waterbirds in 2007: Rob Clay announced that Birdlife's World Bird Festival will focus on waterbirds this year, in part to promote the products of the "Advancing Waterbird Conservation Range-wide" project.

Council members appropriate to approach for review of Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act projects: Rob Clay suggested that Executive might want to review Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act projects relating to waterbirds. Executive agreed this was appropriate; Lisa and Don expressed a willingness to assist with this review.

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Attachment:

REPORT

Regional Workshop for Decision Makers in Latin America

THE IMPACT ON THE DECISIONS ON WETLANDS AND MIGRATORY SPECIES: Management and use of natural resources

By Rosabel Miró

On August 25 to 29 Ramsar and CMS held a workshop for Latin American decision makers representing more than 15 countries (Cuba, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, among others). This workshop was mainly focused on telling the participants about the Ramsar and CMS conventions' missions, criteria for identifying sites and species in need of protection, and joint work and conservation tools (handbooks, implementation mechanisms, etc.). There were also presentations on how initiatives from other groups have promoted cooperation with Ramsar-CMS.

Among the several presentations, I will summarize the following:

1. SPAW as a regional tool to apply Ramsar-CMS conventions

Many of the countries of the Wider Caribbean Region (which includes 28 states and 10 territories, 300 marine protected areas and major rivers such as the Mississippi) have signed the **Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region** (commonly known as the Cartagena Convention). There are three protocols in the agreement, including the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW).

SPAW objectives

- To protect, conserve and manage sensitive and fragile areas
- To protect and conserve threatened species in the region

The signatory Parties have adopted co-operative measures to ensure the protection and recovery of endangered and threatened species of flora and fauna listed in Annexes I (flora), II (fauna) and III (threatened flora and fauna) of the SPAW Protocol. Each signatory Party has identified endangered or threatened species of flora and fauna within its territory and should endeavor to consult with States in the species' ranges that are not Parties to the SPAW Protocol, with a view to co-coordinating their efforts to manage and protect endangered or threatened migratory species.

The SPAW Protocol is available at: <http://www.cep.unep.org/pubs/legislation/spaw.html>

2. Signing of CMS MoU for South American migratory grassland species (as reported by Cristina Morales, BirdLife Americas' CMS Focal Point)

This MoU has been promoted by the Secretary of CMS with strong support from the UNEP/CMS Scientific Councilors and National Focal Points of Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Bolivia. It is important to emphasize the participation of the Government of Brazil (that is not a contracting Party of the Convention) when acceding to sign the Memorandum, demonstrating a clear sign of commitment in favor of the conservation of migratory grassland species.

The Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina, the Ministry of the Environment of Paraguay, the Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries of Uruguay and the Government of Brazil have signed the MoU on the Conservation of grasslands birds of South America and their habitats. The Ministry of Sustainable Development of Bolivia will sign the agreement in a next opportunity.

The countries have decided to work in coordination to improve the conservation status of the species in their breeding and wintering areas, and to develop an Action Plan for the species and their habitats, to orient conservation actions in the countries, and will include measures to promote coordination, knowledge, international cooperation, management, investigation, and information exchange.

The migratory bird species of the Memorandum are characteristic of the natural grasslands of southern South America, which are undergoing a drastic reduction and fragmentation of their habitats. The following species of global conservation concern and listed in Appendices I and II of the CMS were specifically included in the MoU: *Numenius borealis* and *Sporophila zelichi* (Critically Endangered), *S. palustris* (Endangered), *Alectrurus risora*, *A. tricolor*, *S. cinnamomea* and *Agelaius flavus* (Vulnerable) and *Tryngites subruficollis*, *S. hypochroma*, *S. ruficollis*, and *Polystictus pectoralis pectoralis* (Near Threatened).

It is important to emphasize that this achievement is the result of cooperative work between BirdLife International Partners in Argentina and Paraguay, who initiated the arrangement for the inclusion of species in the appendices of the Convention and have encouraged the elaboration and signature of the Memorandum, in close coordination with the governments of the signatory countries.

3. Avian Flu, status update by CMS

Francisco Rilla mentioned that in 2005 an Avian Flu H5N1 Working Group coordinated by CMS/FAO was created. He explained that illegal commerce, not migratory birds, are the primary cause of its spread.

Among the goals of this Avian Flu group are:

- Learn from cases that have already occurred in different parts of the world
- Train veterinarian institutions in developing countries
- Implement information networks for early detection of cases

4. Transboundary wetlands and Ramsar Sites

Julio Montes de Oca, from the UICN Mesoamerican Regional office explained about the conservation and community development work they have been carrying out with rural communities in three

transboundary wetlands located in El Salvador-Nicaragua, Nicaragua-Costa Rica and Costa Rica-Panama.

5. Rice and Biodiversity in Cuba

Lourdes Mugica, a WCC member, presented her studies on waterbirds and rice fields in Cuba, and how the private sector could collaborate on the conservation of important ecosystems for migratory species. Her presentation was the most interesting one (at least for me!) during the 3 days workshop, full of excellent tips for allowing avifauna to use rice fields in a sustainable way. She mentioned that the cultivated areas could be managed in a way to retain fringes or belts of flooded areas not used commercially, where plants otherwise considered weeds such as the *Echinochloa* species could grow. *Echinochloa* is high in proteins and is used by the young of Whistling Ducks. These ducks prefer these plants instead of the rice. She also explained how the compensation for rice lost could be done through other uses of the area, as birdwatching, so campesinos would be inclined to use fewer pesticides. Lourdes stated that half of the birds that frequent rice fields are predators. They do not touch the rice and they are natural pest controllers. Many of her findings are included in the recently published *Waterbirds of Cuban Wetlands* book.

6. NGOs role in the international cooperation

Cristina Morales, from Guyra Paraguay explained that BirdLife has been a key partner for both Ramsar and CMS and described in great detail how the WCC gathered important information about the wetlands and the waterbirds in America through the project 'Advancing Range-Wide Waterbird Conservation throughout the Western Hemisphere'.

7. Regional initiatives: WHMSI, RHRAP and Waterbird Conservation for the Americas

María Rivera explained the WHMSI initiative and its latests news and Xico Vega Pico spoke about the work RHRAP is doing for the conservation of migratory shorebirds along the migratory route. Rosabel Miró briefly mentioned the Waterbird Conservation Initiative background, strategies included in the Plan, its vision and scope of work, the Council and its working groups and some of its achievements, including the web page and the 'Advancing Range Wide' project.

On the last day of the workshop the attendees visited the Río Bayano, part of the Bay of Panama Ramsar Site where they saw some of the waterbirds of the area. They landed on the Chepillo Island, a fishing community where Panama Audubon Society has been working in the past 6 years. A Participatory Biomonitoring project was carried out on this island and the participants of this fieldtrip got to know some of the challenges and lessons learned from this project.

In general the workshop was an excellent opportunity for the decision makers to learn valuable information about the Ramsar and CMS conventions, its duties and opportunities (funding, training, advisory role, etc.), the initiatives that are advancing wetlands and mostly bird migratory species conservation in the Americas, and set the scene for an interesting exchange of knowledge among representatives from the various countries. The workshop was highly educational for all participants.

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