

Ducks and geese: developing better assessments of conservation status



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Introduction

- For (migratory) waterbirds, conservation status is usually, and ideally, assessed at the population scale
- For ducks and geese, this is typically based on counts during the non-breeding season
- Without good levels of coordination and coverage, accurate population and trend estimates can be difficult to derive
- Main data source in Europe is IWC, primarily coordinated through a network of national waterbird count schemes, with support by Specialist Groups working closely with WI
- I will focus on new initiatives and synergies being developed by the Duck SG and Goose SG to enhance existing monitoring frameworks and status assessment processes

Seaducks

- Seaducks are a rapidly increasing priority in Europe in need of improved monitoring, research and conservation action
- New data, primarily from Baltic¹, has focused attention on these species
 - Main species concerned are Long-tailed Duck, Velvet Scoter and Steller's Eider
 - Also concern possibly justified for Greater Scaup, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser and some Common Eider populations
- Notwithstanding recent (2007-09) census of Baltic, surveys are generally incomplete, infrequent and poorly coordinated, and estimates of abundance and trend broad and uncertain

¹ Skov, H. *et al.* 2011. Waterbird populations and pressures in the Baltic Sea.

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- New focus and collaboration is thus needed to ensure:
 - All relevant data (biological and environmental) are available and when relevant incorporated into assessments of population scale trends (and possible drivers)
 - Analytical methods are developed to combine these disparate data sources
 - Future monitoring effort is improved and sustained
- A series of events taking place from 2012 will coordinate a response to these needs, and is well timed to support data gathering for BiE3
- Initial workshop in April at PEDS3 focusing on population and trend estimates, monitoring needs, and planning of further activities
 - Species or region specific working groups
 - Participation encouraged in April or afterwards from anyone with relevant data or knowledge
- Completion of assessments and conservation planning by mid 2014
 - 5th International Seaduck conference, Sept. 2014
 - AEWA MoP 2015

Other ducks

- Population estimates and trends are better known for most freshwater ducks (based on winter counts); monitoring in breeding season less established
- Shifts in winter distribution now key constraint to effective monitoring
- E.g. in Ireland and UK most common wintering ducks now in decline
 - Some are clearly short stopping, e.g. Goldeneye
 - Others now appear to not be doing so, e.g. Velvet Scoter and RB Merganser
 - Others unclear, e.g. Pochard – large decline in UK but trends elsewhere unclear
 - Have they declined or are they just not being counted in new wintering areas?
- Also been insufficient population scale analysis and reporting, making interpretation of national trends difficult
- Nordic Waterbirds and Climate group (NOWAC; coordinated by Aarhus University) beginning to address these issues in collaboration with newly formed IWC Partnership etc
 - Three work groups = i) trends, ii) demography, iii) ecology
 - Current focus on Mallard and Eider

Geese

- Conservation status of goose populations is reasonably well known; good counts and demographic data
- Overview of status published in *Ornis Svecica*¹ in 2010
- Some reduction in monitoring quality in past decade
- Shifts in winter distribution also pronounced in a number of goose populations, though for some count coverage too patchy to be certain
- Goose SG working to resolve this with key partners, principally WI, SOVON & Aarhus University

¹ Fox, A.D. *et al.* 2010. Current estimates of goose population sizes in western Europe, a gap analysis and an assessment of trends. *Ornis Svecica* 20: 115-127.

Conclusions

- Duck SG and Goose SG networks in good shape and able to deliver expert validation of status and threat assessments for BiE3 and other prioritisation processes
- Some new difficulties being experienced with coverage and coordination that need to be addressed urgently, but initiatives for all key areas are now in place through relevant SGs and IWC Partnership
- Much potential for further improving links with others holding relevant data, e.g. better links with national breeding season monitoring, and overarching frameworks like CBMP
- This would help to make future population/species status assessments as accurate and efficient as possible