



U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council Meeting Notes

March 3, 2006
Hotel Boulderado, Boulder, CO

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan (USSCP) Council met in Boulder, Colorado, following the "Shorebird Science in the Western Hemisphere" meeting there. One of the main purposes of this meeting was to develop species-focused working groups that spanned the hemisphere. The conference was attended by 181 folks from 13 countries; 51 students attended. A summary of the meeting and presentation abstracts will be graciously published by the Wader Study Group Bulletin. The Council convened at 8 am and adjourned at 1 pm. The meeting was chaired by Catherine Hickey.

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network

WHSRN Executive Office (Charles Duncan, excerpted from WHSRNews)

In November 2004, the Manomet Center for Conservation Science, home of WHSRN's Executive Office, received a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant for the first year of a multi-year project devoted to conservation of shorebirds in the Americas. The delivery mechanism for the project is the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network and its many partners. In the first year, the project protected over 3,600 hectares of high-priority grasslands in Mexico, and identified private lands for cooperative conservation in Argentina and Uruguay. Monitoring of the northbound migration of imperiled Red Knots was accomplished at three sites across 750 miles of Argentine coastline to shed light on the underlying causes of their declines.

To improve conservation efficiency and accountability, the project, in partnership with Birdlife International's Americas Programme, developed a new Site Assessment Tool that is currently being piloted at WHSRN sites before eventually being used to monitor Important Bird Areas and other sites of conservation value across the Hemisphere. WHSRN has trained practitioners from over a dozen countries in the use of the Tool. The goal is to implement the tool at all WHSRN sites in the next 3 years. Points of contact need to be identified and their roles in the assessment process clearly defined.

Conservation plans have been written in collaboration with species experts for the first six of 21 shorebird species identified as at-risk and amenable to a site-based conservation approach in the Western Hemisphere. These plans have been widely circulated and have had peer review. The species are: American Oystercatcher, Black Oystercatcher, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot, Western Sandpiper, and Red-necked Phalarope. In each case, a species working group has been formed to continue the conservation effort. These groups represent the first time that scientists and

conservationists have come together to develop a unified vision of the conservation needs of these species.

The Hemispheric Council of WHSRN met on 18 January 2006 in San José, Costa Rica, and took several actions of significance.

1. Approval of a new category, a "Landscape of Hemispheric Significance," following the recommendation of a task force on dispersed and ephemeral wetlands. The new category requires a recognized conservation entity (such as a government, a watershed council or a joint venture) to assume responsibility for making shorebird conservation a priority and for working with landowners. A public notification and comment period is required, and the proposing group must comment on how designation by WHSRN will advance conservation within the region. Appropriate nomination forms will be posted to the WHSRN website shortly; the website is being reconstructed to be more interactive.

2. An Invitation to three new members to join the Hemispheric Council: Dr. Enrique Bucher, the Center for Applied Zoology of the University of Córdoba, Argentina, as Councilor emeritus; Ms. Rosabel Miró, president of the Panama Audubon Society; and Ms. Linda Leddy, President of the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences.

The next Hemispheric Council meeting will be held in Quito, Ecuador in 2007.

WHSRN-US (John Cecil, Chair, WHSRN-US Committee)

John reported on the progress on actions outlined by the WHSRN-US Committee in October 2005.

Bob Adamcik agreed to serve on the WHSRN-US Committee representing the National Wildlife Refuge System. His involvement in the near future, however, might be limited due to some agency re-organization. The Committee is interested in working more closely with Bob on implementation of shorebird conservation and management on refuges.

An international WHSRN workshop is being planned for spring 2007 in the Central Valley, CA. The workshop will focus on defining "What it means to be a WHSRN site" including international linking activities, shorebird management resources, and brainstorming on future opportunities. Besides attracting land managers and shorebird biologists, the workshop will attempt to further engage the rice growing community of the region and hold discussions re: best management practices for rice and aquatic birds. Catherine Hickey has the lead on developing the workshop.

To meet the 60-day timeline to complete site nomination reviews, the committee accepted that the number of reviewers will be reduced to three from the five originally noted in the terms of reference. If all three reviewers are concordant in their opinions about a site, then the site nomination would move forward. If reviewers are not concordant in their reviews, then two

additional reviews would be undertaken. Brad Andres will revise the Terms of Reference for the Committee will be revised to reflect this change.

A list denoting the 1%, 10%, and 30% levels of shorebird biogeographic populations identified in the Plan was developed using the newest revisions posted on the shorebird plan website. Regional shorebird plan coordinators will be asked to identify sites that might support regional, international, and hemispheric percentages of specific populations in their region. Rather than trying to address all shorebird taxa at all sites, initial efforts should focus on populations of imperiled shorebird taxa and those of highest concern at international- and hemispheric-level sites. (**Andres by 15 June 2006**). Similarly, a list of sites that are deemed internationally important, by the numeric criterion of 100,000 per year, but are not yet included in WHSRN needs to be generated (**Andres by 15 June 2006**). A letter asking site managers to consider nomination of these numerically important sites into WHSRN should be drafted (**Cecil, Hickey, Andres by 30 June 2006**). The species groups should be engaged to help determine the proportion of populations using specific sites.

Susan Skagen and Garry Donaldson would like to participate on this committee.

As Carol Lively is now working for the Forest Service, she will be representing that organization on the WHSRN Hemispheric Council, and a replacement to represent the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan is needed. Nominations are therefore needed. (**Andres to solicit by 15 June 2006**).

International

Shorebird Research Group of the Americas

A questionnaire is being distributed to those interested in the Shorebird Research Group of the Americas (SRGA) on how that believe that group should function (contact Garry Donaldson at garry.donaldson@ec.gc.ca if you are interested in receiving a copy). The question arose how the group might “endorse” projects, and the suggestion was made to build a list of species and research topic experts that folks could use to identify potential reviewers of proposals or reports. The question was also raised whether species groups should play a role in “endorsing” species specific research projects. The SRGA might maintain the list on a website. The USSCP will eventually need a representative to this group; Stephen Brown is currently serving in the interim in this capacity. The Council should consider holding meetings in conjunction with the SRGA. There is an immediate need to help fund the Neotropical Waterbird Census in South America. Contact Garry Donaldson.

Birdlife Waterbird Project

Rob Clay, Conservation Director, Birdlife International of the Americas, gave a presentation on the work they are conducting to identify important sites for waterbirds and to document the waterbird use of these sites. Birdlife, like the Waterbirds for the Americas project, adopted the

Ramsar Convention's broad definition of a waterbird, which includes shorebirds. Information will eventually be made available on the web. This information is also being included in the proposal to re-evaluate shorebird priorities in Latin America with regards to IUCN criteria. Part of this effort might involve separating stopover assessments from "wintering" site assessments.

Mexican Shorebird Plan

Aurea Estrada, Ducks Unlimited de Mexico, A.C., reported that Mexico's Shorebird Conservation Plan is being reviewed by government officials and will hopefully be published in 2006. Recall that the plan focused on identification of important shorebird sites throughout the country. Canadian Wildlife Service will look into the possibility of translating this the plan into English..

Canadian Shorebird Plan

Canadian regional plans are now complete. There has been a recent meeting of Prairie Habitat JV non-game working group to incorporate shorebird objectives into their planning process.

Policies Affecting Shorebirds

Red Knots and Delaware Bay

The Council discussed the current conservation issue of red knots and Delaware Bay. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined that emergency listing is not warranted, but that they will review the petition in the context of a non-emergency through their normal petition process. A 90-day petition finding should be published sometime in 2006. In the interim, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is considering a proposal for a moratorium on horseshoe crab harvest in 2006. Below is the letter sent by the Council to the ASMFC regarding proposed harvest restrictions.

The U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan Council (Council) represents a collective of individuals and organizations interested in the long-term conservation of the hemisphere's shorebirds. At our recent meetings, we have discussed the issue of horseshoe crabs and shorebirds in Delaware Bay and throughout the Atlantic Flyway. We realize the difficult task the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has in considering the needs of birds that travel from the Arctic to southern South America when making management decisions for the horseshoe crab fishery. Due to the recent dramatic declines in red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*) populations and the lack of their recovery, we offer comments on Addendum IV to the Interstate Fishery Management Plan for Horseshoe Crab.

Under New Jersey and Delaware, the Council believes the most risk averse management strategy would be to invoke option 3, full two-year moratorium, for bait harvest. If shorebird populations, especially red knots, demonstrate a positive response to this

action, the slightly more harvest-liberal strategy (option 2) might be put in place after two years. Although option 4 under the Maryland and Virginia might offer a reasonable compromise, we question whether such detailed regulations would be enforceable. If not, we would favor invoking option 3, partial moratorium.

Concerning take for the biomedical industry, we suggest allowing the harvest of crabs for this purpose and allowing crabs not returned alive to the general area of capture to be available to the bait industry. The Council suggests that the allowable harvest for the biomedical industry not exceed 300,000 crabs and that the amount available to the bait industry not exceed 20% of that amount (60,000 crabs). The Council suggests that biomedical needs be met before bait harvest in Maryland and Virginia be considered.

Brian Harrington volunteered to push the notion of creating a flyway-scale working group for Red Knots.

Snowy Plover

The USFWS just announced that the Pacific Coast Distinct Population Segment of the Snowy Plover will retain Threatened species status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, the USFWS is proposing a 'special rule' under section 4d of the ESA that would allow take within counties that have met management goals.

For more information, go to:

Federal Register Notice - Finding on the petition to delist: <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-SPECIES/2006/April/Day-21/e3792.htm>

Federal Register Notice - Proposed special rule & public comment period:
<http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-SPECIES/2006/April/Day-21/e3793.htm>

Of note, the USFWS is requesting public comment on the proposed special rule by June 20, 2006. The USFWS is asking whether relevant jurisdictions are interested in implementation of such a rule. The USFWS also is requesting specific information and comment on the following:

- 1) The types of activities we should address in a special rule;
- 2) Appropriate monitoring and reporting programs for covered activities;
- 3) Whether wintering habitat should be taken into account in a 4(d) rule, and if so, how it should be addressed;
- 4) How areas without breeding bird goals identified in the Draft Recovery Plan, but which are important for wintering plovers, such as Los Angeles County, should be treated in the 4(d) rule;
- 5) What level of jurisdiction is the appropriate level at which such a special rule should be proposed;
- 6) If and how the Service should consider including within this special rule consideration for individual landowners who develop and implement management strategies

within Counties that have not yet met plover population recovery goals, but that adequately address threats to the species; and

- 7) Whether using 2 out of the previous 5 years to assess whether a County has met its Breeding Bird Management Goals is appropriate.

The Council should review the proposed rule and draft comments if needed (**by the due date of June 20, 2006**)

Avian Influenza

Bob Gill and Rick Lancot provided an overview of the upcoming surveillance monitoring for avian influenza in Alaskan shorebirds. Numerous factors were used to identify target species, which include dunlin, sharp-tailed sandpiper, bar-tailed godwit, ruddy turnstone, pectoral sandpiper, red knot, long-billed dowitcher, rock sandpiper, Pacific golden-plover, and buff-breasted sandpiper. All the Flyway Councils are developing similar plans. Sampling techniques and other information can be found in the national strategic plan available at:

<http://www.doi.gov/issues/birdflu_strategicplan.pdf>. Tara Zimmerman was interested in getting outside review of the Pacific Flyway's shorebird section. The Council raised the question of whether the U.S. North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) Committee should make a statement on avian influenza, rather than each bird initiative developing their own (Andres to contact Deb Hahn by **30 June 2006**).

Monitoring

Collectively implementation of PRISM is somewhat stalled, although major strides have been made with some temperate-breeding shorebirds and in some regions, such as the Atlantic coast and Prairie Potholes. Also, implementation of Arctic PRISM in Canada has resulted in important distribution and local occurrence information. Recall that State Wildlife Action Plans contained monitoring components. The peer-review of the arctic portion of PRISM is still being completed. The review consisted of twenty-six questions posed to six reviewers.

Susan Skagen has agreed to chair the Monitoring Technical Working Group. Upon completion of the current report of the NABCI Monitoring Subcommittee, Susan will replace Stephen Brown on this subcommittee. Thanks to Susan for stepping up to this position and for Stephen representing shorebird interests on the committee. Brad Andres will work with Susan to re-invigorate the working group. Question was raised whether a monitoring meeting is necessary, particularly to exchange information to improve methods.

The Northeast Region received a multi-state grant to improve monitoring of birds. Stephen Brown was involved in the preparation of the proposal, which included a portion to improve PRISM and ISS at northeastern sites.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management, is in the process of selecting individuals to fill three bird monitoring positions. The positions will have some

responsibility for fulfilling monitoring needs of the nongame bird initiatives that align with the Division's priorities.

Garry Donaldson mentioned that the Neotropical Waterbird Census has been ongoing now for 15 years but is still hampered by the lack of consistent funding. Garry to outline annual financial needs of the survey and work with the Council to generate funds (by **30 June 2006**).

Outreach

At the February 2005 meeting, the Council discussed the need to evaluate the structure and function of the Education and Outreach Technical Working Group and to evaluate the Council's role in communications (**Spakoff, Lively, and Andres to convene an ad-hoc team to discuss this issue by 30 June 2006; Andres to ask Debbie Slobe of Playa Lakes JV**).

The Council did discuss the need to promote the USSCP and WHSRN to Joint Venture Management Boards. Below is a list of upcoming management board meetings. Presenters need to be designated for these meetings. Council members should contact Brad Andres if they could attend the Management Board meetings and make a presentation. There is also a need to increase interaction with JV technical committees.

June - Playa Lakes

July - Atlantic Coast, San Francisco Bay, Rainwater Basin

August - Prairie Pothole

September - Intermountain West, Upper Miss?

Accomplishments

Given the USSCP was drafted five years ago, the Council realized that some sort of outreach on the accomplishments is probably needed and would be beneficial to the initiative. The first step would be to review models and draft an outline of an accomplishment report, which would build on the goals and objectives of the USSCP. It might make sense to address Canada and the U.S. simultaneously (**Hickey, Donaldson, Jones, Cecil, Skagen, Stephanie Jones, Sue Thomas, Andres to form ad-hoc committee; outline drafted by 15 July 2006**).

Executive Committee Structure

Due to changes in responsibilities, changes were made to the Executive Committee

Chair: Catherine Hickey, PRBO Conservation Science

Vice-Chair: John Cecil. National Audubon Society

NABCI Representative: Catherine Hickey

Monitoring Working Group Chair: Susan Skagen

Education and Outreach Working Group Chair: Sandy Spakoff (education)

Research Working Group Chair: Stephen Brown

AFWA Waterbird/Shorebird Working Group: Larry Niles

Joint Ventures: Andrew Milliken or Barry Wilson nominated (Stephen Brown to confirm)

USFWS: Stephanie Jones

Federal Agency: Carol Lively

State Agency: Brad Winn

Next Meeting

The next Council meeting will be scheduled to coincide with the Central Valley management workshop in spring 2007. We will plan something more informal for the AFWA meeting in Aspen in September 2006 and intend to participate in the PIF/Shorebird/Waterbird AFWA Working Group meeting.

Submitted by Brad Andres May 30, 2006.