Newsletter of the Asian Waterbird Census

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1. Letter from the AWC International Coordinator

Dear AWC coordinators and participants,

This has been a busy year for waterbird conservation! Since the last issue in May 2003, there have been a lot of exciting activities at the international level that I would like to report to you. Aside from that, a lot more has happened at the national level as reported in this issue.

Firstly, we are pleased to announce our success in our effort to raise funds for development of the AWC from the Japan Fund for Global Environment for one year (which could not have been possible without the strong support of our Wetlands International – Japan Office). The approved amount of JPY 4,100,000 will go towards the publication and distribution of the AWC 1997-2001 report, organization of a meeting of AWC coordinators, the development of an AWC strategy for the period of 2004-2006 and the production of an AWC information brochure (view at AWC website).

So far, implementation of activities has been progressing very well. The AWC 1997-2001 report is in the final stage and is awaiting comments from AWC coordinators; it should be ready for publication by the end of the year. The first meeting of the AWC coordinators organised in Malaysia on 9-10 October went very well. Details of the meeting are reported in this issue. The AWC brochure was produced in time for the meeting and aims to raise the profile of the AWC. The draft AWC Strategy for 2004 - 2006 was reviewed and discussed extensively during the AWC coordinators meeting, it will be finalized by the end of the year.

Together we are all now in a good position to plan and push for a successful AWC in 2004 and further into the future. I believe with all your support, we will be able to make the AWC a really successful programme for waterbird and wetland conservation.

For the AWC in 2004, I would like to encourage all the AWC coordinators as well as volunteer participants to work together to cover all the important wetland sites in your country. The suggested period of the **AWC in 2004 will be from 10 to 25 January**. I hope all of you will be able to manage your time to participate in this very important event during the suggested period. As usual, information collected for the rest of January is also acceptable. For details on how to participate in the census, please contact your national or sub-national coordinator. You can download the contact details for AWC coordinators, AWC count guidelines, site and count forms at the AWC website http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/awcmain.html . For your information, small changes have been made on the South Asian Count Form to accommodate recent taxonomic changes of the gull species.

Finally, I would like to wish you a very happy New Year and an enjoyable time birding for the AWC and for waterbird and wetland conservation!

Best regards,

Mr. David Li
AWC International Coordinator
Wetlands International
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2. Report on AWC Coordinators Meeting

Mr. David Li, david@wiap.nasionet.net

The AWC Coordinators Meeting was organized by Wetlands International in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia on 9 and 10 October 2003. Thirty five people from 20 countries and regions participated, including coordinators and their representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

The meeting was the first formal gathering of the AWC coordinators since the establishment of the AWC in 1987. It provided a great opportunity for the coordinators to come together to discuss the main achievements and issues for the development of the AWC.

The meeting focused on support of international and regional conventions and initiatives, general issues as well as challenges and opportunities for the development of the AWC at national level. Major issues identified included inadequate local expertise, lack of data quality control on the data generated, inability to collect data on all important sites, lack of communication and insufficient access to funding to support basic costs.

Based on the major issues identified, the meeting focused its discussion on the future development of an AWC Strategic Plan for 2004-2006. The Strategy should provide clear targets that the AWC coordinators will need to tackle as a team. Priority was given to enhancement of the geographic and site coverage, improvement of data quality, enhancement of communication, development of training and public awareness programme, fundraising, support to decision making and the development of a regional coordination mechanism. All participants agreed that a number of actions need to be undertaken to achieve the major objectives were discussed and prioritized. The Strategy is to be finalised through consultation in the coming months.

All the participants felt that the AWC Coordinators meeting was very important, productive and useful. Their unanimous recommendation was for the meeting to be organized on a regular basis, so that the coordinators could feel that they are part of a regional team and they could share information and experiences on the development and implementation of the AWC.

For a full report of this meeting and to view the meeting documents and minutes, please visit the AWC meeting website at http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/workshop03.html

3. AWC 2002 and 2003 Results Update

Mr. David Li, david@wiap.nasionet.net

As of the end of October 2003, a total of 1,048 and 1,084 sites were counted in 2002 and 2003 respectively as reported by the AWC coordinators and individual counters (see Table). These figures were much higher than the estimates of 900 sites for both years in our last newsletter. We are expecting an even higher number once we have received the data from countries which haven't reported their findings.

Country/Region	No. of Sites Counted	
	2002	2003
Bangladesh	37	
Bhutan	6	
India	356*	462*
Nepal	3	2
Pakistan	70	67
Sri Lanka	76	68
South Asia Total	**548**	**599**
Brunei	9	
Cambodia	5	
Indonesia	44	
Laos		
Malaysia	23	47*
Myanmar	53	77
Philippines	49	49
Singapore	1	9
Thailand	8	26
Vietnam	16	4
Southeast Asia Total	**208**	**212**
Mainland China		32
Hong Kong	3	3
Macau	1	1
Taiwan	33	23
Japan	106	95*
Korea, Republic of	118	118*
Russia (Asian part)	2	1
East Asia Total	**263**	**273**
Australia	29	
New Zealand		
Papua New Guinea		
Australasia Total	29	0
Total	**1048**	**1084**

Note: * shows the number that has been reported by coordinators, although count data is yet to be received.

4. AWC News from the Region

The following section provides an update of the AWC activities in the region, including summaries of reports from the AWC national coordinators meeting (reported in #2 above).

Australia (Shorebird Monitoring Programme)

Mr. Ken Gosbell, Australia Wader Studies Group
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The Australian Population Monitoring Program (PMP) commenced in 1981. The programme, co-ordinated by the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG), counts both migratory and resident shorebirds in the Australian summer and winter each year utilising a large team of volunteers. Some of the key issues such as site selection, count methods and some actions to minimise variability will be discussed. The need to include supplementary sites not included in the original PMP, including regional surveys, is highlighted.

Several results of the monitoring program were discussed including the trends observed in Victoria and Tasmania of the key species: Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* and Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea.* These were compared with counts from other important sites such as the Coorong in South Australia and the Eighty Mile Beach in the Northwest of Western Australia. In the case of migratory shorebirds it was recognised that there is a need to attempt to evaluate the impact of flyway issues such as habitat change and/or changed breeding conditions separately from local issues. This requires the exchange of knowledge and co-operation from other workers in the flyway. Some of the deficiencies of the program were outlined together with strategies for improving its overall efficacy.

A new database had been recently designed to enable more effective storage and retrieval of count data from any source. Although in the early stages of use, it promises to be an effective tool for counters (better feedback), analysts (central data storage and accessibility) and environmental planners (relevant site information).

Habitat changes in Australia and at staging sites in the flyway, together with the potential impacts of climate change are likely to have major impacts on shorebird populations. The effective conservation of waterbirds (including shorebirds) depends on an accurate knowledge of population size and trends. It is therefore essential to have programs, strategies and tools in place to gain and utilise this knowledge.

The recent analysis of extensive banding and flagging data of shorebirds over a 20 year period has suggested that a population estimate can be made and recruitment rates calculated based on the proportion of juveniles present in catches. Examples were given where these data were compared with selected count data to provide more valuable results.

Bangladesh

Mr. Enam Ul Haque, Bangladesh Bird Club
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Bangladesh will once again actively participate in the AWC, as usual, we would like to invite local birders and those from overseas to participate our birding tours. Kindly find below the programme for joining the birding tour for the waterbird census.

Date	Sites	Notes
Jan 05	Padma River in Munshiganj District	Count ducks, waders; see new settlers on unstable island in treacherous water.
Jan 08-15	Aila, Halir, Pashua, Pana, Banua, Tangua Haors	Count ducks, waders, crakes in lakes; see fishermen live & work in Haor (Lakes).
Jan 08-15	Coastal Islands	Count ducks, waders, etc including Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Asian Dowitcher, Indian Skimmer at newly accreted islands; see fishermen work in Bay.
Jan 16-17	Jamuna River in Sirajganj, Gaibandha Disrticts	Count ducks, waders; see life on riverbank.
Jan 17	JU Campus Ponds	Count ducks.
Jan 22-26	Reservoir, beach and small lake at Muhuri, Patenga, Chapada	Count ducks, waders, etc; see rural life.
Jan 22-26	Hail, Hakalooki Haor	Count ducks, waders; see fishermen work in Haor (lakes).
Jan 22-27	Sunderban (Kochikhali, Katka)	Count ducks, waders, other waterbirds including Masked Finfoot; see pristine mangrove and wildlife including tiger, crocodile, wild boar.

Mainland China

Mr. Xu Qiang, Wetlands International - China
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A Waterbird Conservation Workshop was held at Dafeng, Jiangsu Province of China on 4-6 November 2003 by Wetlands international - China Office. Nearly 60 participants from wetland Nature Reserves, provincial Forestry Departments and other government agencies attended the meeting.

A presentation on the Asian Waterbird Census was made by Mr. Xu Qiang, Technical Officer of WI - China at the meeting to promote the AWC in 2004. The participants were encouraged to actively participate to the AWC in 2004.

Hong Kong (Status of the AWC in Hong Kong and Black-faced Spoonbill Census)

Mr. YU Yat Tung, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, ytyu@hkstar.com

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) has been carrying out waterbird monitoring programme at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay for more than two decades. The annual January count of wintering waterbird since 1979 is a part of the AWC organized by Wetlands International. In addition, The HKBWS has records of waterbirds going back to 1959. The Mai Po Deep Bay wetland was designated as a Ramsar Site in 1995. As the basis of the future management strategy for the Site, the monitoring programme was formalized as an annually-subvented project of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of Hong Kong SAR Government since 1998. The long-term statistical data will constitute an important indicator of the ecological status of the site under the Ramsar Convention. Monthly counts of waterbirds form an important part of the present programme, the other components being counts of migrant shorebirds and surveys of Egret nesting colonies.

January results of 2003 show the aggregate number of wintering waterbirds was 63,198, which is higher than 54,720 of 2002. It remained lower than the peak number of 77,227 recorded in 1996. Corresponding figures for recent years are: 70,216 in 1997, 58,554 in 1998, 64,525 in 1999 and 57,227 in 2000. This indicates some stabilization of the number of wintering waterbirds in the Deep Bay after a fall from the peak in 1996. Results of the monitoring also identified 14 bird species of significance for conservation either due to their being listed as globally threatened or because the Deep Bay supported at least 1% of the regional or flyway populations. They include the globally threatened Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* and Saunder's Gulls *Larus saundersi*.

Monitoring of the number of waterbirds enables a baseline assessment of the population of waterbirds using the Ramsar Site throughout the year, especially with regard to the migrants of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Long-term trends in bird numbers also provide an indication of the health of the Mai Po Deep Bay ecosystem.

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society has co-ordinated the Black-faced Spoonbill Census from 2003 onwards. The specific international synchronous census resulted in 1,069 Black-faced Spoonbills counted in this year. This was the first time the number exceeded 1,000, which was 10% more than that of 2002. The census provides the annual updated information of this species and increases people's awareness of the conservation of this endangered species.

India (Status of the AWC in India and future development)

Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Mr. Sunil Laad and Mr. Zafar-ul Islam, Bombay Nature and History Society, bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in

The AWC was started in India in 1987 at the initiation of the International Waterfowl and Wetland Research Bureau (now Wetlands International) in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). The BNHS is a membership organization and has members all over the country. These members and BNHS researchers were used to collect information on wetlands and waterfowl. Many non-members also participated in the AWC. In order to gain support from BNHS members, state coordinators were appointed in most of the states and the participants were encouraged to send the forms first to the state coordinators for checking and then through the state coordinators to the national coordinator at BNHS. However this was not so straight forward and many of the participants would send the forms directly to BNHS or even to Wetlands International. This resulted in confusion and delays. Moreover, such forms were not checked by the state coordinators so data quality has been compromised.

The number of sites and number of participants vary from year to year, directly related to the funds available in BNHS for this programme. The table below shows the number of sites covered and the number of participants between 1994 and 2002. Data for 1997 and 1998 are not available.

Year	1994	1995	1996	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Participants	389	354	326	14	44	190	327	549
Sites	986	577	573	16	51	193	356	462

New sites and new participants join every year while many earlier participants and sites drop out, hence it is difficult to compare the data across years and across sites. For instance, in 2002, 356 sites were covered while in the year 2003, 462, but only 189 were repeated, 166 were not counted, and 273 new sites were covered. The state-wise coverage also varies from year to year. In some years, 15-20 sites would be covered in a state, then the following year, either none or only 3-4, or double the sites of the previous year would be covered. The type of wetlands covered varies year to year, and in some years, internationally famous wetlands such as Keodaleo National Park (Bharatpur) are not covered!

While the AWC has certainly created interest in India for wetland conservation and this exercise is also extremely useful for nature education, its main purpose to collect meaningful data on waterbird population trends and wetlands is not being implemented. This is mainly due to the following

reasons: Lack of trained manpower, haphazard coverage, same sites counted by many participants, obsession with numbers overlooking the fact that even a low count gives a general idea of a waterbody, lack of proper coordination between participants and state coordinators, lack of good field guides and equipment (binoculars and telescopes), inaccessibility of some good sites, favourite sites or unimportant sites counted, administrative restrictions to count in protected areas and inadequate follow up.

In order to address these problems and questions, the following steps are required:

- Training of the participants
- Database training of the state coordinators
- Long term funding
- Selection of sites in all the habitat types and across the country for long term monitoring
- All Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in wetlands to be covered
- Development of identification guides for waders, ducks, and an inexpensive census manual.
- Quick publication of results
- Involvement of Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) members
- Regular updating of 1% threshold for waterbirds
- Monitoring of threatened wetland species
- Online website (e.g. Kagu)
- Coordination between neighbouring countries
- Mapping of important species, wetlands
- Special attention to flagship waterbirds and important wetlands
- Media coverage
- Training of front line field staff of Forest Department and policy decision makers
- Some sort of recognition and distribution of certificates/mementos for continued involvement by participants

In order to get scientific information from the AWC, it is necessary to maintain quality control through:

- Vigorous and intensive training
- Involvement of serious and experienced bird watchers
- Programme development for filtering erroneous data
- Centralised Data Bank for Storing and Disseminations

Other future steps to improve the AWC would be to train state coordinators and active participants to take up local and regional projects and raise funds on their own to expand this activity in their region through training on:

- Writing of funding proposals
- Long term storage and retrieval of data
- Online data dissemination
- Generation of maps and status of species
- Knowledge of site monitoring protocols
- Involvement of decision makers and local communities

Indonesia

Mr. Yus Rusila Noor, Wetlands International - Indonesia Office, noor@indo.net.id

Wetlands International -Indonesia Office with funding support from the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) has recently translated, updated and published the Shorebird Study Manual into Bahasa Indonesia (the national language). WI Indonesia Office is planning to distribute the publication in time for the AWC 2004.

Republic of Korea (Status of Wintering Waterbird Monitoring in the Republic of Korea)

Dr. Jin-Han KIM, National Institute of Environmental Research, birdkor@dreamwiz.com

The Republic of Korea has over 281,544 hectares of tidal flats, 13,000km of shoreline, 2,900 islands, and some of the most globally important and unique natural wetlands, which provide habitats for an extremely wide range of biological diversity.

More than 50 internationally important bird species were identified as migrating through the wetlands of the Republic of Korea. Among these, the Black-faced Spoonbill and the Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, whose main breeding and resting grounds are located on the west coast of the Korean peninsula, are considered the most important species, since their world populations are estimated at about 900 individuals and 2,500 individuals, respectively.

The wintering population and staging population of the Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis* and the White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* in the wetlands of the Republic of Korea exceed 30% of the world population, and the wintering population of the Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* and the Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* in the wetlands of the Republic of Korea range from 50~95% of the world population.

The AWC in Korea was started in 1988 and coordinated by Prof. Won. Later it was coordinated by The Korean Association of Wildlife Conservation chaired by Prof. Won (1988-1998) and followed by the National Institute of Environment Research (from 1999). In the early stages, the coverage was relatively low due to not only financial problems but also the lack of trained people. But with economic growth and the increase in birdwatchers as well as graduate school students and the expansion of public interest toward birds, the infra-structure was adequate for the whole country to be surveyed in the late 90s. From 1999, waterbird censuses were coordinated, funded and implemented by the government. The results from the census have been used in many

cases by not only the Government but also private companies.

From experience gathered over the years, some new sites were added and some sites were divided or integrated for data quality management. Currently, 118 sites have been selected and monitored by 128 surveyors (64 teams). Every team was given a map which showed the boundary of the census and a standardized report form. The census was conducted on the same day with one day pre-census if needed. This simultaneous census makes the output more reliable because a big population of the Baikal Teal which is now the most abundant species in Korea, move to and from the site day by day. Most participants report their results by e-mail using the standardized form and this helps in the easy creation of database. The table below provides a summary of the results of the AWC since 1988.

Year	No. of Sites/ species/individual birds	Dominant Species
1988~ 1998	10~26/-/-	-
1999	69/178/1,068,256	Mallard (340,581), Baikal Teal (230,508), Spot-billed Duck (103,108), White fronted Goose (61,328), Bean Goose (37,464)
2000	100/186/1,184,694	Mallard (434,472), Baikal Teal (211,954), Spot-billed Duck (147,936), Pochard (61,184), Shelduck (44,396)
2001	114/189/964,150	Mallard (264,118), Baikal Teal (185,699), Spot-billed Duck (93,369), Shelduck (44,710), Pochard (33,070)
2002	118/175/932,258	Baikal Teal (287,206), Mallard (255,421), Spot-billed Duck (62,051), Bean Goose (31,866), White fronted Goose (30,428)
2003	118/189/975,531	Baikal Teal (303,165), Mallard (250,048), Spot-billed Duck (55,118), White fronted Goose (33,583), Herring Gull (29,608)

However there are still many sites which need to be counted in order to grasp the situation of wintering waterbirds in the whole of Korea. There lie many possible errors due to the different ability of participants and also the weather condition at the time of the count.

Malaysia (Experience, issues and future challenges of the AWC in Malaysia)

Mr. Yeap Chin Aik, Malaysia Nature Society, natsoc@po.jaring.my
Mr. Anthony Sebastian, Malaysia Nature Society, aonyx@pd.jaring.my
Ms. Siti Hawa Yatim, Department of Wildlife and National Parks, siti@wildlife.gov.my

Malaysia's involvement in the AWC programme started in 1987 with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), Peninsular Malaysia as national Coordinator. The Malaysian Nature Society, through the Bird Conservation Council (BCC), joined the programme in 1996. The Society started to use its birdwatcher network to assist in surveying wetlands and waterbirds. Survey coverage has a bias towards Peninsular Malaysia, due to population distribution and the presence of a birdwatching fraternity. East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) needed more effective coordination. The appointment of an east Malaysian coordinator, by the BCC, aims to address this shortcoming.

In Malaysia, counts from late December to early February are accepted. This expansion from the usual official two-week survey period was necessary to allow volunteers greater flexibility, and to take into account the monsoon season, which prevents easy access to many important coastal sites. Currently, over 20 sites are monitored regularly during the AWC period by over 30 volunteers and the DWNP.

MNS coordinates the volunteers through the respective Coordinators (West and East Malaysia). Gaps would be filled by the DWNP especially in south and east Peninsular Malaysia. A table consisting of volunteers, possible survey sites and survey dates would be constructed and sent by e-mail to all participating volunteers to inform and avoid duplication of surveys. Survey forms will be sent by e-mail or posted to volunteers (if e-mail facility is unavailable). Completed survey forms returned to MNS will be compiled into a national report. The report (in PDF format) is then sent to all participating volunteers. Hard copies are sent to DWNP and Wetlands International.

The following are some milestones achieved since 1987. A maximum number of waterbirds was counted in 1992 (67,396 individuals) and peak number of sites (86 sites) in 1991. Mapping of major wintering sites was done especially for globally threatened waterbirds; Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea*, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* , Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and the Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*. There is better understanding of the importance of

man-made wetlands e.g. former tin-mining wetlands, ash ponds (power stations) to waterbirds. Assistance was given in the nomination of wetlands for Important Bird Areas in Malaysia. There were discoveries of new, possibly, important waterbird sites. The involvement of MNS volunteers has increased steadily. There was promotion of the program through articles in the media, *Suara Enggang* (bimonthly bird bulletin) and the *Malaysian Naturalist*.

Strengths of the AWC in Malaysia are competent identification skills, several important sites covered regularly and reliable data collected. The weakness is that the number of sites surveyed are still low, East Malaysia is insufficiently covered, the number of involved birdwatchers is still low, database management skills are needed and data entry needs to be speeded up and it is costly to visit some important sites.

The future direction and priority are to identify and count more sites, recount the important sites every year, continue to monitor wetland IBAs and nationally important wetlands, ensure there are enough people for surveys and data quality, solicit and secure long term support for the AWC and ensure more exposure in the relevant media to promote the program.

Myanmar

Mr. Thet Zaw Naing, Myanmar Bird and Nature Society, sst@mptmail.net.mm

After a very successful AWC in 2003, with 77 wetland sites, 53,159 waterbirds of 108 species counted, the Myanmar Bird & Nature Society is currently preparing for organisation of the AWC 2004 with the cooperation of the Nature & Wildlife Conservation Division of the Forest Department, universities and other volunteers and we expect a more fruitful result and extended coverage for census in 2004.

Philippines (Status of the AWC in the Philippines)

Mr. Carlo C. Custodio, Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, wildlife@pawb.gov.ph

In 1989, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) started the waterbird census as part of its regular work program with the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) primarily as coordinator and the staff of the PAWB in the field offices as counters or data collectors. The first set of the national waterbird count came out in 1990 and the waterbird census has been carried out every year since then.

The data that has been generated so far from the waterbird census has been used in the determination of the distribution of threatened migratory birds (*Threatened Birds of the Philippines*) and the identification of important bird areas (*Key Conservation Sites in the Philippines*). Eight of the 117 sites identified as IBAs were based on the waterbird census results. The information of the AWC has also contributed to the implementation of The Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Priorities Program; the second iteration of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the Philippines. The bird group, one of the taxon-based thematic groups that worked on the Program drew information from the results of the waterbird census in analyzing data for identifying priority conservation sites.

Two of the four Ramsar Sites in the Philippines, Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary and Naujan Lake National Park, were designated based on their importance for migratory birds. Olango Island had been earlier set-aside as a protected area under the National Integrated Protected Areas System for the same reason that was used in its designation as a Ramsar site. Data from the waterbird census was also used in identifying Olango Island as a component of the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network and for Naujan Lake for the East Asian Anatidae Site Network. Another site, Lake Malasi, in Cabagan, Isabela in Luzon will be proposed as an Anatidae Network Site.

While the data from the AWC has been used in some meaningful ways as exemplified above, it has not been useful in monitoring the ecological status of wetlands. Trends in the population of waders have not been established thus rendering the making of conclusions difficult. One of the reasons for this is that some members of the original group of trained counters have been given other responsibilities or new assignments. New counters who have not been trained took over and the quality of data turned over has not been quite reliable as evidenced by the reporting of species that are not even found in the Philippines. This also represents the negative side in making the waterbird census part of the DENR's regular work program. Since the field units have to submit reports, the quality of data has been sacrificed just for them to be able to comply with the directive from higher DENR authorities to submit reports on wader counts.

The state of the Philippine economy has also been a factor for the difficulty in sustaining the visits to some areas and the ability to cover additional areas for the census. It would be difficult to predict the future of the Philippine economy but one thing that needs to be done is for the private sector and the DENR to jointly conduct the waterbird census. While the DENR has been successful in getting assistance from private citizens and the NGOs in the conduct of conservation activities, there has

been very little help from them in the conduct of the census. There had been very few volunteers for the census and this could be attributed to the fact that one has to have at least a good pair of binoculars and good binoculars are not cheap in the Philippines. One also has to have the appropriate training obtained either in formal training sessions or by joining experienced counters and learning along the way. Potential volunteers therefore need to have the time and financial resources to able to join waterbird counts, and these resources are difficult to access.

The next steps of the AWC in the Philippine are:

Need for DENR to actively seek the support of established conservation organizations because these groups have personnel with appropriate expertise as well as financial resources.

Help from international conservation organizations like BirdLife-Philippines with Haribon Foundation, WWF and Conservation International. More efforts nevertheless will have to be exerted in enlisting the help of locally-based conservation groups for the AWC.

Assistance will be needed in training volunteers who intend to participate in the AWC.

Biodiversity conservation has not been figuring prominently in the consciousness of the Filipino people. This is based on the survey made by Haribon Foundation recently. As a result of this finding, Haribon developed an Information, Communication and Education (IEC) Framework Plan with DENR Information Officers. This AWC will be integrated in the implementation of this plan.

There might be a temporary need to concentrate efforts only on important wetlands for the AWC, to ensure that the quality of data is not sacrificed.

Sri Lanka (Status of the AWC in Sri Lanka)

Mr. Udaya Sirivardana & Mr. Deepal Warakagoda, Ceylon Bird Club, birdclub@sltnet.lk

The waterbird census started in Sri Lanka in 1984, and was conducted by the Ceylon Bird Club, in association with Wetlands International and its predecessor. The census was initially conducted countrywide, then excluded to certain areas in some years because of the armed conflict, but it is now resuming complete coverage. Each year, 20-30 members of the CBC assisted by a few selected others, have engaged in this activity during chosen days in January or February. The highlights are reported in the CBC's monthly journal. Every year the club publishes a report of the census, with its tabulated data; a review of the status of wetlands; and other relevant remarks, especially on populations of species. Sri Lanka's two Ramsar sites were declared mainly owing to the club's proposals and persuasion, and information which was gathered partly from the census.

The total count countrywide has ranged from about 50,000 to 300,000 birds. The number of species recorded in the census has averaged about 95.

The coverage has generally been satisfactory. Bird identification and counting standards have been consistently good. Planning the census, informing CBC members of it, assigning more competent counters for evenly distributing census skills geographically, making area allocations by personally contacting members and mailing circulars, providing advice and maps when necessary, co-ordination during the census, etc. have been effected each year, and useful methods in these regards evolved over the years.

Thailand

Mr. Petch Manopawitr, Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, pmanopawitr@wcs.org

The collaboration between the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) and the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DoNP) has been strengthened after the first AWC coordinator meeting in Malaysia. This year the BCST has planned to coordinate AWC activities through the Bird Conservation Network of Thailand (BCNT) which engages more than 40 national and local organisations from all over the country. This effort will allow BCNT partners to play a role in collecting and monitoring waterbird populations in wetlands in their proximity as well as to share information for use in conservation. Wetlands International – Thailand is also expected to help coordinate with BCNT partners in the Southern region. Meanwhile, BCST coordinator for AWC has collaborated with Mr. Krairat Eeumamphai and Ms. Bupbhar Amget from the wildlife research division in DoNP to strengthen the effort in monitoring of waterbird populations in Important Bird Areas and other significant wetland areas throughout the country. Mr. Krairat, a newly appointed waterbird survey project coordinator for DoNP, recently revealed that DoNP has committed to conduct a 5 year project starting the end of this year to survey and monitor waterbird populations every two months in more than 60 wetland sites from Chiang Saen in the North down to Pattani Gulf in the South. The covered areas are divided geographically into North, North-Eastern, Central, East and Upper and Lower South and will be monitored through six wildlife research stations across Thailand. The initiatives by DoNP will serve as a strong foundation in which volunteers and BCNT partners can join in and provide tremendous help during the AWC peak period in January.

BCST has started to promote AWC activities through its partners and will start to register AWC volunteers in the 3rd Thailand Birdwatching Fair to be held in Bangkok on 16 November. The event is expected to draw in more than 2,000 people and will be launched by the Privy Councillor, Dr. Amphol Senanarong. The presentation on the importance and the strategy of the AWC is scheduled to be presented in detail by Dr. Philip Round and Mr. Petch Manopawitr at the BCST monthly meeting for volunteers and membership in the second week of December. The arrival of two Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the last week of October at the Khok Kham area in the inner Thai Gulf has sparked excitement and enthusiasm among birders to participate in the AWC this year.

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5. Presentation to promote the AWC at BirdLife Meeting

Mr. David Li, the AWC International Co-ordinator was invited to the BirdLife International Asian Council Meeting on 23 October 2003, Bogor Indonesia to make a presentation on the development of the AWC with a focus on how it has contributed to the monitoring of globally threatened waterbirds and wetland Important Bird Areas. The talk on the AWC was very welcomed and the participants pledged their support to Wetlands International in developing the AWC by working closely with BirdLife International partner organisations.

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6. International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2004

Mr. Yu Yat Tong, Coordinator of the International Black-faced Spoonbill Census, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, hkbws@hkbws.org.hk

The January of 2003 is a remarkable moment for the globally endangered Black-faced Spoonbill. For the first time, its known world population was recorded over 1000 individuals with a total of 1069 individuals. This number indicates a recovery of the population from the brink of extinction in early 1990s. However, the Black-faced Spoonbill is still facing various threats in its breeding, staging and wintering grounds. The annual census on the wintering population of the spoonbill can provide a comparable and useful figures which is the one of the key components for conservation of this endangered species.

I am pleased to inform you that that the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) continues to coordinate the International Black-faced Spoonbill census this winter. The dates of the census are fixed on 16-18 January 2004. You are cordially invited to mark these dates in your calendar and start preparing for the census.

To help our preparations, please kindly advise us whether you will be participating in the coming census and the site you are responsible to. Please reply to hkbws@hkbws.org.hk and copy to my account: ytyu@hkstar.com

Guidelines and suggestions to the census are attached for your reference. It helps to ensure that the census would produce results as accurate as possible. For the last report of the census and updated information are available at the Black-faced Spoonbill homepage at http://www.hkbws.org.hk/bfs/ , you are also welcome to post your finding of the species at the Black-faced Spoonbill Newsgroup at http://www.hkbws.org.hk/cgi-bin/yabb/YaBB.pl?board=Spoonbill .

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7. News on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy

Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee Meeting

The 8th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee (MWCC) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 21 and 22 July 2003. Visit http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/waterbirdstrategy/NewsItems/MWCC8Report.htm to find on the outcomes of the meeting. For more information of the MWCC and the strategy contact Dr. Taej Mundkur, Strategy Coordination Officer, taej@wiap.nasionet.net .

News on the Anatidae Action Plan of the East Asian Flyway

The 2003 International Anatidae Symposium for the East Asia and Siberia Region in conjunction with the 4th Meeting of the Anatidae Working Group and second meeting of the Task Forces on Swan Goose and Baikal Teal was held from 28 October to 3 November 2003 at Seosan City, Republic of Korea. For more information on the Anatidae Action Plan activities, contact Mr.

Yoshihiko Miyabayashi, the Anatidae Flyway

News on the Crane Action Plan of the North East Asian Flyway

The 6th Working Group Meeting of the Crane Network was held on 23 August 2003 at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in conjunction with the Symposium on Crane Conservation in Mongolia on 24 August 2003 and the Training course of the Crane Network on 25 August - 2 September 2003 at Choibalsan City and Daguur Strictly Protected Area in Northeast Mongolia. For more information on the training course, please visit the website http://www.ramsar.org/mtg_mongolia_crane.htm or contact Mr. Simba Chan, Crane Flyway Officer simba@wing-wbsj.or.jp .

News on the Shorebird Action Plan of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway

On 10 October 2003 a formal dedication ceremony for the joining of the Kapar Power Station into the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network was held at the station, Klang, Malaysia. This internationally important site to shorebirds is the first Network Site in Malaysia and the 33rd site on the network. Read the report at http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/waterbirdstrategy/NewsItems/CeremonyKapar.htm . For more information on shorebird Action plan activities, contact Mr. Warren Lee Long, Shorebird Flyway Officer, Warren.LeeLong@deh.gov.au .

Officer, yym@duck.biglobe.ne.jp

8. International Waterbird Census (IWC) news

A test version of the IWC new database system programme was recently sent to a test panel, with the aim to reveal any errors or omissions left undetected by the developers. Once finalised, the programme will enable efficient management of the huge global dataset gathered by the network of volunteer bird counters during the annual waterbird census. The definite version will be used by the Wetlands International regional offices and, eventually, will be distributed among the entire IWC network of coordinators.

9. Global Flyway conference April 2004, Scotland – A last call!

Information on this important meeting was included in the last issue of the AWC Newsletter (No.5, May 2003). The conference has just extended the deadline for submission of abstracts and financial application to 30 November 2003. For those who are hoping to be sponsored to attend the meeting, please visit the Wetlands International website at http://www.wetlands.org/GFC/Default.htm or contact Dr. Gerard C. Boere Gerard.Boere@wetlands.org to catch this last opportunity for financial support.

We welcome your participation in the AWC 2004 during 10-25 January!

For more information on AWC and view previous AWC Newsletters, please visit our website at:

http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/awcmain.html