

## Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group

**Chair:** Baz Hughes

**Location/affiliation:** The Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group was established in 1990 and is coordinated by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), Slimbridge, Glos. GL2 7BT, United Kingdom.

**Number of members:** 266 members in 70 countries worldwide



Baz Hughes

### Mission statement

Identify which Anseriformes taxa are globally threatened, monitor their status, produce and implement international action plans, and carry out and exchange information on conservation projects on globally threatened Anseriformes.

### Summary of main activities in 2014

An action plan for the Critically Endangered Baer's Pochard (*Aythya baeri*) was completed in November 2014. This was subsequently endorsed by the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership 8th Meeting of Partners in January 2015.

A study of the genetic status of captive Baer's Pochard was initiated to establish which of the current global captive populations are pure Baer's Pochard, and to use this information to inform captive management of the species.

Surveys of Scaly-sided Merganser (*Mergus squamatus*) in the core study area in the Russian Far East in 2014 found 32 pairs, a similar number to the previous two years, but lower than the long term average of 40–50 pairs. The causes of this decline, and the decline in breeding success, remain unclear but could be due to predation of nests and adults by Sable and Yellow-throated Martens and/or high levels of heavy metals (particularly arsenic), which have been found in unhatched eggs in recent years (possibly picked up on their main wintering area in the Yangtze catchment in Central China). Heavy metals research was initiated in collaboration with Biodiversity Research Institute, USA, with funding from the Rufford Foundation.

Moulting habitats were identified using stable isotopes analysis: most Scaly-sided Mergansers of both sexes are likely

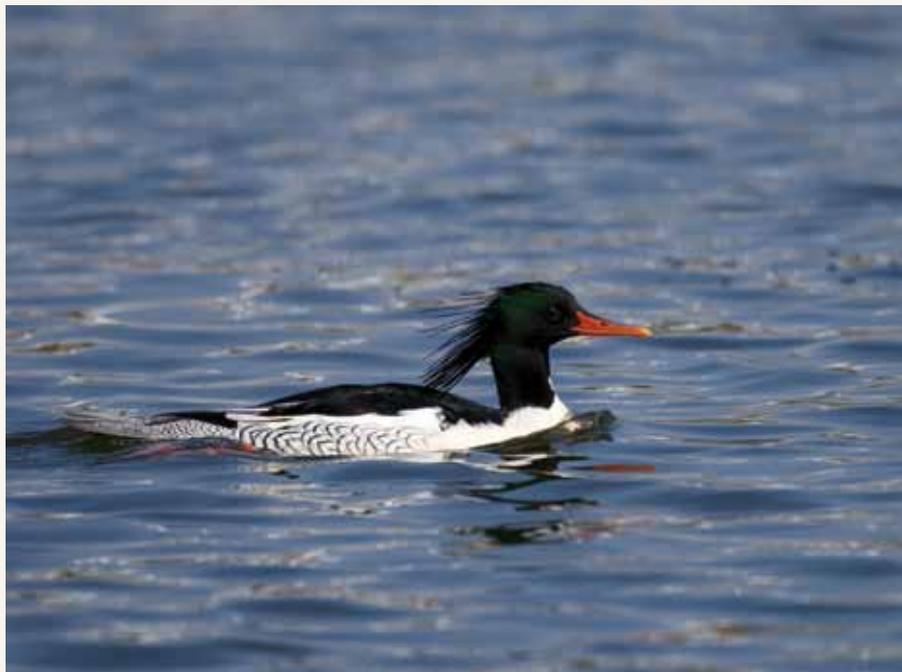
to moult on freshwater, but some male, subadult and failed breeding females may undertake moult migration to brackish and marine waters.

A new nature reserve for Scaly-sided Merganser (and other endangered species) was established in Changbaishan, China, in 2013. Ten nest boxes were erected in autumn 2014.

The captive population of the Critically Endangered Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innotata*) now stands at 54 adults. There was no captive breeding in 2014 (this will happen next in early 2015) to bring the timing in line with the wild birds. A paper was published on the ecology and demography of the last remaining 25 wild birds – there is high adult survival and high hatching success, but very low chick-rearing success, due apparently to shortage of accessible food at Lake Matsaborimena. This supports the need for a reintroduction to kick-start population recovery – the wild population is not productive enough to generate surplus birds that might disperse and colonize new sites.

We secured funding from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative for a three-year project to empower communities to benefit from the natural resources of our proposed Madagascar Pochard reintroduction site – Lac Sofia. It will develop local management structures alongside sustainable and biodiversity-focused management of the lake and its watershed. In turn, this should create conditions suitable for the release of captive-bred pochards and for other threatened Madagascar wildlife.

Scaly-sided Merganser (*Mergus squamatus*), Endangered. © Peiqi Liu



We continued the €2.7M LIFE+ Project "Safe Grounds for Redbreasts" led by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds. An analysis of the impact of wind farms and other landscape elements (roads, treelines, powerlines, settlements) on the distribution of Red-breasted Geese (*Branta ruficollis*) and European White-fronted Geese (*Anser albifrons albifrons*) in Bulgarian Dobrudja was completed and submitted for the EC court case over Kaliakra. It showed that geese strongly avoid foraging near these elements, but the effect only arises over short distances. Overall habitat suitability is reduced by 50% compared with the theoretical maximum, due in particular to the avoidance of powerlines and treelines. Currently,

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wind turbine avoidance contributes a further 6% reduction in habitat suitability after accounting for the other elements. However, if all currently planned and permitted wind turbines in the region were erected, this reduction would increase to around 20%.

We have also developed a sensitivity map for wintering geese which will be used by authorities and companies as an early stage planning tool for wind energy and other developments in the region, providing an overview of the relative sensitivity of different areas to the potentially negative effects of wind turbines.

### Future goals/activities

#### *Baer's Pochard*

Establish Baer's Pochard Task Force under the EAAFP and hold Action Plan implementation workshop in summer 2015; report on winter census carried out in January 2015; conduct winter survey in Myanmar (funding already secured for this); conclude genetics study; and trial treatment wetland system for Baer's Pochard captive management and initiate a conservation breeding programme at Slimbridge.

#### *Scaly-sided Merganser*

Complete and implement Scaly-sided Merganser action plan; hold EAAFP

Scaly-sided Merganser Task Force meeting in Vladivostok in September 2015; establish artificial nest programme in Changbaishan Nature Reserve; and complete heavy metal research and publish results.

#### *Madagascar Pochard*

Maintain sustainable captive breeding population of Madagascar Pochard in Madagascar and develop release plan with partners; conduct integrated conservation and development project at the proposed release site; and build public exhibit in Madagascar.

#### *Red-breasted Goose*

Complete Red-breasted Goose LIFE project and develop future management recommendations.

### Acknowledgements

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