

WI-IUCN SSC Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group



Baz Hughes

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| NAME: CHAIR / CO-CHAIRS | Dr. Baz Hughes |
| NAME: RED LIST AUTHORITY CO-ORDINATOR | Andy Symes (BirdLife International) |
| LOCATION / AFFILIATION | Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), Slimbridge, UK |
| NUMBER OF MEMBERS | 266 members in 70 countries worldwide |

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group (TWSG) is to conserve the world's most threatened waterfowl by focusing on direct action; developing, demonstrating and disseminating best conservation practice and processes; and actively promoting and encouraging information exchange on threatened waterfowl monitoring, research, conservation and public awareness worldwide.

We will do this through producing and implementing international action plans, incorporating in situ and ex situ conservation tools, as necessary; by providing advice to policy makers, international conventions and practitioners; encouraging information exchange and cooperation amongst threatened waterfowl conservationists and with other relevant conventions and organisations, particularly the IUCN SSC, Wetlands International, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the Convention on the Conservation on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), and BirdLife International.

SUMMARY OF MAIN ACTIVITIES 2015

Baer's Pochard (Critically Endangered)

- Baer's Pochard Task Force formed under the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). Funds raised towards Action Plan implementation workshop.

- Around 165 Baer's Pochard were located during a coordinated census of key sites in China in January 2015 – c.125 in the Yangtze floodplain and c.40 at a site in Shandong. This is the largest known count since 2010/11 and, whilst probably a reflection of awareness and effort, rather than a true increase in numbers, it is encouraging that we now know of the existence of a greater number of birds.

- Winter census in central Myanmar in January 2016 located c. 20 individuals at three sites. This is a positive result, particularly as the main site where 12 birds were found (Pyu Lake) was not previously known to support important waterbirds. This suggests further sites may also exist undetected in Myanmar.

- Genetics study at WWT found that captive birds are not hybrids and are not inbred. Conservation breeding programme established from pure birds - 24 birds (12 male and 12 female) were reared in 2015. Began new project called Aquackponics (which could reduce water use in the Madagascar Pochard Breeding Centre in Madagascar). A mixture of aquaponics and hydroponics (comprising two duck ponds, a silt trap and a large aquatic plant 'grow-bed') are being used to house Baer's Pochard at Slimbridge. This will convert ammonia from duck droppings into nitrates, which act as nutrients for plants growing in the water. We will then harvest the plants once they've cleaned the water and use them as duck food.

Madagascar Pochard (Critically Endangered)

Madagascar Pochard Species Action Plan draft finalised for approval by the Government. In December 2015, the captive population stood at 77 individuals, with 25 chicks reared during the year, the first to be reared entirely by Malagasy aviculturists without supervision from overseas experts, making the long-term future of this population far more secure. The wild population remained stable at approximately 25 birds, but fledging success continued to be extremely low. The Bemanevika National Protected Area, which contains the lakes on which the wild population lives, along with the surrounding forests, was officially declared - a huge step towards conserving this important landscape. Work was started towards creating a site suitable for releasing pochards. Initial activities focused on developing management structures through which habitat management and restoration can occur. Biodiversity-friendly farming practices were also promoted among local villagers, as a first step towards management of the watershed.

Red-breasted Goose (previously Endangered, now Vulnerable)

Completed LIFE project to: understand how Red-breasted Geese use coastal Dobrudzha in Bulgaria; identify their distribution and favoured locations; enforce existing protection; minimise disturbance; develop new tools to minimise potential conflict between geese and people; and raise awareness of the importance of Dobrudzha for Red-breasted Geese.

White-headed Duck (Endangered)

The invasive Ruddy Duck is the main threat to this species in Europe. Ruddy Duck eradication programmes continued in the UK (20 birds remaining), France (200 birds remaining), the Netherlands (70 birds remaining) and Belgium (10 birds remaining).

IMPACT ON CONSERVATION

Baer's Pochard (Critically Endangered)

This is an example of a conservation programme in its infancy. The precipitous decline combined with the nature of the threats (suspected but not proven) present a massive conservation challenge. Nevertheless, as this species is Critically Endangered, we have embarked on the species recovery journey – so far just identifying the probable threats and monitoring the wild population to determine whether, and if so how, we can save this species (a close relative of the Madagascar Pochard and thus with transferable recovery techniques). We have also established a conservation breeding programme which will provide a source of birds for reintroduction should the wild population go extinct.

Madagascar Pochard (Critically Endangered)

Collaborative work by WWT, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, The Peregrine Fund and the Madagascar Government over the last seven years has undoubtedly saved the Madagascar Pochard from extinction. While the species is still hanging on a thread in the wild, due to low productivity at the single remaining breeding site, we now have a viable captive population in Madagascar as a source of birds for reintroduction into the wild. We have identified a suitable release site where we will empower local communities to benefit from natural resources at the lake while also improving conditions for the pochard and for wider biodiversity.

Red-breasted Goose (previously Endangered, now Vulnerable)

The Red-breasted Goose was recently downlisted on the IUCN Red List from Endangered to Vulnerable, given the population appears to have remained largely stable over the last ten years. While the TWSG cannot claim to have achieved this conservation outcome, the recent LIFE project has had a significant conservation impact. It has reduced disturbance of geese roosting on lakes by illegal fishing to near zero and the number of Red-breasted Geese illegally killed to zero. Dobrudzha has embraced the Red-breasted Goose: at the end of the project, 98% of local residents knew of the species, 96% were aware of its protection status, and 71% would be concerned if it disappeared from the area. Scientific findings helped prevent the development of a major wind farm adjacent to the key roost at Durankulak Lake and agri-environment measures for Red-breasted Geese have been produced and adopted as part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's national scheme. Red-breasted Goose biological and ecological requirements have been mainstreamed into the Bulgarian National Priority Action Framework for Natura 2000 sites.

White-headed Duck (Endangered)

Hybridisation with the North American Ruddy Duck remains the most critical threat to the White-headed Duck. The TWSG have played a leading role in conducting the research and advocacy needed to ensure that eradication from Europe happens - a process that has taken the best part of 30 years. This has included conducting research into the impact of Ruddy Ducks on native species in the UK; assessing possible control measures; a regional control trial, then a full scale eradication programme; and producing and advocating for the implementation of a Europe-wide eradication strategy under the Bern Convention, including the ongoing monitoring of its success.

FUTURE GOALS & ACTIVITIES

Baer's Pochard (Critically Endangered)

- Raise funds for and hold a Baer's Pochard Action Plan implementation workshop in China.
- Use the captive flock at Slimbridge to trial satellite tag attachments which will then be used on wild Madagascar Pochard.

Madagascar Pochard (Critically Endangered)

- Maintain captive breeding population of Madagascar Pochard in Madagascar. Finish development of release plan and begin trials of equipment and methods. Begin releases into the wild in 2018.
- Establish Aquacaponics systems in the breeding facilities to ensure sustainable management of water.
- Start habitat management and restoration activities at the proposed release site, working through newly created local associations.
- Finish construction of public exhibit in Madagascar.

Red-breasted Goose (previously Endangered now Vulnerable)

- Assess impact of hunting along migration route, through satellite tracking and other studies.
- Restore and manage key roost sites in Dobrudzha, including reedbed management to address the encroachment of trees and shrubs.
- Assess winter energetic requirements to inform management schemes and prescriptions.

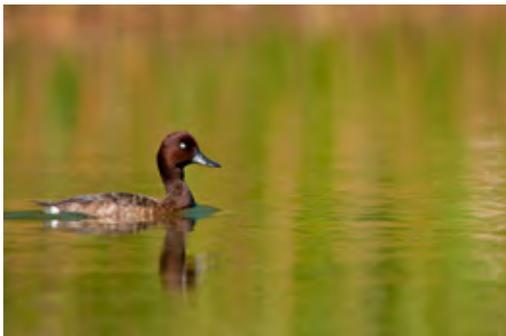
White-headed Duck (Endangered)

- Review implementation of European Ruddy Duck eradication strategy and produce recommendations for its further implementation.
- Support EC LIFE project to eradicate the species from France and the Netherlands.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Critically Endangered Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innotata*), Matsaborimena in 2010
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