

UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP 17 January 2002

Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP)

Background on the process

The Avian Population Estimates Panel (APEP) comprises members of the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Game Conservancy Trust. The Panel's aim is to review published population estimates of birds in the UK periodically and publish a table of these estimates every three years so as to provide a comprehensive list of 'best available' estimates. The first table of estimates was published in 1997¹.

The work of the APEP has been invaluable in providing a single point of reference for all British and UK bird populations and is used widely in support of national and international site designations.

Current and planned activity

Members of the Panel met on 13 September 2001 to initiate the first revision of the 1997 table. JNCC is acting as the collator of the new table, but each organisation on the Panel is tasked with providing revised estimates according to their specific expertise in monitoring in the UK.

The new table (APEP2) will include estimates for GB and UK separately and will also provide All-Ireland estimates (see Stone *et al.* 1997 for definitions of geographical scope). It will include estimates for species for which new national surveys are not available by using published trends and adjusting previously published estimates according to these trends. The new table will also provide clear information on the origin of the estimates within it, and whether any population change is real or methodological.

A new table (or Second Edition) of estimates for bird populations in GB, the UK and All-Ireland, is planned for publication in Autumn 2002.

APEP will aim to publish a third edition in 2005.

Implications for the future development of the UK SPA network

Results from Seabird 2000 will not be available for the current revision, but will be included in the third edition in 2005. Some species within the SCARABBS timetable will not have new surveys since the 1997 table was collated and previous published estimates will be retained. The second edition is being timed to allow the use of new waterbird estimates due to be accepted for publication in 2002. Its publication may therefore be constrained if there is any delay in publishing the new national waterbird estimates.

The implications of bird population changes for developing the UK SPA network are two-fold; perceived changes to the proportion of birds in the network, and real population changes.

As always, the differing timing of national and site surveys presents a problem in interpreting national representation of species in the SPA network that cannot be entirely overcome without monitoring species on all sites at the same time that national surveys are conducted. This means that the proportion of the national population of a species in the SPA network is, in the majority of cases, indicative. Population changes brought about by changing methods of estimation may bring about changes in the indicative representation of species, but will have no other implications for the SPA network.

Real population changes will, however, be of greater concern. If a species population changes very significantly in either a negative or positive way then re-evaluation of the SPA suite for that species may be necessary as it may no longer represent the most suitable selection of sites. The addition of SPA(s)

to a species suite may be appropriate in some instances, while conversely some SPAs may no longer be the most suitable. In the case of declining species, of greater concern will be the reasons for the national decline and whether it is mirrored in the SPA network. Common Standards Monitoring will provide the means to assess populations within the network, but additional work may be necessary to determine the possible causes of such declines at the site level. The knock-on effect of declining populations in the SPA network will be the need for re-assessment of site management and the implementation of appropriate changes in management.

Recommendations

In the light of the activity outlined above, it is recommended that the UK SPA Scientific Working Group:

- **Invite** JNCC to report on progress with collating data for APEP2 later in 2002.
- **Consider** how to evaluate new estimates with respect to development of the UK SPA network.

i Stone, B.H., Sears, J., Cranswick, P.A., Gregory, R.D., Gibbons, D.W., Rehfisch, M.H., Aebischer, N.J. & Reid, J.B. 1997. Population estimates of birds in Britain and in the United Kingdom. *British Birds* 90: 1-22.