

23rd MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
26-27 June 2023, Virtual meeting format

**REPORT ON ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AEWA FOR
THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION**

This report provides an update of the activities undertaken in the Europe and Central Asia region of the AEWA.

The number of Contracting Parties in the Region / Number of Range States in the Region

There are 42 Contracting Parties (including the European Union) out of 54 Range States (including Canada).

The accession of Greece as a Party to AEWA took effect on 01 June 2023.

The Contracting Parties and Range States for the European and Central Asia region are listed in Table 1. 7 countries have submitted a report.

Belgium

Which developments regarding the implementation of AEWA have taken place in the region since the last Meeting of the Parties?

AEWA is well implemented already in Belgium.

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to AEWA

Curlew, Godwit

- In 2021 a Species Protection Programme for wet grassland breeding birds has started for the Flemish region. This SPP puts the focus on the breeding sites for Eurasian curlew and the Black-tailed Godwit and aims to restore populations in bad status across the range in the region and to support the populations that are doing well (at these sites, the focus is broadened to other species of wet grassland breeders that are present). The analysis of this SPP has also been used to identify the places where targeted AEC-measures of the new CAP should be taken.
- The SPP also lead to (kind of spin-off) a specific CAP-measure targeted at Lapwings breeding on arable fields, where the species is breeding more and more often, and where measures that target on grassland management do not match the species' needs nor the farmers' practices. It gives the farmers a small subsidy for no working the fields until the eggs have hatched – this gives a good match with maize crops, as maize is sown relatively late in spring and lapwings like maize stubble to breed. We hope this might help to stop the negative trend, as the species is less well covered or supported by nature management than godwits or curlews.

- Very soon a dedicated staff-member will start working specifically on this SPP to support and carry out more pro-active actions; but some actions have already been initiated, as radio-tagging of Curlews in order to better understand their habitat use during the breeding season. (We are in contact with the International Working Groups of the Godwit and Curlew).

Pink-footed Goose - Wintering site restoration (wet polder grasslands) has been continued to offer the hibernating geese a favourable foraging area, reducing pressure on agriculture.

Emergency situations (extreme cold, draught, toxic or oil spills, etc.) - 2021 and 2023 had long summer drought periods, affecting the breeding habitat of waterbirds and the quality of stop-over sites (presence of shallow water) during the summer migration.

Activities on eradication or other type of action regarding alien species: Eradication of the Ruddy Duck is continuing, in the framework of the protection of the white-headed duck in Europe. Only very low numbers of Ruddy Ducks remain in BE.

Overview of special issues that might be of interest to the StC:

Numerous projects are going on, smaller and bigger, in the framework of climate change but where water birds often benefit, directly or indirectly:

- o flood control projects restoring wetlands in river valleys (big projects mainly in the Scheldt basin as part of the SIGMA-flood control project)
- o smaller scale projects in the field of water retention, slow down runoff, reuse water, to combat drought or to buffer more water: in short projects that reduce the impact of drought and/or flooding as a result of climate change. To support these projects, a special Blue Deal Fund has been established as part of the Flemish Climate Adaption Plan 2021-2023 to support projects from the field.

New research: For the Flemish region, a study is planned this year to identify the sites where disturbance by drones on breeding birds and concentrations of migratory waterbirds could pose a significant disturbance risk. This is done to motivate restrictions on the use of drones (flying height, temporal restrictions, type of drone, ...) in the framework of the EU directive 2019/945 on UAS and third-country operators of UAS.

Croatia

Which developments regarding the implementation of AEWA have taken place in your country since the last Meeting of the Parties?

In period 2017-2023 the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development is implementing the EU financed project “Development of the Natura 2000 Management Framework” through which management plans for more than 2000 Natura 2000 sites, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated according to provisions of the Birds Directive, will be developed and endorsed. Management plans are developed using the participatory approach and all relevant stakeholders are included in their preparation from the beginning of the planning process. For the moment, management plans that are endorsed include 4 SPAs.

In period 2018-2023 the Croatian BirdLife partner Biom is participating in the LIFE Artina – Seabird Conservation Network in the Adriatic project. This project tackles conservation issues of pelagic seabird species in the Central Adriatic focusing on three species: Audouin’s gull (*Larus audouinii*), the Scopoli’s shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) and Yelkouan shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*). Since it is important to protect bird populations in the areas they naturally occur, the aim of this project is also to help proclaim new marine protected areas important for birds (SPAs) which are recognized as key areas not only for nesting but also for feeding and migration. Specific objectives of this project are:

- Identify marine SPAs at sea in southern Croatia for the Audouin’s gull, the Scopoli’s shearwater and Yelkouan shearwater
- Understand and assess the main threats affecting seabird populations on land and at sea in the project area and define actions to mitigate them
- Eradicate terrestrial invasive species (ship rats) on shearwater breeding colonies and control of yellow-legged gulls at breeding colonies of Audouin’s gulls.

In period 2020-2026 Croatia is participating in the European project for the prevention of electrocution and collision of thousands of birds with transmission lines “The LIFE Danube Free Sky-Transnational conservation of birds along the Danube River”. This project is targeting the problem of electrocution and collisions of wild birds with power lines along one of the most important migration corridors, stop-over sites, and wintering places for many bird species in Europe - the Danube River. In Croatia, the LIFE Danube Free Sky project is implemented by three partners - the Kopački rit Nature Park Public Institution, HEP-Distribution System Operator, and the Croatian Transmission System Operator. During the planned five years of project implementation, 15 partners from seven countries are developing strong cooperation and are implementing effective solutions to prevent these threats to birds. After this period, the visibility of more than 245 km of top priority power lines will be increased. Also, more than 3200 of the most dangerous poles within the project area will be adjusted to ensure birds’ safety.

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to AEWA

The World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated in Croatia in the course of 2022 and 2023. Events were reported by many public institutions that are responsible for management of Natura 2000 sites and protected areas in Croatia, by many regional and local authorities, Zagreb ZOO, tourist boards, NGOs.

France

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to AEWA

A symposium took place in 2022 regarding harvest management, or a concerted management of species, their habitats and their exploitation, organised by the Office Français de la Biodiversité, Paris, December 15-16, 2022.

The essential principles have been shared as conclusions:

- Dialogue between all stakeholders;
- Transparent collection and sharing of information and data;
- A proven and evolving scientific model;
- Management hypotheses that area shared and regularly evaluated.

The symposium brought together all the key players interested on the subject and will help French authorities to put in place new mechanisms.

Hungary

Overview of special issues that might be of interest to the StC

HPAI

A serious outbreak of HPAI H5N1 was detected in the beginning of May 2023, predominantly in colonies of Laridae. Black-headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, protected sp.), Mediterranean Gulls (*Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*, strictly protected) and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*, strictly protected) are hit the most severely. Carcasses of these three species have been collected and tested positive for H5N1. As the terns form their colonies later than gulls, there are no estimates yet of the losses for the entire population.

Luckily, there was a very quick reaction from the Ministry. Upon receiving the first pieces of information of birds dying, colleagues involved in bird protection immediately consulted the Department of Food Chain Safety and the national Chief Veterinary Officer. A guidance based on international HPAI guidelines (CMS, AEW, Ramsar Convention, RSPB) and recommendations of international experts, was issued for the national park directorates. The NPD staff has been instructed to monitor the colonies and collect the carcasses to prevent the virus from spreading further, and to follow a communication protocol with a strong message of it being a One Health issue. The carcasses collected are tested for avian influenza. As part of monitoring, ringing activities will be carried out with precautionary measures. Data gathering is continuous, assessment will take place later.

The nesting population of BHG has been steadily declining in the recent years, due to a combination of possible factors. In 2021 it was merely cca. 3200 pairs, about the half of what it was 6 years before. Med.gulls show a fluctuating pattern, the population consisted of cca. 400-800 pairs in the last 7-8 years but seemed to increase in the past years. This year, apart from the losses suffered due to HPAI, the islands holding the largest colonies are unfortunately vacant.

Colonies in reed fields

To counterbalance the sad news, there has been much more rainfall this year than in the past 3-4 years, resulting in our wetlands being in a significantly better condition in all parts of the country, including the extremely dry central region and Hortobágy in the east, home to many waterbirds nesting in sodic wetlands. Some of the absolute winners of the current weather conditions are the Ardeidae species, together with the species joining the egret and heron colonies, the Pygmy Cormorant (*Microcarbo pygmaeus*) and the Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*). They rely heavily on the condition of the reed, but apart from the nesting opportunities, the presence of shallow waters, alkaline fens and sedge communities are crucial for them to provide enough food, small fish and amphibians to raise their chicks successfully. Ringing activities are ongoing, samples for HPAI tests are being taken, but luckily, no traces of avian influenza can be found in the colonies.

The Netherlands

Which developments regarding the implementation of AEWA have taken place in the region since the last Meeting of the Parties?

HPAI

Sovon Vogelonderzoek Nederland has published a report (December 2022) on the impact of bird flu on wild indigenous bird populations, what species may be at risk and what actions can be taken to alleviate the impact of bird flu in populations of wild birds.

With ‘yogelgriep app’ an app was developed and published (including dashboard) that allows for professionals and the general public to register dead birds. These records are linked to the organisations responsible for monitoring and testing for HPAI.

Wageningen Marine Research is studying the impact of HPAI on terns and other sea birds. The report on this study is expected in summer.

The ministries of VWS and LNV are working on a Bird Flu Intensification Plan. This plan is expected to be published in summer 2023 and describes how the Dutch government will accelerate dealing with bird flu outbreaks in The Netherlands, and how it will handle the possibility of bird flu becoming zoonotic.

Species conservation

The CIBBRiNA LIFE project starting second half 2023 aims to achieve EU cross-border cooperation and fisheries engagement to establish regional monitoring programs to achieve a steep change in the reliability of bycatch estimates and further develop, test, and implement effective mitigation measures for the incidental bycatch of marine mammals, birds, turtles and non-commercial fish. NL will deliver program manager.

National Species Action/Conservation Plans are being developed for several seabird species. In 2023 the plans for four species are to be published. In the period until 2030 it is expected that action plans will be developed for five more species (to be determined).

Habitat conservation

Continuation of the review of the SPA network and SPA species

Steps are made towards embedding the “Battleplan Black-tailed Godwit” (Aanvalsplan Grutto) in provincial policies and ensuring appropriate funding.

Monitoring

Continued monitoring of AEWA species and their habitats. Contributions to the 4th total Flyway count East-Atlantic Flyway, January 2023

Exotic species

The Netherlands has recently been able to intensify the control of the small and non-expanding population of Ruddy Duck in the Netherlands.

SEPA

Year of the Oystercatcher (2023): recruitment of bird counters, additional counts and education of the public on this endangered species. Subsidy granted for a Dutch [nature education/awareness project](#) in Mauritania on Red Knot and wetlands conservation.

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to AEWA

An analysis is being done on the Dutch national system of hunting and wildlife management, which regulated hunting and other forms of offtake of certain AEWA populations. This could e.g., result in a change of huntable (bird)species in the Netherlands.

Any other relevant information

NL is involved with Species action plans on marine birds that are being developed under OSPAR.

Sweden

Which developments regarding the implementation of AEWA have taken place in the region since the last Meeting of the Parties?

Sweden is participating in the AEWA European Goose Management Platform.

Sweden is currently updating its Single Species Action Plan for Lesser White-fronted Goose, to be valid for 2024-2028.

As part of the National Monitoring Programme for birds, Sweden participates in the International Waterbird Census (IWC). In January 2023 a total of 1084 sectors were surveyed.

A single male Ruddy Duck was recently seen in Sweden. The sighting awaits verification before action is taken. This is the first sighting of Ruddy duck since 2020. Egyptian Goose is seen more frequently however, with several individuals seen annually. They are eradicated if possible.

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to AEWA

Sweden, through consultants, participates in three AEWA groups (Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit and Seabirds). There have been no working group meetings for these groups yet in 2023.

United Kingdom

Which developments regarding the implementation of AEWA have taken place in your country since the last Meeting of the Parties?

Black-tailed Godwit: Delivery activity in the UK in the past two years has primarily been delivered through the LIFE Blackwit UK (Project Godwit) project. This project has successfully trailed headstarting as a conservation technique for godwits and significantly increased the productivity of the UK population. In tandem habitat improvement works has undertaken to increase the extent of available habitat. A draft UK Action plan to cover 2023-2033 is in development.

European Goose Management Platform: The UK has supported the initial development of an impact model to inform the implementation of the Barnacle Goose ISSMP in both the East Greenland and Svalbard populations. It is hoped the impact model will be completed in 2023. These models will be used to inform discussions on Greenland barnacle goose harvest, due to take place prior to the EGMP meeting in June 2023.

Initial discussions between some range states have taken place on the recent change to the Icelandic greylag goose status and it has been agreed that a flyway plan will be developed. Work on this will follow on from the current work on barnacle goose plans.

Avian Influenza: The UK approach to tackling the avian influenza outbreak continues to be led by international best practice and the latest evidence. We continue to invest in avian influenza research, and we continue to monitor the current situation both in Europe and globally, as well as the effectiveness of any disease control measures taken, including vaccine development. The *UK contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases of animals*¹ explains how the administrations work together in responding to an outbreak at a UK level. The UK's approach to avian influenza disease control is set out in the *Notifiable Avian Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain*² and the *Notifiable Epizootic Avian Disease Control Strategy for Northern Ireland*³ supported by the *Mitigation Strategy for Avian Influenza in Wild Birds in England and Wales*⁴.

Natural England (UK statutory conservation agency) in partnership with RSPB have launched a project to improve understanding of impacts and possible interventions to address AI in wild birds. The project includes updating seabird breeding population estimates, improving the evidence base on the transmission of HPAI and influencing factors and additional conservation interventions for breeding seabirds.

Ruddy Duck: The UK Ruddy Duck population is now thought to number approximately 12 birds, spread across seven regions. Many are single birds, and the species is probably functionally extinct in most regions of the UK. There has been no evidence of breeding since 2018.

Egyptian Goose: The UK Egyptian Goose population is almost exclusively confined to England, with expanding core areas in East Anglia (mainly Norfolk) and the Thames basin, and some colonisation of the East Midlands. Population estimates were 9,661 at the end of December 2018. Since December 2019, Egyptian Geese have been subject to a series of restrictions and prohibitions under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019 and in England, from 1st January 2021, the species has been included on two new general licences that permit users to kill or take certain species of wild birds for defined purposes. COVID-19 restrictions, followed by Avian Influenza, have meant that activity in the field has been limited. Management plans are under development with work planned to commence in 2024.

Lead Shot:

In May 2022 the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) and Environment Agency (EA) published a restriction dossier on lead in ammunition. The dossier focused on the evidence of risk by lead in

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/contingency-plan-for-exotic-notifiable-diseases-of-animals-in-england>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/notifiable-avian-disease-control-strategy>

³ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/notifiable-epizootic-avian-disease-control-strategy>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mitigation-strategy-for-avian-influenza-in-wild-birds-in-england-and-wales>

ammunition on human health and the environment, as well as the socio-economic impact of introducing a restriction under UK REACH. The dossier set out the case for introducing restrictions on lead in ammunition (beyond those already in place for wetlands in the UK) and launched a six-month public consultation, which closed on 6 November 2022.

In January 2023, HSE announced a six-month extension to the restrictions process to allow for consideration of the large volume of technical information received during the public consultation. There will be a further 60-day consultation in Summer 2023, which will give stakeholders an opportunity to comment specifically on the socio-economic impacts of the restriction proposals. HSE's final recommendations are expected in November 2023 this year. The Environment Secretary will then review and make a decision, with the consent of the Welsh and Scottish Ministers.

Overview of special activities and/or meetings related to the AEWA

- The UK:
 - o made available £25,000 in voluntary contributions to the AEWA Secretariat for the Species Officer role.
 - o attended AEWA Technical Committee in Bonn, Germany in March 2023

Overview of special issues that might be of interest to the StC

Wetland site inventory: The UK is committed to establishing a wetland inventory, in support of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, mapping our wetlands, including those outside protected areas, for the first time and underpinning future actions to protect these vital habitats.

Wetland Bird Survey (Webs): UK-wide monitoring of waders and wildfowl in the non-breeding season continues, as the partnership (between statutory bodies and NGOs) was renegotiated in 2022 for the next five years. The scheme produces annually updated population trends for over fifty species of waterbirds and feeds into International Waterbird Census (IWC) population estimates.

Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme: BTO has joined with JNCC and NatureScot in the new GSMP partnership to deliver monitoring of those goose and swan species for which WeBS has not been the ideal means of monitoring. With all wildfowl monitoring now “under the same roof”, there will be changes to GSMP reporting, which will be closely integrated with WeBS reporting in the future. A range of improvements will be made to the scheme over the next few years, including scoping of solutions to monitoring of Icelandic greylag geese in light of the high degree of overlap with British greylags on their wintering grounds.

Seabirds Count, the 4th breeding seabird census for Britain and Ireland: Now in its final phase, involving analysis and write-up of results of surveys conducted between 2015 and 2021, for the 25 regularly breeding seabird species in the UK. This will be the most comprehensive census to date, including population estimates of urban-nesting Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls based on new survey methods and modelling. The aim is to have the results published in the latter half of 2023 in the form of a book, with online complimentary resources being launched at the same time.

Seabird bycatch: -As part of a suite of analyses on seabird bycatch in UK waters, covering a range of AEWA listed species, Defra & JNCC have published reports online available here [Science Search \(defra.gov.uk\)](#)⁵

Ongoing work is identifying areas and fisheries around the UK that might be suitable for regional pilot schemes to undertake seabird bycatch mitigation trials (Defra), and a more in-depth study of bycatch of Northern Fulmar in Scottish waters (Scottish Government).

The UK is engaged with regional initiatives (within the NE Atlantic, through the OSPAR Convention) to minimise - and where possible eliminate - seabird bycatch.

Marine bird monitoring: Marine natural capital evidence programme (mNCEA) initiated in 2021. As part of this, foundational data collection on assets includes new surveys in UK waters of seabirds at sea (via a citizen-science based approach called VSAS), Balearic Shearwater, and non-breeding marine birds (divers, grebes and ducks), as well as a review of breeding seabird monitoring in UK waters. The programme is ongoing and will report in 2025.

Climate Change: The UK government has provided funds to commission research to critically review the evidence of the impact of climate change on migratory species, how changes in migration may affect ecosystem functioning and services and consider future scenarios and how the conservation of migratory species may provide positive benefits. Outputs expected in Summer 2023 and will be considered at CMS COP in October.

OSPAR: The UK joined other Contracting Parties to the OSPAR Commission in contributing to the Quality Status Report 2023, due for publication in Summer 2023. Specifically, as regards AEWA-listed species, it presents indicator assessments involving estimates of abundance [\(here\)](#)⁶ and productivity [\(here\)](#)⁷ of waterbirds and seabirds throughout the OSPAR region and provides an assessment of the likely causes of change. The UK is now helping to develop a Regional Action for Marine Birds (RAP-birds) to address the identified declines.

⁵ <https://randd.defra.gov.uk/ProjectDetails?ProjectId=20461>

⁶ <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/qsr-2023/indicator-assessments/marine-bird-abundance/>

⁷ <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/qsr-2023/indicator-assessments/marine-bird-breeding-productivity/>

Reports not provided by:

- Albania
- Armenia
- Belarus
- Bulgaria
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Georgia
- Germany
- Iceland
- Israel
- Italy
- Ireland
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Republic of Moldova
- Monaco
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Norway
- Portugal
- Romania
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Switzerland
- Ukraine
- Turkmenistan
- Uzbekistan

Table 1: Europe and Central Asia - Contracting Parties and Range States

Europe (Contracting Parties in bold)	Albania
	Andorra
	Armenia
	Austria
	Azerbaijan
	Belarus
	Belgium
	Bosnia-Herzegovina
	Bulgaria
	Canada
	Croatia
	Cyprus
	Czech Republic
	Denmark
	Estonia
	Finland
	France
	Georgia
	Germany
	Greece
	Iceland
	Israel
	Italy
	Ireland
	Hungary
	Latvia
	Liechtenstein
	Lithuania
	Luxembourg
	Malta
	Republic of Moldova
	Monaco
	Montenegro
	The Netherlands
	North Macedonia
	Norway
	Poland
	Portugal
	Romania
	Russian Federation
	San Marino
	Serbia
	Slovakia
	Slovenia
	Spain
	Sweden
	Switzerland
Turkey	
Ukraine	
United Kingdom of Great Britain	
Central Asia	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
	Kazakhstan
	Turkmenistan
	Uzbekistan