

8.4 The Siberian Tundra and its Conservation; the Possible Role of the Proposed African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement

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Preface; a personal note to start with

This Taimyr report is an important publication: it brings together the information collected during the first German-USSR Taimyr Expedition (1989) and the Second Taimyr Expedition (1990) which had a more international character, including a research team from the Netherlands and scientists from the United Kingdom, France and Poland.

During my own field studies on waders in the Netherlands Wadden Sea in the "seventies" and thereafter in my long involvement with wader research, - conservation and - management worldwide, Taimyr has always been in my mind as something like the "Promised Land" a place to learn about, to think about but impossible to reach. But times are changing.....

Migratory species do not recognize borders between countries and they cannot be held responsible for the visible and invisible lines mankind has been drawing on the world map to keep human populations separated from each other.

Even when these lines amounted to real physical blockades for people, geese, ducks and waders moved twice a year in massive numbers between East and West Europe. They acted as a tool in maintaining contacts between ornithologists throughout these difficult times both on an individual basis and during conferences. In particular I must mention those conferences on "Transcontinental Connections of Migratory Birds and their role in the distribution of Arboviruses" (Novosibirsk 1969 and 1976) and those organised by IWRB/Ramsar Convention (e.g. Leningrad 1968 and Alushta 1976).

I had the pleasure of attending the conference in Novosibirsk in 1976 and presenting lectures and films about wader research in the Netherlands Wadden Sea. I will always remember the small closing session of that conference.

We discussed the important issue of joint research expeditions to the arctic breeding areas

of migratory waders, in particular Taimyr. Prof. CHEREPANOV, Director of the Biological Institute in Novosibirsk, remarked that "in principle" it could be made possible and should be organised.

However, it took another 13 years before the first Western-Europeans could visit Taimyr; it was in the summer of 1989 that Dr. Peter PROKOSCH and his co-workers visited the area for the first time.

In spite of that long period it must be said that the many contacts established during the 1976 Conference, have been instrumental for the present involvement of e.g. the Netherlands Government in the conservation of the arctic and sub-arctic breeding areas of geese and waders.

This involvement follows logically on the long tradition of wader-research and wader conservation in the Netherlands itself and in North-and West-Africa and the whole of the Mediterranean in particular, by the Foundation Netherlands Working Group for International Wader- and Waterfowl Research (WIWO), which is also currently involved in the Taimyr Expeditions.

The recent work on Taimyr and elsewhere in the Russian arctic takes place in close co-operation with other countries, e.g. Germany and also non-government organizations e.g. the Arctic Programme of The World Wide Fund for Nature. I am very grateful to Dr. Peter PROKOSCH for the excellent time together in the field during the Second Taimyr Expedition (1990) and the Lena delta Expedition (1992) as well as the good co-operation thereafter towards our common goal: the conservation of the arctic breeding areas of waders and geese.

It is this spirit of good international co-operation which we need to make the proposed African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) a success. The following is a short overview of the AEWA and its possible future role in the conservation and sustainable management of arctic breeding birds.

The African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement

1. Introduction

It has since long been acknowledged that the conservation and management of migratory species (not only birds) is the joint responsibility of those countries where the species occurs during part of its life cycle. In order to have a formal platform for governments to act in this respect, the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention) was concluded in 1979.

At present the Bonn Convention has over 40 parties (see Table 1). The first Conference of the Parties decided in 1985 that concluding an international Agreement for the joint conservation and management of Western Palearctic Waterfowl should have a high priority.

In 1988 the Netherlands Government started to work on a draft text (BOERE 1990) and in June 1991 a draft was ready for a Western Palearctic Waterfowl Agreement (WPWA) with an Action Plan and a general Management Plan.

In June 1991 the Netherlands Government sent the Agreement to the European Commission for further negotiations with all the Range States. For various reasons the EC returned the mandate in early 1993 to the Secretariat of the

Convention to further elaborate the Agreement. The text has been updated, a stronger African component has been included and a second Action Plan has been added for Storks, Ibisses and Spoonbills.

First negotiations between the 115 Range States involved took place in June 1994 in Nairobi in connection with the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Bonn Convention.

From the very beginning the various institutions and experts from the former USSR have been involved in the work regarding the development of the AEWa. The present Government of the Russian Federation strongly supported the concluding of the Agreement for four main reasons:

1. The AEWa includes a large number of breeding birds of the territory of the former Soviet Union the majority of which breed in the arctic and subarctic regions.
2. The AEWa could act as a framework to establish new reserves in the arctic regions, as a vital part of the protected areas system at the whole flyway.
3. The platform created by the AEWa could provide for concrete measures towards a sustainable and balanced use of waterfowl (e.g. hunting !) during their annual cycle along the entire flyway. It could in particular provide for a sustainable supply of waterfowl for the Northern tribal groups.
4. The AEWa could provide an international framework for closer co-operation between East and West Europe in the field of research and monitoring of migratory bird populations. In this respect it may facilitate the exchange of scientists and the provision of financial and technical support for Russian scientists to manage new reserves established in the Russian part of the flyway.

The former Soviet-Union, that is the Russian Federation is not a party to the Bonn Convention. However the Bonn Convention provides an important facility for countries to become a party to an Agreement, without being a formal party to the Convention itself.

Figure 1 also shows the area to be included in the AEWa. The borderline between the AEWa and the proposed Asian Pacific Flyway Agreement, within the former USSR, is of course artificial and is drawn on the basis of the

Table 1. Parties to the Bonn Convention (April 1994).

Argentina	Monaco
Australia	Morocco
Belgium	Netherlands
Benin	Niger
Burkina Fasso	Nigeria
Cameroon	Norway
Chile	Pakistan
Denmark	Panama
Egypt	Philippines
European Union	Portugal
Finland	Saudi Arabia
France	Senegal
Germany	Somalia
Ghana	South Africa
Guinea	Spain
Hungary	Sri Lanka
India	Sweden
Ireland	Tunisia
Israel	United Kingdom
Italy	Uruguay
Luxembourg	Zaire
Mali	

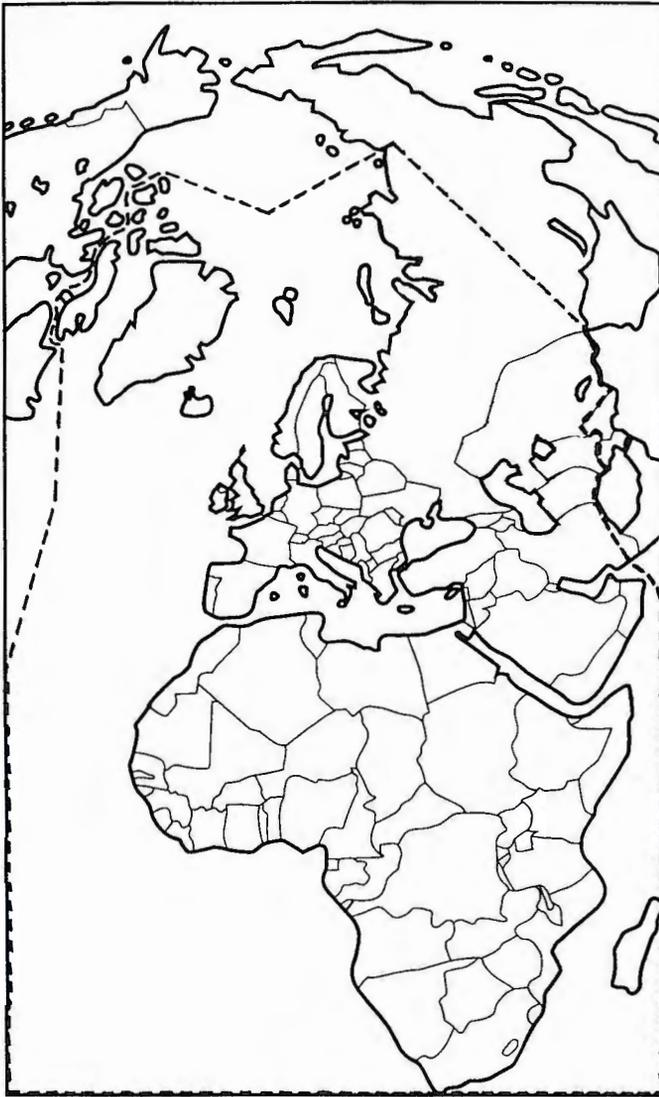


Figure 1. Agreement area for the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (provisional).

best available knowledge and on practical geographical arguments. It is agreed that Taimyr is part of the West Palearctic Flyway although we know that quite a number of birds breeding on Taimyr migrate through the Central Asian Flyway or the Asian Pacific Flyway.

Table 2. list the bird families of whose species are included in the AEWA.

2. Provisions of the Agreement

The African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement provides for a series of measures to be outlined below. They are discussed in the perspective of the conservation of the Northern breeding areas and the proposals as outlined in the Action Plans for the AEWA, covering an initial period of three years. The action plan for Anatidea includes breeding birds of the Russian arctic almost exclusively.

Following the obligations of the Bonn Convention itself (Art.V.1) the fundamental principle of the Agreement is that:

" *Parties shall take measures to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for African Eurasian Waterbirds*".

To reach the general goal as outlined above a series of more specified activities can be described:

3.1. Species conservation

Some arctic breeding waterfowl are rare and endangered. The Action Plan calls for immediate steps to ensure the conservation of these species.

The way to achieve this is by drafting and implementing International Conservation Plans. The Action Plan priorities in this respect regard a number of species breeding on Taimyr: Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*) and Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*). Attention should also be paid to a vulnerable species like the Knot (*Calidris canutus*) for which Taimyr is an important breeding area.

Furthermore the position of the Bewick Swan (*Cygnus bewickii*) must be taken into account.

Table 2. Bird families of whose species are included in the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement.

Gaviidae	Divers
Podicipedidae	Crebes
Phalacrocoracidae	Cormorants
Pelecanidae	Pelicans
Ardeidae	Hérons and Bitterns
Ciconiidae	Storks
Threskiornithidae	Spoonbills and Ibises
Phoenicopteridae	Flamingoes
Anatidae	Ducks, Geese and Swans
Rallidae	Rails
Gruidae	Cranes
Dromadidae	Crab Plover
Haematopodidae	Oystercatchers
Recurvirostridae	Avocets
Bhurhinidae	Thick-knees
Glareolidae	Couriers and Pratincoles
Charadriidae	Plovers and Lapwings
Scolopacidae	Curles, Snipes, Sandpipers and Phalaropes
Laridae	Gulls
Sternidae	Terns
Rynchopidae	Skimmers

3.2. Habitat inventories

The Agreement requires the identification of sites and habitats of international importance for waterfowl. Due to the remoteness of the Siberian arctic and sub-arctic, for many species these key area are not well known.

This is particular true for the staging areas outside the arctic breeding ranges e.g many sides in NW Russia. Much survey work has to be done and the AEWa can be a tool for international co-operation in this respect. A thorough survey of, in particular, North-West Russia is extremely important.

The areas on Taimyr and elsewhere should maintain their ecological functions for migratory waterfowl (no or restricted technological developments, no pollution, no other human interference). The establishment of new zapovedniks such as the Great Arctic Reserve is extremely important and new reserves in the Pechora Delta, on Waigatsh, Yamal etc. must be an integrated part of the system of key-areas in the entire flyway.

3.2. Habitat compensation

If, for one reason or another, wetlands have to be converted into e.g. agricultural land, the Agreement requires compensation by creating a wetland in another place.

This is however extremely difficult for the arctic region. It is well known that once the tundra has been converted/deserted, it is always impossible to eliminate the human influences and bring the tundra back. This is due to the special climatological and physical conditions of the arctic climatological zone.

However knowing this, the more important it is to handle every square meter of the arctic with care. It is a strong argument to establish large reserves in order to be sure that sufficient arctic breeding areas are set aside undisturbed for geese, waders and other bird species.

3.3. Taking of waterfowl.

This is a very important and practical issue in the AEWa. Waterfowl species are extremely important, over the whole flyway, as quarry species. Somewhere between 25-40 million geese, ducks and waders are harvested in the Russian Federation every year, but precise figures are lacking (PRIKLONSKI & SAPE-

TINA 1990; LANDRY 1990). The Agreement, in its fundamental principle, asks for a favourable conservation status for waterfowl. The AEWA provides an excellent international platform to discuss these problems and to reach solutions about the numbers of birds which can be harvested along the whole flyway.

Regarding the arctic region this is particularly true for the geese hunting issue. The common breeding goose of Taimyr is the White-fronted Goose. Large numbers of this population winters in Europe as shown by Taimyr ringing results. Hunting of this species in Western Europe must be done on the basis of a common hunting policy by the European countries. This is the only way to ensure that the White-fronted Goose remains a common breeding bird on Taimyr. The AEWA can facilitate such a common European hunting policy by taking into account the legitimate interests of people living in the arctic region.

The Action Plan for the AEWA therefore requires a thorough survey of present harvest in order to see if hunting pressure is along the lines of wise-use for all species and regions or if certain changes in e.g. the length of the seasons have to be made.

The AEWA also stimulates the collection of hunting statistics as an essential tool for future co-operative management of the flyway populations of Taimyr breeding birds.

3.4. Research and Monitoring.

The basis for good conservation and management is reliable data. Monitoring and research provide this basis and are important elements of the AEWA. Again the specific conditions of the arctic region e.g. Taimyr, its remoteness and the short period that is available for surveys during the breeding season makes international co-operation necessary to collect data over a large area and on a population level.

Special attention should be paid to the moulting sites of geese and ducks. They are flightless during that period and extremely vulnerable to disturbance. They can also easily be trapped in large numbers during their moult and there is evidence that mass trapping of moulting geese and ducks in the arctic, Taimyr, Lena Delta and other areas in the past has caused considerable population declines in some species.

Given the present economic situation in the

Russian Federation and the vast area of the arctic environment to be surveyed, international support, financially and with man-power, for our Russian colleagues is a prerequisite in order to collect data in the breeding areas on a regular basis. The AEWA provides for such co-operation in a co-ordinated way, being an extra stimulus for already ongoing co-operation with Germany, The Netherlands and WWF.

More data is also needed about the breeding biology of arctic waterfowl, in particular, the population dynamics as influenced by complex factors such as snow-cover, predation by arctic foxes, gulls and other species, the lemming cycle etc. and their interrelations. More information may be vital to understand population dynamics of arctic birds and its relation to hunting pressure in various regions of the flyway. These needs are reflected in the programmes as put forward in the Action Plans appended to the AEWA.

The AEWA also asks specifically for an increase of ringing activities for many purposes. This is extremely important for Taimyr as this is the area where migration borders exist between species which migrate west or east. Within one species, the Curlew Sandpiper, the population even splits migrating east and west.

3.5. Education and information.

The function of the arctic region for breeding geese and waders is not well known among the general public. Many times one has to answer questions like: why would a goose fly so far north to these inhospitable areas to breed ?

This is only one aspect. It is also important to inform the local people in the arctic settlements, nomadic tribal groups etc. about migratory species and international flyway management etc. It is imperative to show that international co-operation is a tool to maintain their arctic resources and that the establishment of large reserves is not against their interest.

4. Final remarks.

The conservation, wise-use and management of millions of migratory waterfowl has to be the joint effort of all countries in the entire flyway. The vast arctic and sub-arctic breeding areas which form the start of the Western Palearctic Flyway are a vital part of it and should get all the

attention necessary to protect their fragile ecosystems.

The proposed African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement under the Bonn Convention provides, among others the internationally required formal platform for governments and non-government organizations to achieve these goals for the benefit of us all. Together with the proposed Asian Pacific Waterbird Agreement it provides for at least two-thirds of the world resources and ensures arctic and subarctic breeding birds a conservation and wise management regime.

The territory of the Russian Federation plays a key role in these flyways. The Government of the Russian Federation has already taken a large number of conservation actions. It is hoped that it will continue to do so.

It is also hoped that it will accept its international responsibility and becomes an active Party to the Bonn Convention. After all the Russian Federation is the key breeding area for tens of millions of migratory birds, not only waterbirds, which contribute to the annual temporary increase of biodiversity with several hundred species in almost all African and Asia-Pacific countries !

5. Zusammenfassung

Das afrikanisch-eurasische Wasservogelabkommen ist ein spezifisches Schutzabkommen im Rahmen der Bonner Konvention zum Schutze wandernder Tierarten. Die Inhalte des Abkommens werden kurz dargestellt. Der Russischen Föderation kommt eine besondere Bedeutung für das Abkommen zu, da in der sibirischen Tundra die Brutgebiete eines wesentlichen Teiles der Wat- und Wasservogelarten liegt, die durch das Abkommen geschützt werden sollen.

6. Резюме

Сибирская тундра и её охрана; возможная роль предложенного Африканско-Евразийского соглашения.

Африканско-евразийское соглашение о водоплавающих птицах является специальным природоохранным соглашением в рамках Боннской конвенции об охране мигрирующих видов животных. Содержание соглашения будет коротко представлено. Российской Федерации придаётся в этом соглашении особое значение, так как в сибирской тундре находятся места гнездований значительного количества видов околводных и водоплавающих птиц, которые согласно этому соглашению должны охраняться.

7. Literature

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