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T-PVS/Inf (2017) 3

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

**EXPERT MEETING
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
ACTION PLAN FOR THE ERADICATION OF RUDDY DUCK**

(Sevilla, Spain, 30-31 January 2017)

- REPORT -

*Secretariat Memorandum
prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Governance*

The Expert Meeting on the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of ruddy duck in Europe met in Sevilla, Spain, on 30-31 January 2017.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting;
- Warmly thank Spanish conservation authorities for the excellent organisation of the meeting;
- Take note of the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of the ruddy duck in the Western Palearctic endorsed in its Recommendation No. 149 (2010) recognising the efforts by all Parties implied.

EXPERT MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE ERADICATION OF RUDDY DUCK IN EUROPE

Sevilla, Spain, 30-31 January 2017

1. WELCOME BY THE SPANISH AUTHORITIES AND OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The meeting was opened by Ms Claudine De Le Court, representing the Regional Government of Andalusia, and Ms Barbara Soto-Largo, representing the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing, Food and Environment. Both welcomed participants and noted that their governments were highly interested to pursue the eradication of the ruddy duck in the Western Palearctic as the survival in the wild of this species is a major threat to the survival of the threatened white-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), a species protected by Appendix II of the Bern Convention.

Mr Eladio Fernández-Galiano, Head of the Culture, Nature and Heritage Department of the Council of Europe, thanked regional conservation authorities and the Ministry for their support and expressed his gratitude to the Spanish Research Council (CSIC) and the *Estación Biológica de Doñana* for the hosting.

2. INTRODUCTION BY THE SECRETARIAT OF THE BERN CONVENTION

T-PVS (2017) 2 – Agenda of the meeting (Appendix 1 to the report)

List of participants (Appendix 2 to the report)

Recommendation No. 149 (2010) of the Standing Committee to the Convention

Recommendation No. 185 (2016) of the Standing Committee to the Convention

The Secretariat informed the Group that the Standing Committee to the Bern Convention had recently adopted a new recommendation (Recommendation No. 185 (2016) on the eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic by 2020) aiming to encourage concerned States to increase their efforts so the alien species might be eradicated from the wild by 2020. The purpose of the meeting was to see how States were progressing in that task, so the Bern Convention Action Plan for the eradication of the species (adopted in 2010) would be fully implemented.

3. A REVIEW OF PROGRESS BY THE WILDFOWL & WETLANDS TRUST (WWT)

T-PVS/Inf (2016) 16 - A review of the progress against the Action Plan for eradication of the ruddy duck (Oxyura jamaicensis) in the Western Palearctic (2011–2015)

Ms Colette Hall and Mr Peter Cranswick, representing WWT, presented an assessment of the progress in the implementation of the eradication Action plan. A summary of the main findings of the WWT report is included as appendix 3 to this report.

WWT put special emphasis in the existing information gaps for a number of countries, notably Morocco (with which BirdLife Morocco and SEO-BirdLife Spain could be of help), Denmark, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland and Italy.

It was suggested to team with the AEWA Secretariat to obtain contacts that may provide the necessary information.

4. CURRENT SITUATION AND PLANNED ACTION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Belgium

Mr Tim Adriens made a presentation that can be summarised as follows: Belgium holds a very small wintering population (6 birds) in just 9 sites. There are control visits in spring, usually twice a month but not every possible site is visited each year. There has been a decline from 2011 to 2015. As for birds in summer there is a maximum of 32 birds (only one breeding pair) in 26 different sites in 2016, an increase from the 17 birds of summer 2015. Most birds are in Flanders, close to the Netherlands (only one or two birds in the Walloon Region).

There is an efficient system of early-warning and rapid response. Since 2009, they have killed 46 adults and 23 chicks (15 birds shot in 2015). The plan is to try to kill every single bird detected, with a minimum target of 15 birds a year until 2020. The legislation has improved and permits culling although access to private land is not always possible and the use of silencers not authorised.

France

There are in France around 200 wintering birds, half of those in Europe, which is a problem as France is close to Spain and wintering white-headed ducks have been observed in France. Wintering birds are stable in the last five years, with 95 % of birds in just one wetland (*lac de Grand-Lieu*). For a number of operative reasons birds are only shot during the breeding season. Over 1,900 birds have been culled in the last 20 years (around 900 in the last 6 years) but the number of breeding birds is relatively stable at 40-60 pairs, mostly in Western France. In 2016 180 birds have been culled (45 % chicks, 31 % adult females). Around 1,000 men/hours are devoted to culling every year. If the effort could be increased twofold bird numbers would fall but there are budgetary restrictions that do not permit to increase the culling effort. A LIFE project could perhaps provide the necessary funding.

The Netherlands

Birds are monitored in the Netherlands. In the last 5 years wintering numbers have oscillated between 60-80 without any clear trend. Peak summer numbers have oscillated from 28 to 40.

A national plan for the eradication has been adopted, with a high number of stakeholders, including birdwatchers, provincial authorities, NGOs, wardens, hunters and managers of reserves.

Culls are relatively modest: 17 birds, including 6 chicks. There has been progress in a more solid legal framework for the eradication and a better national co-ordination. Efforts to monitor the status of birds in captivity are progressing. The trade and release of animals is now prohibited.

Still 4 of the 12 provinces have not yet removed legal barriers that may hinder control of animals.

Spain

Eradication efforts in the 1990's and the 2000's were intense and effective. Since 2010 less than 10 birds or hybrids have been identified. Most have been culled by an efficient system of monitoring and rapid response by a national team. There is routine monitoring for *Oxyura* in over 250 wetlands, with monthly counts from March to September.

United Kingdom

After the very intense eradication efforts from 1998 until 2010 (when birds were reduced to less than 200 birds), more targeted controls have been implemented in the last 6 years, the result being less than 20 birds in the 2016-2017 winter.

The efficiency of the eradication brings a number of lessons:

- Shooting (particularly in wintering flocks) was a very efficient methods of control;
- The job could be done by a small team of full-time specialist staff;
- Targeting wintering flocks was key as 80 % of birds were found in just 25 sites;
- It was important to focus during summer in breeding sites which seemed to account for a high proportion of breeding success;
- Targeting adult females proved its efficiency;
- Male display was used to attack birds of both sexes.

Further future work will be focused on eradication of regional breeding populations by removing all females.

5. POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS – POSSIBLE GUIDANCE

The Group showed its agreement with the proposals made by WWT for future action (see box below).

The Group recommended France to ask for a LIFE project to increase culling efforts on the biggest European population.

It was suggested to create a “Ruddy Duck Network” to regularly exchange information (perhaps animated by WWT?).

The Group suggested to carry out a risk analysis on other species *Oxyura vittata*.

Future action

- The new IAS EU Regulation should ensure better compliance with obligations of States on the eradication
- Efforts should be focused on four key countries; For second priority countries it was essential to increase reactive capability
- As perhaps there is relatively little movement between countries each state needs to enact a well implemented control programme
- It is important to focus on better control to reduce population size
- It was vital to implement concerted programmes, involving year-round effort
- For the UK, additional drive is needed to complete eradication
- It would be important to fill the Information gap in Germany, Ireland & Denmark , as well as Morocco, Italy and Switzerland, using BirdLife partners or other Bern Convention or AEWA connections
- The issue of birds in captivity should not be forgotten as the information gap on captive birds needs addressing
- release of captive birds is still a potential concern

6. ANY OTHER ISSUES

No other issues were raised. The Group thanked the *Estación Biológica de Doñana* and Mr Carlos Gutiérrez Expósito for the hosting and interesting excursion.

Appendix 1



Strasbourg, , 6 December 2016

T-PVS (2017) 2

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS

EXPERT MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE ERADICATION OF RUDDY DUCK IN EUROPE

Sevilla, Spain, 30-31 January 2017

Opening of the meeting: 9:30 am Monday 30th January 2017

Venue: Estación Biológica de Doñana
(CSIC, Isla de la Cartuja, C/ Americo Vespucio, s/n, ES-41092 Sevilla)

PROGRAMME

EVENING OF 29TH JANUARY 2017

Arrival of participants

FIRST DAY : 30TH JANUARY 2017

- 1. Welcome by Spanish authorities (*Ministerio de Agricultura y Pesca, Alimentación y Medio Ambiente*) and opening of the meeting by Council of Europe**
- 2. Introduction by the Secretariat of the Bern Convention**
*[Recommendation No. 149 (2010) of the Standing Committee to the Convention
Recommendation No. 185 (2016) of the Standing Committee to the Convention]*
- 3. A review of progress by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)**

*[Doc T-PVS/Inf (2016) 16 - A review of the progress against the Action Plan for eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic (2011 –2015)]*

4. Current situation and planned action at national level

Updates from the different states:

- Belgium
- France
- The Netherlands
- Spain
- United Kingdom

5. Possible next steps – Possible guidance

6. Any other issues

SECOND DAY : 31ST JANUARY 2017
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The 31st January will be devoted to an excursion at the National Park of Doñana or wetlands close to the National Park.

The bus will depart from Sevilla and return to Sevilla.

Appendix 2



Strasbourg, 2 February 2017
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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS

Expert meeting on the implementation of the Action Plan for the eradication of ruddy duck in Europe

Sevilla, Spain, 30-31 January 2017

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Appendix 3

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF THE WWT ASSESSMENT REPORT

- The ruddy duck became established in the wild in the Western Palaearctic following escapes from wildfowl collections. It is considered the greatest long-term threat to the white-headed duck. The obligation to eradicate alien ruddy ducks is recognised by many international conservation conventions and agreements. An Action Plan for eradication in the Western Palaearctic was prepared in 2010, which covered the period of 2011–2015.
- The Bern Convention contracted the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust to review the implementation of the Action Plan.
- A questionnaire was sent to 48 Western Palaearctic countries to assess progress against actions in the eradication plan. Data on peak numbers of ruddy duck (non-breeding and breeding) and numbers of birds controlled in each country were also requested.
- A total of 16 countries completed at least part of the questionnaire, and a further seven provided brief details on the status of ruddy ducks.
- This review provides a summary of the responses from each country. The review covers the period of winter 2010/11 to summer 2016.
- During the period used for this review, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the UK continued to hold the largest numbers of Ruddy Duck during the winter and summer months, whilst Finland, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain reported irregular sightings of less than five birds.
- No records of ruddy duck were reported for Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Morocco and Sweden.
- The highest numbers of ruddy duck were recorded in France, where peak wintering numbers fluctuated between 160 and 256 individuals; the peak count in 2015/16 was 208. Numbers in the Netherlands also fluctuated, with wintering numbers varying between 33 and 81 individuals; the peak count in 2015/16 was 62. Peak wintering numbers in the UK declined from 189 individuals in 2010/11 to 28 in 2015/16. In Belgium, numbers were highest during the summer months, with peak numbers increasing from 14 individuals in 2011 to 32 in 2016.
- The largest breeding populations remain established in France (estimated 40–60 pairs in 2016) and the Netherlands (13 pairs in 2015; numbers unknown for 2016). Breeding is known to occur in Belgium but only one pair has been reported in any one year. There is a small number of possible breeding pairs in the UK: five possible pairs in 2016, only one pair of which is thought to have fledged any young.
- Monitoring of wild birds is generally considered adequate in most of countries; although there are some difficulties monitoring breeding birds, largely due to a lack of surveys of all potential breeding sites.
- Eradication of ruddy ducks from the wild by 2015 was largely completed in Spain and the UK. In Spain, there are a few irregular sightings of birds that have emigrated from other European countries and immediate control measures are taken when birds are reported. Control is ongoing in the UK, with complete eradication expected by 2018.
- Complete eradication of ruddy duck from the wild by 2015 was not achieved in Belgium, France and the Netherlands, with revised targets of 2020 and beyond being suggested. Problems related to site access, resourcing and/or gaining legal permission to control birds were highlighted as reasons for the target not being met.
- National working groups to guide the implementation of the eradication strategy have been established in Belgium, France, Spain and the UK. In the Netherlands, the eradication programme is being coordinated by a governmental authority.

- The introduction of EU Regulation 1143/2014 on Invasive Alien Species means it is now illegal to breed, transport and release ruddy duck in all EU member states. However, until member states introduce regulation sanctions and penalty measures, there is no mechanism for prosecuting against any infringement. Such mechanisms are in place or planned for at least the key countries of Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.
- There is generally a very poor understanding of the extent to which ruddy ducks are held in captivity and few countries were able to provide accurate data on the number of birds held. Complete monitoring of ruddy duck in captivity is only in place in Spain. It is essential that efforts are increased to improve monitoring of Ruddy Ducks in captivity in order to track the current status of the captive population and also the level of compliance with the EU Regulation.
- Public awareness has been addressed in many countries, although in some cases, particularly in the core countries, it has been fairly limited so as not to draw too much attention to control activities.
- Good progress has been made towards eradicating ruddy duck from Europe; however, more effort is needed in France, the Netherlands and Belgium to develop effective control programmes, and current efforts in the UK must be maintained to ensure the population does not become re-established.