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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

(Nantes, France, 14-15 December 2015)

- 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 Nantes, France, on 14-15 December 2015.

The Standing Committee is invited to:

- Take note of the report of the meeting;
- Warmly thank French 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;
- Adopt, if appropriate, a revised draft Recommendation aimed to complete eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic by 2020.

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

Nantes, France, 14-15 December 2015

1. WELCOME BY THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES (ONCFS, MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT) AND OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The meeting was opened by the ONCFS, who welcomed participants and noted the need of a European approach and exchange of experience to progress in the implementation of the eradication plan. ONCFS had been very active in the past years yet methodological problems for control of winter populations in Grand-Lieu Lake were a main concern.

The representative of the Council of Europe noted very good results in eradication efforts throughout Europe even if the targets set in the Bern Convention eradication plan had not been fully met because they were perhaps overoptimistic.

2. A NEW LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR ERADICATION

The representative of the Council of Europe noted that the new EU regulation on Invasive Alien Species which entered into force in January 2015 was particularly well adapted to species like the ruddy duck. The species was to be included in the list of “species of Union concern” which would permit a much sounder legal framework to forbid trade and release of ruddy ducks and facilitate eradication.

3. CURRENT SITUATION AND PLANNED ACTION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Belgium

Birds have been increasing since the 1990's but not spectacularly: 12 birds in 2015 (mostly in Flanders), although not all waterbodies are examined each year. There is a good citizen-science information flow but not a rapid response, as only one volunteer shooter can be mobilised, so that reaction time is around 3 weeks. Since 2009, 33 adults and 18 sub-adults have been culled (only one in 2015). Legislation has improved and there is good national co-ordination.

France

Overall the number of wintering birds has been decreasing in the last five years, although not at the rhythm foreseen. The exception has been the 2015 winter, in which winter counts in *Lac de Grand-Lieu* are around 220 birds (see table).

A first eradication programme was started in 1997, run by the National Hunting and Wild Fauna Agency (*Office national de la Chasse et de la Faune sauvage, ONCFS*). In Grand-Lieu Lake, ONCFS controls are the responsibility of the staff of the Nature Reserve. Culling has been progressing in this lake (around 60 % of birds culled every year in spring culls) but still winter numbers are high.

Most birds are found in Western France.

Main difficulties are of two sorts. First, winter-culling in Grand-Lieu Lake has not yet been solved operationally, so very few birds are shot (however most birds in the area are culled each spring). The other major difficulty is that not all water bodies potentially favourable for ruddy ducks are prospected every breeding season and, on top, response is not always fast enough as only ONCFS staff can control ducks. Sometimes owners deny access and many bird watchers do not communicate sightings.

All those problems will be taken into account in the new Eradication Action Plan being drafted by French authorities.

The Netherlands

On the basis of a pilot experience in 2013-2014, most provinces authorised culling of ruddy ducks and a campaign was started in the winter of 2014. However 5 provinces – out of 12 – have not yet decided to join eradication efforts. Peak winter numbers have remained stable but peak summer numbers are on the decrease.

	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015
Peak winter	68	81	75	57	67
Peak summer	78	25	38	32	34

7 birds were culled in 2014 (including 5 chicks) and 4 in 2015.

There has been progress concerning legal aspects as release of birds is now prohibited. The number of birds in captivity is estimated between 200 and 500.

Monitoring remains a problem in the Netherlands. It is far from complete and information on ruddy duck presence does not circulate fast enough to provide for an effective rapid response.

The Workshop held in Wageningen helped much raise awareness by the provinces on the organs to control ruddy ducks.

Spain

The representative of Spain informed the Group that ruddy ducks had become extremely rare following strong reduction in numbers in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. A good monitoring had permitted to detect only two wintering birds in 2015. The key for complete elimination of ruddy ducks and hybrids in the past had been a very effective alert system followed by very rapid response.

United Kingdom

Culling had continued in the United Kingdom in the last year. From peak numbers at the turn of the century of 6,000 birds last count points to around 30 birds in 2015, of which 10 are female, dispersed in four different regions. The main reasons for success were likely the existence of a dedicated team during the whole eradication period (which had permitted learning resulting in an efficient eradication approach and culling methods) plus a good support from RSPB, which had slowly built into public support for the eradication. Obstacles had come from some ornithologists withdrawing information on sightings – never very efficiently in these connected times – and hostility by some local groups or landowners.

The plans for the future emphasised the need to improve monitoring (including information published in internet), negotiate increased access to key remaining sites and the eradication of all breeding populations focusing on removal of the last 10 females.

4. PRESENTATION BY SNPN OF CONTROL PROGRAMME IN GRAND-LIEU LAKE

A representative of SNPN presented the effort put in the last years to control ruddy duck in Grand-Lieu Lake and its surrounding area. While Spring controls had been rather effective (up to 80 % of breeding birds culled) winter controls were problematic, as birds became very shy and they were not easy to approach. The result was that wintering birds dispersed in Spring to many small wetlands in a wide range where their detection and control were not easy (there was often a long lag between detection and culling attempts).

A visit was organised to the lake where participants could see for themselves that the flocks were rather scary. There were around 200 birds flying, the most important concentration of ruddy ducks in Europe at present. If an effective method for their winter culling was found, ruddy duck eradication would be much advanced. Experts from the United Kingdom and Spain suggested new methods (such as shooting from the sides of the Lake or from floating platform where birds would be forced to approach by making them move by manoeuvring boats).

A further difficulty noted was that outside Grand-Lieu Lake only ONCFS officers are allowed to cull birds, a constraint which delays response. Early detection outside Grand-Lieu Lake is also patchy, with a very long response lag.

5. DISCUSSION OF SOME POINTS OF INTEREST

➤ Resistance / Opposition + communication with the public

Some ornithologists or the public think it is wrong to shoot birds. It is a slow process to convince the public and some ornithologists that culling ruddy ducks has a conservation objective. For success, it is essential to present culling as a method to help the conservation of the white-headed duck and to count on the support of local environmental NGOs as well as main bird-protection NGOs.

➤ Observation / Small populations

It is important to work with the birdwatch community to convince amateur and professional ornithologists to collaborate and pass swiftly the information on ruddy duck presence.

Reluctance to communicate sightings will remain, as some conservationists are concerned that the shooting of ruddy ducks in winter may cause disturbance to other birds. Thus a constant screening of the internet for possible sightings is necessary and has proven a useful tool in the United Kingdom.

In France, it would be useful to focus observation in the area surrounding Grand-Lieu Lake (150 km around) both to detect breeding pairs in Spring and to find where birds moult before arriving to Grand-Lieu.

➤ Rapid reaction / Culling

Rapid reaction requires a dedicated team. It is not too efficient to count on a wide network of “wardens” to do the job. Relying on volunteer hunters may be a new way to be tried, knowing however that in some countries – like France – this may make ornithologist suspicious and thus reluctant to provide information on sightings.

The top priority for culling is to have 3 to 4 dedicated people based in winter in Grand-Lieu Lake with sufficient means to progressively cull the 200 birds during the winter.

➤ Ruddy ducks in captivity

United Kingdom: number may be around 100, but this is just a guess.

Belgium: 300-600 birds

The Netherlands: 300-500 birds

France: 200-300 birds by 60 different owners.

There is some concern that the new EU Regulation on IAS may result in “accidental” escapes into the wild as owners may have no longer any interest in keeping them in captivity if they cannot sell them and the birds have to be sterilised.

6. EUROPEAN CO-ORDINATION

➤ Co-ordinated approach on detection and eradication

It was suggested to establish an informal contact group (for instance by an e-mail contact-group that would permit a faster communication of data. It would involve a frequent exchange of data on monitoring of populations, culling, population numbers, etc.

The Bern Convention Secretariat could not offer the service but would contact WWT to see if, on top of the existing systematic collection of data, such “fast com” contact list could be established.

➤ Assessment of result of the Bern Convention eradication plan

The Secretariat will entrust a consultant (WWT) with such task, for which it would require collaboration from all Parties.

➤ **Possibility to develop a LIFE proposal**

This was seen by all as a fundamental step to obtain the resources needed to finalise the eradication plan. It should involve France, supported by Belgium and the Netherlands. The United Kingdom and Spain were ready to contribute with expertise. All States involved were recommended to support such proposal which would help implement the new EU instrument on IAS.

7. POSSIBLE AMENDMENT OF THE ERADICATION PLAN

The Group made some proposals for a possible amendment of Recommendation No. 149 (2010). It is presented in the form of a new draft Recommendation “on the eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palearctic by 2020” (see appendix 3 to this report).

8. OTHER ISSUES

It was suggested the next meeting of this Group be held in Doñana National Park (Spain) in December 2016, for which the Secretariat will contact Spain and Andalusian conservation authorities.

Appendix 1



Strasbourg, 16 December 2015

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

Nantes, France, 14-15 December 2015

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Appendix 2



Strasbourg, 24 November 2015

T-PVS (2015) 23

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

Nantes, France, 14-15 December 2015

Opening of the meeting: 9:00 am Monday 14th December 2015

Venue: La Plinguetière
(51 route du Champ de Foire, Saint Aignan de Grand Lieu)*

PROGRAMME

- 1. Welcome by French authorities (ONCFS, Ministry of Environment) and opening of the meeting by Council of Europe**
- 2. New legal Framework for eradication**
by Bern Convention Secretariat
- 3. Current situation and planned action at national level**
Updates from the different states: Belgium, France, The Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom
- 4. Presentation by SNPN of the control programme in Grand-Lieu Lake**
- 5. Discussion of some points of interest**
 - Resistance / Opposition / Communication with the public
 - Observation / Small populations
 - Rapid reaction / Culling
 - Ruddy ducks in captivity
- 6. European co-ordination**
 - Co-ordinated approach on detection and eradication
 - Assessment of result of Bern Convention eradication plan
 - Possibility to develop a LIFE project
- 7. Possible amendment of the eradication plan**
- 8. Other issues**

Appendix 3

Convention on the Conservation
of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats

Standing Committee

**Draft Recommendation No. ... (2016) of the Standing Committee, examined on ...
November 2016, on the eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the
Western Palaearctic by 2020**

The Standing Committee to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, acting under the terms of Article 14 of the Convention,

Having regard to the aims of the Convention to conserve wild flora and fauna and its natural habitats;

Recalling that Article 11, paragraph *b*, of the Convention requires parties to strictly control the introduction of non-native species;

Recalling that Article 1, paragraph 2, of the Convention requires Contracting Parties to give particular emphasis to the conservation of endangered and vulnerable species;

Noting that the species *Oxyura leucocephala*, listed in Appendix II of the Convention, is still endangered;

Recognising the efforts of Contracting Parties in preserving the populations of this species;

Noting, however, that the main threat to the long-term survival of the species is its hybridisation with American ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) introduced in Europe;

Noting that the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) has been recognized as an invasive alien species of Union concern under Article 4 of the EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species;

Conscious of the need to arrest the expansion of the ruddy duck in Europe and Northern Africa;

Recalling Recommendation No. 48 of the Standing Committee, adopted on 26 January 1996, on the conservation of European globally threatened birds;

Recalling the International Single Species Action Plan for the conservation of the white-headed duck, prepared by BirdLife International, Wetlands International and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and adopted by CMS, AEWA and the European Union;

Recalling Recommendation No. 61 (1997) on the conservation of the white-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*) which asked Contracting Parties to develop and implement without further delay national control programmes which could include the eradication of the ruddy duck from all the countries in the Western Palaearctic;

Recalling the Bern Convention Action plan for eradication of the ruddy duck (1999-2002) drafted by the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust [document T-PVS/Birds (99) 9];

Recalling recommendation No. 149 (2010) of the Standing Committee, on the eradication of the ruddy duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) in the Western Palaearctic and noting its implementation has contributed to lower the numbers of ruddy ducks in most European States, in particular in the United Kingdom where effective controls have reduced ruddy ducks in the wild to a few tens of individuals;

Noting that the Bern Convention Action Plan for the eradication of the ruddy duck is an integral part of the International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the white-headed duck;

Regretting, however, that delayed, insufficient action or operative difficulties in some states following the Bern Convention's eradication plan, has allowed the establishment of populations in mainland Europe and thereby made eradication more costly and difficult;

Noting that very little action has been taken to address the issue of ruddy ducks in captive collections;

Welcoming the entry into force and implementation by the EU and its member states of Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species and noting with satisfaction that the ruddy duck has been included in the list of invasive alien species of European Union concern;

Referring to the document "*Eradication of the Ruddy Duck (Oxyura jamaicensis) in the Western Palaearctic: a review of Progress and revised Action Plan 2011-2015*" by the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust [document T-PVS/Inf (2010) 21]; THERE WILL BE A NEW DOC BY WWT in 2016;

Conscious that, following present culling efforts, and increasing them in Belgium, France and the Netherlands it is realistic to achieve a full eradication of the ruddy duck in the wild in the Western Palaearctic in the coming years;

Noting, however, that this commendable goal will only be reached if all states concerned collaborate in a common action plan for eradication of the species;

Noting that failure to act effectively and immediately will increase the threat to the white-headed duck and increase the complexity and financial cost of eradication;

Recalling also Resolution 4.5 of AEWA, which, amongst others, strongly urges all countries with ruddy duck populations to establish or step up complementary eradication measures in order to prevent the spread of the species in Europe and towards its complete eradication in the AEWA area,

Recommends that:

All Contracting Parties:

1. Implement without delays the actions specified in the "Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Western Palaearctic, 2016-2020" enclosed as appendix to this recommendation;

Priority States:

- *Belgium*
- 2. speed up an eradication programme aimed at achieving the target of eliminating ruddy duck's national population no later than 2020; to this end, outline and implement a rapid response protocol to improve reaction time;
- *France*
- 3. finalise and implement the national action plan for the eradication of Ruddy Duck; intensify winter controls - especially in Lac de Grand Lieu - and provide the necessary human and financial means to intensify birds culling, increasing also monitoring of breeding and moulting birds in Loire-Atlantique and neighbouring departments;
- *The Netherlands*
- 4. urgently implement the existing eradication programme, providing the resources needed for its completion; fully implement the requirement of the Regulation (EU) No. 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, including in provinces that are at present reluctant to cull ruddy ducks;
- *Spain*
- 5. continue its current policy to eradicate every single ruddy duck or hybrid detected in its territory;

- *United Kingdom*

6. continue present efforts to eradicate the remaining populations of ruddy duck;

All priority states listed above

7. prepare a joint LIFE proposal aimed to facilitating the eradication of ruddy ducks in their territories and fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and under the Regulation (EU) No. 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species concerning this alien species of Union concern;

Other States:

8. Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland: monitor and eliminate systematically all ruddy ducks appearing on their territories and inform regularly the Standing Committee on actions taken;

9. Morocco: control systematically ruddy ducks and hybrids on its territory and inform regularly the Standing Committee on actions taken;

10. Tunisia monitor white-headed duck and eliminate systematically ruddy ducks and hybrids on its territory and inform regularly the Standing Committee on actions taken;

Invites Algeria to monitor white-headed duck and eliminate systematically ruddy ducks and hybrids on its territory and inform regularly the Standing Committee on action taken;

Invites BirdLife International and all concerned BirdLife partners organizations in Europe, the Wildfowl & Wetland Trust, as well as other relevant NGOs, to support the implementation of the eradication action plan as a way to promote the long-term conservation of the native white-headed duck, helping with observations of ruddy ducks or hybrids in the wild and explaining to their members the rationale and conservation benefits of the eradication.

APPENDIX

Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Western Palaeartic, 2016-2020

Goal Ruddy ducks¹ stop being a threat to the white-headed duck
Target Long-term eradication of the ruddy duck in the Western Palaeartic and avoidance of new introductions of the species.

I. Actions concerning eradication of ruddy ducks in the wild

General target Eradication of the ruddy duck in the wild in the Western Palaeartic by 2020

Action 1 Eliminate ruddy ducks in the wild mobilising the necessary resources for culling operations

Action 2 Continue monitoring the distribution of ruddy duck in the wild

Action 3 Keep active the existing national working groups guiding the implementation of this eradication strategy, drafting as necessary national eradication strategies

Action 4 Remove legal barriers that may hinder the control of ruddy ducks

II. Actions concerning ruddy duck in captivity

Goal Avoid any new escape of ruddy ducks to the wild in the Western Palaeartic

General target Phase out all captive populations of ruddy ducks

Action 5 Fully implement the Regulation (EU) No. 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species which prohibits the trade and release of ruddy ducks kept in captivity

Action 6 Devote supplementary efforts to monitor the status of ruddy ducks in captivity

Action 7 Encourage the sterilisation and/or elimination of ruddy ducks in captivity and consider compensating owners for voluntary elimination, thus avoiding possible accidental scape or release of birds

III. Actions concerning public awareness, reporting and international co-ordination

Goal Improve understanding by the public of the problem thus and create a favourable opinion for eradication

Goal Follow the progress of the eradication plan and update it as necessary

Action 8 Implement public awareness activities on the need to control ruddy ducks.

Action 9 Report annually to the Bern Convention on national action and collaborate with other States, the Bern Convention, AEWa and other appropriate bodies in the implementation of this updated eradication plan and the Action plan for the conservation of the white-headed duck.

¹ In the framework of this action plan the term « ruddy ducks » refers both to ruddy ducks and to the hybrids of ruddy ducks and white-headed ducks.

