Strasbourg, 10 March 2025 **T-PVS(2025)02**

CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

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

Friday, 22 November 2024
15.00-16:30 CET
online meeting

MEETING REPORT

Document prepared by
the Secretariat of the Bern Convention

1. Welcome by the Secretariat

The Secretariat welcomed the participants to the meeting. It recalled the last expert meeting to review progress on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck which took place online on 28 June 2023. Due to unforeseen reasons, it was not possible to send to the Focal Points of Contracting Parties the usual questionnaire to assess the progress in the eradication of the Ruddy Duck and the implementation of the Action Plan. The exchange of information during the current meeting would therefore be the only source of information on the situation in 2023-2024 and would be shared at the 44th meeting of the Standing Committee (2-6 December 2024).

The agenda of the meeting (as it appears in Annex I) was adopted. The list of participants appears in Appendix II.

2. Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Western Palaearctic: recap of targets

The Secretariat gave a brief recap of the Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck and its targets. It was recalled that the main target of the current Action Plan is the eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the wild in 2025, which is also the year when the current Action Plan ends. Eradication of the species is a collective task, due to the mobility of the species. Adaptative management is essential for this case. The eventual follow up of the Action Plan should be discussed during the meeting in the light of the situation of the species.

3. National situation – progress towards the targets and issues encountered

The nominated experts gave a presentation on the progress made in their countries.

Belgium

There are still some birds in Flanders. Notifications of the presence of the species came from two areas: one in the West and one in the North. In the West, Ruddy Ducks have been detected in a quite big water reservoir. It was not possible to remove the birds as there is a breeding population of White-tailed Eagle and managers of the area did not give permission for Ruddy Ducks culling to avoid disturbances to the species. In the North (Antwerp), birds have been detected also in a very large reservoir, which makes eradication difficult. The professional sniper which has been shooting birds these last years was not available in 2024. He is the only one shooting birds, so it is clearly insufficient.

The numbers are not so different to the ones in the last report:

	Wintering bird census	Opportunistic data
Peak wintering numbers (1 Sept 2023 – 1 Mar 2024)	1	5
Number of sites with wintering birds	2	6
Peak summering numbers (1 April – 31 Aug 2024)		11
Number of sites with summering birds		6
Number of breeding pairs 2024		1
Number of sites with breeding 2024		1

In summary, in the period September 2023 - August 2024 Belgium had a handful of birds present on its territory, with a minimum of 5 birds last winter visiting the same 6 sites and a maximum of 11 birds on 6 sites last summer. This number is slightly higher than the years before. No birds have been observed in Wallonia since September 2023. Despite having been free of breeding since 2018, again breeding occurred in 2024 in a nature reserve near Antwerp, where a couple was observed with three chicks, indicating vigilance for new breeding to occur is still warranted. One bird was shot in 2024, several actions remained unsuccessful. The currently outlined rapid response procedure appears effective yet permanent removal capacity as well site specificities, such as the presence of other protected species (e.g. white-tailed eagle that started breeding again), still represent bottlenecks. Alternatives to shooting will be considered on sites where the birds were too elusive to be shot. More active surveillance might also be a way to increase the reaction time.

France

A new census of Ruddy Ducks in captivity has been conducted in 2023. There has been a global reduction of 86%, with 16 birds and 7 owners, when in 2014 (last census conducted) there were 203 birds and 52 owners.

As concerns the wild population, the French population has declined by 10 in 5 years thanks to a European funding (LIFE). The relict population is little active (~4 broods in 2024).

25 birds have been culled in 2023: 7 adult birds in winter and the rest (15 adults and 3 juveniles) during the breeding season and after, which means that the wintering population was underestimated previously.

Among the killed bird on Grand Lieu Lake, 5 males were trapped with a cage (with the help of lures and recorded calls) in 2024 and 10 males and 1 female in 2023, demonstrating that the trapping method was quite efficient.

In 2023 a genetic study has been conducted, with the aim to detect influxes -migration events- from other populations, and to facilitate the detection of hybrids, based on 211 samples from France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The results show that migration events might not be exceptional but that genetic outputs are nevertheless useful to identify hybrids (only 1 in the sample of 211).

The slides of the expert's presentation are available here.

Germany

The number of Ruddy Ducks in captivity is declining but the authorities don't have precise data because there is no obligation in Germany to report on Ruddy Ducks in captivity.

Even though it is difficult to have exact numbers, numbers are also declining in the wild: 13 birds were detected in 2024 (compared to 17 in 2023 and 32 in 2022). The decline in observations is constant since 2018. Most observations are in the Northwest federal states. Most birds remain only a few days on the spot which explains the difficulties to take effective measures to cull them. Their place of origine and destination remain unknown. There are only two areas with continuous sightings of 1 to 2 birds each. It is therefore difficult to determine the true number of birds in Germany. No breeding events or chicks have been detected, although there was one attempt in 2020.

2 birds have been culled in 2023/2024. Shooting is often difficult since acceptance of the population is very low, especially with many visitors in some areas. Trapping techniques are therefore being considered as an alternative.

One of the difficulties in combating Ruddy Ducks is that each federal state is responsible for its own invasive species. Although there are contacts between them, coordination still needs to be improved.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available here.

The Netherlands

Ruddy Ducks in the wild in the Netherlands are mainly observed in the West and the North of the country. The number of Ruddy Ducks observed decreased between 2022 and 2023, from 108 birds in 2022 to 75 birds in 2023.

76% of the population (57 birds) resides in the Loenderveense Plas province in Noord-Holland. Smaller concentrations are located at Markiezaatsmeer province Zeeland (7 birds) and at Leidschendam en Zoetermeer province Zuid- Holland (4 birds).

257 Ruddy Ducks have been killed between 2017 and 2024 thanks to control programmes put in place in all provinces. In the season 2022-2023, 94 birds were killed and 37 birds in the 2023-2024 season. Difficulties however arise when dealing with many small and scattered populations, which compromise eradication.

The following constrains are listed for the eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Netherlands:

a) Shooting in urban areas or areas with lots of recreationists is difficult; public safety comes first
b) Small populations and individuals are very spread out during the summer months
c) The species moves easily between the different water systems
d) It takes a lot of time and effort to get a few individuals

The Dutch authorities are interested in advice on how to handle small numbers of Ruddy Ducks which are widely spread and consider that good practices should be shared.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available here.

United Kingdom

The population of Ruddy Ducks in the United Kingdom remains limited to just a few individuals and can be considered functionally extinct in the wild. The last confirmed breeding in the UK was more than 10 years ago, except in England when it was in 2021.

Between January 2022 and May 2024, 3 birds (2 males and 1 female) have been shot. The estimate of the current population in the UK is 11 (mostly single birds with only 2 pairs in South-West England). The top priorities in the strategy for the period 2024-25 will be the removal of the remaining birds – especially females – and the prevention of breeding events.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available here.

4. Solutions, next steps, and recommendations

The participants recognised that good progress had been made in the eradication of the invasive Ruddy Duck in Europe, in particular in the Netherlands, with a population declining. But at the same time, it seems that, on a European scale, the problem persists in 2024, especially in France and the Netherlands, and that although the population in Germany is reduced, it is dispersed and little controlled so far.

At the same time the expert group agreed that, considering 1) the mobility of the species, 2) the growing efforts that the eradication of the last remnants of an introduced species supposes, and 3) that the target of Ruddy Duck being functionally extinct in the wild in Europe will not be reached by some countries by the end of the current Action Plan (i.e. 2025), it is therefore highly recommended that more efforts should continue in the future with a follow-up Action Plan for the coming years.

5. Any other issues

The next expert meeting on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck will be held in 2025, tentatively scheduled for June.

The Secretariat thanked the participants for the engaged and fruitful meeting.

Annex I - AGENDA

1. **Welcome by the Secretariat**

2. **Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Western Palaearctic: recap of targets**

3. **National situation – progress towards the targets and issues encountered**

   Updates from the different states:
   - Belgium
   - France
   - Germany
   - The Netherlands
   - United Kingdom

4. **Solutions, next steps, and recommendations**

5. **Any other issues**

ANNEX II – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Contracting Parties	Name and Function
Belgium	Nicolas PARDON Policy Advisor Invasive Alien Species Flemish Government Agency for Nature & Forestry Tim ADRIAENS Management Team Research Institute for Nature and Forest
France	Jean François MAILLARD Invasive Species Specialist French Biodiversity Agency Adrien TABLEAU Invasive Species Specialist and LIFE Oxyura project coordinator French Biodiversity Agency
Germany	Lena WATERMANN Department of Biodiversity State Office for the Environment of Schleswig-Holstein
Netherlands	Bas VAN BERKUM Policy Advisor for Invasive Alien Species, Hunting and Nature Law Provincie Noord-Holland Beleidsadviseur sector Groen
United Kingdom	Iain HENDERSON Chief Inspector Non-Native Species Inspectorate Animal and Plant Health Agency
Council of Europe / Bern Convention	**Name and Function**
	Mikaël POUTIERS Secretary of the Bern Convention Jose AMENGUAL Policy Adviser