



Strasbourg, 28 August 2023

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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  
THE RUDDY DUCK IN EUROPE**

**Wednesday, 28 June 2023**  
**10:00-12:30 CEST**  
*online meeting*

**MEETING REPORT**

*Document prepared by*  
*the Secretariat of the Bern Convention and Peter Cranswick (WWT)*

## **1. Welcome by the Secretariat**

The Secretariat welcomed the participants to the meeting. A round table of introductions followed the welcome remarks. The Secretariat recalled the last expert meeting to review progress on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck which had taken place online on 20 July 2022. As in 2022, a questionnaire to assess the progress in the eradication of the Ruddy Duck and the implementation of the Action Plan had been prepared by technical experts of Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) and sent to the Focal Points of Contracting Parties with a response deadline of 14 July 2023. The results of the questionnaire would be presented in a progress review report at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Standing Committee. The Secretariat thanked WWT for its continuous support in providing technical expertise to the Bern Convention over the past years for the eradication of the Ruddy Duck. It thanked in particular Mr Peter Cranswick and Ms Colette Hall for the preparation of the questionnaire and analysis of the incoming replies to the questionnaire. The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

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

Mr Cranswick (WWT) gave a brief recap of the Action Plan for the Eradication of the Ruddy Duck and its targets, notably that the population in the wild is functionally extinct by 2025. He highlighted that the eradication of the Ruddy Duck is a collective task rather than that of an individual country, and that coordinated action, monitoring and adaptive management were essential to achieve the target of the Action Plan, particularly as the population becomes smaller and the plan nears its goal.

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

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

### **Belgium**

Fewer than 10 birds remain in the country, at two locations in the Flanders and one location in Wallonia. Following behavioural observations, Belgian authorities suspect that some of these birds were of captive origin, despite keeping Ruddy Ducks in captivity being illegal in Belgium. Although no breeding has taken place during 2022-2023, the potential remains and authorities remain vigilant.

The early warning and rapid response control system remains in place and is operating efficiently. Three birds were culled in 2022/2023. The key challenge continues to be that birds can be secretive in the border area. Exchange of information with neighbouring regions would be useful.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available [here](#).

### **France**

A repeat of the 2014 census of captive birds was conducted in 2022 and showed a decrease of 85%. The captive population in France is now believed to number 16 birds at seven locations. In light of these findings, the captive population is no longer believed to constitute a threat.

Since the implementation of the LIFE project (Oxyura against Oxyura, 2018-2023) in France, the number of Ruddy Ducks in the wild has reduced by 86%. Just 28 birds were recorded at the start of 2023.

The unexpected increase in numbers the previous winter (a maximum of 59 were recorded, compared with 14 the previous year) is thought to be due to an influx of around 30 birds to Grand-Lieu Lac from another country. A genetic analysis using new genetic markers is underway to identify the origin of those birds. At the time of the meeting, six samples had been received from birds in the Netherlands and two from Belgium, to compare with hundreds of samples from birds in France. Representatives of other Contracting Parties were encouraged to share samples to facilitate the investigation.

No influx of birds was suspected to have occurred in 2022/23, and numbers were consistent with the sharp decline in recent years.

Control operations intensified in 2022/23, but fewer birds were eradicated compared with recent years as the total numbers of birds had fallen. Some 18 adults were controlled, plus 19 young, thought to be from approximately nine breeding attempts. In 2023 a new control tool was developed – a prototype trapping system, using live decoys. This proved to be very effective and 11 birds were controlled, mainly males at the start of the breeding season, a time of year when it has been traditionally difficult to control birds, and reducing the likelihood of reproduction. The trap is cheap to construct, and cameras mounted on the trap to detect caught birds means staff time is used efficiently. It was noted that this trapping system could be especially useful in urban areas where shooting cannot be performed.

French authorities concluded that eradication in France was possible, but that they were concerned about further influxes, which would require a stronger coordination at European level. There was recognition of the need and a commitment to continue control after the LIFE project ends.

The team will apply for an extension to the LIFE project in August. The proposal will suggest:

- the creation of a European transboundary dashboard to record Ruddy Duck observations and culling operations;
- the organisation of technical workshop and field trainings on control tools for other countries facing difficulties with Ruddy Duck eradication;
- the production of short documentaries to demonstrate control techniques available to eradicate Ruddy Duck population.

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he meeting participants agreed an extension would very useful and agreed to support the application.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available [here](#).

## **Germany**

A more comprehensive assessment of the status of Ruddy Duck in Germany has been made, based on birdwatchers' observations, federal states' records and the European Alien Species Information Network Notification System. The revised estimate is of approximately 30 individuals in the wild in Germany in 2022. Although there is a concentration in the North, birds are widely distributed across the country, with small numbers occurring at the same sites (similar to the picture in the United Kingdom). There are difficulties in making an accurate estimate, but the population is thought to be stable. The last confirmed breeding record was in 2020, which was not successful.

Only two birds were culled in the last two years and efforts to eradicate birds remain low. Although some control plans have been prepared, several have not been implemented. Technical problems around shooting, and that killing of birds is unpopular, are also barriers. Coordination of control is particularly challenging given the federal set up, but there are positive signs that this approach could be adopted. Initial steps were taken to organise a workshop at federal level to discuss actions needed for eradication in Germany.

Some 24 birds are known to be held in captivity, but data were only available from some states, and there is uncertainty over the true numbers. The requirements of the EU IAS Regulation should mean improved reporting in future.

Meeting participants agreed a workshop in Germany would be very useful to mobilise eradication efforts, with the opportunity for UK, French and Dutch experts to participate.

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. Counts in December 2022 estimated the national total was 110 birds, with 84 concentrated at one site.

Control is delegated to the provinces, and is coordinated through an interprovincial working group. At the time of reporting all provinces had a control programme. Notably, licences have now been issued to control birds in Natura 2000 sites, a key barrier previously. This is only possible in some provinces currently, but it is aimed to extend this to all areas. This has enabled eradication efforts to be particularly intensified in Noord-Holland and Zuid-Holland, where most of the population is located. Nationally, 89 birds were controlled in 2022/23, a marked increase on the 15-30 birds in the previous five years. The significant increase in control activities only began in 2023, so it is anticipated that the annual total will be bigger in future years. The meeting welcomed the significant increase reported, and noted that experience from other countries was that numbers controlled had to exceed the peak winter numbers in order to achieve an obvious decline in the population.

The slides of the expert's presentation are available [here](#).

## United Kingdom

The population of Ruddy Duck in the United Kingdom remains limited to just a few individuals (around 13 birds, mainly in the West of England). There have only been a handful of breeding records in the last five years, and no confirmed breeding took place in 2022/2023.

One bird was shot in 2022. To improve the speed and success of the response to future sightings, permissions are being sought in advance to access sites/land and to shoot (sightings frequently occur at the same sites). Monitoring will also be increased during the course of 2023 in an effort to increase the numbers of individuals eradicated. Low-level control (c€20K per year) is expected to be needed for a number of years before the few remaining birds die out.

Captive population is very limited, with only two owners known to the authorities.

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, especially in France and the Netherlands. Germany's efforts to improve the understanding of the Ruddy Duck population in their country were also welcomed. Key points of note and needs to take forward were recorded as follows:

### Belgium

- The situation was being managed well, and Belgium was encouraged to continue the existing approach.
- It was agreed that rapid access to data for improved coordination of control would be helpful.

### France

- Whilst further progress was still needed to reduce the population size to low levels, the approach so far had produced very positive results, and the new trapping approach to enhance this further, and overcome the inherent problems of control on Grand-Lieu Lac was applauded.
- It was recognised that further adaptation would likely be needed for the challenges once numbers were very, as in the UK.

### Germany

- The key challenge was to mobilise control activity – a review/recognition of needs would allow to have a clear plan for authorities to act upon.
- It was agreed that a national workshop, with invited experts from the UK, France and Netherlands who have already addressed the key issues and barriers, would be very useful to establish effective control mechanisms.

#### The Netherlands

- The significant progress to mobilise effective control was recognised – the true impact will not be seen until next winter, once a full year of implementation has been undertaken; proper review of its efficacy will be possible at that point, and any additional adaption or needs can be identified.
- The Netherlands was encouraged to roll out a similar control approach in other key provinces.
- It was recommended that control should target females where possible, notably when undertaking control of small groups.
- Providing genetic samples would significantly help the analysis by France.

#### United Kingdom

- The situation continues to be managed effectively; the efficacy of the more detailed and nuanced approach to address the challenges of small numbers is awaited with interest.

#### France LIFE project extension

- To support France in their request to the EU Commission for an extension of their LIFE project, participants discussed proposals to strengthen coordination and cooperation at EU level.
- Particular interest was shown with regard to the proposed workshops. Participants noted that these workshops or other form of cooperation could be particularly relevant to German authorities, who needed to scale up their efforts for Ruddy Duck eradication.
- Furthermore, the new trapping approach developed by France was seen as a useful complementary tool for Ruddy Duck eradication, particularly in urban or other scenarios where shooting is problematic or challenging.
- The meeting participants agreed to contribute technical points to the proposal and to support the application.

### **5. Any other issues**

The next expert meeting on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck will be held in 2024, tentatively scheduled for June.

The Secretariat thanked the participants for the engaged and fruitful meeting. It also thanked Mr Cranswick (WWT) for his assistance and guidance throughout the discussion.

## **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**

<b>Contracting Parties</b>	<b>Name and Function</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	Nicolas PARDON Policy Advisor Invasive Alien Species Flemish Government Agency for Nature & Forestry
<b>France</b>	Jean François MAILLARD Invasive Species Specialist, French Biodiversity Agency  Adrien TABLEAU Invasive Species Specialist and LIFE Oxyura project coordinator, French Biodiversity Agency  Agathe PIROG Project Coordinator and field operator, LIFE Oxyura project, French Biodiversity Agency
<b>Germany</b>	Peter HERKENRATH Head of bird conservation North Rhine-Westphalia Office of Nature, Environment and Consumer Protection
<b>Netherlands</b>	Bas VAN BERKUM Policy Advisor for Invasive Alien Species, Hunting and Nature Law Provincie Noord-Holland Beleidsadviseur sector Groen
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Iain HENDERSON Chief Inspector, Non-Native Species Inspectorate Animal and Plant Health Agency
<b>Independent consultant</b>	<b>Name and Function</b>
	Peter CRANSWICK Senior Project Development Manager, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)
	Colette HALL Senior Research Officer, WWT
<b>Council of Europe / Bern Convention</b>	<b>Name and Function</b>
	Mikaël POUTIERS Secretary of the Bern Convention  Nadia SAPORITO Junior Project Officer