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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, 21 July 2021
10:00-13:00 CEST
online meeting

MEETING REPORT

*Document prepared by
the Directorate of Democratic Participation and Peter Cranswick (WWT)*

1. Welcome by the Secretariat

The Secretariat welcomed the participants to the meeting, which was attended by the nominated experts from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and experts from NGOs, who have been actively involved in shaping the eradication plan since the 1990s.

The Secretariat recalled the last expert meeting to review progress on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck which had taken place on 25 February 2020 in London Wetland Centre, kindly hosted by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT).

It further recalled [Recommendation No. 209 \(2020\)](#) on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck in the Western Palearctic by 2025, adopted by the Standing Committee in 2020.

The Secretariat informed the participants that a questionnaire to assess the progress in the eradication of the Ruddy Duck and the implementation of the Action Plan had been sent to the Focal Points of the Contracting Parties to the Bern Convention in June with a response deadline of 18 August 2021. The questionnaire had been prepared by technical experts of WWT. The progress achieved in the implementation of the recommended measures will be reviewed and presented at the 41st 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, and in particular for the drafting of this year's questionnaire and the following analysis of the incoming reports. The Secretariat also thanked Mr Peter Cranswick, the technical expert of WWT, for his assistance in moderating and guiding the discussions throughout this expert meeting.

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.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* is a North American species. Escapes from captive collections in the UK in the 1960s allowed a significant wild population to form in Europe. Ruddy Duck is the one of the most significant threats, through hybridisation, to the globally endangered White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, native to the Western Palearctic.

The Bern Convention has long championed international action to control Ruddy Ducks. An eradication plan prescribes actions for Contracting Parties to monitor and control birds in the wild and in captivity. Though often protracted, significant progress has been made over the last two decades, to the extent that the latest iteration of the eradication plan considers that functional extinction¹ in the wild is possible by 2025 (Recommendation No 209 (2020)).

All Contracting Parties report the status of Ruddy Ducks and progress with control at regular intervals, to enable international coordination of this shared challenge. The priority is to maintain active and synchronised control in countries that had or still have significant breeding populations, namely Belgium, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The current plan specifies that these four Contracting Parties meet annually to review progress, identify challenges, and – with the advice of experts – seek to resolve those issues quickly, to ensure that the goal of eradication in the wild can be met within the period of the plan. (Germany is also included in this adaptive management process, given a lack of reporting and therefore uncertainty over the status of Ruddy Ducks.)

¹ Although small numbers may remain in the wild, they would be so few and so separated that breeding is extremely unlikely and the population would naturally die out without further control

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

The nominated experts gave a presentation on the progress made in their countries. The Secretariat informed that the invited expert for Spain, a Tier 2 country, was excused from the meeting and therefore no report was available for Spain.

Belgium – all Ruddy Ducks recorded in recent years have been found in Flanders; none has been seen in Wallonia. Numbers are very small – in summer 2020, there was a maximum of eight birds across six locations; in winter 2020-21, a maximum of five birds from two locations. No breeding was recorded in 2020 or 2021. Although there is no direct evidence, the birds occurring in Belgium are believed to derive from the population in the Netherlands and/or France.

All birds sighted are targeted for control. Citizen science helps provide records, and there is a rapid response from marksmen. Control measures have been in place since the late 2000s, since when 86 birds have been controlled, including two each in 2019 and 2020. The rapid response programme is well resourced and will be maintained. It is, however, considered that control in Belgium alone will make little impact on numbers in the country, as birds are probably coming in from neighbouring countries.

France – an EU LIFE project is underway to eradicate Ruddy Ducks and has made significant progress in the last few years, reducing the national population from around 200 to fewer than 20 birds. Considerably improved control efforts include systematic searching of potential breeding sites, targeting sightings even of single birds, and quicker reactivity (within 1–2 days) following sightings. Lower breeding productivity may also be a contributory factor to the reduction in numbers. It is thought that just a few pairs attempted to breed in the most recent years, and nest trapping has also been used for control. Most birds are found around the former stronghold in the northwest, though some isolated birds are observed in the east.

It is thought likely that functional extinction will be achieved within the project or shortly afterwards. The LIFE project will end in two years. It is believed that control will continue, funded nationally, and that it will be possible to arrange for this to be sufficient for the size of the population at that point.

The captive population is thought to be around 200 birds. In association with the main breeding association, breeders are being encouraged to transfer their birds to secure zoos.

The Netherlands – there are around 100 Ruddy Ducks, possibly more, quite widely spread across the east and centre of the country. There are around 30 breeding pairs.

Control has been delegated to the provinces, and an interprovincial working group has been established to consider a cross-border approach and many measures are in place. Control is undertaken by specialised hunters. Many control measures have been in place for many years. However, just 15–33 birds have been controlled annually over the last five years, and although there was a slight decline in Ruddy Duck numbers in Flanders in the last year, control is clearly insufficiently effective to bring about the required reduction to achieve eradication. Implementation of control is hampered by many of the known issues encountered in other countries (detection of birds, technical challenges of shooting birds on large waterbodies), and also by legal and policy issues, such as lack of access to key sites and restrictions on shooting due to public safety concerns and perceived public reaction. Consequently, the national population has remained broadly stable over a long period.

Germany – there are 5–10 sightings annually, and the impression is that numbers are declining, perhaps due to eradication elsewhere or fewer in captivity. There are two key sites: one in the north has held a pair for several years, and breeding occurred in 2020 (the ducklings disappeared); another site, close to the Dutch border, has held up to three birds in winter, though none was seen in 2020-21. There have been only two known breeding attempts – the 2020 record, and another in the 1990s (no birds occur at that site now).

There is a reporting system in place, following the EU IAS Regulation, but there have been few reports, and there is a reluctance by birdwatchers to report Ruddy Ducks. There may also be an awareness issue

among birdwatchers. There is control effort, but it is quite limited. It is thought that some birds are escapes from captivity. Some states have information on numbers in captivity, others do not. Numbers in captivity are thought to have decreased since the IAS Regulation came into force.

United Kingdom – recorded numbers have been very small for several years. There are around 20 birds or fewer, recorded across 12 to 14 sites in the last two years. Most are widely separated, with just singles or at most two or three birds in any one region. Consequently, breeding is now a rare event (none in 2019, and perhaps two pairs in 2020), such that the species is close to being functionally extinct.

Monitoring is undertaken, along with careful checking of different sources of sightings, which are actively followed up by a very experienced control team. Few birds are controlled, given the small population and the difficulty of locating birds, but there is confidence that the population is not growing, and that further losses will also occur through old age. Control measures will continue to be maintained.

4. Solutions, next steps, and recommendations

The participants considered that positive progress had been made in most countries and adequate measures were in place in all but the Netherlands. Whilst the problems cited there are real and challenging, they are common to other countries and have been overcome, notably in the United Kingdom. It was felt that for control to be effectively implemented required policy solutions, at individual sites, and to ensure impetus and coordination nationally, given that responsibility for control has been delegated to the regions.

The meeting considered if the Netherlands required more resources (e.g. its own LIFE project). It was felt, however, that the Netherlands did not lack for resources (and it has extensive and successful control programmes for other invasive species). Further, there was thought to be little appetite for a further project, not least, given the complexity and the lead-in time needed, that would likely be out of proportion to solution that is required.

The participants considered the situation in the Netherlands to be pressing and urgent. Control elsewhere will likely be achieved to schedule – but whilst a significant population remains in the Netherlands, the risk remains that the species may spread more widely. The situation in the Netherlands significantly undermines the chances of the international eradication plan meeting its target. It also potentially compromises the considerable gains made as a result of two significant LIFE projects, in the UK and France. All Contracting Parties will be required to maintain their current control programmes while this risk remains.

A full report of the adaptive management requirements, and of the status of Ruddy Ducks and control measures in Contracting Parties will be provided in advance of the Standing Committee meeting.

5. Any other issues

The next expert meeting on the eradication of the Ruddy Duck will be held in 2022.

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 Palaeartic: recap of targets
3. National situation – progress towards the targets and issues encountered

Updates from the different states:

 - Belgium
 - France
 - Germany
 - The Netherlands
 - Spain
 - United Kingdom
4. Solutions, next steps, and recommendations
5. Any other issues

Annex II

PARTICIPANT LIST

Contracting Parties	Name and Function
Belgium	Tim ADRIAENS Scientist, Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO) Brussels
France	Jean François MAILLARD Invasive species specialist, French Biodiversity Agency, Nantes, France Adrien TABLEAU Invasive species specialist and LIFE Oxyura project coordinator, French Biodiversity Agency, Nantes
Germany	Peter HERKENRATH Head of bird conservation

	North Rhine-Westphalia Office of Nature, Environment and Consumer Protection, Recklinghausen
The Netherlands	Bas DE MAAT Policy Officer N2000 and invasive alien species, Province of Zeeland, Middelburg
United Kingdom	Iain HENDERSON Chief Inspector, Pilot Non-Native Species Inspectorate Animal and Plant Health Agency London
Spain	Rubén MORENO-OPO DÍAZ-MECO (<i>excused</i>) Jefe de Sección Técnica Subdirección General de Biodiversidad Terrestre y Marina Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico Madrid
Independent consultant	Name and Function
	Peter CRANSWICK Senior Project Development Manager, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) Slimbridge, United Kingdom
	Colette HALL Senior Research Officer Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) Slimbridge, United Kingdom
	Baz HUGHES Independent expert Gloucester, United Kingdom
Secretariat of the Council of Europe	Name and Function
Ursula STICKER	Secretary of the Bern Convention Council of Europe Strasbourg, France
Marc HORY	Project Manager Council of Europe Strasbourg, France
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