

Future Meetings Committee of the Waterbird Society

2013 Annual Report

Membership:

Chip Weseloh, Chair (chip.weseloh@ec.gc.ca), Susan Elbin (selbin@nycaudubon.org) and Jeff Spendelow (jspendelow@usgs.gov).

2012-2013 Committee Activities:

This committee meets (by email) whenever new ideas emerge. We welcomed Jeff to the committee this past year

Since our last annual report, we have secured (and Council has accepted) Baja California as our meeting location for 2014. Felipe Chevez-Ramirez is the Chair of the local committee and his accepted proposal is attached FYI. Meeting locations have not yet been secured for 2015 or 2016 but much negotiation has occurred. We would like to hold the meeting in Florida (after have been away from the eastern U.S. for three consecutive years, 2012 in Vancouver, 2013 in Germany and 2014 in Baja California) but we have been turned down by three different potential local chairs in Florida. It seems impossible to get any agency (or university) to support/endorse/host a meeting there. However, we will continue to look for a WARM location on the East Coast for 2015. Another possibility for 2015 would be to meet at the College of the Atlantic on Mount Desert Island in Bar Harbor, Maine, in late August; John Anderson has offered to serve as Chair of the Local Committee. The August date is suggested as that would allow our members to take advantage of University housing when the students are not in residence. This needs discussion from Council.

For 2016, we have been in a long period of negotiations with the Sarawak Conference Bureau for a possible meeting in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo in the autumn. They are very keen for us to meet there and Chip will be going there in late November to view the facilities. We have been in discussions with Dr. Iain Taylor of Australia on the possibility of making that meeting a large regional meeting of waterbird researchers from the western Pacific and eastern Indian Oceans, e.g. Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China and India. He is very enthusiastic about such a meeting, has many contacts in that part of the world (from India to Japan to Australia). He has attended meetings in Sarawak previously and says that they do a wonderful job of organizing there and have excellent facilities....not to mention GREAT birds and orang-utans !!! His email discussion of such a possibility is attached FYI.

There has been an initial email discussion among the Executive of holding a second meeting in 2016 to accommodate those WbS members who feel Borneo is too far away (and/or too expensive) for them to attend. This was done several years ago when the WbS met in Taiwan; a second, nearly simultaneous meeting was held in North America. This would serve to enhance our international stature in the western Pacific/eastern Indian Ocean area but still allow us to hold a more central meeting for the bulk of our members. A recent suggestion was to let the 2016 NAOC meeting, scheduled for August in

Washington D.C. serve this function. There has been a very mixed email discussion on contributing/attending an essential "big AOU" meeting like the NAOC as part of our 2016 meeting. To counter this, it has been suggested that we have a WbS "Day" at the NAOC when we would hold our business meeting, a sponsored luncheon (as we did at the Vancouver NAOC meeting) and an all day symposium of some nature on waterbirds. In this way, those who might only want to attend (or register for) an NAOC meeting for one day, could take in virtually all of the WbS activities at the meeting. WE NEED MORE DISCUSSION ON THIS POSSIBILITY.

Another option for 2016 has just emerged. I have inquired of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds. They are meeting right now in Grenada and meet every 2nd year ...which would mean they'll be meeting again in 2016 at some location in the Caribbean. On the down-side, they usually always meeting in July...which would be out of the question for us, eh? I have asked their Director if there would be any interest in meeting jointly with us in 2016. We will keep Council updated on their reply. If this were to be a viable option for 2016, we could consider postponing Borneo until 2017. Obviously, there are several options here and we will continue to explore them.

We have not done any planning yet for meetings after 2016.

2013-2014 Proposed Work of the Committee:

Requests for Council Action:

1. A thorough discussion on the potential acceptance of a proposal for an August WbS AGM and Conference meeting at College of the Atlantic in 2015. August is earlier than we usually meet and our Committee would like an assurance that a date in August, as late as possible, would not be an encumbrance to such a proposal.
2. A thorough discussion of the suggestions presented above for two meetings in 2016; one to be held during our normal October-early November time slot in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia which could be billed as a major regional meeting for waterbird researchers from the western Pacific and eastern Indian Ocean areas. A second meeting would be held in conjunction with the 2016 NAOC in August in Washington D.C. as noted above. I am not sure where the possible Caribbean joint meeting might fit in at this stage.

Respectfully submitted,

Future Meetings Committee

Chip Weseloh, Chair

Susan Elbin, Member

Jeff Spendelow, Member

Proposed waterbird conference in Sarawak

Justification

In general terms, the Asia Pacific Flyway is the most threatened of all the flyways for migratory waterbirds because of excessive human populations, over-exploitation of wetlands, inadequate protection, and lack of regulation. Wetlands for resident waterbirds are also under severe threat throughout Asia. There is a definite need for more science, more conservation and more international exchange of ideas and collaboration. A conference would be valuable.

There have been international waterbird conferences previously in Asia, such as in Taiwan in 2005, but no major conference since then that I am aware of.

The Waterbird Society does not have as high a profile in the Asia/Pacific region as in N. America and Europe. A conference organised in Sarawak will enhance the Society's profile and enable it to contribute more to waterbird ecology and conservation in the region.

Themes

Selection of themes is probably important as it might influence the numbers and types of delegates. The best strategy might be a compromise between the need to have discussion of specific important questions and the need to be as inclusive as possible. Throughout the Asia/pacific area a high percentage of research on waterbirds is management orientated.

Themes that might attract both researchers and those in conservation agencies might be advisable.

Some possible themes might be:

1. River regulation and its effect on waterbirds
2. Migratory shorebirds
3. Migratory waterfowl
4. Management of Ramsar sites
5. Waterbird ecology in production landscapes
6. Effects of climate change on wetlands and waterbirds
7. General waterbird ecology

There must be many more possibilities.

Who would attend?

A number of countries have active researchers and effective national organisations that would cooperate with advertising etc.

The most influential countries in the Asia/pacific region, in terms of numbers of potential delegates and the possibility of financial and other assistance are Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia. Delegates might be also expected from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Russia, New Zealand, Thailand.

I think it would be difficult to estimate the numbers that might attend from the Asia/pacific region until there is an idea of costs. For example, if costs are reasonable and people have enough time to plan quite a few postgraduates might attend. Governments might send representatives if questions are considered that are of national and international interest, especially if smaller side meetings can be held.

The question of delegates from N. America and Europe I think needs to be considered separately.

Should this be the main waterbird Society conference or an additional one?

I think this must be a central question. The backbone of the Society is in North America and it must be important that delegates from there are able to attend their annual meeting. I suspect that the added costs might be too much for many. On the other hand there must be many who would appreciate the possibility of seeing a different lot of wetland environments and learning more about waterbirds in Asia.

Having this as an additional conference obviously could have some financial implications. However, there will be many Asian delegates who would attend this conference but would be unable to attend one in North America.

Who would pay?

In my experience conferences in Asia need substantial financial backing to be inclusive and successful. Delegates from countries such as Nepal, India and Bangladesh and other poorer nations would probably need all expenses paid as the likelihood of internal funding is negligible. Some assistance might be needed for some others and there is also the tradition of assisting any key-note speakers and management committee members. Delegates from countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia, New Zealand may be able to find their own funding.

It is highly possible that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, through their ornithological societies, could be encouraged to help with funding as all are relatively wealthy and have a strong interest. If there is a major theme of shorebird ecology in the flyway and conservation across the flyway, it is possible that a contribution might be had from Australia and New Zealand governments.

Obviously, since Sarawak has raised the possibility of a conference and their Ministry of Tourism wants to be involved, a significant financial assistance package of some sort should be expected. They presumably are interested in having a large number of delegates in their hotels.

Who would organise the conference?

In my view an enterprise such as this would need a good international team, including one or two representatives from the host country as well as from N. America, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Australia. Then a good team of administrative staff would be needed.

It might be an idea to start by establishing contact with key individuals in such countries who might subsequently become committee members but start off by them making contacts within their countries to assess the likelihood of funding assistance and attendance numbers. It will be important to select people very carefully to avoid any social or political mistakes in countries where such things matter.

It might be better if the conference was a collaborative effort among several organisations and not just the Waterbird Society. This would spread both load and liability!

Are there adequate facilities in Kuching?

Kuching has a large number of very good hotels close together in the city area at reasonable prices and it also has several good conference centres. I think there is no doubt the facilities for a successful conference are there.

Also there are some excellent locations for conference field trips.

First steps

I think the most sensible first step would be for the Waterbird Society to consider the more philosophical questions, especially relating to the desirability of having a meeting at such a distance from the main membership. If there is *in principle* acceptance of the idea the next step might be to find out what the organisations in Sarawak are prepared to offer by way of facilities and financial help, and an estimate of the likely costs in Kuching. In the end it will probably boil down to funding and I imagine the Waterbird society will not be prepared to take any financial risk for which it could be responsible.