

Breeding Birds

Joint Monitoring Group of
Breeding Birds in the
Wadden Sea, JMBB
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The Breeding Bird Season in the Wadden Sea in 1999



Introduction

With this contribution the coordinators of the Joint Monitoring Group of Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea, JMBB, start presenting annual overviews of the highlights - and the depths - of the breeding season in the Wadden Sea. Besides the regular publications in the series "Wadden Sea Ecosystem" with comprehensive assessments of the data from the complete surveys in 1991 and 1996 as well as on census areas in 1990 until 1999 (Fleet et al., 1994, Melter et al., 1997, Rasmussen et al., 2000), these overviews are directed at all participating counters, administrators and others interested.

The data 1999 are far from being complete yet, but herewith the coordinators want to give a brief impression of the most remarkable developments in breeding bird numbers in the total Wadden Sea shortly after the end of the last breeding season. Especially, information on common species breeding in large numbers are scarce before the full analysis. The coordinators restrict themselves to the species of importance to the joint monitoring breeding bird program in the framework of the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Program, TMAP. Most data were obtained by verbal or written communication, so hardly any sources are mentioned. The names of the geographical parts of the area, as in use in the program, are abbreviated as follows: DK for Denmark, SH for Schleswig Holstein, NI for Niedersachsen and NL for The Netherlands.

The JMBB has the impression that the breeding season in 1999 was relatively good. The weather conditions allowed comparatively high breeding success rates depending on food availability and predation pressure. In 1999, besides the described ones no massive population changes occurred. For

a final assessment, as well as information on trends, the full analysis of the data in the framework of the JMBB is necessary.

Cormorant, Ducks, Raptors and Owls

The Wadden Sea is of high importance for breeding Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* in West Europe. This became very obvious last year when considerably lower numbers bred all over Europe. After an increase for years and years, this came as quite a surprise. Data collected by Otto Overdijk (werkgroep Lepelaar) show that on the mainland of NL, the number was halved (to 306 pairs) in 1999. In the Wadden Sea, there was a much smaller decline, from 709 to 664 pairs. This decline was most obvious on the island of Terschelling. Other colonies diminishes only little, and on the island of Schiermonnikoog, there was a small increase. The same happened in the German Wadden Sea (NI), where three colonies were found with a total of 39 pairs. Spoonbills settled here with five pairs in 1995. In SH, there are no breeding cases yet, although Spoonbills are regularly seen.

The Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* does very well in the salt water of the Wadden Sea. On the island of Trischen, SH, 235 pairs were counted in 1999; only 37 in 1997. In NI, six colonies were found (one in trees) at the mainland coast behind the dike with a total of 850 pairs. The colony on Vlieland, NL, increased from 253 pairs in 1997 to 412 in 1999, and on Texel, NL, there was a new settlement of 25 pairs in the Spoonbill colony. In NL,

there are also colonies on Rottumeroog and on the artificial island "De Hond" with 12 and 135 pairs.

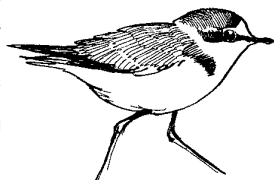
In NL, fluctuations of Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* seem to vary from place to place. Numbers on the Boschplaat and Rottumerplaat declined respectively 19% and 10%. On the other hand, on the Oosterkwelder of the island of Schiermonnikoog, a team of SOVON Vogelonderzoek Nederland found an absolute maximum of 3 300 pairs during two special Eider counts. Different counting methods and/or interpretation could possibly have effected this phenomenon. For the first time since 1991, a total number of Eiders could be established in DK. The outcome was about 1 000 pairs. This is 50% more than in 1991 (91: 440), but differences in counting methods does not allow for interpretation.

Although the picture is far from complete, the Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* seems to have declined in NL from 1998 to 1999; on Texel, from 30 to about 15 pairs; on Ameland, from 13 to 8 pairs. After the settlement and fast increase in the 1970s, a decrease - with some ups and downs - seems to be apparent especially on Ameland and Schiermonnikoog. One wonders when stabilization in numbers will occur. In DK, the number of Hen Harrier has also diminished, from 5 pairs in 1996 to none in 1999. In SH, the species number increased during recent years to about 5 pairs. Local fluctuations in the mice populations and the attainability of mice could be an important reason for changes in numbers, as is the case in Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*. In NL, the numbers in 1999 were also low compared to the year before.

Shorebirds

Each year some tenths of Dunlin *Calidris alpina* are found in DK and less than ten pairs in SH. In NL, pairs that behave unobtrusively were seen regularly during the breeding season in the past years; in the Dollard and on the island of Griend in 1998. In 1999, there were two such pairs on the Boschplaat on Terschelling. In neither year nests were found or young seen. In NI, this species has been extinct for nearly 20 years.

More common, but mostly in strongly fluctuating numbers, is the Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. In habitats that look perfect for these plovers, often none are found. However, 37 pairs were found



on very short grazed meadow land on Rømø, DK, in 1999. Mostly the nests were situated on old cowpats. The total number in DK has increased from 62 pairs in 1998 to 92 in 1999. This increase was found both on Rømø and Fanø. Since 1994, the number in DK has tripled. Far less optimistic are the reports from SH, where 593 pairs were registered in 1993 against less than 200 in '99. Also in NI, for some years already, this species has declined strongly in numbers, most of the East-Frisian islands have been abandoned, the total population size decreased from 76 in 1995 to below 30 in 1999. From the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea, only a few data are reported yet, but decline seems apparent.

Gulls and Terns

Despite the fact that already hundreds of pairs of Mediterranean Gulls *Larus melanocephalus* breed in the south-western delta area of NL, this species remains very rare in the Wadden Sea. The birds are seen regularly on many locations, but each year only a few breeding cases have been reported. In 1999, there were two pairs of Mediterranean Gulls in Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* colonies in SH, one breeding pair on Griend, NL. Even rarer is the Little Gull *Larus minutus*. We only know of one record (nest found) on the salt marshes of Groningen, NL in 1999. Two successful pairs of Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus* were found on the Boschplaat, NL.

The Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* occurs in few colonies in the northern Wadden Sea, however numbers are declining. The total was 86 pairs in 1996; In 1999, less than 20 were found in NI and SH together and in DK only seven that were unsuccessful. The colony on Langli, DK was deserted.

There are better news about the Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*. On Griend, NL 7800 pairs were reported in 1999, after the deep depth of 5000 in 1997 (Baarspul & Oosterhuis, 1999). However, a colony of about 2335 on Rottumerplaat was deserted in 1998. On Juist, NI, there was an increase of 50% to 2176 in 1999. Finally, the colony on Langli, the largest in DK, increased to 1 529 breeding pairs.

In 1999, the number of Little Terns *Sterna albifrons* in DK remained on the level of 1998: 254 pairs. The largest colony of 100 pairs in the Wadden Sea is located in DK on the harbor terrain off Esbjerg and had very good success, but most other colonies suffered from flooding on 9th of June and 14th of July. In SH, about 350 pairs were



counted (307 in '96), while in NI a small decline was noticed, to about 250 pairs. On Texel, NL, the number also decreased a little from 110 in 1998 to 95 in 1999. However, small new colonies were reported from the outer sands Razende Bol en Richel, NL. Coincidentally also in SH, 1999 was the first year with successfully breeding Little Terns on an outer sand in the last decades. In the second stronghold of Little Tern in NL, Rottumeroog, 18 pairs were counted in 1999. This place once, - 1993 and 1995 - held 59 and 49 pairs. The total for NL will be about 170 pairs for 1999.

Literature

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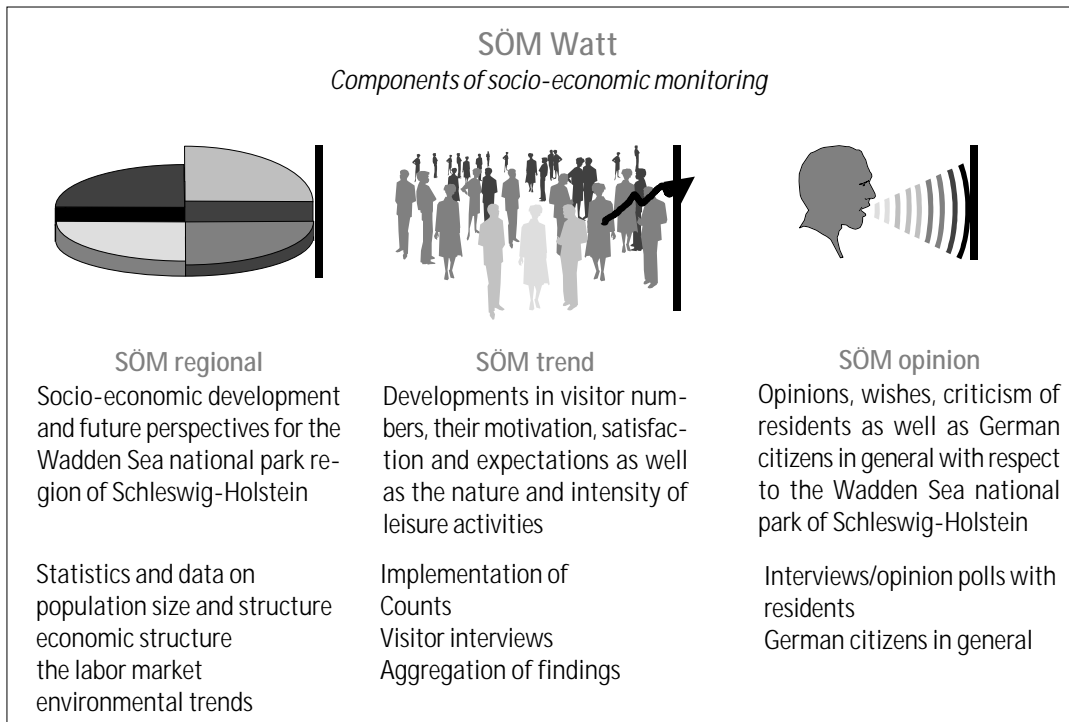


Figure 1
Components of the socio-economic monitoring (SÖM Watt)

- finding and supporting solutions to conflicts between the economic development of the region and national park policy.

The socio-economic monitoring program includes three components (see Fig. 1):

SÖM regional

Analysis of selected data from official statistics.

SÖM trend

Opinion polls. In 1999, more than 500 interviews were carried out by the National Park Service at 8 locations along the coast. The target group was visitors to the national park (people on holidays or day-trippers and residents visiting the area for recreation purposes). The local authorities, where surveys were carried out, could add a question of their choice to the questionnaire. These investigations will be continued in 2000 and are planned for future years.

SÖM opinion

This component is still in preparation. First activities will probably start in 2000. An opinion poll is planned in the two counties adjacent to the Wadden Sea, addressing the local inhabitant's perception and acceptance of the national park policy. Cooperation with regional partners is welcome. First contacts on this topic have taken place. These include an exchange of information and opinions with the World Wide Fund for Nature, representatives of the regional tourism sector, of

the regional trade and business sectors and with the Technical College "Westküste".

Hopefully, these activities will contribute to what has been declared by the three Wadden Sea countries as a shared vision in the Trilateral Wadden Sea Plan: "Integrated management of human activities which takes into account the socio-economic and ecological relationships between the Wadden Sea area and the adjacent areas."

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