

## Editorial Foreword



Photo G. Nehls

### Dear Reader,

This WSNL special issue is exclusively dedicated to the mass mortality of Eider ducks, which mainly occurred in the southwestern part of the Wadden Sea in the winter 1999/2000. The issue is giving an overview on the Eider epizootic in the Netherlands and Germany to all interested persons in the three Wadden Sea states on what are the relevant scientific findings, as well as possible and proved causes. In the papers, the mortality is reflected in terms of numbers of dead Eiders, the distribution of wintering and breeding Eiders, findings regarding pathology, parasitology, water quality and food supply.

Three expert meetings on the eider mortality took place in the Netherlands to collect all information and results of studies and to discuss the causes of the mass mortality in 2000. The first workshop was held at the Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ) on Texel on 20 April 2000, and the second one was organized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fishery in Den Haag on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2000. In August 2000, a governmental report on all findings compiled by the Expertisecentrum LNV was published as a Werkdocument IKC Natuurbeheer. At the 10<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium in Groningen in October 2000, a workshop on the Eider mortality was organized by the Dutch Wadden Sea Society and recommendations on that subject were integrated in the overall recommendations of the Symposium.

The Eider mortality in the Wadden Sea was and is, once again, very high in the current winter

2000/2001. More than average numbers of dead Eiders have been found on the beaches in the Netherlands, but not as many as last winter. 800 - 900 dead Eiders have been counted until the beginning of March 2001, so several thousands must have died. The birds are mostly adults and more males than females, and they are mostly found in the west of the Dutch Wadden Sea. However, mortality cannot be observed in the North Sea, where large numbers of Eiders - more than in the Wadden Sea - are wintering and feeding on spisula. Also, the numbers of dead Eiders in Lower Saxony are above normal although lower than last winter. Dead Eiders were as numerous on the Wadden Sea coast of Schleswig-Holstein in the last months of 2000 as they were in the previous year. As last year, there is no indication of higher numbers of dead Eiders in Denmark.

The mass mortality of the winter 1999/00 was probably not a one-off phenomenon. The identification of causal relationships and - if necessary - additional adequate management measures remain, therefore, of highest priority. It is the aim of the given documentation on the Eider mortality that the information will serve as valuable scientific background for consequences concerning management.

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