

The Breeding Bird Season in the Wadden Sea in 2000

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Introduction

The coordinators of the Joint Monitoring Group on Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea (JMBB) present the most remarkable results and interesting observations from the recent breeding season in spring 2000 focusing on the species of importance to the joint monitoring program. The overview is aimed to inform all participating counters, administrators, and others interested shortly after the season. Except for a few species, the 2000-data are not complete.

The results of the last complete breeding survey in 1996 were published in autumn 2000 (Rasmussen et al., 2000). The report nicely presents the large amount of work that has been carried out in the field by many hundred enthusiastic counters. It is our hope that the report will inspire the fieldwork in the 2001-season, in which the next coordinated complete count of all the breeding birds in the Wadden Sea will take place after five years.

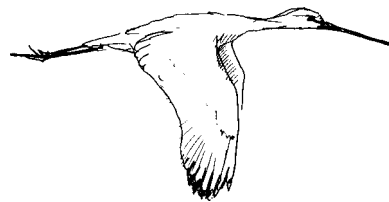
The impression by the JMBB is that the 2000-breeding season in the Wadden Sea was in total not as good as the 1999-breeding season. In both the northern and western Wadden Sea, large parts of the white beaches and low salt marshes, especially on the mainland, were flooded between the 27th and 29th of May. This caused extensive losses of eggs and young especially of Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*), Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Arctic and Little Tern (*Sterna hirundo* & *albifrons*) and caused large displacements of the late breeding colony species. In Denmark, the single most important colony site Langli, holding 62 % of the colony breeders in the Danish Wadden Sea, was host to a fox rearing its young which had a severely negative effect on the overall breeding success of most species. In the Netherlands, increasing numbers of foxes mainly affected colonies of Avocets and Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*).

In the following names of the geographical parts of the area are abbreviated as following: DK for Denmark, SH for Schleswig-Holstein, LS for Lower Saxony and NL for The Netherlands

Cormorant, Spoonbill, Egret, Raptors, Ducks and Owls

On Texel (NL), a colony of Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) that established in 1999 (25 pairs) increased to 120 pairs in 2000. The colonies on Vlieland and De Hond decreased slightly. In LS numbers of breeding pairs slightly increased on Lütje Hörn and Memmert. On Trischen (SH), breeding numbers increased further to 265 pairs in 2000. In the Danish Wadden Sea, there were no colonies of this species.

For breeding Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), the Wadden Sea is of special importance after a large increase during the 1990s. Only in the last two



years numbers decreased slightly in the Dutch Wadden Sea after many years of increase: 1998: 709 pairs; 1999: 689 pairs and 2000: 640 pairs. This development was mainly caused by a 50% decrease in the important colony on Vlieland; other colonies were stable or increased slightly. In other parts of the Wadden Sea, Spoonbills established new colonies and expanded further: A new colony with 7 pairs was established on Balgzand, a Dutch mainland salt marsh site. In LS, 3 new colonies were established on the islands Norderney, Baltrum and Spiekeroog. Including the older colony on Memmert and Borkum, 49 pairs bred in total. In SH, the first breeding attempt with two pairs was found on a hallig salt marsh. In the Danish Wadden Sea, there were no breeding attempts. Overall numbers were still higher than in 1996, when totally 594 pairs were found.

The Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) is increasing and expanding into the Wadden Sea. The species bred for the second year in the Dutch Wadden Sea. There were successful pairs on Vlieland and Terschelling. On other islands, non-breeding individ-

uals were seen. In May, there were observations of Little Egrets on Föhr, Sylt, Eiderstedt (SH) and in LS. In NL, peak numbers were 80 in September 1997 and in December 2000, 10 individuals were seen.

In NL, the number of Common Eiders (*Somateria mollissima*) dropped significantly in the breeding season 2000. The drop in numbers followed high death rates observed in Common Eider in the winter and spring 1999 and 2000. The total number of Common Eiders has dropped significantly since the peak in 1997, when more than 10,000 pairs bred in the Dutch Wadden Sea. The 2000-breeding season was delayed and comparatively few nests were found in areas where also adult birds were counted. The overall success was moderate to low in large parts of the Dutch Wadden Sea. It is believed that this situation in NL is caused by a persistent food shortage for Common Eiders in a large part of the Dutch Wadden Sea in April through June 2000. The situation for Common Eider and Oystercatcher (see below) is causing great concern in NL and further research is conducted to reveal the causes. In SH, numbers of Eider has declined since 1996.

The majority of Hen Harriers (*Circus cyaneus*) in the Wadden Sea breed in the Dutch part. Here, numbers declined from 1999 to 2000 on Ameland (8 to 3) and Schiermonnikoog (10 to 6), were stable on Terschelling (34 to 33) and increased on Texel (18 to 22). In LS, numbers were stable.

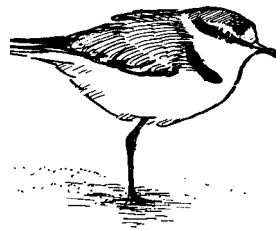
The Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) was increasing as a breeding bird in the Wadden Sea. One pair was found breeding on the northern coast of Groningen. There were also 2 successful pairs on high sands in SH. In NL, there was a resident pair on Vlieland but no nest was found. In LS, there were several pairs on anthropogenic structures in the Wadden Sea.

Numbers of Short-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) declined on Texel (12-7) and Ameland (7-3) from 1998 to 1999 and again in 2000. On Terschelling, however, a record peak of 12 pairs was recorded. Again in 2000, there were some pairs found on the mainland coast of Groningen. Local food conditions seem to play an important role in the annual variations. There were no breeding pairs in SH and on the mainland LS. However, on the islands of LS, the numbers were quite stable. Especially high numbers were found on Norderney and Borkum with 8 and nine breeding pairs. In DK, there have been two pairs on Mandø since 1998.

Shorebirds

The breeding number of Oystercatcher (*Ostralegus haematopus*) in NL, LS and SH has increased steady since 1900. In recent years this development changed and numbers decreased. In NL, even groups of non-breeders disappeared. In 1999 and 2000, the numbers in SH decreased annually by 10%.

The Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) increased further in DK where 105 pairs were found mainly on Rømø. The breeding success was estimated to be reasonably good despite loss of eggs and chicks and flooding at the end of May. It is not



known to what extent the pairs were recruited from the local pairs or from SH where numbers were reduced during 1990s. In SH, the number was at the same low levels as in 1999 with less than 200 pairs. In NL, the numbers declined, and for the first time no breeding pairs were reported from Vlieland and Schiermonnikoog. The species showed a further decline and serious status in LS.

In the Dollard (NL), numbers of Avocet (*Avocetta recurvirostra*) almost tripled from 500 to 1400 pairs but disappeared from the Leybucht (LS).

Gulls and Terns

The Great Black-Backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) remained a rare species in the Wadden Sea, with only 4 pairs (at least 2 successful) on the Boschplaat, Terschelling in NL. In DK, only 1 pair bred compared with 5 in 1993. In LS, one breeding pair could be confirmed on Memmert, two pairs were seen on Mellum.

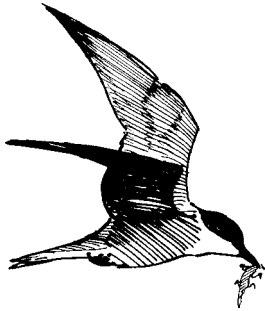
The Mediterranean Gull (*Larus melanocephalus*) has been expected to increase in the Wadden Sea for the last 10 years where several hundred pairs were found in the Dutch Delta area, but numbers were still low. In NL, 4 pairs were found: On Texel and the Groningen Coast respectively two and one pair were washed away in the high flood at the end of May. A successful pair bred on Griend were one young fledged.

On the 30th of May an Elegant Tern (*Sterna elegans*) was found in the Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) colony on Langli. The bird acted as a breeding bird holding a territory in the central

part of the colony and stayed for 13 days after discovery. The finding was kept secret until the bird had disappeared to protect the breeding birds on the island. This caused an intense debate in DK about public information of birds in sensitive breeding areas. The species breeds on the West Coast of Mexico, but interbred with Sandwich Terns in France in the 1980s.

The same problem turned up in LS, where a single breeding bird of Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) was observed on the island of Minsener Oog. This bird paired with a Common Tern and founded a clutch. But the protection of such large tern colonies (below) is a matter of prime importance and has to be taken more seriously than the specific wishes of individual bird watchers.

The Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) is severely threatened with extinction in its north-



ern most European breeding area in the Wadden Sea. But, numbers increased in the Elbe area (LS/SH) in 2000 from around 20 pairs in 1999 to 49 pairs in 2000. Interestingly the terns did not settle in a single colony but bred fairly equally dis-

tributed in salt marsh and inland areas which are managed for bird conservation. In DK, only one unsuccessful pair was recorded on Rømø. A pair with young was seen on the coast of Fanø (DK), but these birds are thought to have bred somewhere outside the Wadden Sea in DK. As late as 1996 86 pairs bred in the Wadden Sea.

The Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) increased in the largest colony on Minsener Oog in LS where 3,600 breeding pairs were counted. In NL, numbers seemed to be a little lower than 1999.

Numbers of Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*) increased to 279 pairs in DK, the highest numbers since regular counts started early 1990s. Breeding success was unfortunately almost absent due to the flooding at the end of May 2000. No major changes were detected in the western Wadden Sea.

Reference

Rasmussen, L.M., Fleet, D.M., Hälterlein, B., Koks, B.J., Potel, P., Südbeck, P., 2000. Breeding Birds in the Wadden Sea in 1996. Results of a total survey in 1996 and of numbers of colony breeding species between 1991 and 1996. Wadden Sea Ecosystem No. 10. Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Wilhelmshaven, pp. 122.

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