

Fourth German Seabird and Coastal Bird Colloquium

The bi-annual colloquium was held in Norden, Germany, from 16 – 17 November 2002 and was organized by the "AG Seevogelschutz", a working group of institutions in charge of research and management of birds at the German Baltic and North Sea coasts. The colloquium was attended by about 150 scientists and managers and addressed salt marsh management, monitoring and offshore wind farms.

A number of long-term surveys of breeding and roosting birds in salt marshes were presented, from which reliable conclusions on the effects of different salt marsh management regimes on birds could be drawn. Non-grazed salt marshes clearly showed a higher species diversity. Songbirds and ducks profited the most from cessation of grazing, whereas the typical coastal birds responded more differentiated. Beside utilization, also other reasons for a decrease could be observed. Additionally, species and area-dependent effects played a major role. It could be shown that water level in salt marshes was another crucial factor, which may have been underestimated in the past. Therefore, the discussion of salt marsh management and effects on birds should not only focus on utilization, because this would be an inadmissible simplification, but has also to take into account the other important factors.

Contrary to these developments in non-grazed salt marshes, it could be shown that geese preferred a short canopy vegetation. Conspicuous shifts in area use and population, which were probably independent of each other, were observed for Brent geese and Barnacle geese. However, sufficient habitats for geese will be available in future, at least for the bird numbers observed in previous years.

The aim of a natural development of salt marshes has been established as a common policy in the national parks. The presented examples illustrated that decisions on specific management measures have to be taken on a local level and that for each site the complex situation of different factors like utilization, predation and disturbances, as well as the effect of raising the water level has to be assessed individually.

The colloquium also showed the great value of long-term monitoring of bird populations in the development of salt marsh management concepts. However, not all changes of bird populations could be explained by using the established methods. For an integrated population monitoring a better knowledge of the reproduction biology of the observed species is required. Such a monitoring of breeding success could indicate changes at an early stage resulting from climate change, effects of predation and shifts in food supply.

The rapid development of offshore wind farm projects required also new methodological approaches to assess the environmental impact of these installations. Three contributions presented results and experiences with these new methods. During the discussion, it was stated that quality assurance procedures for these new methods are indispensable and that the results should be made available also for other scientific purposes. The meeting also supported the designation of further marine protected areas before new permits for offshore wind farms would be given.

The abstracts of the lectures can be downloaded from the recently launched website of the "AG Seevogelschutz" (www.seevogelschutz.de).

Source: Veit Henning, 4. Deutsches See- und Küstenvogelkolloquium in Norden, Ostfriesland. SEEVÖGEL - Zeitschrift Verein Jordsand, Hamburg 2002/Band 23, Heft 4, p. 107.