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## Many migratory bird species decreasing in the Wadden Sea

Wilhelmshaven, 1 July 2015: An updated report on the numbers of migratory birds in the Wadden Sea region released by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (Wilhelmshaven, Germany) on 3 June this year shows that more species are now declining compared to former reports. In total, 34 waterbird species are included in the progress report. The numbers of 6 of these species are increasing, 13 species are stable and 15 species are in decline. Among the increasing species are the Spoonbill and the Barnacle Goose, which are familiar to more and more people enjoying these spectacular birds in the saltmarshes. Species such as the common gull and the pintail are stable. Among those in decline are the Shelduck, the dunlin and the black-headed gull. While the numbers of individuals of these three species observed have decreased in recent years, the species as such are still common. However, rare species such as the Kentish plover and the ruff are also in decline.

*“Finding the reasons for the changing bird numbers in the Wadden Sea means solving a puzzle that involves more scientific disciplines than ornithology. But in accordance with the legislation and declarations governing the protection of the Wadden Sea we urgently need to find out what is causing the decrease in numbers. This kind of knowledge is necessary before initiatives can be taken to prevent further decreases and hopefully turn the situation around to achieve increasing numbers,”* says senior researcher Karsten Laursen, Aarhus University, the chairman of the Joint Monitoring of Migratory Birds Program (JMMP) for the Wadden Sea.

The reasons, for the changing numbers are unknown. The results indicate that species feeding on fish, such as the spoonbill and the cormorant, are increasing in numbers, together with species feeding on grasslands, such as the barnacle goose. Former discussions about decreasing trends among the bird species breeding in the Arctic, seems not to be the case since these species vary in numbers during the 25 years study like species breeding outside the Arctic. But the species finding their food on the tidal flats in the Wadden Sea, taking worms and shellfish, occur in fewer numbers than formerly. This indicates that the explanations for the changes could be found in the tidal flats.

The Wadden Sea is among the best protected areas in the world. It receives considerable public awareness and is covered by national and international legislation. Among the instruments in place to protect the region are National parks, Natura 2000 sites established under the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Systematic migratory bird counts in the Wadden Sea have now been performed for 25 years. The Wadden Sea constitutes one of the world's most important wetlands for migratory birds resting during migration between their Arctic and Scandinavian breeding grounds and the wintering areas in the Mediterranean region and Africa. The JMMP counts are performed in the framework of the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Program (TMAP) carried out by the official authorities responsible for nature conservation in the three countries that share the Wadden Sea, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands. TMAP is a long-term monitoring program covering the long ecological uniform landscape extending over a distance of 550 km from Den Helder in the Netherlands to Esbjerg in Denmark.

Regular, systematic and coordinated counts from the ground take place year round, and they are supplemented by aerial counts to cover remote islands and duck species at sea. Several hundreds of observers are involved in the program, for which several institutions and agencies join efforts. The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat (CWSS) is responsible for the day to day management of the programme and the preparation of the meetings of the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Group (TMAG) and of the technical monitoring groups.

Title of the report: Trends of Migratory and Wintering Waterbirds in the Wadden Sea  
1987/1988-2011/2012

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