

Rice and Waterbirds Working Group

Conference call 10 May 06; 2pm-330pm DST

Next Call: 20 June 06, 2pm DST. Conference call to be facilitated by Garry Donaldson.

Participating on call: Chris Elphick (Chair), Garry Donaldson, Lourdes Mugica, Jennifer Wheeler, Daniel Blanco, Charles Duncan, Catherine Hickey, Paul Baicich, Sammy King, Kathy Parsons. Unable to participate: Ghisselle Alvarado

The proposed agenda:

1. Review purpose and goals statement.
2. Discuss group activities
 - Veracruz NOAC meeting
 - Best Management Practices workshops
 - Barcelona symposium
 - Outreach products/tools
 - South/Central America/Caribbean activities
3. Funding
4. Working group composition
5. Avian flu

1. Purpose and Goals of Working Group

Participants agreed that the following text captured the purpose and goals of the group, acknowledging comments by Ghisselle Alvarado and Paul Baicich that policy recommendations might include legislative action, that understanding birds and rice includes effects of pesticides, and that stakeholders include rice consumers.

Purpose: *To promote conservation of aquatic birds using habitats associated with rice cultivation.*

Goals:

- 1) *To develop capacity to conserve aquatic birds using rice habitats by engaging in productive dialogue with the rice industry and other stakeholders;*
- 2) *To understand the relationship between birds and rice cultivation including dimensions that are ecological, agronomic, economic and social;*
- 3) *To develop management and policy recommendations to optimize the bird/rice relationship; and*
- 4) *To communicate and promote conservation and related marketing strategies to and with all stakeholders.*

2. Group Activities

NAOC Meeting

Many of the working group participants will be attending the North American Ornithological Congress in October 2006: Chris, Charles, Kathy, Sammy, Ghisselle, Paul, Garry, Jennifer, and possibly Catherine. Daniel noted that Adrián Di Giacomo (Aves Argentinas) will be there to present a paper on Bobolink use of rice fields in Argentina, and would likely be interested in joining any conversations. The NAOC is thus an opportunity to meet in person to work on group activities and to solicit involvement in issues of rice and birds.

Given the size, complexity, and deadlines of the NAOC conference, it may be difficult to obtain a formal meeting space or presentation slot, but Chris will inquire. Kathy will look into display space at the Waterbird Society booth. In any case, a handout to advertise group activities would be useful.

Best Management Practices Workshops

Catherine and Sammy reaffirmed an interest in pursuing Best Management Practice workshops in the Central Valley (early 2007) and Southeast U.S. (mid 2007) respectively. Daniel also expressed an interest for hosting one in Argentina. These workshops would serve as an opportunity to share recommendations about “wildlife-friendly” growing practices (now in development in association with the Audubon-Monsanto Waterbirds on Working Lands project), garner feedback from rice growers and others, and tailor these recommendations to regional realities.

Catherine will prepare a more detailed workshop description for the next conference call.

Symposium at Waterbird Society Meeting in Barcelona, late 2007

Chris, Lourdes, Kathy and Jennifer met as a small group, and a draft prospectus has been developed for a symposium. The symposium is envisioned as an opportunity to synthesize information on the full range of rice-and-bird issues (e.g., use, effects, best management practices, social marketing) to share with individuals at the meeting and in a more lasting form, as a Waterbirds special publication.

Lourdes remarked on the importance of involving representatives from the rice growing industry to ensure that scientists and conservationists understood the perspectives of farmers and producers. (Ghisselle also expressed this in an email). Chris thought a representative from International Rice Institute might be appropriate for this.

Chris will expand the current prospectus into a draft symposium outline, and circulate to the full group.

Outreach Activities

A web page on rice and birds can be hosted from the www.waterbirdconservation.org site. This page could provide information on related issues, announce group activities (e.g., workshops and symposia), link to selected publications and related initiatives, and serve as a repository for working group documents. Additional technical capacity will be needed to provide the desired on-line, searchable database of publications.

Jennifer, working with Paul, will prepare a draft webpage, and circulate to the full group.

Catherine inquired about other outreach products (e.g., fact sheets); Chris felt that many would arise from the Aububon-Monsanto project.

Catherine also remarked on the importance of sharing the activities of this group with other networks (e.g., bird initiatives).

Central/South America/Caribbean Activities

Lourdes felt that a good emphasis in Cuba would be to work more closely with grower groups, especially as they have expressed an interest in receiving input from the environmental community.

Daniel concurred that an emphasis for Argentina and South America should be for conservationists to insert themselves into the rice growers "conversations." The Best Management Practices approach would seem to be an effective way to do this. In general, there would be benefit from strengthening a network to bring people together to share information on rice and birds.

Charles remarked that WHSRN perhaps could take on funding of workshops and outreach for rice growers in an around sites where rice is important. He described that there was once a good working relationship around the three WHSRN sites in Suriname which were associated with rice.

3. Funding

Most of the group activities discussed will need some level of funding. Catherine discussed the importance of prioritizing funding needs, since funding is likely to be piece-meal (obtainable in small amounts for individual tasks) at first. Ultimately, packaging of needs into a larger request will be desirable, so it is important that group members keep each other informed about needs.

4. Composition of Group

Please send any additional corrections/additions on the Member Directory to Chris.

The group discussed a listserv (electronic mailing list), but a formal list was felt to be a bit premature.

The group discussed group composition; Chris felt it was important to not become overly large, but to be able to access networks of individuals and information as needed.

“Gaps” in representation discussed by the group were related to waterfowl (Anatidae) interests and the management perspective (direct work with farmers, such as done by some Joint Ventures.) Also, the group should consider the scale at which it wants to operate, and the possibility of more members that work on an international scale. Finally, prior to meeting at the NAOC in Veracruz, it should be determined if there is anyone in Mexico working on the rice and bird issues.

5. Avian Flu

Chris remarked on the possibility of transfer of disease from domestic birds kept in rice fields to wild birds. This phenomenon, depending on what information develops, may have an influence on group activities in the future.
