

Rice and Waterbirds Working Group

Conference call 29 Mar 06; 2pm-330pm EST

Next call—May 10, 2006; 2pm EST

Participating on call: Chris Elphick (Chair), Jennifer Wheeler, Daniel Blanco, Charles Duncan, Catherine Hickey, Paul Baicich, Sammy King, Kathy Parsons

Unable to participate: Ghisselle Alvarado, Garry Donaldson, Lourdes Mugica

The proposed agenda:

- Discuss and define purpose of group; scope out goals/objectives; identify additional expertise/individuals for possible recruitment
- Waterbirds and rice research and management symposium proposed to occur at Waterbird Society meeting, Barcelona 2007. This seems to be an idea the entire group thought would be good to explore; what is our plan forward?
- Next steps for the group

The agenda was modified to include introductions at the start of the call and to include a discussion of the possibility of finding support for working group activities.

1. WG members:

Chris Elphick—faculty member University of Connecticut; extensive experience studying avian use of rice fields in California; has authored chapter in forthcoming book (Eady et al., funded by DU) interested in compiling and providing nexus for fragmented research efforts on waterbird use of rice and other row crops (activities include drafting review manuscripts, cataloguing waterbird/rice datasets from literature, providing on-line reference database)

Kathy Parsons—scientist Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences; experience studying impacts of pesticides on birds and reptiles in cranberry wetlands and associated habitats; published a literature review of waterbirds and agricultural wetlands in 2002; interested in applied research to develop agrochemical management practices in agricultural lands that reduce toxic exposures in wildlife

Sammy King—USGS coop leader, Louisiana State University; interested in regional issues facing lower Mississippi valley with regard to rice and waterbirds—including conversion to sugar cane, hurricane and saltwater intrusion problems, plans to restore coastal prairie habitats; conducting research with graduate students on marshbird (rails, bitterns, other) and waterfowl use of rice habitats; working broadly throughout the region with joint venture and other partners, including TNC

Charles Duncan—director, executive office of WHSRN; interested in promoting rice agriculture as it provides new habitats for migratory shorebirds; interested in provision of habitat by rice cultivation in and near WHSRN sites, also concerned about potential toxicity of treated fields

Catherine Hickey—chair, US Shorebird Conservation Council; Shorebird Conservation Coordinator, PRBO; interested in promoting shorebird habitats in central valley, CA; interested in promoting best management practices in rice agriculture to benefit shorebirds through policy initiatives

Daniel Blanco—scientist, Wetlands International; coordinates 15-year Waterbird Census. Recently completed a project to study waterbirds and shorebirds utilizing rice habitats in Argentina and Brazil, and now developing technical publication

Paul Baicich—council member, Waterbird Conservation for the Americas; chair, Waterbird Council Communications Committee; National Wildlife Refuge Association; interested in applicability of shade-grown coffee/landbirds model to rice/waterbirds; interested in function of rice fields abutting wildlife refuges; wants to promote education and marketing aspects of rice/waterbirds

Jennifer Wheeler—international coordinator, Waterbirds Conservation for the Americas; USFWS waterbirds coordinator; sees helping to fill a nexus role in connecting various constituencies around rice/waterbirds topic; interested in issue of rice agriculture and proximity to Ramsar wetlands

Ghisselle Alvarado—scientist, National Museum of Costa Rica; interested in waterbird research and conservation

Lourdes Mugica—faculty, University of Havana; studies waterbird use of rice habitats in Cuba

2. Other potential members—

- a. Garry Donaldson—Canadian Wildlife Service, waterbirds and shorebird coordinator (Kathy)
- b. Paul Buttner—California Rice Commission (Charles)
- c. Bill Hoehm—rice industry (Chris)
- d. Matt Whitback—National Wildlife Refuge in TX (Charles)

3. Purpose and activities of group—Chris identified three potential areas of activity including 1) research—especially reviewing/compiling current knowledge, 2) developing best management practices guidelines, 3) communicating outcomes to various audiences. Kathy suggested that a broad purpose of the group might be to promote conservation of aquatic birds (marshbirds including sparrows, shorebirds, waterbirds, waterfowl) using rice habitats. Discussion followed that focused on identifying strengths of current group membership, priority issues to tackle, research and management needs throughout the Americas. There was general agreement to maintain a broad scope (taxonomically and spatially) at least initially as ideas are fomenting. Sammy spoke to the need to think broadly in terms of societal forces affecting rice agriculture and thus impacts on birds. These factors include economic and social considerations that operate at regional or larger scales (Louisiana case in

point). Research ideas included the need to compile science-based knowledge on waterbird use of rice agriculture, need to identify information gaps, need to network fragmented research community (provide a directory of ongoing research activities, online database of literature, promote opportunities (workshops, symposia, etc) to connect researchers and managers). Specific examples of these opportunities include 1) workshop in South America to share knowledge of topic, 2) symposium in Oct 2007 in Barcelona at Waterbird Society meeting, and 3) WHSRN workshop in central valley, CA in spring 2007. The importance of engaging the rice industry was reiterated; several rice stakeholder groups were identified including the Rice Association, various rice commissions. The Audubon/Monsanto project—Waterbirds on Working Lands—was proposed as a potential model for reaching out to grower communities.

4. Near-term operation—there is interest and potential opportunity to secure funds for a paid coordinator of this effort, however the group agreed that further discussion was needed to clarify our vision and goals/objectives. We agreed to meet in approximately a month's time to continue this discussion. In addition, we agreed to post on the Waterbird Conservation for the Americas website and distribute through the waterbird listserv the minutes of this initial meeting. The Waterbirds Initiative has generously offered to support conference calls of the working group for the near term.

5. Next steps—

- a. Charles invited members to submit ideas to be included in an upcoming proposal submission to NFWF Conoco Philips program. This is envisioned to fund implementation of action plans for highest priority shorebird species, but could conceivably include rice related tasks. Deadline is this Friday, Mar 31.
- b. Chris and Kathy offered to head up a small task force to organize a symposium and proceedings on rice and waterbird research and management at the Barcelona meeting in 2007; Lourdes Mugica will be recruited to co-convene; those interested in helping to organize, secure funding, recruit presenters, etc should email Chris by April 7; a conference call will be scheduled the week of April 10 to develop a prospectus and timeline to share with working group at next meeting.
- c. Catherine offered to collate ideas that elaborate our discussion of purpose, goals, objectives, tasks for the working group. Please send your thoughts to all for consideration. Fund-raising opportunities will be explored once we have a clearer vision of why we exist and how we expect to operate as a voluntary committee (at least at present).
- d. Please send to Chris your email address and other contact information
