

## **Rice and Waterbirds Working Group call: 6th Mar 2008, 2 pm US Eastern Standard Time**

Present on call: Paul Baicich, Chris Elphick, Catherine Hickey, Kathy Parsons, Jennifer Wheeler  
Apologies from: Daniel Blanco, Garry Donaldson, Charles Duncan, Sammy King

### **1. Update on the status of the Barcelona proceedings (Chris)**

Drafts of most (but not all) chapters have been received. Many have gone through an initial editorial review by Chris, and are now out for peer-review. Overall we are a little behind schedule, but not badly so, and Chris still anticipates having most of the editorial work completed by fall. We currently lack a planned paper on the industry (the original author had to back out). The students from UMD were asked to develop their report into a chapter, but declined due to other commitments. Including some of their material remains an option, however (e.g., if someone were willing to help turn it into a chapter). A student working with Chris is compiling information from the chapters to create a detailed database containing information on all species of birds documented to use rice.

### **2. Update on funding for publication (Kathy)**

\$16,500 has been raised to date. Additional requests for funding have been made by Kathy (several foundations) and Garry (CWS). Catherine has also been making investigations for potential funds, with the help of fund raisers at PRBO.

### **3. Update on web site additions (Jennifer)**

Jennifer has notes from prior conference calls ready to post on the web site. About half the speakers from the Barcelona symposium have provided copies of their presentations, and we plan to post these on the web site. We will also send a second request to those who have not yet sent anything. The UMD report on the rice industry in the western hemisphere has been sent out for review. A few minor edits/additions need to be made. Jennifer will do this and then post the report on the site. Jennifer created a fact sheet on "RWWG 2007 Activities" for the McAllen Partners in Flight meeting, which she will distribute a copy of to Steering Committee members and then post on the web site. The list serve now has 67 members.

### **4. Updates on workshops (Catherine)**

No new news, but a California workshop is tentatively planned for the summer. Catherine has been working on proposals with other organizations in California, that would provide funds to examine the value of different conservation practices in rice fields (especially for shorebirds).

### **5. Strategic planning (Kathy)**

Continuing on from our last call we discussed what the group's focus should be over the next couple of years. Ideas put forth on the last call fall into three general groups and Chris suggested organizing small groups of 3-4 people to develop a plan for each topic. Each group should be lead by a member of the committee, who would then seek others (including those outside the committee) who they feel can help devise a workable strategy. Each group would be tasked with developing a plan for their topic and identifying relevant partners that RWWG should engage with. Groups should then report back to Steering Committee so that we can collectively prioritize future activities. The three groups would focus on the following topics:

- a) *Engaging the grower community.* Among the likely tasks for this group are: identify potential voluntary conservation practices; seek grower input on the feasibility of implementing such practices; develop a strategy for implementation; evaluate effectiveness of practices. Catherine has agreed to lead this group. Including a representative of the rice grower community is essential for this group. Possible templates for future activities are the regional workshop focus employed in southern S. America and/or the species-focused approach emerging for King Rails in the southeast U.S.

- b) *Engaging conservationists.* This group's efforts are likely to be two-fold. First, they should build on the symposium to develop research products that more comprehensively assess the value of rice fields to waterbirds in a broad context. Potential questions would include: For which species is rice especially important? In which regions are the conservation benefits greatest? How much does rice contribute to population level conservation? And, ultimately, what goals can be set for waterbird conservation in rice agroecosystems. Second, this group needs to develop partnerships with conservation organizations to promote conservation efforts where they will be most effective. Chris and/or Kathy will take the lead of this group.
- c) *Engaging the industry and/or public.* The initial focus of this group is likely to be to take the UMD report and identify opportunities to promote rice in ways that will benefit waterbird conservation activities in rice growing regions. Working with group (a), this group should seek to develop interactions with the rice growing industry to implement activities that are mutually beneficial to the industry and to meeting conservation goals. Simultaneously, the group should work with group (b) to identify ways to increase public awareness of the conservation issues relating to birds in rice agroecosystems. Currently, no leader has been identified for this group, although Paul has offered to participate.

In addition to the activities of each group, Kathy will lead an assessment of how to prioritize our overall activities in order to maximize benefits for waterbirds. This discussion will be informed by the conclusions of each subgroup. Our next call (1<sup>st</sup> May) will focus on getting a discussion going on this topic.

Finally, we discussed the possibility of seek funding for a permanent position linked to this group. Given the volunteer nature of the steering committee membership, and the many competing demands on all of its members, such a position seems necessary if significant progress is to occur at a faster pace. There is also a clear need to have someone involved who can invest the time to bridge the gap between the conservation world and the farming world. Catherine, Charles and Kathy will look into the options for funding such a position.