

Bulletin 109

SHOREBIRD SCIENCE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE MEETING, COLORADO, USA, FEBRUARY–MARCH 2006

This issue includes the report of what must have been the largest shorebird conference ever to have taken place in the history of the world! This is no exaggeration. I was there; it lasted four solid days (no time off for excursions or good behaviour). Each day started with a plenary talk at 8.00 am, followed by a full day of two parallel sessions that ended at 5.00 pm, followed by an event every evening. This must have tested the stamina of everyone, not to mention the organisers. Was it worth it? Resoundingly: “YES!”

As the first major Western Hemisphere shorebird conference for eleven years, there was huge pent-up demand: 180 attended, and there were 108 talks and 34 posters covering the whole spectrum of current shorebird research interests and conservation issues. Highlights for me included Lew Oring’s seminal broad-ranging discourse on the evolution and history of the shorebirds we know today as well as the three talks on the recent discovery of the importance of ‘biofilm’ as a food resource for small calidrids.

Apart from the conference programme, it was the opportunity to forge new friendships and scientific collaboration and to meet the real people behind the e-mail addresses that made the meeting so valuable for many who attended. It was a very friendly occasion and there was much fun, especially on the last night when serious and not-so-serious prizes were presented and Brian McCaffery and Dov Lank sang *Hotel Boulderado*.

The organisers of the Colorado meeting – Rick Lanctot, Brad Andres and Stephen Brown – are to be congratulated for their inspired leadership, for the huge amount of work they must have shouldered and for the meeting’s great success.

Inevitably, the question arises: How can Western Hemisphere shorebirdology capitalise on this new beginning? Fortunately arrangements are already in hand for a 2nd Shorebird

Science in the Western Hemisphere Meeting to take place in Venezuela in May 2007. That is really good news. But where then? And how can the impetus be sustained?

These were the issues discussed by Bob Gill in his opening plenary talk *Are we a flock and do we know where we are going?* To me, as a visitor from Europe, the answer to both questions was clearly and unequivocally “Yes”. I am sure everyone in the IWSG wishes our Western Hemisphere colleagues every success in building on the enthusiasm generated by the Colorado meeting.

‘WINTERING’ OR ‘NON-BREEDING’ OR ‘CONTRA-NUPTIAL’?

As an inhabitant of the Northern Hemisphere, it is natural for me to say “the *islandica* subspecies of the Red Knot *winters* in NW Europe”. However, I readily understand our Southern Hemisphere colleagues when they object to the use of ‘winters’ in relation to populations, such as the *rogersi* knot population that crosses the Equator to spend the main non-breeding period in the austral summer. Those who are conscious of this problem (and as Editor of the WSGB, I try to be one!) have usually sought to resolve it by describing such locations as ‘non-breeding’ quarters. However, this is rather ambiguous because it could refer to places used at any time of year outside the breeding season, such as migration stopover sites. Now, Tony Williams of the Avian Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town has coined the phrase ‘contra-nuptial quarters’ to describe the final destination of migration from the breeding grounds (it is used by Vincent Ward in his note about Grey Phalaropes at the end of this issue). Although some may think this is ‘a bit of a mouthful’, it has the virtue of clarity and overcomes the trans-equatorial problem. What do you think? Will it catch on?

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