

The role of coastal saltmarshes in the annual life-cycle of waders: outcomes of a workshop held in November 2004, Papenburg, Germany

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Most important intertidal areas used by waders worldwide include saltmarsh. However, apart from such basic information as the number of birds using this habitat and aspects of breeding ecology, very little is known about the function that saltmarshes play in wader life-cycles and life-histories. With this in mind, an international workshop was organised in November 2004 at Papenburg, Germany, to bring together people working on saltmarsh waders. The aims were to evaluate the importance of saltmarshes for waders and to identify needs for further research and conservation at a global scale. The talks highlighted the role of saltmarshes as breeding, roosting and feeding sites. Existing knowledge, however, is based on only a limited number of studies, in relatively few geographical regions and on a small number of species. There is an urgent need for further research, particularly on the numbers and distribution of breeding waders, on the fitness consequences of saltmarsh use (e.g. annual breeding success, predation on staging birds), on effects of habitat changes (e.g. vegetation dynamics, sea-level rise), and to explain trends in staging migratory birds. The workshop participants recommended the setting up of a number of research programmes, including individual, population and ecosystem approaches. These aim to increase knowledge relevant to facilitating conservation measures and initiate monitoring schemes covering population size and breeding success.