

**ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RARITIES COMMITTEES AERC**

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**MINUTES of the 5th Conference  
of European Rarities Committees  
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**Participants**



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## The AERC main aims

After a very constructive discussion about what AERC can and cannot, all delegates agreed that on the main aims of the Association of European Rarities Committees are:

- fostering closer cooperation between rarities committees
- improving standards of record assessment by bringing record assessment practices in different countries closer together
- helping and encouraging the establishment of new committees
- helping new committees develop through advice and information
- exchanging information on how best to produce an annual report (through discussion and exchange of reports)
- raising awareness of the issue of escapes, and raising awareness of the biological importance of escapes.
- raising awareness and seeking agreement of taxonomic issues
- Developing a network of Identification experts who are prepared to help other committees in the assessment of records in their area of expertise
- improving networking between committees and establishing partnerships between established and newer rarities committees
- promoting the role of rarities committees in the birding community via the AERC-homepage with the aim of getting birding tourists to submit records to the appropriate rarities committees all over Europe and the world

## Updating the AERC guide-lines

The following updates have been added to the Guidelines. In appendix 1 you can find the updated guidelines with the original Texel introduction.

- The national reports should include the homepage address of AERC <http://aerc.mypage.org>
- Every national rarities committee should have its own **national homepage** with an updated list of species that must be reported. These national homepages should also include information on Category E species in that country.
- Every national rarities committee should **provide their data to the AERC** on request (in a compatible format)
- All national rarities committee should **give reasons for non acceptance** of a record on request to the appropriate birdwatcher.
- All committee, consultants and specialist **comments should be confidential** prior to publication of any decisions. Information concerning records under consideration, or decisions prior to publication, or other committee matters should normally not be discussed outside the committee, except through the secretary or chairman to whom all outside enquiries should be directed.

## New Rarities Committees in Europe

Since the last meeting in 1997 in Blahova, several new rarities committees have been created or are ready to start. Laszlo and Jozsef Szabo from Romania presented information on their newly created rarities committee. Unfortunately Sancar Baris from Turkey was not able to attend the meeting, but AERC will offer every possible help to establish a Turkish Rarities Committee. Andrea Corso from Italy discussed the newly created Italian Rarities Committee. It will not replace the already existing Italian committee (COI), which considers only the first five records of

every species, but it will work in co-operation with them, following the AERC guidelines.

### **Partnership between Rarities Committees**

To fulfill the aim of fostering closer cooperation between rarities committees, AERC offered the opportunity of partnerships between established rarities committees and new rarities Committees. The first partnerships have already been made in Lednice:

- Finland/Estonia
- Hungary and France / Romania
- Cyprus / Italy
- BBRC / Latvia [to be confirmed by the Latvian RC]
- Czech Republic / Slovakia

More rarities committees may propose partnership or ask for help looking for a partner.

### **AERC Webpage ( <http://aerc.mypage.org> )**

The AERC Webpage was first set up by Jan Pollet who passed it on to Marnix Vandegehuchte a few months ago. The webpage should spread useful information for rarities committee members as well as for every birder. In the near future the webpage should have links to every national rarities committee. A birder visiting a foreign country can easily check what species he has to submit to that country's rarities committees. He can submit the record on the European form, [downloadable from the AERC-homepage]. The status of any given species can be checked in each country in the forthcoming European list. The homepage will also offer English summaries of all recently published rarities reports. In addition and of use to various rarities committees there will be information about escapes (E-species) and feral populations in European countries. The National Rarities committees should publish the Escape list (possible and proven escapes) on their homepage or on the AERC homepage, so that this information will be available for other Rarities committees.

To foster closer cooperation between rarities committees, a discussion forum (mailing list) for RC members has been set up. The Moderator is Marnix, who will also check that only RC members will be on the list. This will speed up information flow between Rarities Committees.

To subscribe post a message to: [AERC-subscribe@onelist.com](mailto:AERC-subscribe@onelist.com) with your full name, E-mail address and country in the body of the mail.

To unsubscribe: [AERC-unsubscribe@onelist.com](mailto:AERC-unsubscribe@onelist.com) with your full name, E-mail address and country in the body of the mail.

To post a message to the list use: [AERC@onelist.com](mailto:AERC@onelist.com).

The secretary of your national RC must send the names and e-mail addresses of all the committee's members to Marnix (he will check the identity of list members). You can only send a message after you got a confirmation of your subscription.

### **European report**

The idea of an European report was born on Heligoland in 1991. In Kekskemet in 1993 AERC developed the idea of an annual report containing information of European rarities, thus putting single observations in a wider context of biological importance, also considering influxes etc. George Sangster tried to compile all this informations. There were many technical problems, like missing English summaries, missing reports from several countries or simply missing important data on a species because it was not considered by a national Rarities committee made the task

incredibly hard. After 6 years we agreed that the aim of compiling a European report was not feasible. Many thanks to George who made a great start.

## European List

In 1995 AERC decided to publish a list of all the species recorded in those European countries with a rarities committee. The list should give the status of each bird in each country (including whether the species has to be reported to the rarities committee). After 4 years, the list is still not ready to be published. This is mainly due to the lack of taxonomic agreement. Meanwhile AERC started to put the national lists (preferably with links to a national site) on the AERC homepage. Nevertheless an European List would be very useful for the birding community, as a quick reference of a species' status in European countries. Therefore the following decisions have been taken:

- Marnix and Gabor will compile the European list and put it on the AERC Webpage with scientific names.
- The national rarities committees will submit ready-to-use data in a standardised format.
- We will set up a working list now, following BWP and considering all diagnosable taxons, without taking any taxonomic decisions. We will await taxonomic agreement and amend the list as appropriate following that..
- The European List should include Cyprus and the Canary Islands so that it contains as much useful information as possible..
- The compilers of the list (Christian, Marnix, Gabor) have the option of marketing a first paper publication, either scientific or commercial.

## Taxonomic subcommittee

During the 1997 meeting a taxonomic subcommittee was set up with members from several countries (Alan Knox and David Parkin GB, Andreas Helbig D, George Sangster NL) with the aim of seeking international agreement in taxonomic issues. At the 1999 meeting the role of the taxonomic subcommittee was reaffirmed. In the light of accelerating progress in avian taxonomy, many European RCs are turning to AERC for advice to assist them in the preparation and maintenance of their national lists. On behalf of the taxonomic subcommittee, George Sangster has identified about 350 taxonomic and nomenclatural issues relating to the WP list. For many of these, information is incomplete and AERC urges researchers to study and record all identifiable forms in the WP and publish relevant information concerning diagnosability, areas of sympatry, intergradation or hybridisation, and similar matters. As a first stage of the subcommittee's deliberations, the list of about 350 issues has been reduced to the following short list for prioritised consideration:

- Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*
- Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*
- Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*
- Common Teal *Anas crecca*
- Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*
- Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*
- Great White Heron *Egretta alba*
- Tawny/Steppe Eagle *Aquila rapax*
- Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
- Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
- Herring Gull group *Larus argentatus*
- Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
- Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

- White Wagtail *M. alba*
- Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*
- Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*
- Bonelli's Warbler *P. bonelli*
- Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*
- Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*
- Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
- Citril Finch *Serinus citrinella*
- Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*.

The taxonomic subcommittee is working on the basis that stability should be maintained unless there are good scientific reasons for change, and that the evidence for this has been published, preferably in a refereed journal. Inevitably, the inadequacy of some of the present information means that some issues will take longer to resolve than others.

## **Escapes**

The escape problem should become more widely discussed between rarities committees. This was currently very difficult because publication space within the national reports was limited and frequently did not allow for a full list of escapes. Information flow should greatly improve with the following tools:

- National Rarities Committees homepages should offer enough space for category D and E species. These homepages will easily be accessible via the links on the AERC homepage.
- Category E species should be listed on each country's web-site.
- The AERC discussion forum should greatly improve the information flow between Rarities Committees.
- Links to homepages including information on feral bird populations will be included to the AERC homepage.
- A search engine for webpages including information on species likely to become escapes should be set up.

## **Creation of a Mongolian RC**

Peter Barthel presented information on the newly created Mongolian Rarities Committee. The Mongolian situation is complicated by the fact that there are no local birdwatchers or ornithologists, but many tourists visiting the country and publishing unsubstantiated reports. Therefore a Mongolian Rarities Committee is urgently needed, although in a first step there will be only one Mongolian member in this international committee. More European specialists are welcome and any proposal should be directed to Peter Barthel. AERC welcomes the fact that the Mongolian Rarities Committee will follow the AERC guidelines.

## **Creation of an International Slender-billed Curlew Committee**

The Slender-billed Curlew, *Numenius tenuirostris*, is the most endangered bird species of the Palearctic region. Today, the Slender-billed Curlew world population has declined rapidly and probably does not exceed a few hundred birds. The lack of data on Slender-billed Curlew ecology has made it difficult to identify appropriate conservation measures to safeguard the species.

One of the tools to reverse this trend is the creation of an international database storing all available Slender-billed Curlew records. That was started in 1991 by the ICBP and continued in the framework of successive conservation initiatives for the species. Unfortunately, Slender-billed Curlew are likely to be seen in countries with

no established rarities committee and there is no formal process of assessment of claims. Because of this we propose the launching of the *Slender-billed Curlew assessment Committee under the AERC*.

Objectives of the Slender-billed Curlew assessment committee under the AERC are:

1. To **assess the suitability** of records of Slender-billed Curlews **in countries where no national rarities committee exists**.
2. To **assist on request** every national rarities committee in the assessment of Slender-billed Curlew records.
3. To **encourage** European rarities committees to collect as much detail as possible for every encounter.
4. To **stimulate the submission** to the relevant authorities of every Slender-billed Curlew observation, including historical and specimen records.

All records whether judged as proven and unproven will be kept, together with supporting documentation permitting eventual future reassessment.

The AERC has organized a committee to perform this task, current members are Peter Barthel (Germany), Andrea Corso (Italy), Marc Duquet (France), George Handrinos (Greece), Gabor Magyar (Hungary), Jimmy Steel (GB) and Didier Vangeluwe (Belgium).

### **Meeting 2001**

There were two candidates for the AERC meeting 2001: Romania and the Danube Delta in summer and Poland on the Hel Peninsula in autumn.



The delegates voted for Poland in autumn. The Hel Peninsula is a narrow stripe of land ca 50 km long going into the sea, where, during migration, birds concentrate in good numbers (especially passerines, waders, raptors, seabirds). The place offer great variety of habitats and birdwatching is possible everywhere just outdoors. The place is also well known as one of the best spots for rarities in Poland.

The meeting will start Friday evening 28.09.2001 and end Monday evening, with departure Tuesday morning 02.10.2001.