



**LIFE 13 BIO/UK/000315**

**LIFE Waders for Real**

## F.2 Report on working with other projects

Ryan Burrell, Project Ecologist

### Abstract

This report covers the interactions of LIFE Wader for Real with other projects. Networking with other LIFE and Non-LIFE projects is a crucial element of any LIFE project. Interactions with other projects provided opportunities for knowledge exchange and the development of relationships with new organisations, teams and projects. These relationships will provide significant opportunities for future collaborative working.

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## 1 Introduction

Conservation and ecological restoration are collaborative disciplines, where knowledge exchange can provide significant benefits to achieving successful outcomes and project development. Networking with other projects should be seen as crucial to the delivery of projects like LIFE Waders for Real, and as such it is a requirement by the EU LIFE programme.

The aim of this report is to present the networking activities conducted, projects interacted with, the outcomes and lessons learnt. The results of this report should prove beneficial to other LIFE and non-LIFE projects when planning their approach to networking and interactions with other projects.

Through communications and networking, the LIFE Waders for Real team and its partner organisations have benefited significantly. Relationships with new organisations and projects have been developed and existing ones strengthened. Relationships that have in cases led to current and future collaboration on expanding work started by LIFE Waders for Real and on the development of entirely new projects.

## 2 Why is networking important?

All projects funded by the EU LIFE programme are required to interact with other LIFE and/or non-LIFE projects. Although, required to do so, LIFE Waders for Real saw a great opportunity within the to create networks and collaborative links with other UK and European projects focused around our key themes of:

- Stakeholder-led farmland biodiversity projects
- Wetland restoration
- Wetland bird recovery
- Predator management
- Predator ecology



Figure 1: LIFE Project Godwit and LIFE Waders for Real teams during networking visit to LIFE Project Godwit field sites, 13 - 14th June 2018

Our themes are also the focus of a large number of projects, research and interest throughout Europe. This is driven by the cultural significance of waders and wetlands, alongside the significant loss of wetland habitats and significant declines shown by wetland species. However, this interest and the competitive nature of funding for ecological conservation alongside policy differences can generate tension between related organisations and projects. This drove historic conservation efforts to suffer, being siloed or territorial in approach as organisations and individuals strove for recognition and funding.

An isolated approach, is limited in its scope to generate positive outcomes, negatively affects the success of biodiversity projects and can lead to repetition of negative outcomes and inefficiency. Networking and knowledge exchange are now acknowledged to be crucially important in project success, in some cases seen to be as important to the progress of conservation as the work itself.

### 3 Objectives of networking

- 1) Knowledge exchange. Many European countries, including the UK have had or currently have projects similar in general scope to LIFE Waders for Real. Sharing knowledge, improves the efficiency of individual projects, increases understanding and awareness of topics and allows current projects to build on the experiences of others.
- 2) Relationship and collaboration development. We sought to develop new relationships and expand existing ones to promote future collaboration and development of new projects.
- 3) To increase the awareness of the LIFE Waders for Real project, its approaches and how these can be developed to suit other projects.

## **4 Summary of networking approach**

The initial direction taken by LIFE Waders for Real was to expand awareness of the project in the wider community of ecological researchers, practitioners and stakeholders and with existing collaborators. This was conducted through core communications including; press releases, promotion on project social media accounts and blogs then at the initial project stakeholder and steering group meetings to which other local projects were invited. Promotion through online media, press releases and blogs continued throughout the project (See dissemination report). The LIFE project database was used to identify relevant LIFE projects, and at which point contact was made. After the establishment of LIFE Waders for Real, from year two onwards opportunities to conduct site visits to relevant projects and host visits to our own sites was sought and arranged where possible. Such events were seen to contribute towards all networking objectives. In addition, significant to meeting all networking objectives was attendance at academic conferences, the annual International Wader Study Group and International Union of Game Biologists meetings were identified as suitable for regular attendance. These meetings are both attended by a broad range of stakeholders, practitioners, researchers and policy makers, both within relevant fields and beyond. These conferences were seen as valuable opportunities to meet all objectives. Throughout the duration of the project opportunities to attend meetings with other projects, stakeholder groups and organisations were taken to develop relationships. In addition, brief descriptions and links to the pages of other relevant projects with whom we have had contact were listed on our project website as a means to direct website visitors on to other projects.

## **5 Networking actions with summary examples and outcomes**

Over 40 networking events were organised or attended over the course of the project, covering at over 50 organisations and/or projects. Events range from 2-day networking workshops with specific organisations and projects, as described in the case studies below to smaller discussion meetings and attendance at our end of project, regional and international conferences. Often networking events were accompanied by seminars by the project team which generates discussion.

### **5.1 Interaction with LIFE Programme events**

- LIFE networking events were attended where possible throughout the project. In 2015, the project manager gave presentations to an audience of prospective applicants for LIFE funding. In 2018, the project manager presented at the LIFE Platform meeting 2018 – Volunteering for Nature Conservation, where useful discussions with other LIFE projects were had, in particular GrassLIFE (LIFE16 NAT/LV/000262), LIFE Birds Directive (LIFE08 INF/UK/000214) and LIFE ELCN (LIFE16 PRE/DE/000005) due to their overlapping themes. Project representatives were invited to visit the LIFE Waders for Real site in the future.

## 5.2 LIFE Project Examples

- **LIFE Limosa-habitat Hetter (LIFE07 NAT/D/000232)** - <http://www.life-uferschneepfe.de/index.php?id=34&L=1>  
This project was discovered through the LIFE projects database prior to the submission of our proposal, at which point contacts with the relevant project staff were made in regard to our own proposal. This project has significant overlaps with LIFE Waders for Real, both focused upon wet grassland restoration and breeding wading birds as flagship species. The knowledge and experience contributed at this time was very helpful for our submission. Conversations with Dr Andreas Barkow and Manuel Fiebrich of the Limosa-habitat Hetter project continued throughout LIFE Waders for Real, though unfortunately no visit could be arranged. Links with this project, also started discussions with Dr Hermann Hotker and Dr Natalie Meyer of NABU, Germany in regard to future breeding wading bird recovery projects.
- **LIFE Project Godwit (LIFE15 NAT/UK/000753), alongside RSPB and WWT Conservation and Reserves Staff** - <https://projectgodwit.org.uk/>  
LIFE Project Godwit and LIFE Waders for Real shared a 2-day knowledge sharing workshops in 2018 and 2019 respectively. These were open to the teams from both projects and relevant members of staff from partner organisations (GWCT, RSPB and WWT) with 15 and 23 attending in each case. At both events, a series of short talks highlighted overlapping experience and prompted opportunities for knowledge exchange. These workshops were significant for both projects. Unused equipment was identified, and arrangements made to share it between the two projects. Knowledge and experience on monitoring protocols and predator exclusion allowed for amendments to be made and training arranged to improve practice. The strong relationships built with this project and staff from its partner organisations is extremely valuable for all involved, future collaboration between these teams was also discussed and is highly likely in the future.
- **LIFE LaserFence (LIFE15 ENV/UK/00038)** - <http://laserfence.eu/>  
The LIFE Laser Fence project aims to develop an innovative technology, Agrilaser, to keep pest animals away from agricultural fields. The technology involves using a laser to discourage animals from an area, as an alternative to poisons or barriers. During a 2-day visit to the LIFE Waders for Real study area, their project team discussed the potential to use this technology to discourage wader predators and experience of non-lethal management methods. Unfortunately, we were unable to develop this idea further, but it may form the part of future collaborative work between the two projects.

## 5.3 Non-LIFE Project Examples

- **Boa Island Breeding Wader Project** - <https://www.lelp.org.uk/projects/lough-erne-wildflowers-farmers/>  
The Boa Island Breeding Wader Project led by Lough Erne Wildfowling Council and the local farming community adjacent to Lower Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh, N. Ireland. The is an innovative partnership seeks to support the recovery of breeding wader species, formerly common in the area. On 8-10<sup>th</sup> July, our Project Ecologist and Project Assistant undertook site visits and stakeholder meetings with the Boa Island team. Knowledge and experience was shared on project management and working with stakeholders. Our team were able to offer detailed advice in respect to habitat management for breeding waders and suggest potential changes to agri-environment scheme approaches to regional policy makers. Michael Stinson, Boa Island Breeding Wader project had this to say:



Figure 2: Boa Island site (left) and project teams during visit discussing grassland restoration (right)

*“The experience of interacting with the Waders for Real Project has been extremely beneficial for our own breeding wader conservation work in N Ireland. The Waders for Real staff have been invaluable through their knowledge sharing and by offering practical advice to improve breeding wader habitat/ increase productivity – all underpinned by the robust evidence base they have gathered through the Waders for Real Project.*

*In July 2020, Waders for Real staff visited Co. Fermanagh to see our sites and exchange information on the ground. The visit was highly productive and was particularly useful through enthusing local landowners regarding conservation works on their farms and inspiring the local shooting community to expand their breeding wader conservation efforts. The kind invitation to attend the end of project conference at GWCT Headquarters was another very useful opportunity to make new contacts and learn more about the key outcomes of the project. I look forward to continuing to liaise with the Waders for Real team after the conclusion of the project.*

*Michael Stinson*

*Boa Island Breeding Wader Project”*

- **Avon Roach Project** - <http://www.avonroachproject.co.uk/>  
The Avon Roach Project (ARP) worked to reinstate a self-sustaining population of Common Roach (*Rutilus rutilus*) to the Avon catchment between 2008-2014. Hence, it shared a project area with LIFE Waders for Real. In cases, management by LIFE Waders for Real could if done without discussion prove detrimental to the past work of this project. Initial discussions demonstrated the overlapping desires of both projects for better habitat management within the Avon Valley and that infact management by LIFE Waders for Real could be complimentary for Roach. Telephone discussions and two meetings were had during the LIFE Waders for Real project to maintain relationships and identify important areas for each project.

## 6 Other key outcomes from networking

- 2 lowland breeding wader and 1 red fox PhD Studentships attained by LIFE Waders for Real staff in partnership with Bournemouth University as a result of links made during the project.
- Links made with several European organisations and projects working on breeding waders and their predators. Allowing for detailed discussion of methods, results and findings alongside the development of future collaborations. Relationships strongly driven by attendance at international conferences.
- Collaborations between GWCT and RSPB staff from LIFE Project Godwit on proposal for Lapwing conservation planning for Friesland, Netherlands as part of IWSG 2019 Meadow Birds Conservation Workshop.
- Attaining DEFRA Facilitation funding as a result of insights gained from advisors on the Martin Down Farmer Supercluster which neighbours the Avon Valley. This has allowed our Project Ecologist to be employed to provide wet grassland management advice to farmers within and beyond the project area going forward.
- Project Ecologist was asked to join a regional ornithological scientific advisory committee and the International Wader Study Group executive committees. These opportunities allow for the lessons learnt from LIFE Waders for Real to be integrated into discussions at a regional and international level.

## 7 Lessons learnt from networking activities

Initially it was difficult to identify similar LIFE projects with which to form links, though this became easier as the project progressed, and awareness of our activities increased through communications outputs. Our knowledge of how to interact with the LIFE tools also increased over this period. Utilising project websites and posting links to other projects is a useful way for similar projects to disseminate their results and boost their audience. Social media accounts were a valuable tool for networking, prompting initial discussion then building relationships through discussion. Attendance at international conferences and LIFE programme events were important and highly useful networking opportunities. Using MSc and BSc students throughout the project provided us with opportunities to engage with a large number of UK universities.

## 8 Conclusions

The opportunities provided by the LIFE programme to undertake networking activities have been valuable to the development of the project team and partner organisations. In many cases, networking with other projects led to the development of protocols for surveys, methods or approaches based on shared experience and knowledge. An important and extremely valuable outcome of the LIFE Waders for Real project are the strong relationships built with staff at many other conservation organisations, universities and projects. The team now have a large network of contacts, working on similar ecological issues with which they can openly discuss ideas, solve problems and collaborate. There is the potential for this to lead to future collaborative projects with other EU countries on wetland restoration, wader conservation and predator management.