Publicatie

East Atlantic Flyway assessment 2017

The status of coastal waterbird populations and their sites

Coastal wetlands are famous for the large numbers of waterbirds they hold, often coming from far during their migration or forming large breeding colonies. When viewing such spectacles of thousands of birds, the impression could arise that they are plenty and doing well. However, coastal wetlands are rather scarcely distributed across the globe and the waterbirds using them are specialists concentrating at these few sites but not at all numerous everywhere. This renders these wetlands of crucial importance to them. Loss or decreasing quality of such sites can have huge impacts as the birds using them have few other places to go. Migratory species, which most waterbirds are, even depend on a string of wetlands during their annual itinerary between breeding, staging and wintering sites. Such a string of wetlands used by multiple populations of migratory birds following more or less the same routes is called a flyway.

Request

The intricate connections between the breeding, staging and wintering sites of the bird populations involved formthe rationale behind flyway cooperation. When the WaddenSea, one of the important sites in East Atlantic Flyway, was inscribed on the World Heritage Site list in 2009, this came with the request to increase cooperation along the flyway for better conservation and management.

Response

In response to this the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI) was launched, and one of the subjects intended to benefit from international cooperation was monitoring. In many countries and many sites along the flyway monitoring was already in place, but as changes in the bird use of any given site may be caused locally as well as by factors operating elsewhere along the migration route. The overall conservation status of the bird populations can only be evaluated when information at the scale of the entire flyway is available.

Not that bad

With respect to the numerical development of bird populations of the coastal East Atlantic Flyway as a whole, the picture seems not that bad at present. Almost twice asmany populations show a significant increase than show a decline both on the long- and on the short term. This is based on 95 populations from 72 species forming a cross-section with respect to taxonomy, breeding and wintering regions, diet and migration strategies.

However

If we break these totals down to functional groups however, we see that populations using intertidal mudflats, depending on benthic food and breeding in the arctic climate zone do less well than populations using other habitats, feeding on plants or fish, and that are short distance migrants or residents. Waders (shorebirds), especially those breeding in the Siberian Arctic, form a taxonomic group showing particularly unfavourable trends.

See the rapport in PDF [1] (Let op 99,4 MB!)

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