

History and Administration of the Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Program, 1995-2001

DAVID D. DOLTON, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, PO Box 25486 DFC, Denver, CO 80225-0486

HISTORY

Introduction

The Webless Migratory Game Bird Research (WMGBR) Program was established in December 1994 with the first projects being funded in 1995. It was designed to provide cooperative funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), state wildlife agencies, and other sources for research on migratory game birds other than waterfowl (e.g., doves, pigeons, cranes, woodcock, snipe, and rails). Information from these studies will be used to more effectively manage these "webless" species.

Formation of the program was not easy and what follows is an attempt to document the events and the individuals associated with its evolution. This historical overview was derived primarily through use of unpublished minutes from meetings between 1984 and 1995 of the Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird (MSUGB) Subcommittee (named Committee between 1991-1996) of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (IAFWA). The WMGBR Program is similar to the preceding Accelerated Research Program which was discontinued in 1982. After its formation in 1984, the MSUGB Subcommittee worked for 9 years to reinstate a research program for migratory shore and upland game birds. These efforts were realized finally when H. Ronald Pulliam, Director of the National Biological Survey (NBS; now U.S. Geological Survey-Biological Resources Division), contributed \$300,000 for the program for FY1995/96. Subsequently, John G. Rogers, Deputy Director of the USFWS, authorized the Division of Federal Aid to allocate \$150,000 per year as an annual funding item for the program beginning in FY1996. In FY1998, the USFWS contributed \$300,000 for the WMGBR Program, thanks to the efforts of Paul R. Schmidt and Robert Blohm (USFWS) who worked to get an additional \$150,000 for the Program in the budget for the Office [now Division] of Migratory Bird Management (MBM)]. Beginning in FY1999, however, only \$150,000 from the MBM budget was available. Efforts are continuing to secure additional funding for this important program.

The Accelerated Research Program, 1967-82

The history of the Accelerated Research Program (ARP) was documented by MacDonald and Evans (1970). In July 1967, Congress appropriated \$250,000 for the program. Support for this appropriation came from the Southeastern Association of Game and Fish Commissioners and the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners (predecessor to the IAFWA). Also, Leonard E. Foote (Wildlife Management Institute) was instrumental in development of and gaining support for the program (R.E. Tomlinson, pers. commun.). Internal support within the USFWS (then Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife) came principally from Walter F. Crissey, Director of the Migratory Bird Population Station (MBPS); significant input for justifying the program was provided by Aelred D. Geis, William H. Goudy, Howard M. Wight, and Roy E. Tomlinson (H.M. Reeves, pers. commun.). Subsequent to the appropriation, the International Association created a National Program Planning Committee for Shore and Upland Game Birds (later known as the National Program Planning Group [NPPG]). The ARP was designed to provide funding for migratory shore and upland game bird research. The NPPG was formed to solicit, screen, and select projects for funding under the program (Sanderson 1977).

Congressional funding of the ARP was \$250,000 annually. Of this total, \$175,000 was contracted to states; \$50,000 was used directly by the USFWS to support 2 field stations—one in Maine to study American woodcock and one in South Carolina to study mourning doves; and, \$25,000 was retained by the USFWS to administer the program. William Russell was the first biologist at the Maine woodcock station followed by

William Krohn. Spencer Amend initiated the dove study in South Carolina, followed by George Haas. The dove study site was later moved to Georgia. Henry M. Reeves administered the program until March 1968 when Duncan MacDonald was hired for this purpose. In 1971, Fant Martin took over, followed in 1975 by Richard Coon and in 1980 by Thomas Dwyer.

In the 16 years the program was in operation (1967-82), 122 research projects were completed in 41 states. Over the years, funding for state projects amounted to about \$2.5 million. The ARP ended in October 1982 when funding for the program was eliminated, primarily because of fiscal constraints upon the USFWS.

Formation of the Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Subcommittee

When the ARP was terminated, the NPPG, which served as an advisory group for the ARP, became inactive in 1982. Consequently, a new group was deemed necessary for focusing attention on MSUGB issues. Accordingly, and largely due to the efforts of Roy Tomlinson (USFWS), and Ronnie George and Ted Clark (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department), the MSUGB Subcommittee was established in 1984 by Mr. Clark, who was Chairman of the IAFWA's Migratory Wildlife Committee. The Subcommittee quickly became a force in migratory bird management.

Development of the Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Program

After its formation, the MSUGB Subcommittee sought to obtain information about the contributions made through the ARP and to determine whether or not the state wildlife agencies wanted to support Subcommittee efforts to have it reinstated. Clait Braun (Colorado Division of Wildlife) outlined 20 specific benefits of ARP to state wildlife agencies (letter attached to MSUGB Subcommittee minutes, March 1985). In summary, he showed that ARP facilitated substantial interchange of ideas among individuals working within regions and different agencies, which greatly expanded our knowledge about this important group of birds.

In 1985, Ronnie George, Chairman of the MSUGB Subcommittee, conducted a survey of all state wildlife agency directors about current MSUGB research needs and the ARP; all 50 states responded to the questionnaire. Results were summarized in a March 1986 report by Mr. George, entitled *Results of the Accelerated Research Program Questionnaire*. All but 3 states indicated MSUGB needs that had not been addressed to date. Thirty-two states felt that [future] MSUGB research needs could best be undertaken through combined USFWS and state wildlife agency funding. Forty-seven states believed ARP served a useful purpose considering the cost, and 49 states favored reestablishment of ARP (or a similar program) as a Congressionally-funded *addition* to the USFWS budget. Only 17 states, however, gave unqualified approval to redirecting current USFWS funds to an ARP-type program.

In a second March 1986 report, entitled *Summary of Accelerated Research Program Publications by Region and State*, Mr. George listed references for 340 publications known to have directly resulted from ARP. One of the most significant contributions was the book, *Management of Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Species in North America* (Sanderson 1977). These publications detail the wealth of information that was learned through the research program.

After confirming that state agencies had been pleased with the program and desired a similar program to be organized, the MSUGB Subcommittee passed a resolution in March 1986 asking the IAFWA to support reestablishment of ARP (or a similar program) as a Congressionally-funded \$350,000 annual addition to the USFWS budget. The IAFWA also passed the resolution, but did not take further action because they did not feel the timing was right. At the March 1988 MSUGB Subcommittee meeting, a USFWS representative stated that the need exists for such a program, but that the USFWS was faced with rather severe budget limitations and there was a reluctance by the current administration to initiate new funding activities. He also stated that to effect such a resumption, enthusiasm and pressure from the Subcommittee was necessary. Consequently, another motion was made for the current Chairman, Kenneth Babcock, to reiterate the need for immediate study on several declining populations and ask the IAFWA Budget Committee to address

those concerns when they testified before Congress on budget considerations. Once again, the IAFWA voiced support of their efforts but decided it was not the appropriate time to make a request before Congress.

In March 1990, a different strategy was undertaken by the Subcommittee, whereby Chairman Babcock was asked to write directly to Director John Turner of the USFWS, pointing out the success of the past program, the current needs, and requesting the addition of a \$350,000 line item by the USFWS. Two letters eventually were written. In the telephone reply to the second letter, Deputy Director Richard Smith indicated that the USFWS would consider the request in its 1992 budget deliberations.

At the March 1991 MSUGB Committee (new name) meeting, Mr. Babcock reported that Max Peterson, Executive Vice President of the IAFWA, acted on their past recommendations and provided testimony before the House Appropriations Committee for the FY1992 budget. In this testimony, the IAFWA strongly recommended addition of \$350,000 to the USFWS budget for the development of a research program to address existing data deficiencies on webless migratory game birds. Subsequent to the meeting, Chairman Babcock contacted directors of all state wildlife agencies to urge their congressional delegations to support the add-on to the budget. Many state agencies did contact their delegations. Mr. Peterson then testified before the USFWS Appropriations Subcommittee and asked that they add an item to the budget specifically for this work. Unfortunately, these efforts failed.

In 1992, the MSUGB Committee decided to change direction and develop a proposal for an entirely new program that would be submitted to the USFWS. Chairman Babcock (pers. commun.) then asked John H. Schulz (Missouri Department of Conservation) to take the lead in formulating a proposal for a fresh type of research effort. Although his name did not appear on the document, Mr. Schulz prepared the first draft of a proposal, entitled *Proposal for a Webless Game Bird Research Program*, with input from others. According to Schulz (pers. commun.), Roy Tomlinson (USFWS) provided the most detailed and lengthy comments, while substantive comments were also provided by Clait Braun, Richard Jachowski (NBS), Thomas Tacha (Texas A&M University-Kingsville), and Ronnie George. The proposal was distributed to MSUGB Committee members for review in August 1992. In the package, the USFWS was asked to establish an annual, line-item-funded research program for migratory shore and upland game bird species. One significant difference from earlier efforts was a request of \$750,000 that would fund cooperative state-federal studies. These monies were envisioned to be matched at some level with state or other funding. It was suggested that 12.5% of the funds allocated for such a program be retained by the USFWS for administrative costs. The proposal package included a detailed screening process utilizing committees to review and prioritize submitted proposals. The MSUGB Committee would then review the lists and recommend studies to the USFWS for funding. A suggestion was made to give greater weight to studies supported by population management plans. After input from MSUGB Committee members, a revised proposal was sent to all state wildlife agency directors and USFWS Director Turner on 10 December 1992. The USFWS replied favorably to the plan on 18 March 1993, but several concerns were expressed in an attached review of the proposal by the Office of Migratory Bird Management. Chairman Babcock expressed his appreciation to the USFWS in a letter dated 28 May 1993, and offered suggestions for resolving the concerns raised.

The MSUGB Committee decided in September 1993 to recommend that an ad hoc Task Force, consisting of 2-3 committee members and an equal number from the USFWS, be formed to work out the details of a final joint proposal. The USFWS concurred. Subsequently, Ronnie George was named Chairman of the Task Force with the following members: Duane Shroufe (Arizona Game and Fish Commission), Cal DuBrock (Pennsylvania Game Commission), Roy Tomlinson [David Dolton replaced Roy after his retirement in June 1994] and Robert Blohm (USFWS), and Russell Hall (NBS). This group met to finalize the proposal for a webless research program, and developed details for a review process and evaluation criteria for research proposals under the program.

In August of 1994, Kenneth Babcock met with USFWS Director Mollie Beattie to urge her support for the webless research program. Also, he met with Ronald Pulliam and F. Eugene Hester (NBS) to enlist their support (K. M. Babcock, pers. commun.). The effort was successful. Mr. Babcock stated that Noreen Clough

(who worked in the Director's Office at the time) helped arrange the meeting and that Paul Schmidt (Chief, MBM) helped set the stage by briefing the Director beforehand.

On 13 September 1994, Ronnie George transmitted the final version of *Recommendations for a Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Program*, prepared by the Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Task Force, to MSUGB Committee Chairman Kenneth Babcock. Key recommendations included the designation of 4 Technical Committees to evaluate proposals, a WMGBR Review Committee appointed by the MSUGB Committee to make the final project selection, the designation of a Project Officer within MBM to coordinate this activity, a USFWS budget line item of \$750,000 annually, and that the United States Congress be urged to pass a budget, including a Webless Migratory Game Bird Research Program.

The efforts and persistence of the MSUGB Committee finally came to fruition in the fall of 1994 when funding became available, as stated in the Introduction. One stipulation was that 1/3 of the project cost must come from non-federal dollars. Also, funds were to be given for the life of the project rather than for just one year, as was done under the ARP.

Even though the amount of funding was not at the level recommended in the original proposal, the WMGBR Program has been successful thus far. MBM absorbed the administrative cost of the program without taking any of the research funds and designated David Dolton as Project Officer and program coordinator.

Another key contribution made by the MSUGB Committee was the publication of the book entitled *Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Management in North America* (Tacha and Braun 1994). This was a revised and updated version of the book edited by Sanderson (1977). As stated in the Preface to the book, key individuals responsible for planning, authorship selection, and other aspects of the publishing process included the editors and ad hoc committee members T. C. Tacha, C. E. Braun, J. M. Anderson, R. R. George, and R. E. Tomlinson. Authors of individual chapters were recognized authorities in their field. Immediately after publication, the book began to serve as a guide for research on species described therein.

There remains support to increase funding to the level originally recommended. On 26 July 1996, and again on 28 July 2000, the 4 Flyway Councils passed a Joint Recommendation requesting that the USFWS and the National Biological Service [USGS in 2000 version] seek additional revenue to fully fund the WMGBR Program at the recommended level of \$750,000 per year. In December 1998, an IAFWA Ad Hoc Committee on Migratory Bird Funding met with USFWS personnel in Washington, D.C. to discuss funding needs for migratory birds. One of the recommendations was to fund the WMGBR Program at the full recommended level.

WMGBR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

At least 1/3 of the total project cost must be paid with non-federal dollars. In-kind services, such as salaries of state employees and vehicle expenses, are acceptable as matching funds. Study proposals may be on any webless migratory game bird topic identified as a research need in a national, regional, or state management plan or other document, or in the 1994 book entitled *Migratory Shore and Upland Game Bird Management in North America*. Additionally, a letter of support is required for each proposal from the state in which it originates.

A call for proposals is distributed by the USFWS Project Officer in May each year to USFWS Flyway Representatives and Migratory Bird Coordinators, and USGS-Biological Research Division (BRD) Regional Offices and the Cooperative Research Units office. Flyway Representatives are responsible for distributing the letter to biologists in their respective states. State biologists, in turn, are asked to send the information to other state personnel, universities, and any others who may be interested. Migratory Bird Coordinators forward the letter to National Wildlife Refuges and other federal offices. USGS-BRD Regional Offices are asked to forward the letter to all their respective Science and Technology Centers, while the Cooperative Research Units office distributes the call to all Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units.

The review process is as follows. Proposals are sent by 15 November to the Project Officer for the program (David Dolton, USFWS/MBM). He checks the proposals for budget and support letter compliance and sends these materials to 4 Regional Technical Committees (Appendix 1). These committees review all the proposals submitted within their respective region and provide David with an evaluation of each project. The evaluations are based upon criteria that have been developed for this program and also upon regional needs (Appendix 2). Additionally, the projects are ranked in priority order. A compilation of all evaluations and rankings, along with the proposals, are then sent to members of a WMGBR Review Committee for review.

Ronnie George (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department) served as the first Chairman of the Review Committee from 1994-96. Current committee members include Robert Boyd, Chairman, (Pennsylvania Game Commission) and David Dolton (USFWS), along with the 2002 Chairmen of the 4 Technical Committees: Western—Steve Tessmann (Wyoming Game and Fish Department); Central—John H. Schulz (Missouri Department of Conservation); Northeastern—Brad Allen (Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife); and Southeastern—Billy Dukes (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources).

In February, the WMGBR Review Committee discusses the evaluations and rankings and makes a recommendation on which projects to fund. These recommendations are presented for final approval to the IAFWA’s MSUGB Working Group at their meeting held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. Funds become available as soon as contracts can be completed and signed.

To date, \$1,355,183 in WMGBR Program funds has been expended to support 37 research projects and 1 workshop with a total value of \$5,192,358 (Table 1). Proceedings of the Marshbird Monitoring Workshop are available from David Dolton. The uneven Grand Total for WMGBR funds is due to NBS contributing an additional \$5,578 to the program in 1996 and an unused \$395 in 1999. Although not reflected in the Grand Total, USGS-BRD (formerly NBS) provided additional support in 1997, 1998, and 1999 by contributing a total of \$30,000 directly to 3 of the projects selected. For 2001, 13 proposals with a total value of \$2,108,749 were received, requesting \$691,982 in WMGBR funds. Four projects were funded as requested; a fifth project (woodcock) was partially funded.

The WMGBR Program is invaluable in providing much-needed funding for webless species who receive considerably less attention than waterfowl. The current level of funding will not begin to meet the needs identified in the 1994 management book mentioned previously, but it is a start. This is a very cost-effective program and it is hoped that funding can be increased in the future.

Table 1. Projects funded through the Webless Migratory Game Bird Research (WMGBR) Program, 1995-01

	Number of	WMGBR	Total Project
Species	Projects	Program Funds	Cost
Mourning dove	8	\$348,495	\$803,102
American woodcock	8	\$276,739 ^a	\$1,421,071
Marsh game birds	9	\$188,313	\$1,146,017

Band-tailed pigeon	4	\$284,875 ^b	\$647,000
Sandhill crane	8	\$249,908	\$1,175,168
Marshbird Monitoring Workshop		<u>\$6,853^c</u>	
GRAND TOTAL	37	\$1,355,183 ^d	\$5,192,358

^a An additional \$13,000 was given to one project by the U.S. Geological Survey (Biological Resources Division) in 1997.

^b An additional \$11,000 was given to one project by the U.S. Geological Survey (Biological Resources Division) in 1998 and \$6,000 was given to one project in 1999.

^c An additional \$6,046 was provided for the workshop by the the U.S. Geological Survey (Biological Resources Division) in 1998. Other funding support came from a variety of state and federal agencies, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and private organizations.

^d The National Biological Service contributed \$5,578 to the WMGBR Program in 1996.

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LITERATURE CITED

Much of the information contained herein is from minutes and reports on file in the author's USFWS office. Additionally, all remaining copies of Tacha and Braun (1994) are being stored there. Copies of either the minutes or the book can be obtained upon request.

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