

OSPAR-HELCOM-ICES Joint Working Group on Marine Birds (JWGBIRD)

Work programme 2021–2023

JWGBIRD work themes

This work programme provides a thematic overview of the work carried out by JWGBIRD. Tasks under each theme are listed in Annex 1 and will be updated on an annual basis.

The aim of describing a three-year work programme is to facilitate the sign-off process that follows different annual schedules for OSPAR, HELCOM and ICES. The aim is also to enable long-term planning and delivery of significant products that may require several components to be developed during consecutive years.

1) Database and data products

This work theme encourages JWGBIRD to move towards a more transparent way of working with data and assessments (i.e. TAF, transparent assessment framework) and enables JWGBIRD to produce seamless cross-regional data products.

Work under this theme includes:

- a) Definition of appropriate, and whenever possible, compatible formats for data submissions and storage,
- b) resolving data issues associated with the database and/or specific datasets,
- c) providing checks for re-submissions to the databases,
- d) developing data products for assessments, advice and public use
- e) specifying technical aspects of how to make data stream processes operational, e.g. to automate delivery of indicator assessments through scripts.

JWGBIRD will provide input to the ICES Data Centre that hosts the biodiversity portal containing the *OSPAR seabird database*. The database contains data on breeding numbers and productivity of seabird and waterbird species collected at breeding sites across the OSPAR Area. It also contains data on numbers of wintering and passage waterbirds (incl. waders) from coasts and estuaries, which are counted mostly from land and in some cases, from the air. These data will be used to construct regional indicators, baselines and thresholds to assess OSPAR's common indicators on B1 – marine bird abundance and B3 – Marine bird productivity. The OSPAR seabird database could be expanded to cover the Baltic Sea, and become a cross-regional database. JWGBIRD will explore the possibility of including data on numbers of breeding and wintering waterbirds and seabirds in the Baltic. HELCOM Biodiversity Database hosts data for all species relevant for the Baltic Sea region and, where possible, automated harvesting between the two databases should be explored

JWGBIRD will oversee the *European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) database*, which is the only current cross-regional data product considered by the group. The database is in the process of being migrated to ICES at the beginning of the JWGBIRD work programme. ICES Data Centre together with JWGBIRD experts are preparing to take over the hosting, maintenance and development from the previous hosts. The ESAS database work will be further steered by the dedicated ESAS subgroup of JWGBIRD.

The ESAS database covers the entire ICES area and includes 'at-sea' data. The data can be used for ICES advisory products and for OSPAR and HELCOM assessments.

To support the work on migrating birds under the auspice of JWGBIRD there is a need to establish functioning dataflows and agreed data hosting for *data specific for migration*, such as telemetry and tracking data, migration count data etc. For this purpose, existing options should be identified and their suitability for the needs of the group explored.

2) Monitoring

Work under this theme includes:

- f) Providing a forum for discussion of monitoring programmes, focusing on the development of joint or coordinated monitoring e.g. at-sea protocols, and contributing to ICES advisory products regarding monitoring practices and programmes as appropriate.
- g) Providing updates to OSPAR CEMP guidelines and appendices¹, HELCOM monitoring programmes and guidelines when required.
- h) Providing expert opinion on the development and implementation of new monitoring strategies and guidelines for birds, e.g. in relation to threatened and declining species, bycatch, wintering birds, migration routes and distribution.

3) Assessments

Work under this theme includes:

- i) Ensure information flow with regular communication to all three convention secretariats on policy development relevant to JWGBIRD and/or general bird related issues.
- j) Providing updates of indicators for the OSPAR Quality Status Report 2023 (QSR 2023) and for the HELCOM HOLAS III
- k) Developing further, existing Common and Candidate Indicators and/or develop new indicators, where a need has been identified by one or more of the Conventions, including requirements concerning the criteria addressed in MSFD assessments to be conducted by Member States of the European Union.
- l) Developing integration methods and other aspects of indicator assessment, which require further development to be in line with MSFD assessment requirements under the revised Commission Decision (2017/848).
- m) Deliver a Thematic Assessment of marine birds for the OSPAR QSR 2023, which includes an integrated assessment of status of species and species groups, an assessment of pressure impacts and on the effectiveness of current measures.
- n) Carrying out other assessments, including for example assessments of threatened and declining species, and biogeographic analysis.
- o) Contributing bird-related information to assessments carried out by other relevant groups, e.g. on issues such as incidental bycatch or food-webs.

4) Ad hoc expert consultation

¹ Co-ordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme (CEMP) – the CEMP guidelines and appendices are published for each OSPAR Common Indicator. They provide instructions on how to collect data to construct the indicators and on how to assess state or trends in the indicator.

Responding, as needed, to queries from the parent organisations and their respective subsidiary bodies relating to bird issues by providing expert opinions.

5) Provision of expert input to ICES advisory process

Provide expert input to advice requests in ICES including the ecosystem and fisheries overviews. Such input would be peer reviewed and quality assured, before ICES advice is published.

Ways of working.

JWGBIRD annual meetings

To date much of the work of JWGBIRD has been concentrated around the annual meetings. These usually take place in either October or November and should, when possible, be timed to ensure delivery of products into the respective parent organisation's processes. Annual meetings can be held online if required by public health issues.

Where project resources are available, specific actions carried out by JWGBIRD can be resourced through projects, for example co-financed projects. This might have implications for the timing of completing actions in specific years or months. Whenever a project resourced activity is planned, JWGBIRD will communicate details on the planning to OSPAR, HELCOM and ICES well in advance of the activity to enable dissemination of the information to all possibly concerned parties.

An additional meeting is planned in Spring 2022 as part of the NEA-PANACEA project (details below). This extra meeting, called 'JWGBIRD-PLUS' will be extended to seabird experts from the Mediterranean and Black Sea, in order to promote dialogue and cooperation across the four European regions.

Sub-group working

Sub-groups may be defined in order to work more thematically, especially where it is foreseen that completing the task would require substantive work which might stretch across several meeting cycles.

Task descriptions should be developed for each sub-group individually.

At present, work related to European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) database is carried out by the ESAS subgroup of the JWGBIRD. In addition, the need to establish a designated subgroup focusing on bird migration has been identified and supported.

Intersessional work

JWGBIRD may be asked for expert opinion and/or intersessional work at short notice. These requests may not always be directly related to the environmental programmes of the conventions, but may be relevant to other international processes and policies. When such actions are requested of JWGBIRD the group will keep OSPAR, HELCOM and ICES respectively informed of ongoing actions. Expert opinion may be required at more frequent intervals than annual, and the annual meeting cycle and reporting format of the group may not necessarily be the most appropriate forum in which to deal with such requests (e.g. due to mismatched deadlines). Correspondence and intersessional work between relevant group members should be used to provide a timely delivery of required outputs. Contracting Parties of the various conventions will need to be made aware of the resources (i.e. time of experts) that will be required for all aspects of the Group's work.

Delivery of results

The JWGBIRD annual report includes products under each work theme that are specific to the annual list of tasks required of the group. Products developed and delivered intersessionally shall be appended to the report. The report is co-authored by the three organisations.

The group, or a co-chair as a representative of the group, can deliver communications or short expert opinions when required at short notice and independent of the annual timing of the JWGBIRD meeting. If possible, such responses should be summarised in the annual report.

The group should also aim, where possible and appropriate, to submit some products for publication in scientific journals or to be presented at conferences.

At the end of the three-year period covered by this work programme, the group shall present an overview of the products delivered. The overview should detail the products delivered under each of the themes outlined above. The overview will feed into an ICES, peer review and advice process as relevant.

Group membership

Membership of JWGBIRD is obtained by experts seeking nomination from their national delegations to either ICES, OSPAR or HELCOM. It is important that all members of JWGBIRD have a firm connection to their national delegations.

The JWGBIRD co-chairs can also invite non-members to attend the annual meeting or to take part in intersessional work. Invited experts should demonstrate particular skills that are relevant to the delivery of a specific request. A list of members and their affiliations is available on the JWGBIRD web pages ([link](#)) and is updated annually.

The group is open to connect with other relevant bird groups and networks, for example groups working in the Arctic region and/or non-governmental organizations.

This group is led by three co-chairs representing each of the conventions. There is currently no limit on the length of tenure of each co-chair.² This arrangement should be reviewed by members on an annual basis. The arrangements of the relevant sponsoring convention for each chair should be followed if a chair is to be replaced.

Convention specificities

OSPAR

JWGBIRD reports to OSPAR's Biological Diversity Committee (OSPAR BDC) via the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Co-ordination of Biodiversity Assessment and Monitoring (ICG-COBAM). There is also a need for JWGBIRD to collaborate with national leads to deliver actions on OSPAR's Threatened and Declining bird species via ICG-POSH (Protected Species and Habitats) which is also under OSPAR BDC.

Key OSPAR work areas for JWGBIRD during 2021-2023 will centre around delivery of the Quality Status Report 2023. This includes the updated assessment of common indicators, pilot assessments of candidate indicators and an integrated Thematic Assessment of marine birds (see Table 1 and annex 1).

Table 1: Indicators assessments to be delivered by JWGBIRD for the OSPAR QSR 2023

² ICES operate a 3-year limited tenure on the chairs of each of their working groups. This has not been applied, as yet, to JWGBIRD.

Indicator name	Type	Lead	Region I	Region II	Region III	Region IV	Region V
B1 - Marine bird abundance	Common	Ian Mitchell (UK), Volker Dierschke (DE)	<i>update (R1 data in IA2017)</i>	<i>Update plus at-sea data pilot</i>	<i>update</i>	<i>new</i>	
B3 - Marine bird breeding success	Common	Ian Mitchell (UK), Volker Dierschke (DE)	<i>update (R1 data in IA2017)</i>	<i>update</i>	<i>update</i>	<i>new</i>	
B5 - Marine bird bycatch	Candidate	Volker Dierschke (DE), Signe Christensen-Dalsgaard (NO), Sven Koschinski (DE)	<i>Pilot</i>	<i>Pilot</i>	<i>Pilot</i>	<i>Pilot³</i>	<i>Pilot³</i>
B7 - Marine bird habitat quality	Candidate	Volker Dierschke (DE)		<i>Pilot</i>			

Some outputs for the OSPAR QSR2023 will be delivered through a project partly funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) – NEA-PANACEA (North East Atlantic Project on biodiversity and eutrophication assessment integration and creation of effective measures). The work on marine birds under NEA-PANACEA will be led by Ian Mitchell and Volker Dierschke (co-chairs of JWGBIRD at the beginning of the work programme) and will aim to deliver an assessment of the OSPAR Common Indicator B3 – marine bird productivity and a Thematic Assessment of marine birds for the OSPAR QSR2023. As part of the wider delivery of NEA-PANACEA, OSPAR-nominated members of JWGBIRD will be invited to join members of the other OSPAR biodiversity expert groups at the SUPER-COBAM meeting in October 2021. SUPER-COBAM will address common issues being faced by the different expert groups in delivering indicator assessments and thematic assessments for the OSPAR QSR 2023.

OSPAR has identified a need to prioritise work on measures and actions to improve the status of seabirds to enable their recovery. JWGBIRD will be involved in developing this work in the period covered by this work programme.

HELCOM

JWGBIRD reports to the HELCOM State and Conservation working group. JWGBIRD is required to collaborate, as needed, with national leads and co-leads of HELCOM indicators related to seabirds and with national leads of HELCOM recommendations, including but not limited to:

Recommendation 34E-1 ‘Safeguarding important bird habitats and migration routes in the Baltic Sea from negative effects of wind and wave energy production at sea’, and

Recommendation 37-2 ‘Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM red list’.

The group can also work on other HELCOM projects that support the commitments mentioned above.

Key HELCOM work areas for JWGBIRD during 2021-2023 will be the preparation and delivery of bird assessments for the next holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III, see Table 2). One bird indicator addressing bird and mammal bycatch in fishing gear is partly funded by EMFF in the project HELCOM BLUES (HELCOM biodiversity, litter, underwater noise and effective regional measures for the Baltic Sea).

³ Development of a pilot assessment in Regions IV and V may be constrained by a lack of data. This issue is being explored by the indicator leads.

Table 2: Indicators assessments to be delivered by JWGBIRD for HELCOM HOLAS III

Indicator name	Type	Lead	Region V
Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear	Core	Sven Koschinski (DE), Volker Dierschke (DE),	<i>update</i>
Abundance of waterbirds in the breeding season	Core	Volker Dierschke (DE), Fredrik Haas (SE)	<i>update</i>
Abundance of waterbirds in the wintering season	Core	Volker Dierschke (DE), Fredrik Haas (SE)	<i>update</i> ³
Waterbird habitat quality	Candidate	Volker Dierschke (DE)	<i>pilot</i>

ICES

JWGBIRD reports at present to ICES ACOM. The group's task list will be reviewed annually by both ICES ACOM and SCICOM, but substantive comments will only be taken in relation to issues that are helping delivery of the ICES strategy, or require knowledge creation/synthesis to respond to the advice request by ICES. At present such work includes:

- Development of an ICES region wide (i.e. across HELCOM/OSPAR) set of operational indicators in line with the [Transparent Assessment Framework](#) TAF and follow [FAIR](#) (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) data principles.
- Assessment of effects of anthropogenic activities on marine birds other than incidental bycatch / fisheries).
- Assemble bird bycatch data and qualitative information from other sources not covered by ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) (incl. strandings, entanglement, interviews, research projects, national/local monitoring).
- Determine and further advance methods to assess the resilience of protected bird species to bycatch, and make these available to WGBYC. Provide input to ICES advisory products.

The bycatch-relevant work of JWGBIRD will be according to the [ICES roadmap for bycatch advice](#). Contribution to advice will follow the [Guide to ICES advisory framework and principles](#).

Annex 1 Task List

The JWGBIRD task lists are typically reflective of the autumn-to-autumn work of the group, however delivery deadlines for tasks can also be related to schedules in HELCOM, OSPAR or ICES.

The task list is updated annually by the co-chairs and is a 'living document'. The task list is used as a communication tool towards OSPAR, HELCOM and ICES.

JWGBIRD task list

Task	Lead	Started in the year	Included in JWGBIRD report	Other outputs	Delivery to specific meeting/ date
A) Impacts on populations of extreme events incl. oil spills and extreme weather. {Deferred to meeting in Autumn 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic}	Maite Louzao Arsuaga	2021			
B) Impacts of litter on seabirds (i.e. ingestion, entanglement) – reviewing evidence and proposing further research priorities.	David Fleet	2021	Yes 2020/21	?	
C) Plan bird assessments for OSPAR QSR2023: C-1) Agree format of datacall. {Datacall to be issued Sep-Dec 2020} C-2) Set baseline values for B1 marine bird abundance indicator {Retain current baselines (start of timeseries) – defer selection of more objective baselines to next indicator update} C-3) Draft proposals for a pilot assessment of at-sea abundance data in southern North Sea.	Ian Mitchell Ian Mitchell Ian Mitchell Nele Markones	2020 Not conducted due to COVID	Yes – summary of data returns & append data format – 2020/21 Yes – draft results – 2020/21	Papers to OSPAR	COBAM 31/11/20 BDC 22/03/21

Task	Lead	Started in the year	Included in JWGBIRD report	Other outputs	Delivery to specific meeting/ date
C-4) Review progress on revising indicator B3 marine bird breeding success	& Eric Stienen Morten Frederiksen and Tycho Anker-Nilssen, Ian Mitchell	2020	Yes - <i>brief update on decisions and progress in OSPAR – 2020/21</i>	BDC and COBAM Proposal for B3 thresholds	BDC 22/03/21
C-5) Draft proposal for a pilot assessment of B5 seabird bycatch mortality.	Signe Christensen -Daalsgaard Sven Koschinski, Volker Dierschke	2020	Yes - <i>brief proposal on what could be included in the pilot assessment of B5 and how it will be produced, including resource requirements and working arrangements with ICES WGBYC</i>	<i>Proposal for COBAM 2020 and BDC 2021</i>	COBAM 31/11/20 BDC 22/03/21
C-6) Draft proposal for a pilot assessment of B6 Marine Bird Distribution {Deferred until at least 2022 due to funding and data constraints}	TBC	Deferred to 2022			
C-7) Draft proposal for a new candidate indicator and pilot assessment of offshore habitat quality. (<i>merge with task D-3</i>)	Volker Dierschke	2020	Yes – <i>draft results – 2020/21</i>	proposal to COBAM	COBAM 31/11/20 BDC 22/03/21

Task	Lead	Started in the year	Included in JWGBIRD report	Other outputs	Delivery to specific meeting/ date
				2020 and BDC 2021	
D) Plan bird assessments for HELCOM HOLAS III					
D-1) Agree procedures for waterbird abundance indicators.	Volker Dierschke	2020	Yes – brief update on decisions and progress – 2020/21		no
D-2) Discuss possibilities to expand waterbird assessments to other MSFD criteria.	Volker Dierschke and Ainars Aunins (TBC)	2020	No	No	no
D-3) Draft proposal for a new candidate indicator and pilot assessment of offshore habitat disturbance. (<i>merge with task C-7</i>)	Volker Dierschke	2020	Yes – draft result – 2020/21s	Candidate Indicator proposal to S&C 2021	Yes HELCOM to specify date
E) Review of results from offshore (at-sea) surveys of the Baltic and planning future work.	Ainars Aunins and Ib Krag Petersen		Possibly?		
F) Develop methods for measuring and communicating confidence in OSPAR & HELCOM assessments. Lead.	Ian Mitchell		Yes	No	
G) Support ICES advisory services	Nele/ICES Sec?	2021	Possibly	G-1) Participation in dedicated workshop in 2022	no
G-1) Request from NEAFC on bird by-catch: Present request and progress at JWGBIRD 2021 and provide feedback.					
G-2) In support of the ICES roadmap for bycatch advice, assemble bird bycatch data and qualitative information from additional sources than by					

Task	Lead	Started in the year	Included in JWGBIRD report	Other outputs	Delivery to specific meeting/ date
WGBYC (incl. strandings, entanglement, interviews, research projects, national/local monitoring). G-3) Assessment of effects of anthropogenic activities on marine birds other than incidental bycatch/fisheries				G-2) Report to ICES WGBYC	
G') Methods development G'-1) Determine and further advance methods to assess the resilience of protected bird species to bycatch					
H) Migration of ESAS database to ICES Data Centre Subgroup of JWGBIRD working on data policy, model and format.	Nele/Carlos (ICES)	2020	Possibly	Database	
I) Conduct Indicator Assessments for OSPAR QSR 2023 (see table 1) I-1) B1 - Marine bird abundance (update of common indicator)	Ian Mitchell / Volker Dierschke	2021	Yes 2021/22	<i>Draft to COBAM Dec 2021</i> <i>Final to BDC 2022</i>	<i>COBAM Dec 21</i> <i>BDC Mar/Apr 2022</i>
I-2) B1 - Marine bird abundance (PILOT using at-sea data)	Nele Markones				
I-3) B5 - Marine bird bycatch (PILOT)	Volker Dierschke / Signe Christensen-Dalsgaard, Sven Koschinski				
I-4) B7 - Marine bird habitat quality (PILOT)	Volker Dierschke				
I-5) B 3 - Marine bird breeding success	Ian Mitchell / Morten Frederiksen	2021	Yes 2021/22	<i>Draft to COBAM 2021</i>	<i>COBAM Dec 21</i> <i>BDC Mar/Apr 2022</i>

Task	Lead	Started in the year	Included in JWGBIRD report	Other outputs	Delivery to specific meeting/ date
				<i>Final to BDC 2022</i> <i>NEA-PANACEA reports</i>	
J) Conduct OSPAR Thematic Assessment of marine birds for QSR 2023	Ian Mitchell / Volker Dierschke	2021	Yes 2022/23	<i>Draft to BDC 2022</i> <i>Final to BDC 2023</i> <i>NEA-PANACEA reports</i>	<i>BDC Mar 2022</i> <i>BDC Mar 2023</i>
K) Develop and submit - OSPAR Marine Bird Recovery Action Plan (Task S5.03.T1 under OSPAR NEAES 2020-30 Implementation Plan)	Matt Parsons / Ian Mitchell / Volker Dierschke	2021	Yes 2023/24	<i>Drafts to BDC 2022 & 2023</i> <i>Final to OSPAR 2023</i>	<i>BDC Mar 2022 & Mar 2023</i> <i>OSPAR JUN 2023</i>
L) Organise JWGBIRD-Plus	Ian Mitchell / Matt Parsons	2022	Yes 2022/23	<i>NEA-PANACEA Reports</i>	<i>COBAM Dec 2022</i>

Supporting Info

Task L - In Spring 2022 an additional meeting of JWGBIRD will be held, as part of the NEA-PANACEA project (details below). This extra meeting, called 'JWGBIRD-PLUS' will be hosted by JNCC in Aberdeen, UK and will be open to all JWGBIRD members, plus invited seabird experts from countries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, who are also assessing the status of marine birds as part of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. JWGBIRD-PLUS will identify the synergies and differences between GES assessments of marine birds in the four European Regions. This will provide capacity to involve and promote dialogue and cooperation with relevant stakeholders across the four regions. It will also create an action plan detailing priorities for future co-working and establishing best practice.

Intersessional: Support HELCOM conservation initiatives and assessments	Volker Dierschke	No		Yes – brief activity report	<i>ad hoc responses required to various questions from Secretariat.</i>	
Intersessional: Publish guidance on best practices, methods and reporting for at-sea monitoring of seabirds in the Baltic Sea	Nele Markones	Summer 2020?		No	HELCOM S&C Sep 2020	
Intersessional: Review assessments of OSPAR Threatened and Declining Species <i>Thick-billed Murre (Uria lomvia)</i>	Ian Mitchell	2020		No	<i>Review of draft assessments to ICG-POSH in Nov 2020 and March 2021</i>	<i>ICG POSH 20/11/20</i>
<i>fuscus subspecies of Lesser Black-backed gull (Larus fuscus fuscus -NO}</i>	Ian Mitchell	No	2021	No	<i>Review of draft assessments</i>	<i>ICG POSH 05/03/21</i>

					<i>to ICG-POSH in March 2021</i>	
Roseate tern (PT), Balearic shearwater (ES), Black-legged kittiwake (UK), Iberian guillemot (ES/PT)	Matt Parsons	No	2021	No	<i>Review of draft assessments to ICG-POSH in Nov 2021</i>	<i>ICG POSH Nov 2021</i>
Ivory gull, Macaronesian shearwater (<i>Puffinus baroli</i>), Stellers eider	Matt Parsons	No	2023	No	<i>ICG-POSH 2023</i>	<i>ICG POSH Nov 2023</i>