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This is not a business-as-usual wader study

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This is not a business-as-usual *Wader Study*



Dear IWSG members,

I start with the good news: Happy Birthday to us! Unbelievably, this year is the fiftieth anniversary of the International Wader Study Group. In 1970, several study groups were set up in the UK, and the Wader Study Group (later IWSG), driven by Clive Minton, soon spread its wings involving people across Europe and even from across the Atlantic. We are now the most special species-specialist group on earth. We owe huge thanks to the pioneering team and the many dedicated committee members who in the last 50 years devoted part of their lives to the Group. Yes, that's you. Actually, after decades many early members are still part of the IWSG family. This issue includes a first account of what the (I)WSG involves, and more stories will follow this year – we have lots of reason to celebrate!

But now this. I am writing this editorial while in isolation in my own home, staying a 'social distance' away from loved ones, a remedy many governments chose in early spring 2020 to mitigate the pandemic. In those unsure early days in March, possibly many of you, just like me, attempted to act as if 'life must go on, and work for sure'. But by the end of the month I received a very concerned message from one of our members in Bangladesh that made me sit back and realize that this *Wader Study* falling on your door mat or in your inbox is not business-as-usual. This issue reaches you in times that are upsetting and dangerous, especially for the elderly – some of our IWSG members included.

Therefore, as I am writing to you to introduce our 50th anniversary, I want to congratulate each one of you and say thanks for your contributions, but also to express my deepest concern and compassion. I worry for many of you who are vulnerable because you are elderly, have health issues or live in places where you are facing possibly unreliable access to help and care. International solidarity and cultural inclusion has been our core business, but in this crisis I feel empty handed.

Sitting back, I also started thinking about our heritage. The Group is lucky to have quite a large young force, but is also still being driven by an older generation, sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes for decades already, sometimes jumping back in after retirement. This force is

supporting the young ones (and the not so young ones), with invaluable experience and vision. We need you, so on behalf of all IWSG members, I want to especially express my concern for our long-term members – let us please take care of them.

Now, the practicalities. To say it upfront, Jutta Leyrer, this year's conference organizer, warns us there is a chance we cannot meet in 2020. For an organization that is deeply indebted to the opportunities we were given in the last decades to meet people from everywhere where our birds go, this is a big blow. Jutta and her team are working hard to make sure the annual conference can take place and, if not possible physically, we will find some other way to meet. We will keep you posted via email and social media, or check our website.

The message from Bangladesh mentioned the IWSG family, and indeed, we have built friendships, even relationships, across borders and cultures. These ties have saved birds and habitats, have given us purpose and hope that we could possibly turn the tide of the effects we have on our planet. Instead, in the year we are celebrating our 50th anniversary, we may be separated due to the unintended (but possibly inevitable) effects of the many global connections human kind has so enthusiastically established.

To end on a positive note, next time we meet in person it may feel as the first time we met. It may feel as the famous 1987 conference in Gdansk, Poland, the first meeting behind the Iron Curtain, or for me as the 1990 conference in Comacchio, Italy, my own unforgettable warm welcome into the family.

See you then!

In the meantime, please stay well and stay in touch.

Yvonne Verkuil

Chair, IWSG