

Fifth International Swan Symposium: Easton, Maryland, 3–6 February 2014

The 5th International Swan Symposium (5th ISS) of the Wetlands International/IUCN-SSC Swan Specialist Group (SSG) was held at Easton, Maryland, USA from 3-6 February 2014.

International swan symposia have been convened at c. 10-year intervals since the inaugural meeting at Slimbridge, UK (in December 1971), with subsequent gatherings at Sapporo, Japan (February 1980), Oxford, UK (1989) and Airlie, Virginia, USA (February 2001). The 5th ISS was hosted by The Trumpeter Swan Society (TTSS) and coincided with the 23rd TTSS Conference. John Cornely (TTSS former Executive Director) and Becky Abel (Associate Director) co-chaired the host committee with Jerry Serie (Local Committee chair) whilst Eileen Rees coordinated the scientific programme along with the Scientific Committee members: John Cornely, Bart Nolet, Chris Perrins, Ma Ming and Scott Petrie. John Cornely stepped down prior to the symposium to take on the role as the TTSS Senior Conservation Advisor. The historic Tidewater Inn in the heart of Easton provided a pleasing venue and there was a consensus from attendees that it was an excellent meeting.

About 100 swan researchers and conservationists attended from 16 countries, from Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Netherlands, Iceland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden, UK and the USA. Three days were dedicated to presentations and workshops, which covered a wide range of information and issues. The talks considered all aspects of swan ecology, with sessions on: (1) populations and distribution, (2) habitat and diet, (3) management, (4) breeding biology, (5) migration strategies, and (6) threats to swan species. Key management issues – with voices on both sides of the debate – included the control of the non-native Mute Swan within North America. The illegal shooting of migratory swans in Europe, the illegal poisoning and trapping of swans in China and lead poisoning in North America were raised as points of conservation concern. A special workshop led by the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APIC) addressed avian interactions with power lines and focused on methods to minimise swan collisions with the cables. Three other workshops were convened, on the use of stochastic growth models for estimating swan populations (led by Dr. Oz Garton), the organisation of the Swan Specialist Group, and on the implementation of the AEWB Bewick's Swan Action Plan, respectively.

Other highlights included a local field trip sponsored by Waterfowl Chesapeake to observe Tundra Swans and other waterfowl wintering on the eastern shore of Chesapeake Bay, coupled with a stop at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and Visitor Centre. Refuge staff gave a presentation on the unique wetland ecosystem that supports the diverse flora and fauna of the Bay and the threat of a rise in sea level on coastal resources and communities. The banquet on Wednesday night featured a presentation by the author and naturalist Tom Horton and award-winning photographer David Harp, who spoke on the Bay's bounty and beauty and underscored future challenges of living on the edge between land and water. A special lifetime membership award was presented to Easton resident Don Cochran, the one living founder of The Trumpeter Swan Society established in 1968. A special TTSS life-time achievement award to Prof. Bill Sladen was accepted by Tom Wood on Bill's behalf. Pelle Andersen-Harild (Denmark) received a presentation for being the only person to have attended all five international swan symposia; Julius Morkūnas (Lithuania) and Bart Nolet (the Netherlands) were highlighted as each having given three presentations during the meeting. TTSS presented the *George Melendez Wright Trumpeter Swan Conservation Award* to outgoing Executive Director John Cornely, the highest honour that the Society can bestow. Previously the award has been presented to Harry Lumsden, Jim King and Harold Burgess. TTSS President Gary Ivey proclaimed the conference an overwhelming success, and stated that “the collaborative efforts to exchange vital information

among swan researchers and managers at this conference will significantly advance our understanding and conservation of swans worldwide.”

Following on from the meeting, seven key papers presented at the symposium have now been published as a “mini proceedings” in *Wildfowl* 64. *Wildfowl* is an open access and pdfs of the papers (which range from tracking Tundra Swan migration and a study of Bewick’s Swan breeding biology, through the control of Mute Swans on Chesapeake Bay, to new work on Black Swans in Australia) are now accessible on the journal’s website at <http://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl>. There was also universal agreement within the Group that we should meet more frequently, perhaps at 5-year intervals, with the 6th International Symposium now scheduled for 2019.

Eileen Rees & John Cornely



John Cornely (USA, left), with Scott Petrie (Canada), during presentations at the 5th International Swan Symposium banquet, February 2014. (Photo: Dave Weaver).



Tundra Swans feeding in stubble fields during the field excursion to Chesapeake Bay. (Photo: Dave Weaver).



Presentations at the 5th ISS: (a) Radek Włodarczyk (Poland), (b) Lizhi Zhou (China) (c) Jerry Serie (USA), (d) Leif Nilsson (Sweden), (e) Bart Nolet (Netherlands), (f) John Coleman (Australia), (g) Diana Solovyeva (Russia), and (h) Chris Perrins (UK). (Photos: Dave Weaver).



Conference delegates during the banquet, from left to right: Dima Boiko (Latvia), Peter Glazov (Russia), Diana Solovyova (Russia), Julius Morkūnas (Lithuania), Sibyl Cochran (USA) and Nico Stenschke (Germany). (Photo: Dave Weaver).



Pellen Andersen-Harild (Denmark, right, with Eileen Rees), recognised for his attendance at all five international swan symposia since the first meeting was held at Slimbridge, UK, in 1971. (Photo: Dave Weaver).