

# EUROPEAN MONITORING NEWS

## Introducing the EBCC board members

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Bird Census News has started a new article format, where it introduces current board members of the European Bird Census Council (EBCC). The articles cover interviews with the board members and the first issue is dedicated to two persons behind the recent breakthroughs in atlas projects: Verena Keller (EBBA2) and Mikhail Kalyakin (EBBA2, Russian Bird Atlas). Both Verena and Mikhail have been in the board of the EBCC since 2010.



Verena Keller. Kola Peninsula, Russia. 20.07.2016.

Photo by Niklaus Zbinden

#### **What is your title and the current working position?**

Dr. Verena Keller. Project Manager European Breeding Bird Atlas  
Recently retired from Swiss Ornithological Institute, Sempach, Switzerland.

#### **You have been the head of the Atlas Steering Committee for a long time (from the start). When did you first hear about option of conducting EBBA2 and what were your first thoughts then?**

I was familiar with the first EBCC atlas from the time I started working at the Swiss Ornithological Institute in 1990 because my colleague Luc Schifferli was actively engaged in the EBCC board at the time. It was Luc who asked me to write the species text for Common Eider together with Martti Hario from Finland and I felt very honoured. I don't remember when I first heard about the thoughts to make a new European atlas. The idea was already around when I was elected to the EBCC board at the conference in Cáceres in 2010. The new board was very motivated but it was clear that the planning of the project could not fit into the regular tasks of the board. When I suggested creating a smaller working group, my board colleagues welcomed the idea and asked me to chair it.

#### **Now after all these years, the book is finally ready. How do you feel now?**

When we prepared the first project concept we proposed to publish the book in 2020, because of the biodiversity targets that were set for this year. Looking back I am still a bit surprised that we actually

managed to keep this final deadline. Seeing the beautiful book now finished is very satisfying and a highlight at the end of my working career. I am also very proud of the EBBA2 coordination team. It is only the collaborative effort of the team, the steering committee and the whole network that made this possible.

**Data collection of EBBA2 required massive amount of field work including capacity building in some parts of Europe and you participated also this personally in various locations. Could you tell to the readers some of the memorable moments?**

I did most of the EBBA2 fieldwork together with my partner Niklaus Zbinden and there are many memorable events. Atlas work means visiting areas which you usually don't visit when travelling to foreign countries. We would never have driven up so many narrow roads to remote villages in the mountains of North Macedonia, where we were always welcomed by people who spoke German, Italian or French. On the Kola Peninsula in northern Russia we were warned to pay attention to brown bears but sadly we only came across fresh traces; mosquitoes and horseflies were much more of a nuisance. Being able to explore a very small part of the Kola Peninsula was very special for us and I remember in particular standing on top of a mountain and looking across the vast expanses of Taiga, mires and lakes all around us.

**You have read the book probably already multiple times during the writing, revising and proof reading process, what were the largest surprises of the atlas results to you?**

Probably the biggest surprise was the geographical coverage achieved in the end, much higher than what we initially hoped for. The changes in distribution were expected and it was maybe more surprising to see where changes were documented which differed from expectations. For me it was surprising, for instance, to see that on the Iberian Peninsula quite a number of species expanded their range towards the south. The amount of the spread of some coastal species to inland wetlands was also unexpected.

**EBBA2 is not only about the book, but a larger development of bird monitoring. How do you see that EBBA2 has influenced European monitoring in general but also the working strategies in the EBCC. (Sorry pretty large question 😊)**

The EBCC has always focused on the whole continent but with the geographical limitations of PECBMS and other initiatives there was still a bias towards the western part of the continent and politically to the European Union. EBBA2 has changed our angle of looking at Europe. The EBCC network has been strengthened in east and southeast Europe and we have to build up on this and think about ways to improve monitoring across the continent. This is a challenge because it is much more difficult to find resources for long-term projects than for a project like EBBA2 which is limited to a certain period. EBBA2 and the initiatives that led to the EuroBirdPortal have changed our approach to running EBCC projects. PECBMS, EBBA2 and EBP are strongly anchored in the EBCC network and at European level in the same institutions. The close collaboration between the projects is an important step towards strengthening monitoring across Europe.

**What is your favourite bird group or species and why?**

I have always rather been a generalist. I started working on waterbirds because of the possibilities to study applied questions in relation to human activities in wetlands. I was always attracted to lakes and rivers, which was probably also a reason for my interest in waterbirds.