

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the European Bird Census Council

27th April 2023

19.00 CEST, held virtually

Present:

Agu Leivits, Ainārs Auniņš, Alena Klvaňová, Anna Gamero, Anton Morkovin, Blas Molina, Chris van Turnhout, Clara Pladevall, Danae Portolou, Dawn Balmer, Eva Silarova, Gabriel Gargallo, Gianpiero Calvi, Henning Heldbjerg, Jean-Yves Paquet, Jiri Reif, João Rabaça, Johannes Kamp, Joni Vorpsi, Jozef Ridzon, Lechoslaw Kuczynski, Mark Eaton, Mattia Brambilla, Mikhail Kalyakin, Nermina Sarajilic, Nicolas Strebel, Peter Knaus, Petr Musil, Qenan Maxhuni, Ruud Foppen, Samuel Wechsler, Sara Fraixedas, Sergi Herrando, Silvia Ursul, Sylvain Antoniazza, , Tatiana Kuzmenko, Thomas Vikstrøm, Verena Keller, Virginia Escandell, Vitalie Ajder, Zoltan Szabo.

Part 1

Confirmation & approval of the minutes from the previous AGM

Mark Eaton (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Minutes from the last AGM in Lucerne are on the website (<https://www.ebcc.info/about-us/board-meetings/>) and there were no comments raised.

Chair's report, incl. report from the main EBCC initiatives (EBBA2, PECBMS, EBP)

Mark Eaton thanked Board members and observers for all their effort over the last year. There are no changes to the Board but we will propose changes in roles later in the meeting. We meet regularly throughout the year and our last meeting was an in-person meeting in March in Belgium. We aim for one in-person meeting a year and the rest are online.

We have established an EBCC Office, hosted by CSO in Prague and run by Petr and Alena and they are engaged on a wide range of activities including supporting common bird monitoring. PECBMS continues to prosper and they are seeking new funding at the moment. They have made terrific progress with trends updated in Nov 2021; getting faster each year. EBBA2 was published in 2020 (8,347 copies sold) and maps made available online in 2022. Royalties are around 52,000 euros. The main focus of work at the moment is archiving to ensure all materials properly archived. EBBA Live is being piloted. EuroBirdPortal EBP continues to prosper; they are receiving around 60 million records per year from 100,000 observers and 21 online portals. Other uses of EBCC data in the last year include the Wildlife Comeback in Europe report, led by Rewilding Europe and Zoological Society of London.

The wonderful delegate network has continued to do good work.

Communications is a vital part of our work and you are all encouraged to help and contribute. Give us a follow us on Twitter and Facebook and share your news with us.

Our next EBCC conference will be in Riga in April 2025 and we are confident this will be another excellent conference.

Bird Census News published volume 35 in December 2022 with papers about impacts of Covid-19 on bird monitoring programmes, Iceland and Western Siberia. We are currently working on two issues. Please consider BCN for papers.

EBCC finances are relatively healthy. We will set up a Small Grants Fund to support projects in low and middle income countries in Europe for activities like start up for new monitoring, emergency funding, national atlases, start up for online tools and capacity building. The grant procedure will formally open in May and the grants will be time limited and the maximum is likely to be around 10,000 euros.

Report from the EBCC Office

Petr delivered the first report from the EBCC office which was established in April 2022 and is located in CSO in Prague. The aim is to provide support to the EBCC Board. Key areas of work has been developing capacity and supporting International Census Plots in three countries, capacity building and giving assistance to developing schemes eg delivery of binoculars to Moldova, facilitated audio recorders to Ukraine. We have also been helping to set up the Small Grant Fund and assisting in methods in PECBMS. The next step is to focus more on fundraising, the Swiss Ornithological Institute SOI has kindly supported the EBCC in 2022. We encourage other countries to support the Office where possible and we will be fundraising via a new donation portal.

Communication has also been very important and we have given nine presentations at meetings and conferences, have worked on the EBCC website and continued social media. Other activities include maintaining and building contacts with other organisations such as EU, coordinating EBCC research opportunities, input to research papers, supporting Board officers and helping with EBBA2 data requests and archives.

Mark Eaton thanked Petr and Alena for all their work.

Treasurer's report

As of 1 January 2022 capital was €77,367.50.

Benefits including data charges (€6,700), and royalties from EBBA2 (€7,702.06). Expenses were banking costs (€398.23), and supporting ICP (€5,879.00). Capital on 31 January 2021 was €85,492.33. There were no benefits from project funding and donations and no expenses for board meeting costs.

To put into perspective, the accounts were as follows

2016 (Halle conference) €46,585.69

2019 (Evora conference) €18,949.72

2022 (Lucerne conference) €87,812.58

April 27th 2023 (online AGM) €92,391.36

The financial position of EBCC has improved strongly over the past four years allowing us to invest in new activities that contribute to EBCC's primary goals. In 2023 we expect to spend money on supporting ICP projects in Serbia, Moldova, Montenegro, the Office, and supporting EBCC related projects through the Small Grant Fund.

The accounts have been audited by Koen Devos and Ruud Foppen. Ruud Foppen commented that the accounts had been approved for 2022 (and he has an Hoopoe in his garden!) and said that Chris van Turnhout has done a great job of the accounts – thank you Chris!

Delegate officer report & changes in the delegates

Danae Portolou has taken on the role of Delegates Officer from Henning Heldbjerg who stepped down from the Board at the Lucerne conference.

We currently have 90 delegates from 47 countries.

Countries with one delegate are Azerbaijan, Georgia, Liechtenstein and Serbia.

Countries with no delegate are Kazakhstan, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City.

There was just one change of delegate, in Ukraine where Iurii Strus is stepping down and Tatiana (Tania) Kuzmenko is taking over; she is currently working with SOI and Frankfurt Zoological Society. Danae reminded us that delegates should help promote the work of EBCC and can share their own news and activities for inclusion in the newsletter, they can disseminate EBCC news to their networks and inform us of changes in contact details.

A quick poll showed that of those attending the AGM, 76% were delegates, 18% were PECBMS coordinators, 24% EBBA coordinators, 18% EBP coordinators and 18% other.

Board elections

There are no changes to the composition of the Board. Mark Eaton, with great regret, is seeking to step down as role of Chair due to work pressures. Mark is going to take on the role of Editor of Bird Census News. Our proposal is Verena Keller as Chair and Sergi Herrando as Vice-Chair. Both are well known and will do a fantastic job. Both Verena and Sergi were elected via a an online poll . Mark congratulated Verena and Sergi.

Verena gave a vote of thanks to Mark. Verena recalls talking to Mark at Schiphol airport a few years ago and encouraged him to take on the role. He has been a very good Chair! EBCC has gained an excellent reputation over the last decade. Mark is sure Verena and Sergi will do an excellent job.

Part 2

PECBMS update by Alana Klvaňová

Trends and indicators were published in November 2022 with data from 30 countries and covering 170 species. There has been a lot of work to accelerate the publication of the report and there is currently just one year delay and also work has been completed on technical improvements.

The PECBMS network has been maintained network over Europe and there has been good engagement through a webinar in Feb (31 participants) and general communication. The PECBMS team have provided updates to EBCC Board and stakeholders including EUROSTAT and DG ENV.

There have been four publications and a further two in preparation. The current tender ends in April and it has been frustrating that funding for the future has not yet been secured but there is hope funding will come soon. Many thanks to the volunteers, coordinators and the PECBMS team.

Exploration of the association of the European bird species with the EUNIS habitats categories (level II) by Anna Gamero

Biodiversity indications combine information of several species typical of a habitat to produce a simple measure of the state of the habitat. Birds are a suitable group to produce indicators because they are well known, cover many ecological niches and are relatively easy to monitor. Good population estimates can be produced over time. Species selected need to be responsive to changes in the habitat. An example of a quantitative approach for species is the work on relative habitat use in Denmark (Larsen et al 2011). EUNIS habitat classification is used in the EU and for example used in the assessment of red list of habitats (Janssen et al 2016). The aim of this piece of work was to quantify bird species association with EUNIS habitat types (45 types) and assess the degree of degradation of each possible habitat type. The analysis used PECBMS site-level data (annual spring species abundance, coordinates of site, all species). The approach was to find a link between species recorded and the habitats and the % of coverage for each EUNIS habitat type in the 1km buffer around the site was calculated. Nocturnal and exotic species were excluded, as were species recorded in fewer than 50 sites and habitats recorded in fewer than 100 sites and covering an area less than 50km². Used data 2000-2019, around 25,000 sites from 25 countries, 260 bird species and 34 habitat types. Produced a habitat preference index for a species. Black Woodpecker was presented as an example.

Forest Bird Indicator has 34 species, with quantitative approach using EUNIS forest, produced indicator based on 27 species overall change 0.7%.

Work also assessed habitat species association for 34 EUNIS habitat types (I & II) and calculated habitat specific trends for 206 species (80 non PECBMS species). Found that coastal habitats, bogs and arable land are declining, forest increasing (Level I) and that less disturbed habitats tended to have more positive trends (Level II). The report was delivered to EU commission in December 2022. Future work will look at habitats represented in the PECBMS sites and potential for additional PECBMS habitat indicators and species and also look at which additional habitats indicators PECBMS could produce and if European trends can be produced for rarer species using site-level data. Many thanks to all.

EBBA Live by Sergi Herrando

The project involves updating breeding bird distributions of birds in Europe. We have two brilliant atlases and a clear interest from policy makers on species distribution (at finer scale) and more regular spatial updates. In this context, the EBBA Live Farmland project attempts to produce updated maps for 50 farmland bird species and also strengthens the existing networks (EBP and PECBMS). It has two phases: Phase 1 (2022–2023) start with monitoring data from PECBMS and Phase 2 (2024–2026) will use monitoring data from PECBMS site-level database and casual data from EBP.

Example of Skylark using monitoring data. Build 50-km maps of observed breeding occurrence based on bird locations in PECBMS. Quite clear we can't produce comprehensive 50-km maps of observed distribution because the spatial coverage is incomplete at 50-km. However, the PECBMS site-level dataset looks as a promising basis for modelling probability of occurrence at 10-km resolution, as done in EBBA2. A pilot modelled map for Skylark is shown based on EBBA2 modelling approach and using data for 2018–2022. The maps from EBBA2 (2013–2017) and the new ones look really similar.

There are a few differences between them and so further investigation is needed. Some very preliminary work to model temporal change has been also done. Lot of work on validation of models, not only as a whole but also at national and subnational levels. It is important to understand how we can interpret the results –e.g. is it reliable, accurate, consistent with national data? Plan to do checking of monitoring data April-May 2023, modelling May-Nov 2023 and then a report and maps made available to national partners in December, when workshop planned. In 2024–2026 data from EBP will be added to study the capacity for improving the 50-km maps. Many thanks to all

EBP development by Gabriel Gargallo

EBP now covering 34 countries, 99.9% of the EU, only missing Malta but hope they will join in the next month. 0.4% of the data is received manually, 99.6% received on automatic transfer on a daily basis. More than 500 million records with many from complete lists. Recent work includes EBP-EFSA collaboration since 2019 and the launch of a new New Migration Mapping Tool which checks 50 species for most up to date info from EURING and EBP.

In July 2022 worked on pilot early warning system for HPAI, combining information on abundance models (weekly), long distance movements (monthly), local movements (seasonally) and HPAI outbreaks (weekly). Combining these four outputs able to produce a pilot early warning system on HPAI on weekly basis. There is a follow-up contract for three years 2023–2025, 600,000 euros, five main work packages.

- 1 – early warning module implementation in the new Migration Mapping Too (including alert system and updating of the risk assessment model in near real time (eg weekly updates)).
- 2 – update of the current EFSA list of target wild bird species.
- 3 – improvement of the early warning system module in WP1.
- 4 – improvements of the early warning system module delivered in WP3 using additional wild bird data sources and more explorative analytical techniques.
- 5 – improvements of the early warning system delivered in WP3 including risk factors associated with poultry.

In Sept 2022 they submitted a new LIFE preparatory project proposing 3.5 years work covering July 2023-December 2026 and a budget 1,110,605 euros and they are expecting to sign in next few weeks. This project will have three main areas of work:

- improve data collection/capacity building in SE Europe
- full EBP species coverage
- selected demonstrative outputs

Any other business

Johannes Kamp asked about Kazakhstan and what engagement EBCC has. EBCC responded that there has been some involvement in EBBA2 but no EBCC delegate. JK will ask colleagues in that country if there is any interest in a delegate.

Vote of thanks from João Rabaça to Mark Eaton for his excellent role of Chair of EBCC and said the future of EBCC is in very good hands with Verena and Sergi.