

SCAR Working Paper
The Future of the Expert Groups on Birds and Seals

Background

1. The Expert Group on Seals (EGS) and the Expert Group on Birds (EBS) were both established in 2002 as part of the SCAR Review process.
2. The terms of reference (ToR) adopted for each of the groups were established at the same time. These are included at Appendix 1.
3. In essence, the ToRs of both groups address two major goals:
 - a. Promotion of research on birds or seals.
 - b. Provision of information on the status and trends of populations to address Antarctic Treaty System-related matters.
4. These two major goals are interrelated to the extent that lack of information on a given species or on some aspect of the population dynamics of that might trigger requests for further research.
5. Research within SCAR now largely functions through the SCAR Scientific Research Programmes (SRP) within or among the SCAR Standing Scientific Groups.
6. Therefore, the research roles of the two Expert Groups as stated in the Terms of Reference are now largely subsumed within the process of the establishment of Scientific Research Programmes. Indeed, both groups have been explicitly encouraged to participate in the current Scientific Research Programme 'Evolution and Biodiversity in the Antarctic'.
7. This means that the main functions of the two groups now largely concern the provision of information on the status and trends of typically pelagic vertebrates which return to land to breed. This information is provided to, or exchanged with Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) bodies such as the Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP), the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), and the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS), and other bodies such as the IUCN and BirdLife International.
8. This provision of information currently takes place using both published data and unpublished information and advice from experts in particular fields. This information is conveyed formally and informally to the various bodies requesting advice from SCAR.
9. One recent outcome of this service provision function has been a questioning of the extent to which data and advice provided by SCAR are current. In the most recent example, concerning a Working Paper on Southern Giant Petrels submitted to the CEP, SCAR was forced to withdraw this paper in two

successive years. This was a consequence of claims by other bodies that new data suggested that SCAR's advice should perhaps not be followed, and something of an inability to counter these claims. This has placed SCAR at risk of having its ability to provide accurate, independent scientific advice questioned (see ECO Number 1 2007).

10. Given these risks, and the change to the functioning of the groups, it is suggested that a change should be effected to these Expert Groups. Recommendations in this regard are made below.
11. This suggested change has been discussed with the Chief Officers of both Expert Groups. The Expert Group on Birds suggested a gradual change whereby the interaction between our groups is increased, e.g. by combining meetings, co-host workshops etc. They acknowledged benefits in meeting together but there are sufficient differences in interests, projects, etc. to warrant continued independence. The Chief Officer of the Expert Group on Seals expects this group to agree with this vision.

Recommendations

12. The EG Birds and EG Seals should be closed down in their present form.
13. An Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations should be established.
14. The Terms of Reference of this group would be:
 - a) the collation and provision of information on the status and trends of populations of specific species in the SCAR area of interest based on needs identified by SCAR or by the group.
 - b) the provision of advice to ATS bodies and others as requested from time to time, as agreed by SCAR, and in collaboration with these bodies including the exchange of data.
15. The group would consist of a Chief Officer, Secretary and two standing members, with participation by Member Countries based on their expertise and the issues at hand.
16. The Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations should be established via a transitional period of three years.

Procedure

17. In the transitional phase the meetings of the two groups should be combined, workshops should be co-hosted, and further interaction between the two groups should be pursued.
18. In the transitional phase the membership of the group should be extended with experts in the field of processing of large data sets and mathematical modelling.

19. The Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations would base its outcomes on published papers only (including papers published with a doi only).
20. Where unpublished data are used, the group would submit a 'white paper' providing analysis of the data that support the outcomes. The Standing Scientific Group on Life Sciences should arrange a peer review prior to publication.
21. The Expert Group would, wherever possible, seek formal collaboration with similar groups from other ATS bodies, especially with a view to facilitating data exchange and management to improve the information and advice provided by this group to SCAR and to the ATS.

Time line

22. The Executive Committee of SCAR in her meeting of July 2007 in Washington DC will discuss the present working paper. If agreement with the recommendations and the procedure is reached, the Chief Officer of the Standing Scientific Group on Life Sciences will inform the Chief Officers of both Expert Groups and will request them to start the procedure.
23. Upon a report from the Chief Officers of both Expert Groups on the progress of the procedure, the Standing Scientific Group on Life Sciences will formulate a recommendation to establish an Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations and to close down the Expert Groups on Birds and Seals to the Delegates of SCAR in her meeting during SCAR XXX (2008) in St. Petersburg, Russia.
24. If the recommendation is adopted by the Delegates, the two Expert Groups will continue with the procedure as mentioned. This means that the meetings of the two groups should be combined, workshops should be co-hosted, the membership of the group should be extended with experts in the field of processing of large data sets and mathematical modelling, with the assistance of the National SCAR Committees.
25. In the transitional period the group should be led by a co-ordinator and the Chief Officers and the Secretaries of the Expert Groups on Birds and Seals.
26. A progress report should be delivered to the SCAR Executive Meeting in 2009, through the Chief Officer of the Standing Scientific Group on Life Sciences and the two Expert Groups should organise a combined workshop during the Xth SCAR International Biology Symposium during which the merger would be effectuated.
27. Upon a report of the Chief Officer - elect of the proposed Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations to the Standing Scientific Group on Life Sciences, SSG-LS will formulate a recommendation to establish an Expert Group on Status and Trends of Top Predator Populations and to close down the Expert Groups on Birds and Seals to the Delegates of SCAR in her meeting during SCAR XXXI (2010).

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference SCAR Expert Group on Birds

1. Encourage, coordinate and support pure and applied research on Antarctic and subantarctic birds. Foster the entry of young scientists to these research efforts.
2. Undertake the on-going compilation and synthesis of existing long-term and broad-scale data on the distribution and abundance of Antarctic and subantarctic birds,
3. Contribute to the conservation and management of Antarctic and subantarctic birds through the appropriate utilisation and interpretation of currently available scientific data.
4. Provide scientific advice, information and recommendations to the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and other Antarctic Treaty System ATS fora in relation to all aspects of Antarctic and subantarctic ornithological issues such as tourism and logistics.

Terms of Reference SCAR Expert Group on Seals

1. Provide information on the status of Antarctic seal stocks, as specified by the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS),
2. Provide an annual update on the number of seals killed or captured for commercial and scientific purposes, as specified by (CCAS),
3. Encourage research and exchange of information on Antarctic seals, and
4. Provide scientific advice and recommendation to SCAR and other relevant international organizers such as CCAS, CEP and CCAMLR.