

NATIONAL REPORT DUCK COUNTS SURINAME

JUNE 2004

THE WETLANDS

Introduction

After so many years of counting we feel that we have to come to fixed transects. In the east this can be achieved now. Only a part out of the zone 'Walapa' is important and it has become clear that this part, the old plantation 'Blijdslust' is the only part worth surveying.

In the west the 'Prallala Pan' is worth surveying. But the zones 'Totness' and 'Bigi Pan' still cause a problem. 'Totness' never had significant numbers of Blue wing, but harboured large groups of Black-bellies. 'Bigi Pan' had groups of a few hundreds of Blue wing and once a group of 2000 has been counted, but always on different places. The different names we used through the years and the different limitations of the 'wetlands' can cause a lot of confusing. Hence I will try to make the different relations clear of all the names we have used in the reports.

The relation of the different observation sites and Wetlands

Survey Unit Name
SU: Coppenamemonding Nature Reserve Part of zone 6. The Prallala Pan is located in this reserve, and all observations done in this zone had been done in the Prallala Pan alone. Therefore the name Coppename Nature Reserve can be erased, and the observations in this zone can be regarded as observed in the Prallala Pan.
SU: Hertenrits Nature Reserve North (Bigi Pan) Ducks have been seen during one of the first surveys at this spot which is located in zone 'Totness'
SU: Hertenrits Nature Reserve West (Bigi Pan) Also at this spot, ducks have been seen during one of the first surveys. It is located in zone 'Bigi Pan'
SU: Bering Hole (Bigi Pan) A lagoon located in zone 'Bigi Pan'
SU: Zone 5: never observations of importance have been made here except for some <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats
SU: Zone 1: No observations of importance,

except for some <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats
SU: Zone 1a: this is a lagoon with observations sometimes up to a few hundred blue wings
SU: Zone 3b: Once (2001) 3000 Blue wing have been observed, further no significant numbers
SU: Zone 6: the observations in this zone can be regarded as had been observed in the Pralalla Pan.
SU: Zone 7 No observations of importance except for some <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats
SU: Zone 8: Is part of zone 'Totness'
SU: Zone 9: Is part of zone 'Totness'
SU: Zone 4b: Plantation Blijdslust is located in this zone. All observations of over 500 Blue Wing in zone 4b have been done here.
SU: Zone 11 No observations of importance
SU: Zone 3a: No observations of importance except for some only <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats The so called Belgie Pan is located in this zone
SU: Zone 10: the lagoon Bigi Pan is located in this zone. The name Bigi Pan has been used for the whole Multiple Use Management Area. Zone10 is now part of zone 'Bigi Pan'
SU: Zone 2a: No observations of importance except for some <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats
SU: Zone 4a: No observations of importance except for some <i>Anas bahamensis</i> foraging on the mudflats
SU: Zone 12: is part of zone 'Bigi Pan'. Only once a group of 2000 Blue Wings has been observed here. For the rest not even a single Blue wing has been observed
SU: Zone 2b: No observations of importance
SU: Pralalla Pan: is the most important lagoon Often large groups of BW have been observed there. Largest group: 11000 BW

Zone Totness: No observations of importance of BW; except for some *Anas bahamensis* foraging on the mudflats. Large groups of Black-bellies
The zones 7, 8, 9, the northern part of 10 and 11 along the coast between the Coppename River and Nickerie River has now become the new zone 'Totness'

The new zone 'Bigi Pan' includes now the zones 10 and 12.

Blijdslust is part of zone 4b, and is the second most important wetland for duck surveys. Often large groups of BW, up to 4000, have been observed here

Zone 1b is a small area located in zone 1, which seemed important only at the beginning of the surveys.

Belgie Pan is a confusing name. At the beginning we thought that a lagoon in zone 3b had this name. We observed once 3000 BW there. Thereafter the BW have been counted separately for this lagoon and also added to the total of 3b. Afterwards it appeared that a lagoon close behind the sea zone 3a is the Belgie Pan. Here never significant numbers of BW have been observed. Kris and me will try to solve this problem.

Zone 'Walapa kreek' includes now the former zones 4b and 3b

Zone 'Matapica' includes now the former zones 4a and 3a

Blijdslust (part of Zone 'Walapa kreek')

- . The area is an abandoned plantation area, and consists of brackish short grass and fern swamps, and brackish to fresh water short grass swamps. There are many open waters (ponds). The water depth varies between approx. 30 cm in the dry season to approx. 70 cm in the rainy season. Some parts dry up in the dry season. Some of the lakes are partly covered with *Nymphae spec.* The area is very well accessible, and is known for its rich fish population and fishing activities. Some fisherman have their overnight camps here. Extensive hunting may occur.

Zone Pralala Pan

The Pralala Pan within the Coppename-monding Nature Reserve, is a large lagoon surrounded by Mangroves *Avicennia spec.* and with patches of Mangroves in the lagoon. It is not deep. Probably not deeper than 1 m. The water is salt or brackish. During dry seasons the water level can be very low, and part of the lagoon may dry up. Only the deep middle part may then have water. No part of the "Pan", however, dried up this year. This year the sea has removed the mangroves at the seaside and made a

hole of more than 50 meter. At high tide the sea is entering the lagoon now. Fishermen have been seen fishing in the pan although this is forbidden. The changes for illegal hunting have increased.

Zone Totness-Nickerie

This zone contains the narrow coastal strip from Totness to the mouth of the Nickerie River. Most of the coastline is covered by Mangroves *Avicennia spec.* with patches of dying mangroves. This zone is directly influenced by the tide, and is connected with the sea by many small creeks. The water may vary from brackish to salt. There are some brackish short-grass marshes and brackish open water lagoons. Water depth may reach to more than one meter in the rainy season, and many marshes and lagoons dry up in the dry season. The most western part of the zone is well accessible, hence lot of fishery activities and hunting take place here.

Zone Bigi Pan

The Bigi Pan lagoon within zone 'Bigi Pan' is the largest open water lagoon in the country surrounded by mature and dying mangrove forest, and shallow salt to brackish water swamp covered with halophytic herb vegetation, short grasses and ferns. A larger area around this lagoon is also called Bigi Pan or the Bigi Pan Multiple-use Management Area, and contains also many open water lagoons which vary from brackish to fresh water, surrounded by short grass swamps and tall grass swamps dominated by *Typha angustifolia*.

It is in these open waters where waterfowl are found. Partially, the Bigi Pan area is also surrounded by rice fields. The depth of the water in the Bigi Pan lagoon varies from approximately 50 cm in the dry season to approx. 1 meter in the rainy season. Parts of the lagoons surrounding the Bigi Pan lagoon dry up in the dry season. The Bigi Pan lagoon itself never dries up.

The entire area is subjected to tidal action, and is very accessible. The Bigi Pan lagoon is connected with the sea by several creeks and with the Nickerie River by the Jamaer Canal

The Bigi Pan area, including the Bigi Pan lagoon, is known for its rich fish population and many fishermen use the area for fishing which takes place the whole year round. Several fishermen have their camp in the Pan. The area is also visited by plenty hunters. Lot of hunting takes place here.

PARTICIPANTS

Almost all surveys have been executed with the maximum number of 5 participants.

Participants from last year who continued, where Kris Mohadin, Rabin Nekrui, Foek Chin Joe and Otte Ottema. Shamita Sahdew 'Mieke' participated only once.

The new recruits from last year are: Chequita Bikhi, Rawien and Adjai. All these three have continued with the surveys. Foek continued making photo's and Kris helps me with producing the field sheets and the National Report. In general he is an important support. Apart from Otte and Kris, Rabin Nekrui is now capable of counting independent. It is a pity that he probably will not be able to continue next year.

Claudine Sakimin who participated in the first year has joined the group again.. She now works for the Nature Conservation Division of the government.

RESULTS

The results of the Blue Wing counts were comparable with the first two years and last year in the sense that the peak this year was again in the beginning of March and that we did not see any in October and April. The total numbers of Blue Wing however were much lower than before. The peak this year counted 5400 individuals. Like last year, the Pralala Pan had less Blue Wing than plantation Blijdslust which formerly was part of Walapa kreek (former zone 4b). It again had the highest numbers for this year. In the beginning of March we counted 3000 Blue Wing there. The BW left earlier than the previous years. The numbers were very low in the last survey of March. This was also the case in the east of Venezuela.

We may interpret the data in the following sense. Until far in January Blue Wings keep coming from the North. The birds which migrate in November and December do not stay long but go further south. By the end of January, these birds start to return to Suriname but do not move on further North. By mid March, the birds start moving to the north. By end March all have left. It is also possible, that they start moving north in the beginning of March and that the turnover is high.

ENCOUNTERED PROBLEMS

We still have not been able to estimate the amount of open water and floating and emergent vegetation in the wetlands. There are simply too many lagoons and the area's are too large and too different to accomplish this task. We also cannot provide good maps of the wetlands, because they are not available. The plant Ecologist Pieter Teunissen flew once with us to look at this problem. His advice was: use satellite photo's. We have been able to get a few for free, but were not yet able to look at them.

PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

If sufficient funds are available we will continue in the same way as this year, with 5 surveys, the extra one in the beginning of March, because then we can expect the peak. We have not been able to purchase head-phones and recorders, because we did not have enough funds. We esteem it important to purchase these (preferable 5 of each, but two would be a great help already).

Kris and I will see how we can tackle the problem of zone Bigi Pan. How we can choose a fixed transect there. Maybe skip a large part of the zone Totness.? We could decide to fly only halfway this zone and then fly to zone Bigi Pan having the possibilities to observe large numbers of black-bellies.