

# NATIONAL REPORT DUCK COUNTS SURINAME

JUNE 2005

## THE WETLANDS

### Introduction

This year we monitored only the three most important wetlands: Pralala Pan, Blijdslust and Bigi Pan. We did not survey the zone Totness- Nickery because we never saw Blue Wings in that zone and so we could concentrate more on the difficult zone Bigi Pan. We managed to define fixed flight routes for all future surveys. However, this could not be done for the Bigi Pan zone because of the complexity of the wetlands there.

We knew the area well and were flying for a long time more or less the same route, but now this has been fixed in GPS coordinates. See the map (separate file) and the coordinates in 'Bigi Pan'

### 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 *Nymphaea 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, situated 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. Last year, the sea rooted up the mangrove trees at the seaside over the length of more than 50 meter creating an open connection of the lagoon with the sea. Now, at high tide sea water is entering freely in the lagoon. Fishermen have been seen fishing in the lagoon, although fishing in nature reserves is not allowed. The possibilities for illegal hunting have increased. This year the opening did not appear to have become bigger. Comparison of a map of 1960 to a recent satellite photo shows that the Pralala Pan did not exist in 1960. That area was a mudflat. Since 1960 accretion took place there with extension of the mangrove forest to the west and a little bit to the north. The last 10 to 5 years it seems that erosion has started to take

place again, and if this continues for a long period, the lagoon may disappear again which is not hoped.

### **Zone Totness-Nickerie**

This zone is the narrow strip along the coast 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 satellite photo (separate file) shows the area. In the west the actual Bigi Pan can be seen, after which the Multiple Use Management Area has been named. The flight route drawn on the is the route we more or less always have been flying. The following coordinates describe the route, which we will follow from now on and which is almost identical with the one on the map. After having count in the Pralala Pan, we will fly straight to **P1**: 5°55'0" N - 56°38'34" W, and further to **P2**: 5°55'40" N - 56°41'0" W, **P3**: 5°57'0" N - 56°42'0" W, **P4**: 5°57'0" N - 56°48'0" W, **P5**: 5°56'85" N - 56°49'21" W. The last point is in the actual Bigi Pan and not far from '11' on the satellite photo. From there we will fly as is shown on the photo but more over the edge of the lagoon. Back at point 11 the count is finished and we will then fly straight to the Wageningen airstrip for a break.

The Bigi Pan lagoon within zone 'Bigi Pan' is a large open water lagoon 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 small 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 4 participants at a time. Participants of last year who have continued counting were Kris Mohadin, Foek Chin Joe, Chequita Bikhi, Rawien, Adjai, Claudine Sakimin and Otte Ottema.

Foek was a great help in recording the flight route for the Bigi Pan using his GPS, and Kris helped with producing the field sheets and the National Report. In general he is an important support. Rabin Nekrui is no longer my assistant in the Bird Section. He is now working full time in the Brownsberg Nature Park. He can only help when he is urgently needed, that is if Kris or me is not available.

## **RESULTS**

We were able to execute 5 surveys in the three selected wetlands, Bigi Pan, Pralala Pan and Blijdslust: the four obliged ones and the extra count in the beginning of March, because this is usually the peak of the Blue Wing in Suriname. The October survey has been combined with a shorebird survey carried out for and paid by the Nature Conservation Division of LBB, so saving the flight costs for DU. It was the intention to purchase head-phones with the money saved in this way. However, this has not been realized yet.

The results of the Blue Wing counts were extraordinary low, with the peak in January.

Last year, the number of Blue Wing was already lower than ever before. In the peak period this year in January, 1800 Blue Wings have been counted in total (1500 alone in the Pralala Pan), while the number in most years was more than 10000 individuals in the beginning of March. This year in the beginning of March, we counted 350 Blue Wing in the Pralala Pan, none in the Bigi Pan and none in Blijdslust. End of March we had 200 Blue Wings in the Bigi Pan, 85 in Blijdslust and none in the Pralala Pan. In April and October we did not observe any Blue Wing as usual. Internet contact revealed that the numbers in Latin America were normal. I did not hear anything from our closest neighbors, but some Blue Wings have been observed in the winter in the neighborhood of Vancouver where the temperature was 15° C. However it was not clear to me that that was unusually high. If that is true, then it could explain our low numbers. The Blue Wing left earlier than the previous years and did not go so far south.

## **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 areas are too large and too different in type to accomplish this task. We also cannot provide good maps of the wetlands, because they are not available. Ecologist Pieter Teunissen flew once with us to look at this problem. His advice was to use satellite photos. We have been able to obtain a few for free, but the scale of those is too small to see enough details..

### **PLANS FOR NEXT SEASON**

If sufficient funds are available we will continue in the same way as this season with 5 surveys, the extra one in the beginning of March, because then we can expect the peak. From now on we will fly along a fixed route over the Bigi Pan zone. We have not been able to purchase the head-phones yet, but we have the funds now. Hopefully we can do this before the beginning of next season.