

NATIONAL REPORT DUCK COUNTS SURINAME

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THE WETLANDS

Introduction

This year we monitored only the two most important wetlands: Pralala Pan and Blijdslust using the criterium that only wetlands with a peak higher than 1000 Blue Wing should be monitored. When we, during the extra survey in the beginning of March, did not find any Blue Wing in Blijdslust we decided to fly over zone Matapica and found the Blue Wing there. Therefore we include zone Matapica in the last three surveys. See Results for discussion.

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. Two years ago, 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. Since then, 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 for.

Zone Matapica

The former zones 3a and 4a are combined in the zone Matapica. It has not been surveyed since we stopped surveying the whole coastal area, because we seldom saw any significant numbers of Blue Wing there. It is situated behind the Atlantic coast from “Braamspunt” 5°58’ N & 55°09’ W to “Motkreek” 5°58’ N & 54°48’ W.

There are many shallow and very brackish lagoons, some of them covered only with *Rupia maritima* and some also with *Nymphaea ampla*. There are also some open lagoons. Some lagoons are surrounded by young or mature mangrove trees.

PARTICIPANTS

Almost all surveys have been executed with 4 participants at a time. All Participants of last year continued counting this year. They were Kris Mohadin, Foek Chin Joe, Chequita Bikhi, Rawien Jairam, Adjai, Claudine Sakimin and Otte Ottema.

Kris helped with producing the field sheets and with the National Report. In general he is an important support. Otte Ottema was not able to count in most of the surveys because of other commitments. He has been replaced by Rabin Nekrui. Kris has been coordinating the surveys this year. Apart from Kris and Otte, Rabin is the only assistant up to now who is able to do reliable counts. However, looking at his results of his counts this year we have some doubts about his motivation. There are lots of more problems with him which I prefer not to mention here. We are considering not to use him anymore for the counts. Foek Chin Joe might be able to count reliable next year.

RESULTS

We were able to execute 5 surveys in the three selected wetlands, Pralala Pan, Bijdslust and Matapica (this zone only the last 3 surveys): 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. Through the help of air company Gum Air we finally have been able to purchase 3 headphones and 4 intercom connections which have been used on all the surveys. They have proved to be a very useful tool. We have been considering to purchase 5 headphones with 6 intercoms, but decided not to do this because of budgetary reasons. Now 3 counters can talk with each other and the pilot. The results made everybody happy.

The results of the Blue Wing counts were very disappointing. They were extraordinary low, as last year, but with the peak in the beginning of March like usual and not in January as last year. In the peak period 1600 Blue Wings have been counted in total (1100 alone in the zone Matapica), while the number in the first years of the project reached more than 10000 individuals in the beginning of March.

The reason for the low numbers in the Pralala Pan may be the open connection with the ocean, which must have changed the salinity of the water and allowed fisherman to

enter the lagoon. This year was a la Ninja year. In Suriname we are having an unusual high rainfall causing an exceptional rise of the water level in the lagoons which are not connected to the sea , and as result a lower water salinity. This may be the explanation for the fact that no Blue Wings have been encountered in Blijdslust during the last 3 surveys, while the numbers in the zone Matapika were relative high. Most of these Blue Wings were situated in the neighbourhood of Blijdslust but more closely to the sea.

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 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 photo's. 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 including the extra one in the beginning of March, because then we can expect the peak. And we will count the same three selected wetlands as this year, namely Pralala Pan, Blijdslust and Matapica.