

Population trends for coastal migratory waterbirds in the East Atlantic Flyway: A new initiative for monitoring in coastal West Africa



Marc van Roomen^{1,2}, Geoffroy Citegetse³, Abdoulaye Ndiaye⁴, Tim Dodman¹, Barend van Gemerdens⁵ & Gerold Lürßen^{1,6}

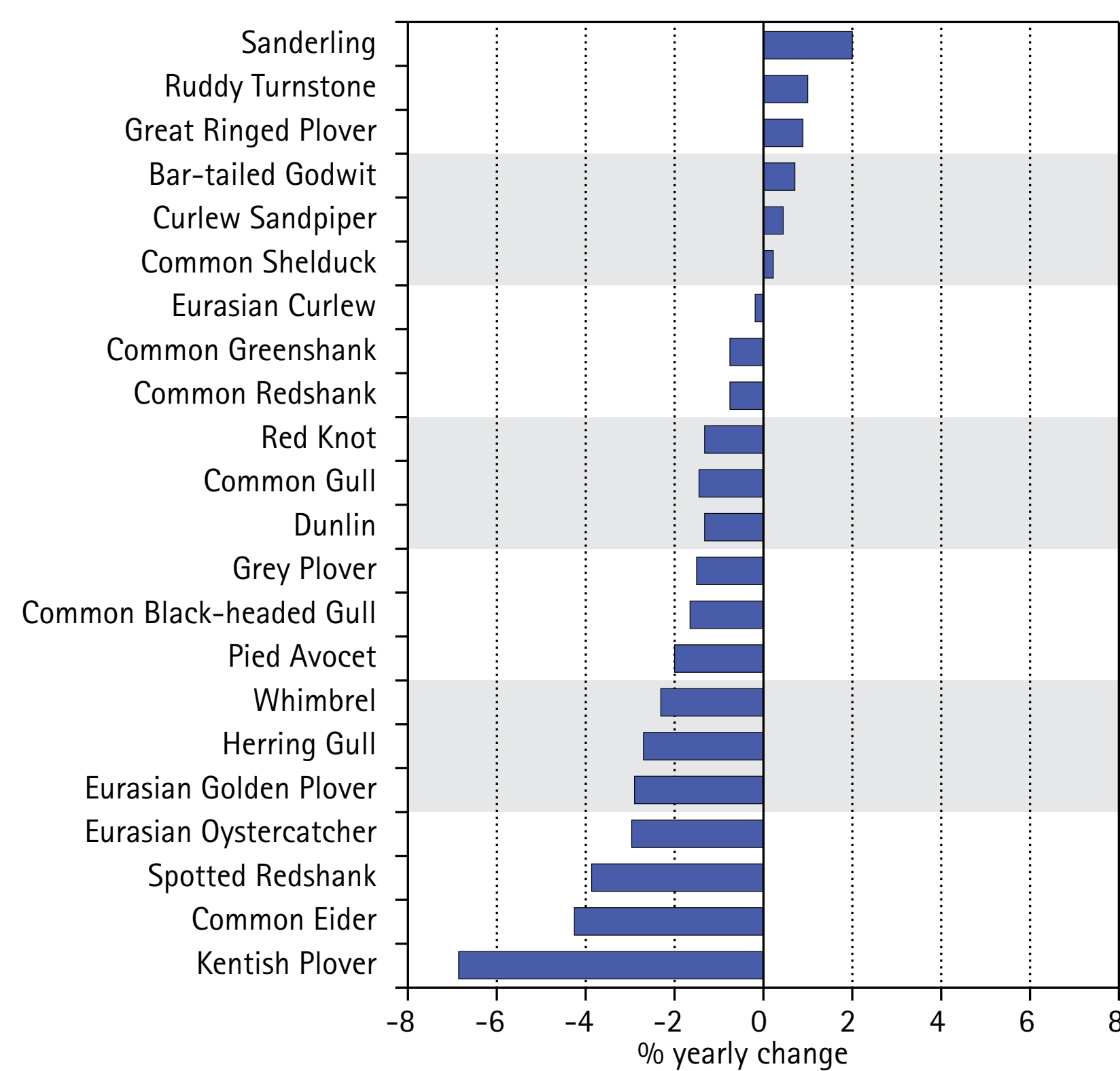
At least 12 million waterbirds use the East-Atlantic Flyway and migrate yearly between the Arctic, Europe and Africa. The majority of these birds rely for their survival on a limited number of key sites in coastal areas, such as the Wadden Sea in Europe and the Banc d'Arguin and Archipelago dos Bijagòs in West Africa. The pressure on these sites – and therefore on the birds – is increasing. Reliable population estimates and trends are needed to guide conservation action, both at the site level and for the flyway as a whole.

As part of a broader initiative to strengthen the conservation of migratory waterbirds, the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative and the Conservation of Migratory Birds project are improving the monitoring of waterbirds in especially the coastal zone of West Africa.



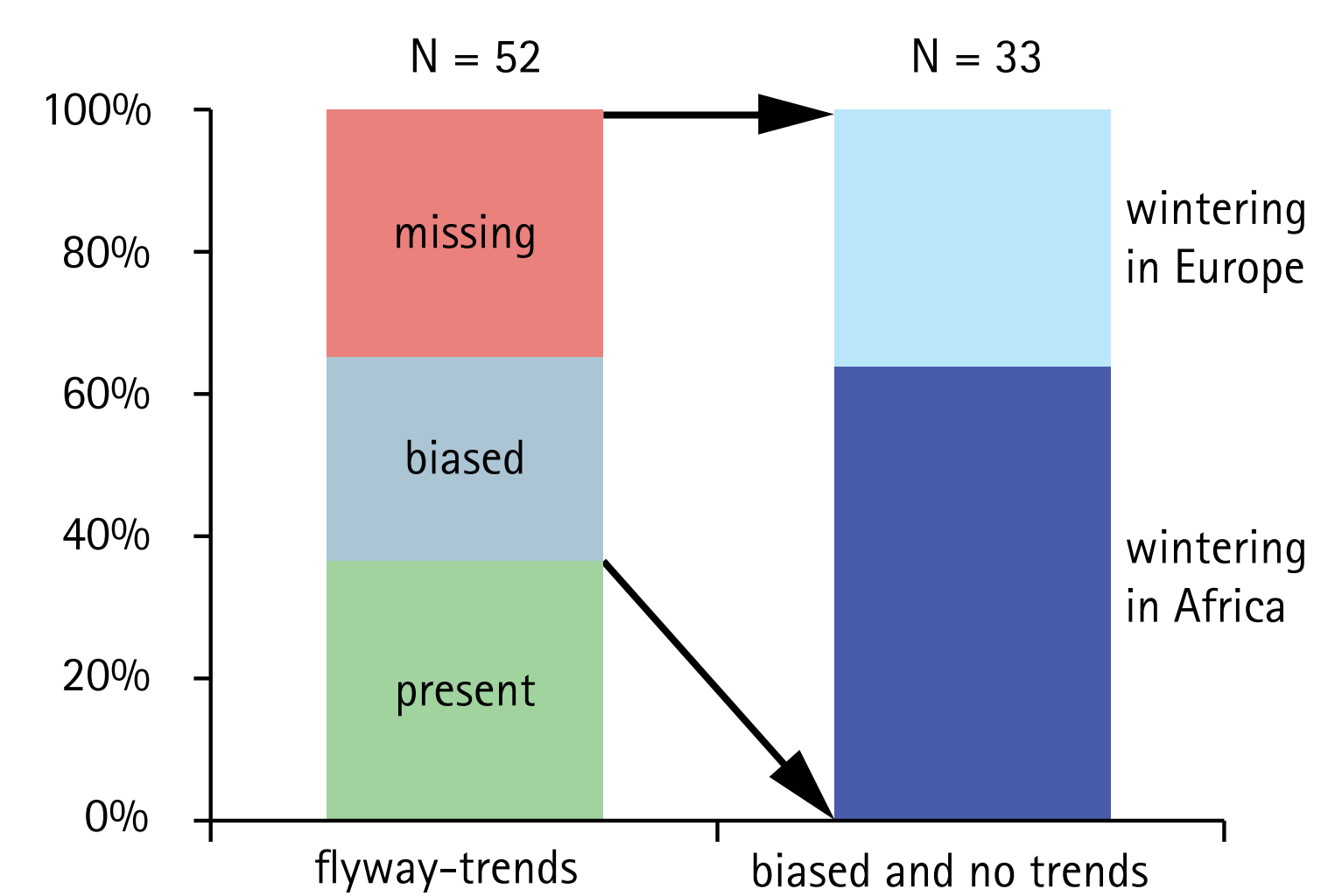
East-Atlantic Flyway by G.C. Boere & T. Piersma, 2012

Many key species in decline



The results of long-term monitoring in the Wadden Sea indicate a strong decline in 70% of the populations of migratory waterbirds depending on tidal mudflats. It is not clear to what extent these declines are related to specific conditions in the Wadden Sea or are caused by conditions in other parts of the flyway.

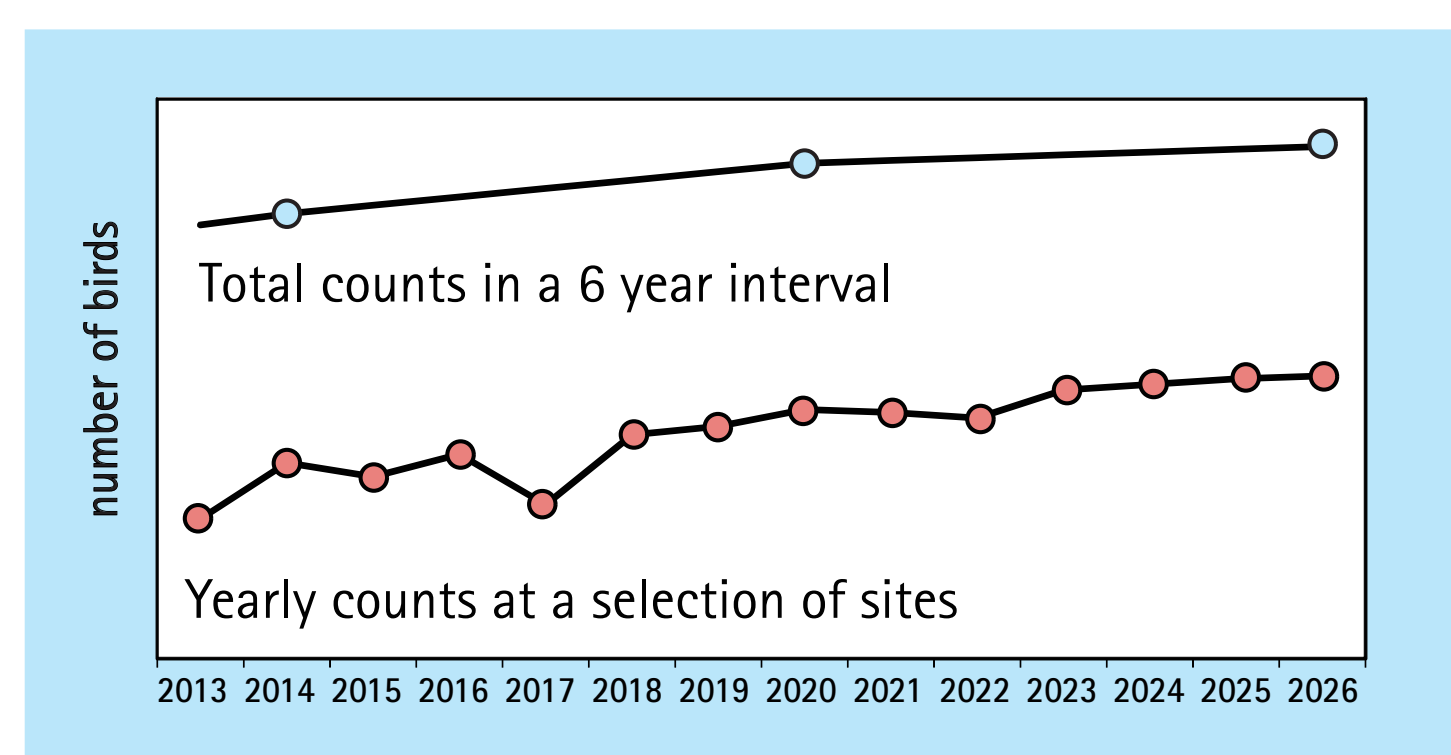
Current monitoring not enough



Monitoring data from the whole flyway is needed for targeted conservation action. Good flyway trends are only available for 35% of the 52 key species. Increased monitoring in especially West Africa would greatly improve the situation. A further need is to collect data on reproduction and survival. These drivers of population change and its interactions with pressures will increase our understanding of the most important bottlenecks.

Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI) & Conservation of Migratory Birds (CMB) project

Monitoring strategy in coastal West Africa

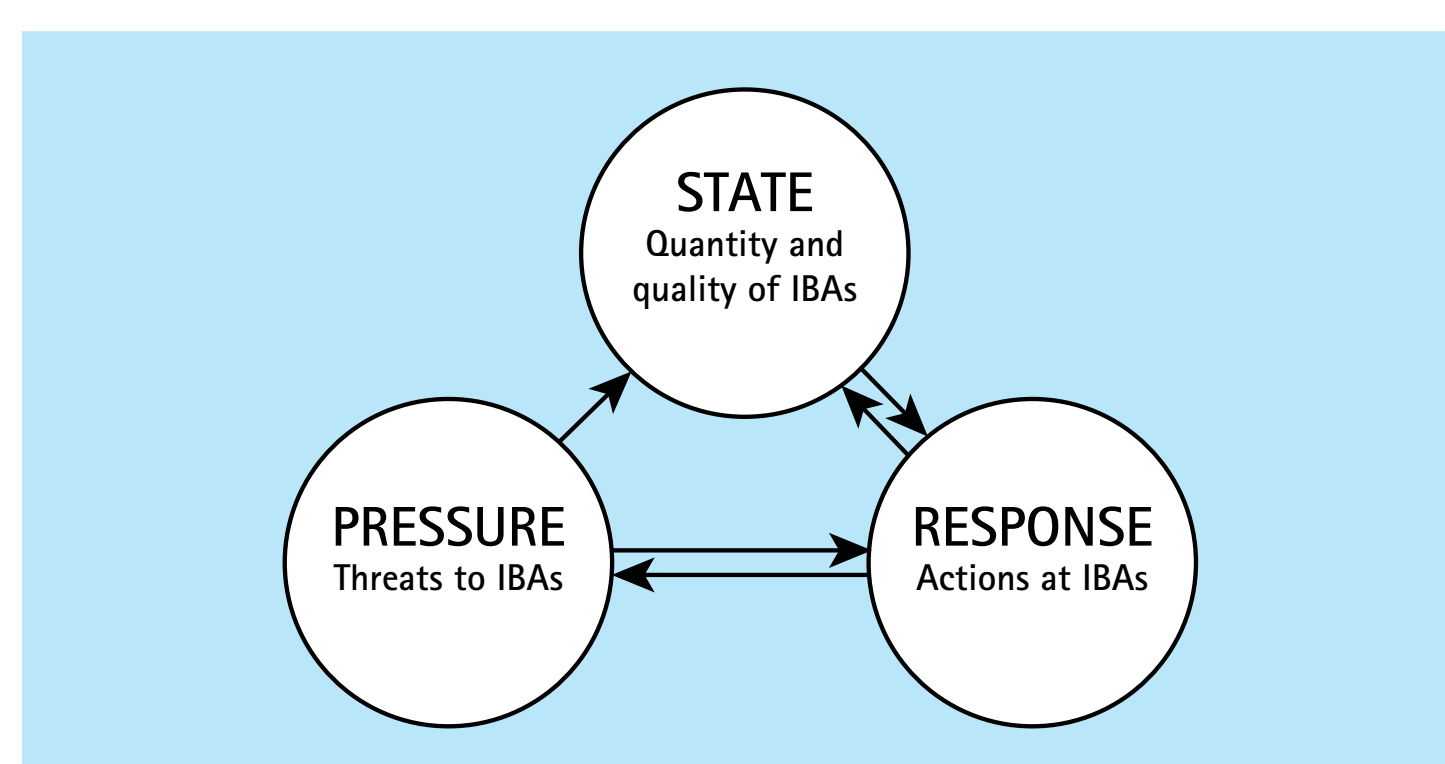


A monitoring strategy for coastal West Africa has been developed. It consists of yearly counts at a selection of sites and total count of all key sites once in six years. Counting in January has the first priority followed by July and other months enabling the inclusion of the data in the International Waterbird Census of Wetlands International.

The counts of a selection of sites will start in January 2013, the first total count under this initiative will be organized in January 2014.

Monitoring pressure and response

It is also important that information is collected on the threats that sites (or birds) are exposed to. In addition, it is important to know whether appropriate conservation actions are in place to counter these threats. These indicators allow a better understanding of the causes of detected population trends and are instrumental to designing conservation strategies. The monitoring methodology of status, pressure and response developed by BirdLife International will be used in the monitoring in West Africa, and elsewhere along the flyway.



Monitoring reproduction and survival

vital rate monitoring

- breeding studies
- juvenile proportions
- ring recoveries
- mark-resight studies

reproduction

survival

population models

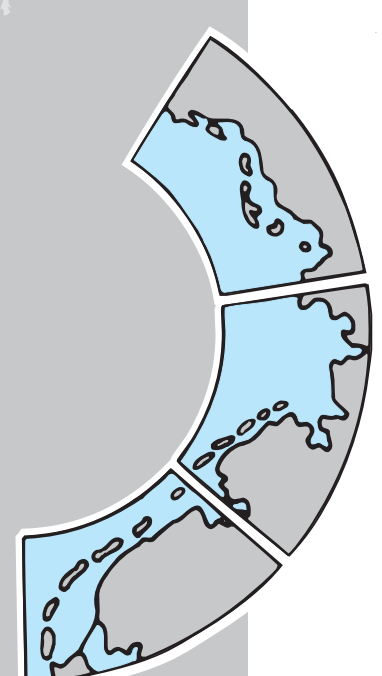
population size & trend

By studying reproduction and survival for key species, the drivers of population trends can be analysed. It will help to identify which stages of the life cycle are currently the most problematic. In combination with the registration of pressures and environmental factors, this will help to identify the drivers of population trends and distinguish between natural and human induced causes.

The current initiative aims to bring together all research projects to ensure that the results are widely shared and their implications applied to conservation and management.

Collaboration is needed

The monitoring is initially organized in Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Cape Verde. But we hope that other countries along the East-Atlantic Flyway will join as well. The ambition is to stimulate a truly East-Atlantic Flyway-scale cooperation for waterbird monitoring. Anyone interested in more information about this exciting initiative can contact us at the addresses below.



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Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative
Common Wadden Sea Secretariat
Gerold Lürßen
luerssen@waddensea-secretariat.org

Conservation of Migratory Birds project
BirdLife International and Wetlands International
Geoffroy Citegetse
Geoffroy.Citegetse@birdlife.org

1 Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative, 2 SOVON Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology, 3 BirdLife International, 4 Wetlands International, 5 Vogelbescherming Nederland, 6 Common Wadden Sea Secretariat