

SHORT NEWS

Lesser White-fronted Goose exhibition

In autumn 1999, the Finnish Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) Life Project arranged a large exhibition concerning LWfG, ranging from scientific research to conservation actions world wide. The exhibition, consisting of 13 large posters in English and Finnish was arranged in Inari in northern Finnish Lapland, in the Sami Museum *Siida* from 15 November, 1999 until 15 January, 2000.

The posters depicted identification of LWfG and the ecology of the species in the breeding grounds and at the migration staging places. A central subject was the different actions of the LWfG project. The spring migration route from Greece via Hungary, Estonia and the Finnish Bothnian Bay to breeding areas in Lapland and Finnmark was presented by an own poster, as well as the autumn migration route from Lapland and Finnmark via the Kanin

Peninsula and Kazakstan to wintering areas somewhere in the Caspian Sea – Black Sea region.

The breeding, from the egg-laying and incubation period to the fledging of goslings and a description of the breeding areas were presented as were also the monitoring work along the migrating routes and in the breeding areas. Other posters described catching of geese by cannon nets at a staging ground, catching of LWfG during moulting for ringing and satellite transmitter tagging, expeditions to Siberia, Kazakstan and China, farming of captive LWfG and genetic studies.

The posters, including c. 75 pictures, were supplemented by a set of 50 slides, a short video film, a recording of LWfG voices and examples of field equipment like satellite transmitters, colour rings and a cannon net.

The exhibition was visited by c. 3000 persons from altogether 26 different countries.

The exhibition (posters) is designed to

be transportable, and it will be circulated first in Finland and later also in other countries: contact Maarit Kyöstilä, Siida / Northern Lapland Visitor Centre, FIN-99870 Inari, Finland, e-mail: maarit.kyostila@metsa.fi

Internet pages based on the exhibition can be viewed at <http://www.metsa.fi/natural/projects/lwfg/index.htm> (in English) and at <http://www.metsa.fi/luo/projektit/kiljuh/index.htm> (in Finnish).

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Lesser White-fronted Goose protected in Turkmenia

The State Committee for Environmental Protection of Russia organised a conference concerning the strategy of use and conservation of Russian wetlands in the period 24-26 February, 1999 in Moscow. During the conference, the protection of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) within the Russian Federation and also in other neighbouring countries was discussed between the nature conservation authorities and scientists. A Turkmenian scientist asked for contribution to compile an appeal to Turkmenian authorities concerning the protection of the LWfG in Turkmenia. According to him, LWfG was added to the Red Data Book of Turkmenia on 21 June, 1999. This is the first step in protection of the LWfG in Turkmenia.

Turkmenia has formerly been, and could possibly still be an important wintering ground for the LWfG. This was also indicated by the International Waterbird Census (IWC) last spring, when Eldar A. Rustamov observed 43 LWfG at Krasnovodsk Gulf (39°42'–40°02'N, 52°53'–53°32'E) in the period 15-18 March, 1999, and further 395 LWfG somewhat more east at Balkhan Gulf (39°49'–40°02'N, 53°32'–53°50'E) in the period 19–20 March, 1999.

Juha Markkola

New information about wintering Lesser White-fronted Geese in Uzbekistan

In spring 1999, a study titled "Review on Anatidae species and their key sites in Uzbekistan" was published in Uzbekistan by Kreuzberg-Mukhina et al. In this review, lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) is said to be wintering and also regularly hunted in the Surkhandarya region, along the upper stretches of River Amudarya (37°14'N, 67°47' E), in the bordering areas between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and close to the border of Tadjikistan. LWfG is proposed to be included in the Appendix of the Red Data Book of Threatened Animals of Uzbekistan (Asimov 1996) as a rare migrant for which hunting and trapping should be forbidden.

According to the review, the proportion of LWfG in hunting bags of geese during winter in the area indicate a rough estimate of 2000–4000 wintering LWfG. This incur that Uzbekistan could be one of the most

important wintering places for LWfG along the European-Siberian-Caspian flyway by now. However, one needs to keep in mind (as shown e.g. in Kazakstan; see Tolvanen et al. 2000, pp. 43–50 in this report) that the statistics of the hunting bags can be unreliable, as White-fronted Geese (*A. albifrons*) are commonly erroneously identified as LWfG.

Original text of the review (English slightly revised) is as follows:

"Lesser White-fronted Goose - Anser erythropus. Status: For this species there is only one reliable old finding known (April, 1944) in the lower parts of the Amudarya river. Data on migration and wintering is practically missing (Kashkarov 1987), but in Surkhandarya region (high parts of Amudarya, near Termez), flocks of LWfG are wintering regularly. In 1990, the proportion of LWfG in the hunting bag was evaluated to be c. 20-30%. The Lesser White-fronted Goose is present in c.20 % of goose flocks, mainly consisting of Greylag Geese (Anser anser). In Chardara water reservoir LWfG has been hunted occasionally during the last years. LWfG commonly occur in flocks of 8-10 birds (Nazarov unpubl.).

Conservation status: This species is suggested to be included in the Appendix of the Red Data Book of Threatened Animals of Uzbekistan (Asimov 1996) as rare migrant. Hunting and trapping should be forbidden".

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Elena Kreuzberg-Mukhina & Juha Markkola

Status of the awareness campaign for the Lesser White-fronted Goose

Introduction

The awareness campaign for the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) was implemented in the autumn 1998. The basic need is to increase the knowledge and raise awareness on the species' situation among management authorities, and especially, hunters in the countries hosting staging or wintering populations of the species (Kostadinova et al. 1999). The campaign was initiated by the Norwegian Ornithological Society (NOF) and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) has been responsible for the production of the information material on the ecology, occurrence and identification of LWfG (posters and stickers). This material was produced during 1998 and 1999 in order to be distributed in villages, among groups of hunters and in local/regional administration offices.

The aims of the campaign have been to: Raise awareness among hunters, and try to move the hunting pressure away from the LWfG to a sustainable hunting on the more numerous goose species, e.g. Greylag Goose (*A. anser*) and White-fronted Goose (*A. albifrons*).

Status of the Awareness campaign

The preparation work on the production of information material (poster/sticker) was carried out in 1998 and 1999. During 1999 altogether 11,740 posters and 23,800 stickers are produced in eight different languages/versions. The printed material describes the ecology, occurrence and identification of LWfG in the languages of seven key countries where the LWfG is threatened by hunting - Kazakstan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Russia. For Kazakstan, which possess spring and autumn gathering sites of major importance for both the Fennoscandian and the western Siberian populations of LWfG, both a Russian and a Kazak language version is produced. In addition, we made an English version of the information material for general information and international promotion of the LWfG conservation work.

The printed material is now distributed to the contact persons in all countries except for Azerbaijan (due to technical problems), but during the first part of 2000 the material will be sent to our contact in Azerbaijan. At present the material is being distributed among hunters and local



Photo. During the Lesser White-fronted Goose surveys in northern Kazakhstan, posters and stickers were distributed widely among hunters and general public in October 1999; here is the Kazakh language version of the sticker. © Petteri Tolvanen, 1999

people in key staging areas as well as in the breeding areas in Russia. In Bulgaria, the material was already spread in all areas where LWfG occur in June 1999, and the posters was exposed in visiting places for Eco-tourists as well as in villages in north-east Bulgaria where the hunting pressure on geese is high.

In Kazakhstan, the material was spread during October 1999. This was carried out in close co-operation with the Naurzum State Nature Reserve in the Kustanay area, and the Kurgaldshinski State Nature Reserve in the Astana area. Meetings were held with the national management authorities in Astana. Parallel with the distribution of the material, a comprehensive survey of the occurrence of LWfG was carried out in the Lake Tengiz and the Kustanay area (see Tolvanen et al. 2000, pp 43–50 in this report). Data on the species and age ratios of mixed goose flocks, distribution, behaviour and area use of LWfG in these areas was carried out in order to provide basic knowledge to the management authorities for future conservation efforts. According to the progress plan, the awareness project is fulfilled. However, further national distribution and practical use of the material in the conservation work for LWfG will continue in the future.

In near future the awareness campaign should be extended to the main wintering areas in China, the East Dongting Lake area. The importance of this area for the world population of LWfG, and the poisoning of

LWfG even in the core area of the Nature Reserve (see Markkola et al. 2000, pp 9–15 in this report), makes it the highest priority target area for the awareness campaign.

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Ingar Jostein Øien, Irina Kostadinova & Tomas Aarvak

New Lesser White-Fronted Goose data from Lithuania

A questionnaire about the situation for the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) together with some basic information about the species has been sent to countries along the migration routes of the LWfG by the Finnish LWfG Life project. The target organisations are ministries responsible for nature conservation and hunting as well as governmental and non-governmental hunting and conservation organisations in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Albania, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Also Russia, Kazakhstan and Greece will be contacted, but in a different way, because these countries are already involved in international conservation efforts for the LWfG and have some own national conservation initiatives.

One of the most interesting answers to the questionnaire was received from Lithuania. At present, after the protection of LWfG in Romania, Lithuania is the only country in Europe, where the LWfG is not officially protected.

LWfG protected by 2001?

Surprisingly, the Red Data Book of Lithuania contains only rare and endangered animal, plant and fungi species that grow and reproduce within the territory of Lithuania. The species registered only on migration, as is the case of LWfG, are not included in the Red Data Book. On the other hand, LWfG is neither included in the list of wild animal species that are allowed to be exploited (including hunting, catching) in Lithuania (Order of the Minister of Environment No. 249, approved 11 December, 1998). However, this does not have any effect, because there is no penalty foreseen for killed LWfG. On the list of penalties for illegally killed animals (Resolution of the Government of the Rep. of Lithuania No. 1276, 19 December, 1994) only the following text is included: "wild geese (Bean or White-

fronted), the Barnacle Goose – penalty 70 LT" (1 LT=c.0.25 USD). This matter is administered by Biodiversity Division and Nature Resources Division of Nature Protection Department in the Ministry of Environment.

Luckily, the situation will probably change quite soon, because Lithuania is a candidate member of the EU and will carry into effect the EU Birds Directive, where the LWfG is included in Annex I of strictly protected species. An approximation project on EU Habitats and Birds Directives in Lithuania started in September 1999 and will be completed by 2001.

Updated information about the occurrence of the LWfG in Lithuania

The Nature Resources Division of the Ministry of Environment possess statistics only on shot wild geese in general, without separating different species. Ms. J. Urbelionyte from the Nature Resources Division provided statistics of shot geese, except the species included in the Red Data Book. The hunting bag was not very big, 222 geese during the hunting period 1 October – 1 December, 1997 and 60 geese in the period 1 October – 1 December, 1998.

A summary of the occurrence of the LWfG in Lithuania was presented in 1996 by Svazas (1996). A more updated and more comprehensive article was published by Svazas et al. (1997). In these articles, the authors concluded that the staging areas of the LWfG are insufficiently investigated and that LWfG are probably frequently overlooked in large flocks of other goose species. However, until the 1960's, large flocks were sometimes observed: e.g. flocks up to 600–800 LWfG in coastal areas, especially at Kurshiu Lagoon and Nemunas River Delta (55°18'N, 21°20'E) (Valkevicius 1967 cited in Svazas 1996).

According to Svazas et al. (1997), LWfG has been characterised as a very rare and irregular migrant in most published articles, with only single birds or small flocks recorded (Ivanauskas 1959 and Valius 1980 according to Svazas et al. 1997, Logminas 1990). Recent findings, however, indicate that LWfG is still an uncommon, but rather frequent migrant in western Lithuania and also inland observations exist.

LWfG flocks have been frequently recorded during recent intensive autumn surveys (Svazas et al. 1997), but only single birds in spring. A flock of 130 staging LWfG was observed in the Nemunas river delta area in late September 1989. In autumn 1992 (late September - early October), 76 staging LWfG stayed in flooded grasslands east of the delta area

and 43 birds were recorded on pastures near the town of Silute E of the delta area. The largest flock of staging LWfG (200–230 birds) was recorded in the Nemunas Delta area in early October 1995, and a flock of 43 LWfG stayed in wet pastures near Silute in late September 1995 (Svazas 1996). Small staging flocks (up to 30 birds) were also recorded in several coastal sites in autumn 1996–1997.

For the inland areas, Mr. V.Nedzinskas (cited in Logminas 1990) mentions that single birds or small staging groups of LWfG were almost annually recorded in Zuvintas Lake strict nature reserve in 1966–1986, but other ornithologists e.g. Mr. A. Pranaitis have stated that there are no reliable records of LWfG in southern Lithuania for the last 15 years. However, several single birds or small groups of LWfG have been recorded in certain inland sites during recent years. Larger flocks (up to 107 birds) were observed in the Raseiniai district in autumn 1994 and 1997 (Svazas et al. 1997). A single bird stayed 17–19 May, 1985 at the fish ponds in Kietaviskes, Kaisiadorys district (Preiksa & Raudonikis 1998). Furthermore, a flock of 22 birds was seen in Kauno Marios reservoir, Kaunas district on 2 April, 1997 (Preiksa & Raudonikis 1998).

There are only two real wintering observations of the LWfG in Lithuania: in January–February 1980 one young individual wintered in Vilnius town in a pond (Preiksa & Raudonikis 1998), and one wintering bird was observed in 1982 (Idzelis & Grazulevicius 1987 cited in Svazas 1996).

Conservation status of LWfG staging places in Lithuania and suggestions to intensify protection

According to Svazas et al. (1997), several Lithuanian LWfG staging sites are located in protected territories: Zuvintas strict nature reserve (cf. comment above), Nemunas Delta Regional Park. However, the most important staging areas in Silute and Raseiniai districts are not protected and are threatened by possible change of these habitats into agricultural land.

The list of needed activities for conservation of the LWfG in Lithuania is quite long, but well argued:

1. include the LWfG in the Red Data Book of Lithuania
2. improve public awareness especially among hunters (identification of LWfG among White-fronted Geese)
3. set high penalties for killed LWfG
4. to prohibit goose hunting in September–October in the goose staging areas located in Nemunas Delta Regional Park and other important areas near Silute town and in the Raseiniai district

5. carry out supplementary surveys at important or potential staging sites of the LWfG
6. restrict human exploitation of the staging areas near Silute town and Raseiniai district
7. carry out habitat management in order to avoid overgrowing with shrubs and trees

It is obvious that at least a part of the observed LWfG belong to the Fennoscandian breeding population and visit Lithuania on their way to Hungary and Greece (see Lorentsen et al. 1998) and back. Implementation of LWfG protection in Lithuania is of the highest importance.

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Darius Stoncius & Juha Markkola



Photo. A pair of Lesser White-fronted Geese at the Valdak Marshes, Norway. © Ingar Jostein Øien, May 1999

SHORT NEWS

Observations of Lesser White-fronted Geese in central Europe in autumn 1999

During goose surveys at well known staging places for geese in Hungary, Austria and eastern Germany in October and November 1999, Lesser White-fronted Geese (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) were observed at seven different sites. In Hungary, the fish ponds in Hortobagy and Biharugra are well known as stopover sites for the Fennoscandian wild population of LWfG. Also the birds observed in eastern Germany and Austria most probably belong to the Fennoscandian

Table 1. Observations of Lesser White-fronted Geese in Central Europe in autumn 1999.

Date	Locality	Country	Number	Comment
26 Oct	Soponya Fishponds	Hungary	2 ad	unringed
27 Oct	Halastó, Hortobagy	Hungary	36	flying to roost
29 Oct	Biharugra Fishponds	Hungary	16	leaving roost
30 Oct	Sükösd, Gemerc	Hungary	2 ad	unringed
7-8 Nov	Larye Lake (Neusiedler See)	Austria	6	at the roost
14 Nov	Schwedt/Oder	Germany	1 ad	at feeding area
18-19 Nov	Neolithheid, Köthen	Germany (Sachsen Anhalt)	28	at the roost

unmanipulated population. It is interesting to notice that 28 LWfG were observed in eastern Germany in mid-November, when 36 LWfG had been observed further south in Hungary already three weeks before. This may indicate that the Fennoscandian LWfG migrate in several bouts on the central European migration route, and even though the LWfG gosling production in Fennoscandia seemed to be low in 1999, the number of LWfG using this route was

quite high (at least if, as assumed, the birds at Biharugra and Hortobagy were not the same birds). Altogether at least 84 individuals were observed.

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New wintering area for Lesser White-fronted Geese in Crimea Peninsula, Ukraine

Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) is not previously described as a wintering species in Crimea. In recent years a marked increase in the number of geese wintering in the Crimea Peninsula has been observed. Among the common goose species, which numbers several hundred thousand individuals, LWfG have been observed in total numbers up to 1000 individuals. Some of the LWfG have been observed mixed in flocks of Red-breasted Geese (*Branta ruficollis*). In these new wintering grounds for geese, several circumstances are unfavourable. The economical situation for local people is aggravating, which incur an unregulated hunting on the geese, including LWfG. There is reason to be worried about the situation for the wintering geese in this area in general, because the goose flocks are now intensively hunted. The situation for LWfG is especially worrying, as local people have no knowledge about the critical conservation status of the species. Since wintering of geese is a new phenomenon in Crimea, no management traditions exist that might regulate hunting. The need for implementing conservation measures are therefore urgent in this area.

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Photo. A pair of Lesser White-fronted Geese at the Valdak Marshes, northern Norway in May 1999. It is unknown whether the Fennoscandian LWfG migrate through Ukraine or not. © Ingar Jostein Øien, May 1999