

The status of Lesser White-fronted Goose in the Kola Peninsula, north-western Russia

Esko Aikio¹, Sami Timonen², Natalia Ripatti³ & Erkki Kellomäki³

¹ A 777, Korrettoja, 99800 Ivalo, FINLAND, e-mail: esko.aikio@samediggi.inet.fi

² Kosteperäntäkatu 2 B 12 K, 90100 Oulu, FINLAND, e-mail: sami.timonen@vyh.fi

³ Regional Environmental Agency of Häme, P.O. Box 131, FIN-13010 Hämeenlinna, FINLAND, e-mails: natalia.ripatti@vyh.fi, erkki.kellomaki@vyh.fi

1. Introduction

The recent status of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*, later LWfG) in the Kola Peninsula in north-western Russia is unclear. According to the scientific literature published in 1990's there is only scattered data about the breeding and migration of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula.

In this article we try to summarise the available knowledge about LWfG in this region, especially during the breeding season, and try to estimate the status of it. The summary is not a complete one, and it is based on the material published in some Russian journals, hand books and questionnaires to Russian scientists (V. Zimin, K. Litvin, A. Giljazov, V. Bianki).

Very little information exists about the breeding population of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula. In the beginning of the 20th century, LWfG was said to be regular during migration in the region of Aynovy Islands (Heinäsaaret) (Figure 1). In the pictorial bird book of Heinäsaaret made by the Finnish ornithologist Einari Merikallio (1939), there is a note (in Finnish): "the goose species is hard to determine because of the shyness of the birds, but it seems that LWfG is the commonest one visiting Heinäsaaret, it might also have bred here (according to a monk, whose information I could not confirm). LWfG are seen mostly in pairs or most usually in small flocks (less than ten birds) at least in the early summer, but also in August 1928. In midsummer I have not observed them. The harvest time may frighten them away. The hay makers have told that the geese have sometimes wandered all around in the hayfields which indicates that some goose species have at that time spent their time here in big numbers".

The breeding of several pairs of LWfG has been confirmed in the larger island of Heinäsaaret at least in 1949 (Dementiev & Gladkov 1967). In addition, according to Tugarinov (1941), "...the northern limit of breeding distribution of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula has reached seaside only rarely, while it is a very common bird on inland peninsula, also on the mountainous lakes".

In the White Sea region, in northern Russian Karelia, the southern limit of the breeding distribution of LWfG has reached the Nuorunen hill in Paanajärvi National Park in Kuusamo district, c. 60° N. On 24 July, 1937, a female LWfG with four goslings has been caught on a lake in mountainous tundra zone of the Nuorunen hill (Suomalainen 1952). According to an assumption by Dr. V. Zimin, LWfG probably was a breeding species even in Karelia at the beginning of the last century. At present, this area is included in the territory of Paanajärvi National Park. In this area there has been carried out research of the bird fauna from the end of the 1980's to the beginning of the 1990's by Dr. Sergey Sazonov from the Karelian Research Centre RAS, but LWfG have not been observed. Later on, Dr. Vladimir Zimin and two Finnish ornithologists, Mr. Esa Lammi and Mr. Ilkka Heiskanen have visited the Nuorunen hill in July, 1998. During their visit no LWfG or any faeces of the species were observed (Zimin 1998).

Since the 1930's, a systematic scientific research of flora and fauna has been carried out in the Laplandsky Strict Nature Reserve (Zapovednik) (Figure 1) in the westernmost part of the Kola Peninsula, but breeding pairs or goslings of LWfG have not been observed in this area in the years 1930–1998 (A. Giljazov, pers. comm). There has been only some observations of LWfG: 25 May, 1937, one pair was seen at Tsuna River, and in autumn 1939 one juvenile was found at the Lake Ekostrovskaya Imandra (possibly on

migration) (Figure 1). Later on, there has been only two observations of LWfG in the Laplandsky Strict Nature Reserve in the breeding period: on 27 June, 1969 three geese in a bog area in Lake Rumel and a pair flying at Lake Tsuno on 25 May, 1982 (Semenov-Tjansanski & Giljazov 1991).

Many observations of LWfG have been made in the highland between the Rivers Teriberka and Mutska (Figure 1) (Kitshinski 1960). Mikhailov (1992) considers LWfG to be a rare species in this area. According to the latest publications (Bianki et al. 1993), LWfG is regarded as a rare breeding species on the islands and in the coastal zone of the Barents Sea in the western and northern parts of the Kola Peninsula. In this area LWfG is estimated as a scarce breeder with a frequency of breeding only 1–3 times in 10 years.

In the region of the Pasvik Nature Reserve in the Paz River (Paatsjoki) valley, during the field work of Dr. Bianki from 1991 to 1996, LWfG was not observed (Bianki 1997). For the first time, in 1996, in the region of Yaniskoski (Jäniskoski), a Russian ornithologist Dr. Bakkal (Institute of Zoology, RAS, St. Petersburg) investigated the territory on the eastern side of Paz River, south of the Pasvik Nature Reserve. According to the results of this survey, LWfG was very rare in this area or was missing totally.

The main breeding area of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula is said to be in the inland mountain areas of the north-eastern parts of the peninsula. Bianki et al. (1993) mention that LWfG breeds most frequently in the area between the Yokanga and Ponoy rivers (Figure 1). Here, as in the Kanin Peninsula, the breeding frequency has been estimated at 8–10 times in 10 years, but the breeding density is estimated similar to the western and northern parts of the Kola Peninsula (Bianki et al. 1993). Bianki et al. (1993) also present data from four nests measured by the Tundra Station, but the exact locations of the nests are not mentioned. LWfG is commonly seen in the area during spring and autumn migration, but no moult migration has been observed (Bianki et al. 1993).

2. What is the present distribution of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula?

In the years 1976–1981, the breeding bird fauna of the north-eastern Kola Peninsula was extensively surveyed, and at least one flying LWfG was seen in the Yokanga River. On the other hand, in the same article there is a note that LWfG breeds regularly in the areas near River Yokanga and Lake Enozero (Mikhailov 1993). In the same area, Mr. Ilppo Kangas from Finland found two LWfG flocks consisted of 18 and 22 individuals (part of them probably juveniles) in early September, 1997 (I. Kangas, pers. comm.). In addition, in September 1999, I. Kangas (pers. comm.) observed a flock of 17 ind. and a brood of two adults and two juveniles in an area near Lake Maksim (c. 80 km NNW of Lake Enozero). In the summer 1999, another brood of 5 birds (probably 2 ad and 3 juv) was reported by another Finnish observer in the pine forest zone in the north-eastern parts of the Kola Peninsula (I. Kangas, pers. comm), but the observer of the latter brood (E. Petterson) unfortunately died before he reported the details of his observation.

One breeding LWfG pair was found in 1978 or in 1979 near the mouth of the river Ponoy in a small river valley during extensive surveys carried out within an area of c. 800 km² (Filchagov & Tserenkov 1984). On 31 August, 1992 one LWfG was seen together



Figure 1. Map of the Kola Peninsula. 1 = Teriberka, 2 = Mustka, 3 = Aynovy Islands (Heinäsaaret), 4 = Ekostrovskaja Imandra and 5 = Laplandsky Strict Nature Reserve (Zapovednik).

with Bean Geese in the Chunozero Lake valley (A. Giljazov, pers. comm.).

According to Bianki et al. (1993), LWfG occur during the spring migration along the coastline of the Kola Peninsula, excluding the coastal area south of mouth of the river Ponoy. On the Rybachiy Peninsula (Kalastajasaarento) (Figure 1), LWfG is said to be more numerous than elsewhere in the Kola Peninsula. During the autumn migration the geese are seen in the same areas, more regularly in the area north-west from Yokanga River. According to Bianki et al. (1993), moulting LWfG has been observed only on Kalastajasaarento (6–10 ind./km²), but there are no notes about the regularity of the migration.

3. Discussion

The present status of LWfG on the Kola Peninsula is unclear, especially in the north-eastern and middle parts of the peninsula. People visit this most potential breeding area only very rarely, and thus these remote areas have been undisturbed for a long time (V. Zimin, pers. comm.).

It is clear that more detailed research is needed in this area to reveal the current status of LWfG. It would be important to localise the present breeding and moulting sites of the LWfG population in Kola, which perhaps represents the majority of the genetically and conservationally discrete unit of the Fennoscandian population assumed by geneticists (Ruokonen & Lumme 1999). Surveys would be important also for the knowledge of the local bird fauna and the status of natural habitats in this area. For the field work, helicopter and boat transport is necessary because there are no roads in the area (A. Giljazov, V. Bianki, V. Zimin, pers. comm.).

The human influence is increasing in the north-eastern Kola Peninsula, mainly because of fishing and hunting tourism and mining industry. It is notable and regrettable, that sports hunters from western countries arrange goose hunting trips to the Kola Peninsula at spring time.

4. Acknowledgements

Some data of LWfG in the Kola Peninsula has been received by the conservation co-operation between Finland and Russia within the framework of the Finnish LWfG Life Project. Thanks to Dr. V. Bianki (State Nature Reserve of Kandalaksha), Dr. V. Zimin (Institute of

Zoology, Karelian Research Centre RAS), Dr. A. Giljazov (Laplandsky Biosphere Reserve) and Dr. K. Litvin (Bird Ringing Centre, Russian Academy of Sciences) for giving data of the status of LWfG.

References

- Bianki V. V., Kohanov V. D., Koriakin A. S., Krasnov J. V., Paneva T. D., Tatarinkova I. P., Chemiakin R. G., Shklarevich F. N. & Shutova E. V. 1993:** Ptitsi Kolsko-Belomorskogo Regiona. – *Rus. ornitol. zhurn.* 2(4):491–586. (In Russian)
- Dementiev, G. P. & Gladkov, N. A. (eds.) 1967:** Birds of the Soviet Union. – Vol.7. pp. 342–346.
- Filchagov, A. V. & Tserenkov, A. E. 1984:** Tsislennost vodoplavaytshih ptits na vostotsnom poberezhe Kolskogo polyostrova. – *Ornitologija. M.: MGY, Vyp. 19.* pp. 215–216. (In Russian)
- Kitshinski, A. A. 1960:** Faune i ekologi ptits Teriberskogo rajona Murmanskoi oblast, Tr. Kandalakshkogo gos. zapovednikah. – Murmansk: Kn. izd-vo. Vip. 2. pp. 122–212. (In Russian)
- Merikallio, E. 1936:** Heinäsaarten lintukuvakirja. 198 pp. Helsinki, Otava, 1939. (In Finnish)
- Mikhailov, K. E. 1993:** Avifauna zonalnyh tundr severnoi tsasti Kolskogo polyostrogo. – *Rus. ornitol. zhurn.* 2, 1:7–28. (In Russian)
- Ruokonen, M. & Lumme, J. 1999:** Phylogeography and population genetic structure of the Lesser White-fronted Goose. In: Tolvanen, P., Øien I. J. & Ruokolainen, K. (eds.): Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronted Goose conservation project. Annual report 1998. – WWF Finland Report 10 & Norwegian Ornithological Society, NOF Rapportserie Report no. 1-1999:51–52.
- Semenov-Tjan-Shanski, O. I. & Giljazov, A. S. 1991:** Ptitsi Laplandii. (In Russian)
- Suomalainen, P. 1952:** Havaintoja Oulangan-Paanajärven seudun ja kaakkois-Sallan linnustosta – *Ornis Fennica* 29(3):88–102. (In Finnish)
- Tugarinov, A. J. 1941:** Fauna of the USSR, Ptizi, T1, v.4, M-L.
- Zimin, V. B., Artemiev, A. V. & Lapshin, N. V. 1998:** Raport “Vesennie skopleniya migriruyushih ptis na Olonetskoi ravnine v 1998”. (In Russian)