



AEWA LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE  
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP



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**2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group**

9. - 11. November 2012, Lake Kerkini, Greece

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**REVISION OF THE LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE INTERNATIONAL SINGLE SPECIES ACTION PLAN (Western Palearctic Population)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Western Palearctic population of the Lesser White-fronted Goose was adopted at the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the AEWA Parties in 2008 in Madagascar. The Action Plan foresees that a revision should be carried out five years after its adoption.

Substantial progress in the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose has been made since the adoption of the Action Plan with an increase in the overall implementation of conservation activities for the species. The Committee for Captive Breeding, Reintroduction and Supplementation of Lesser White-fronted Geese in Fennoscandia (RECAP), which functions under the Working Group, has been successful in reaching agreement on several issues previously of contentious nature. Reinforced monitoring efforts across the species' range have also provided new data which has helped to lessen knowledge gaps. However, much still remains to be done. The revised Action Plan will build on the progress made with a strong focus on remaining conservation gaps across the species' migratory range.

The responsibility for updating the International Single Species Action Plan lies with the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group. To kick-off the revision process, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat will facilitate a workshop during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Working Group Meeting. The discussion will focus on the action part of the plan (i.e. chapters 5) Framework for Action, 6) Activities by Result and 7) Implementation), of which a simplified version is attached in Annex I for ease of reference. Other agenda items such as the priority conservation activities for the next inter-sessional period 2013-2014 as well as the discussion on critical sites and a common monitoring scheme will also be reflected in the revised Action Plan.

Based on the discussion at the Working Group Meeting, the Secretariat will provide range states with a first draft of the revised Action Plan in early 2013 for comments. Working Group members are requested to coordinate comments nationally with all relevant government authorities and stakeholders.

Once finalized, the revised Action Plan will be presented to the AEWA Technical Committee and will then be submitted to the AEWA Standing Committee at its 9<sup>th</sup> meeting - set to take place in September 2013 - for preliminary approval. The final adoption of the revised Action Plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose is foreseen to take place at the 6<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the AEWA Parties in 2015.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group is being convened within the framework of the EU LIFE+ project "Safeguarding the Lesser White-fronted Goose along its European Flyway" [LIFE10NAT/GR/638].

**5. FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION – GOAL, PURPOSE AND RESULTS**

*Action Plan Goal and Purpose*

	<b>Objectively Verifiable Indicator</b>	<b>Means of Verification</b>
<p><b>Action Plan GOAL</b> To restore the Lesser White-fronted Goose to a favourable conservation status within the AEWA Agreement Area</p>	<p>Neither of the wild populations in the Agreement Area qualifies as ‘threatened’ according to the IUCN Red List criteria because the Western Main population exceeds 25,000<sup>1</sup> individuals, the Fennoscandian population exceeds 1,000<sup>2</sup> individuals and neither population is declining. Breeding range is stable or expanding. Adequate managed and protected habitat is available at all the key sites along the species’ flyways.</p>	<p>Conservation Status Assessment of Migratory Waterbirds, Wetlands International, and/or Assessments by the International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group established to coordinate implementation of this Action Plan.</p>
<p><b>Action Plan PURPOSE</b> To stop and reverse the current population decline and range contraction.</p>	<p>Neither the Western Main population nor the Fennoscandian population is declining. A 5-year moving average of the finite rate of population increase (<math>\lambda</math>) is above 1.0.</p>	<p>For the westernmost flyway: counts of spring flocks at Matsalu Bay, Estonia, at Porsangerfjord, Norway; counts of spring and autumn flocks at Hortobágy, Hungary. For the main flyway: counts of autumn flocks in Kustanay oblast, Kazakhstan, <i>covering a large-enough area to avoid effects of local fluctuations caused by year-to-year variations in location and extent of suitable roosting/feeding sites.</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> Figure derived from the AEWA Action Plan Table 1. This is necessary for a species not to be listed as Column A species.

<sup>2</sup> Figure derived from the IUCN Red List criterion D for small populations of a species classified ‘globally vulnerable’: D. Population very small or restricted in the form of either of the following (1) Population size estimated to number fewer than 1,000 mature individuals or (2) Population with a very restricted area of occupancy (typically less than 20 km<sup>2</sup>) or number of locations (typically five or fewer) such that it is prone to the effects of human activities or stochastic events within a very short time period in an uncertain future, and is thus capable of becoming Critically Endangered or even Extinct in a very short time period.

### *Action Plan Results*

<b>Result</b>	<b>Objectively Verifiable Indicator</b>	<b>Means of Verification</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
<b>Result 1: Mortality rates are reduced</b>	A 5-year moving average of the number of individuals at regularly monitored spring staging sites	Counts of flocks at Hortobágy/Hungary, at Matsalu Bay/Estonia, at Porsangerfjord/Norway, in the Evros Delta/Greece and in Kustanay oblast/Kazakhstan in spring.	Essential	Medium / long
<b>Result 2: Further habitat loss and degradation is prevented</b>	All Important Bird Areas and other key sites for Lesser White-fronted Goose are protected and managed with the aim of achieving 'Favourable Conservation Status'.	Natura 2000 database up-dated with monitoring data.  National government reports to the European Commission, CMS, CBD, AEW, Ramsar Convention and Bern Convention.  Periodic independent assessments to be carried out by national BirdLife partners as part of their IBA Monitoring Programme.	High	Long
<b>Result 3: Reproductive success is maximised</b>	Five-year running mean of juveniles reaches 25-30% for both Fennoscandian and Western main populations.	Counts of autumn flocks at Matsalu Bay, Estonia and north-west Kazakhstan in October.	Medium	Long

<p><b>Result 4: No introgression of DNA from other goose species into the wild population occurs as a result of further releases and DNA introgression from already released birds from captive breeding programmes is minimised</b></p>	<p>Any future release of captive-bred birds involves only individuals reared from wild-caught stock.</p> <p>Apparent hybrid geese are removed from existing free-flying introduced flock, subject to findings of a feasibility study.</p>	<p>National reports from governments.</p> <p>Reports from International Working Group (and captive-breeding sub-group).</p> <p>Papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.</p> <p>Review and evaluation of existing studies on the species' genetics is conducted by independent scientific expert.</p> <p>Long-term future of all captive breeding programmes is reviewed by a specialist Sub-group of the International Working Group.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Short</p>
<p><b>Result 5: Key knowledge gaps filled</b></p>	<p>Knowledge gaps filled by 2015</p>	<p>Monitoring &amp; expedition reports Papers published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.</p>	<p>Essential</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p><b>Result 6: International cooperation maximised</b></p>	<p>All Lesser White-fronted Goose Range States are parties to the key international conservation agreements.</p> <p>The International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group (and sub-group on captive breeding, supplementation and reintroduction) is established and operating effectively.</p> <p>National Action Plans, based on this SSAP, are established, implemented and progress shared with other Range States via the International Working Group.</p>	<p>Status of Contracting Party lists issued by relevant agreements.</p> <p>Progress reports by the AEWA Secretariat.</p> <p>Reports and assessments issued by the International Working Group (once established)</p>	<p>Essential</p>	<p>Short / Ongoing</p>

## 6. ACTIVITIES BY RESULT

### *National activities by Range States required to deliver each Action Plan Result*

Result	National activities and applicable Principal Range States	Implementation Responsibility
<b>Result 1: Mortality rates reduced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure by 2010 that, in principle, hunting legislation affords adequate protection to Lesser White-fronted Goose (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated for enforcement of hunting legislation and that these resources are deployed to control hunting effectively (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are allocated for identifying the traditional flyway and stop-over sites, and making that flyway safe for the geese (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• By 2010, ban goose hunting at all key sites for Lesser White-fronted Goose (as listed in Annex 3 to this Action Plan) during the period when Lesser White-fronted Geese are usually present, given the difficulty of reliably distinguishing goose species in flight (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• By 2010 establish no hunting zones (covering both roosting and feeding sites) at all Lesser White-fronted Goose IBAs, SPAs and Ramsar sites (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Plant lure crops to direct Lesser White-fronted Goose away from areas where hunting pressure is known to be high and towards refuge zones (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Redirect hunting from adults to juveniles in areas where Greater and Lesser White-fronted Geese occur together away from key sites (<b>Russia, Kazakhstan</b>).</li> <li>• Implement obligatory training as outlined by the Hunting Charter of the Bern Convention (Nov 2007) for hunters particularly in Eastern European countries (signatories to the Bern Convention, European Commission);</li> <li>• Carry out an information campaign to engage local and European hunting organisations and nature protection NGOs (Norway, EU member states)</li> <li>• Upgrade level of protection from illegal hunting within existing protected areas through training and improved enforcement (European Commission, <b>ALL</b>)</li> </ul>	Column to be completed by Range States
<b>Result 2: Further habitat loss and degradation is prevented</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all key sites for Lesser White-fronted Goose (breeding, staging and wintering) are afforded appropriate protected area status at national and international levels, including classification as Special Protection Areas in EU Member States (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Ensure that all key sites for Lesser White-fronted Goose have a management plan that: (a) addresses the conservation requirements of Lesser White-fronted Goose and (b) is resourced, implemented, monitored and periodically updated (<b>ALL</b>);</li> <li>• Monitor habitat quality in the breeding range to ensure that any anthropogenic pressures, including the potential impacts of climate change, are identified as early as possible (<b>Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden</b>);</li> <li>• Take measures to restore and/or rehabilitate Lesser White-fronted Goose roosting and feeding habitat in the staging and/or wintering range (<b>ALL</b>).</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Result 3: Reproductive success is maximised</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid infrastructure development and other sources of human disturbance, including recreation/tourism liable to have an adverse impact on the known core breeding areas (<b>Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden</b>);</li> <li>• Take measures to avoid overgrazing and nest trampling if/where this is known to be a problem (<b>Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden</b>);</li> <li>• Take measures, where feasible, to minimise predation, where this is shown to be a significant limiting factor (Finland, <b>Norway, Russia, Sweden</b>);</li> <li>• Take measures to eliminate waterbird hunting on the breeding grounds (<b>Russia, Norway</b>) and in all staging areas close to the breeding grounds (<b>Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden</b>).</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Result 4: No introgression of DNA from other goose species into the wild population occurs as a result of further releases and introgression from already released birds from captive breeding programmes is minimised</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a special website to serve as a ‘clearing house’ for information on this issue.</li> <li>• Ensure that any future release of captive-bred birds involves only individuals reared from wild-caught stock.</li> <li>• Remove any apparent hybrid geese from the existing free-flying introduced flock, subject to findings of a feasibility study (<b>Sweden</b>).</li> <li>• Conduct a review and evaluation of existing studies of Lesser White-fronted Goose genetics; to be carried out by an independent, appropriately experienced scientific expert or group of experts (specialist Sub-group of the International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group).</li> <li>• Review long-term future of all captive breeding programmes (specialist Sub-group of the International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group).</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Result 5: Key knowledge gaps filled</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate sources of possible financial support for further conservation-oriented research;</li> <li>• Use a combination of satellite tracking and field surveys to locate the key breeding grounds for the bulk of the Western main population;</li> <li>• Assess the hunting pressure at key sites;</li> <li>• Use a combination of satellite tracking and field surveys to locate the key breeding, staging and wintering sites for the Fennoscandian population;</li> <li>• Conduct a Population Viability Assessment (PVA) for the remaining wild Fennoscandian population;</li> <li>• Use a combination of satellite tracking and field surveys to locate the key staging and wintering grounds for the bulk of the Central Asian population;</li> <li>• Undertake further field surveys of suitable breeding habitat and staging areas on the Kola Peninsula to update the estimate for the Fennoscandian subpopulation;</li> <li>• Establish an effective network of coordinated counts in the wintering grounds (or main staging areas if wintering areas are not known), to monitor overall population trends as accurately as possible;</li> <li>• Evaluate spatial use patterns at the habitat level to identify areas where hunting directly threatens Lesser White-fronted Geese and to direct local conservation efforts (e.g. planting of 'lure' crops) to hunting-free refuges and corridors;</li> <li>• Continue to refine genetic knowledge and the techniques deployed for genetic assessments;</li> <li>• Develop a strategy for genetic management of the species both in the wild and in captivity based on previous agreements such as the 2007 AEWA negotiation mission and findings of the CMS Scientific Council in 2005;</li> <li>• Assess the current status of key sites for Lesser White-fronted Goose with regard to the species' ecological requirements, taking into account protected area status, habitat quality, conservation management and active threats.</li> <li>• Increase knowledge of breeding site fidelity for males and females and exchange with other populations;</li> <li>• Undertake studies on predation by the White-tailed Eagle;</li> <li>• Investigate the importance of small mammal cycles on reproduction of the Lesser White-fronted Goose.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Result 6: International cooperation maximised</b></p>	<p>Achieving this result requires action (as of May 2008<sup>3</sup>) by the following Range States:</p> <p><b>AEWA:</b> Azerbaijan, Estonia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkey, Turkmenistan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>CMS:</b> Azerbaijan, Iraq, Russian Federation, Turkey, Turkmenistan</li> <li>• <b>Bern Convention:</b> Russian Federation</li> <li>• <b>CBD:</b> Iraq</li> <li>• <b>Ramsar Convention:</b> Turkmenistan is planning to join in October 2008</li> </ul>	

<sup>3</sup> Derived from lists of parties posted on the websites of the relevant Treaty Secretariats in May 2008.

## 7. IMPLEMENTATION

### Principles of implementation

- An International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group shall be established.
- The main priority for the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose is the conservation of the wild populations breeding in Fennoscandia and Russia.
- The EU, including all its Member States and candidate countries, shall continue to treat this species with a high degree of concern, in particular by ensuring prompt compliance with EU Directives and the rulings of the European Court of Justice from all EU member states.
- The efficiency of conservation measures is to be assessed by the International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group.
- Implementation and future modification of this International Single Species Action Plan – and all related decisions – shall be undertaken with transparency and accountability so that progress can be subject to scientific scrutiny at any time.
- Each Range State shall consider support for ‘on-the-ground’ conservation measures, particularly along the Lesser White-fronted Goose flyway(s) that traverse(s) its territory.
- Particular attention shall be paid to mortality due to hunting and urgent targeted measures shall be implemented to reduce the magnitude of this threat, the success of which shall be promptly and regularly reviewed and evaluated.
- Supplementing wild populations with captive-bred birds shall be considered if other conservation measures are not as quickly efficient as needed and should populations continue to decline. As with any other captive breeding, reintroduction or supplementation initiatives this project will be subject to consideration and advice by the Committee for captive breeding, reintroduction and supplementation of Lesser White-fronted Geese in Fennoscandia (see below).
- The timeframe for the implementation of the plan is 5 years from the date of formal adoption. After 5 years the SSAP should be updated and an evaluation of the conservation results should be carried out.

### Immediate steps required:

- Explicit endorsement by Range States of this International Single Species Action Plan;
- Establishment of the International Lesser White-fronted Goose Working Group referred to above;
- Establishment of a Sub-group dedicated to the issues of captive breeding, reintroduction and supplementing of wild populations in Fennoscandia;
- Establishment of a national Lesser White-fronted Goose taskforce (or similar group) in each Range State;
- Establishment and resourcing of the position of ‘Lesser White-fronted Goose Single Species Action Plan Co-ordinator’ within the AEWa Secretariat;
- Coordinated reporting and information sharing through the International Working Group and/or the AEWa Secretariat, as appropriate;
- Preparation of a National Action Plan for each Range State, in co-operation with the International Working Group and relevant National Taskforce, and based on this International Single Species Action Plan (see *AEWA Conservation Guidelines No. 1*);
- Implementation of National Action Plans, including through allocation of adequate and appropriate resources;
- Maintaining and further developing research and monitoring programmes for supporting and assessing implementation of the International Single Species Action Plan.