

## Questions to the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group concerning the definition of the Swedish Lesser White-fronted Goose population

### INTRODUCTION

The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat is approaching the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group for guidance on the basis of a recommendation from the AEWA Technical Committee concerning an issue related to the conservation of the globally threatened Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*).

The issue in need of expert clarification concerns the definition of the small Swedish Lesser White-fronted Goose population which was supplemented/reintroduced in the early 1980s. Following a request submitted by Sweden to the AEWA Technical Committee in September 2011 (see Annex I) to amend certain text in the current Species Action Plan, the AEWA Technical Committee recommended that clarification on the definition issue should be sought from the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group. This advice is to be taken into account during the next revision of the Action Plan which will be launched in November 2012 and is to be completed in early 2013. The AEWA Technical Committee recommendation is attached as Annex II.

Following the rapid decline of the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Europe, Sweden embarked upon a captive-breeding programme in the late 1970s. The captive-bred young were imprinted on and released with Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*) foster parents. During migration the released Lesser White-fronted Geese followed the Barnacle Geese down to their wintering grounds in the Netherlands, thus creating a modified flyway for the Lesser White-fronted Geese and avoiding countries where the main threat of hunting was and partly still is imminent. A small remnant of the 'wild' Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronted Goose sub-population still breeds in northern Norway (numbering an estimated 80 individuals). The global Lesser White-fronted Goose population is currently estimated at 28.000-33.000 individuals.

The discovery of observations from the time of the first releases of captive bred Lesser White-fronted Geese for re-introduction in Swedish Lapland, which indicate that a small number of wild Fennoscandian birds were still present in the general area of release, raises the question of whether the conservation project in fact should be described as a 'supplementation' instead of a 're-introduction'. As a compromise between the Nordic Range States when drafting the AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose (adopted in 2008), the Swedish population is currently referred to as supplemented/reintroduced.

The current conservation efforts for the species are very much focused on the remaining 'wild' Lesser White-fronted Goose populations. This also forms the basis of the AEWA Single Species Action Plan ([http://www.unep-aewa.org/activities/working\\_groups/lwfg/lwfg\\_ssap\\_130109.pdf](http://www.unep-aewa.org/activities/working_groups/lwfg/lwfg_ssap_130109.pdf)). Hence the definition or (re-definition) of the Swedish population can potentially have major effects on conservation policies.

Assisted by the AEWA Technical Committee, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat has prepared four specific questions concerning this delicate issue, on which we hope to receive guidance from the IUCN Reintroduction Specialist Group.

### QUESTIONS FOR CLARIFICATION

1. For a conservation project releasing captive bred stock into the wild to be described a 're-enforcement/supplementation', is it a requirement that the released individuals mix with an existing wild population?
2. Can a [waterbird] conservation project which was originally carried out as a re-introduction (release of captive bred individuals into the wild using foster parents of a different species), later

be formally described as a 'supplementation' on the basis of the discovery of old data indicating that a small number of birds from the former wild population still existed in the general area where the release took place?

3. Can a migratory waterbird population which uses a human-modified flyway partially lying outside of its known historical range be defined as 'supplemented' or even 're-introduced'?
4. What would be the most correct description of such a population which ensued by releasing captive bred young with foster parents from a different species, which then may or may not accidentally have come across remnants of the wild population and which now uses a human modified migration route, most parts of which lie outside the species' historical range?