



AEWA LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP



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4th Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group

11-13 November 2019 – Bucharest, Romania

CRITICAL SITES FOR THE LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

Update of Critical Site List

At the 3rd Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group in 2016, the Working Group updated the list of sites critical for the conservation of the Fennoscandian and Western main populations of the species, originally established at the 2nd Working Group meeting in 2012.

The criteria adopted for the selection of the critical sites were as follows:

- sites critical for the conservation and recovery of the Lesser White-fronted Goose, which;
- are also important for other migratory geese and waterbirds.

This list of critical sites needs to be reviewed by the Working Group again – particularly in light of new monitoring and satellite-tracking data - and amended as necessary (see Annex I).

Selection of priority sites for conservation action 2020-2023

Whilst recognizing that all of the identified critical sites are important, the Working Group also agreed in 2016 on a selection of sites deemed particularly vulnerable and in need of urgent conservation measures to be prioritized during the following inter-sessional period.

Subsequently, during 2016-2019, internationally coordinated and funded activities were implemented in seven of the nine sites/areas prioritized - in addition to ongoing national conservation efforts. Detailed descriptions of the implemented activities can be found in the various reports published under the framework of the Working Group report series.

The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Kizil Agach State Nature Reserve, AZERBAIJAN: No internationally coordinated activities were implemented in Azerbaijan during the inter-sessional period due to lack of in-country capacity and resources. Although satellite-tracking data indicates that geese are increasingly moving directly to the Araz Water Reservoir on the border with Iran during autumn migration, Azerbaijan remains a critical country for the Western main population and surveys to assess the current situation are urgently needed at various sites, including Kizil Agach and Aggol National Park. Efforts have recently been made by the AEWA Secretariat to address the in-country capacity gap as well as to re-establish contact with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, which should ease the implementation of on the ground action going forward.



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The 4th Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group is being hosted by the Romanian Ministry of the Environment and organized in cooperation with the Red-breasted Goose EU LIFE Project "LIFE for Safe Flight" coordinated by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), with additional funding provided by the Governments of Norway and Finland.



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- Evros Delta, GREECE: In addition to continued management measures carried out by the Evros Delta Management Authority in collaboration with stakeholders, a number of activities – mainly linked to diminishing the threat of illegal killing – were implemented at the Evros Delta within the framework of the EU LIFE project for the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose coordinated by BirdLife Greece which ended in 2017. Although the main Fennoscandian flock has increasingly frequented nearby Lake Kerkini during winter in recent years, the Evros Delta remains critical as it currently serves as the only additional available wintering site for the population. Habitat management measures to restore overgrown riverbeds and flooded areas are recommended to better cater for the requirements of the species.
- Araz Water Reservoir, IRAN/AZERBAIJAN: Further international expeditions as well as local surveys carried out since 2016 have further confirmed the Araz Water Reservoir on the border between Iran and Azerbaijan to be the single most important known wintering site for the Western main population at present. Additional surveys are suggested to better understand the migration and turnover of birds between Azerbaijan, Iran and staging/wintering areas further south in Iran and Iraq. In addition, work must continue to ensure the long-term protection and management of the site on both sides of the border, including engagement with the local communities. As part of the follow-up surveys it is suggested to include the Ghareh Gheshlagh Wetland and other areas south of the Araz Water Reservoir in Iran in the priority list, as illegal hunting of Lesser White-fronted Geese is regularly reported from these areas.
- IRAQ: No internationally coordinated activities were implemented in Iraq, mainly due to uncertainties regarding local partners and the security situation. Regular contacts exist, however, through the Lesser White-fronted Goose monitoring network. Satellite-tracking data shows that eastern parts of the country remain important and efforts urgently need to be stepped up during 2020-2023 to organize a full-scale survey for Lesser White-fronted Geese including a prioritization of sites, threat assessment etc. followed by conservation action, as appropriate.
- KAZAKHSTAN/RUSSIA (numerous lakes listed): Kazakhstan and the bordering areas in southern Russia remain critical for both the Fennoscandian and Western main populations. An international large-scale expedition to assess the status of the Western main population was carried out in autumn 2016 and is set to be repeated in autumn 2020 in collaboration with the ongoing EU LIFE Red-breasted Goose project. Follow-up work with the hunting community is urgently needed to increase the protection of Lesser White-fronted Geese on autumn migration. A 2017 survey to assess the motivations behind the illegal killing of Lesser White-fronted Geese showed that a large proportion of hunters were unaware of the protected status of the species. Going forward, the relevant areas in southern Russia - Lake Zhetykol in particular – are also recommended to be targeted specifically, as little is known about the exact number of geese frequenting the lakes or about the hunting pressure and habitat availability at these sites.
- Ob River Valley, RUSSIA: The Ob River Valley remains crucial for both the Fennoscandian and Western main populations. Going forward, additional work is needed to understand which next steps should be undertaken with regards to increasing the protection of the species during moult and subsequent autumn migration.
- Talimardzhan Water Reservoir, TURKMENISTAN/UZBEKISTAN: Repeated expeditions carried out in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan during 2017-2019 failed to identify significantly large numbers of Lesser White-fronted Geese at any sites during autumn and winter migration – including in the foreseen target areas of the Talimardzhan Water Reservoir in Uzbekistan and the relevant border areas in Turkmenistan. This site is therefore proposed to be removed from the priority list 2020-2023, pending new relevant data from satellite-tracking efforts further confirmed by on-sight observations of Lesser White-fronted Geese. The Amudarya floodplains near Termez in Uzbekistan were, however, assessed to potentially be a very important site for the species. Unfortunately, due to its location in the immediate vicinity of the Afghan border the area is very difficult to survey, requiring permits also for Uzbek nationals due to military restrictions.

Based on the outcomes of the implemented projects summarized above as well as additional monitoring and satellite-tracking data, the following sites/range states are suggested to be prioritized for conservation action during 2020-2023:

Range state	Site	Pop.	Proposed activity
Azerbaijan	Kizil Agach State Reserve	WM	Survey to determine the current status of the site in terms of LWfG occurrence and habitat suitability and threats. Increase in-country monitoring capacity. Implement conservation measures based on outcomes. Potentially include in cross-border project.
Azerbaijan	Aggöl National Park	WM	Survey to determine the current status of the site in terms of LWfG occurrence and habitat suitability. Increase in-country monitoring capacity. Implement conservation measures based on outcomes. Potentially include in cross-border project.
Greece	Evros delta	F	Continuation of activities against illegal killing. Habitat management measures to restore overgrown riverbeds and flooded areas.
Iran / Azerbaijan	Araz water reservoir/Nakchivan	WM	Ensure the long-term protection and management of the site on both sides of the border, including engagement with the local communities/capacity-building. Survey on migration and turnover of birds between Azerbaijan, Iran and staging/wintering areas further south in Iran and Iraq. Potentially include in cross-border project.
Iran	Ghareh Gheshlagh Wetland and other areas south from Araz	WM	Survey to assess the occurrence of LWfG in the area as well as threats (illegal killing, drought etc). Potentially include in cross-border project.
Iraq	full scale survey and prioritization of sites	WM	Survey to assess the occurrence of LWfG in Eastern Iraq. Prioritization of sites, threat assessment etc. followed by conservation action, as appropriate. Potentially include in cross-border project.
Kazakhstan / Russia	Lakes Kolykol, Taldykol, Ayke and smaller lake systems up to Lisakovsk, Kamysty district in the Kostanay region - combined with Lake Zhetykol in Aktyubinsk Oblast in Russia	F & WM	Survey to assess the status of the Western main population in 2020. Follow-up work with the hunting community. Target areas in southern Russia - Lake Zhetykol in particular – specifically, to determine LWfG occurrence as well as hunting pressure and habitat availability.
Kazakhstan	Koybagar-Tyuntyugur lakes system, Karasu district in the Kostanay region	F & WM	Survey to assess the status of the Western main population in 2020. Follow-up work with the hunting community.
Kazakhstan	Zhylandy and Balykty in Akkayin district, Northern Kazakhstan region	F & WM	Survey to assess the status of the Western main population in 2020. Follow-up work with the hunting community.
Russia	Ob River Valley (Lower Ob, several sites including moulting site on the coast which is not yet protected)	F & WM	Planning and implementation of next steps to increase the protection of the species during moult and subsequent autumn migration. Assess need to push for protection of additional areas within the Ob River Valley complex.
Poland	Biebrza Basin	F	Ensure regular monitoring of the site. Assessment of habitat suitability, potential threats etc. and implementation of appropriate conservation measures following assessment.
Estonia	Käinä Bay	F	A new, very important spring staging site of the Fennoscandian population, revealed in spring 2018. It is supposed that the LWfG have switched from the traditional spring staging sites

			on mainland Estonia to this site. Ensure regular monitoring. Assessment of habitat suitability, potential threats etc. and implementation of appropriate conservation measures following assessment.
Uzbekistan	Amudarya floodplains near Termez	WM	Survey to assess the occurrence of LWfG in the area during winter. Initial survey to be carried out locally, due to restrictions on movements of foreigners. Follow-up action, including international survey if significant LWfG numbers located.

Although not recommended to be prioritized for urgent conservation action in the list above, it is suggested that monitoring and evaluations be carried out at the Hortobágy National Park in Hungary as well as the previously traditional spring staging sites in Estonia (Matsalu Bay region and Noarootsi Peninsula) to determine why the importance of these classic areas have markedly decreased, in order to further inform the conservation of other critical sites. In the Hortobágy National Park in Hungary, also intensified habitat management actions are recommended to better cater for the requirements of the species.

Action requested from the Working Group

- Review the attached list of selected critical sites (Annex I) and amend it as appropriate, possibly also adding and/or removing sites based on new available monitoring and satellite-tracking information;
- Select and agree on a shortlist of critical sites along the flyways in need of urgent conservation action during the next inter-sessional period and/or in need of urgent monitoring to assess their importance for the species.

Annex I - List of Critical Sites for the Lesser White-fronted Goose (as of November 2019)

COUNTRY	SITE	SEASON	POPULATION	CURRENT ESTIMATE
Azerbaijan	Gizil Agach State Reserve (Golden Tree)	winter	WM	50-410
	Aggol National Park	winter	WM	33-230
	Arraz Water Reserve (Nachevan)	winter	WM	100
Bulgaria	Shabla Lake Complex	winter	F/WM	5-20
	Durankulak Lake	winter	F/WM	5-20
Estonia	Matsalu Bay region	spring staging	F	30-50
	Noarootsi Peninsula (and Silma Nature Reserve)	spring staging	F	30-50
	Käina Bay	spring staging	F	110
Finland	Oulu region wetlands (especially Säärenperä)	spring staging	F	100-130
Germany	-	-	-	-
Greece	Evros delta	winter & passage	F	54-75
	Lake Kerkini	winter & passage	F	35-69
Hungary	Hortobágy	winter & passage	F	22-82
Iran	Miankaleh Peninsula and Gorgan Bay	winter	WM	5--20
	Bujagh National Park	winter	WM	<5
	Aras River and Dam	winter	WM	>1000
Iraq	-	-	-	-
Kazakhstan	Kulykol-Taldykol Lake System	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Koybagar-Tyntyugur Lake System	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Bolshoy Kak Lake	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Kazakh Zharkol, Kostanay province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Russian Zharkol, Kostanay province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Shagly-Teniz Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Alva Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Kamyshlovo Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Zhaltyr Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Balykty Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Aksuat Lake, North Kazakhstan province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Shalkar-Karashatau LAke, Aktobe province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Shalkar Lake, Aktobe province	passage	WM/F	>1000
	Zharsor, Kostanay (51.36440; 62.81942)	passage	WM/F	>1000
Aikya, Aktubinskaya (50.92418; 61.58656)	passage	WM/F	>1000	
Lithuania	Nemunas Delta, Klaipėda	spring migration	F	<10
Norway	Inner part of Porsanger fjord (includes Valda Marshes)	non-breeding	F	60-90 ind.
	Sirbma, Tana municipality, Finnmark county	spring migration	F	1--10
	Kvænangsbotn, Troms county	spring staging	F	1--10
	lesjav'ri, Finnmark county	breeding	F	10--20 pairs
Poland	Biebrza Basin	spring migration	F	35 ind.
Romania	Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and Razim Complex	winter & passage	WM/F	5-20
	Balta Ialomitei (island in Danube)	wintering	WM/F	5-20
	Iezeer Calarasi (near Srebarna)	wintering	WM/F	5-20

	Suhaia	wintering	WM/F	5-20
Russia	Dvuob'ye	passage	WM/F	20.000
	Lake Manych-Gudilo	passage	WM/F	2.000-10.000
	Foothills of Engane-Pe Ridge, the Polar Urals (includes Niya-Yu River valley)	breeding	WM	30-50 pairs
	Dyupkun Lake, Putorana Plateau	breeding	WM	unknown
<i>Syria</i>	-	-	-	-
Turkey	Evros delta	winter	F	unknown
Turkmenistan	Kelif-Zeyit	passage/winter	WM	0-50
	Durnaly	passage/winter	WM	0-50
	Fields to the north of Serdar	passage/winter		10-100
Ukraine	Syvash Bay	passage	WM/F	100-500
Uzbekistan	Amudarya river flood land	winter	WM	100-500
	Talimarjan water reservoir and adjoining territories	passage/winter	WM	10-50