


# The Lesser White-fronted Goose

International Cooperation for Successful  
Conservation of Threatened Migratory Species – in  
the Arctic and Beyond



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A photograph of a flock of Lesser White-fronted Geese in flight. The geese are arranged in a loose V-formation, flying from left to right across the frame. They have dark wings and bodies with a characteristic white patch on their foreheads. The background consists of a range of snow-capped mountains under a clear, pale blue sky.

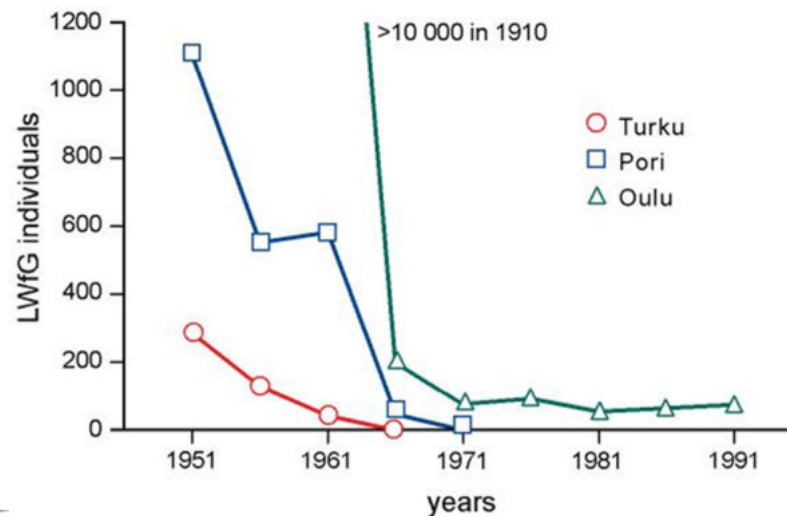
This talk is on behalf of our **international Lesser White-fronted Goose community** which consists of people from national governments, international and national expert organizations, field practitioners, site managers, volunteers etc. from about 25 countries across the species' range.

This is a **20+ year conservation story**.

Stress that this is very much a **group effort**. Migratory species are not something any one nation or organization can protect alone.

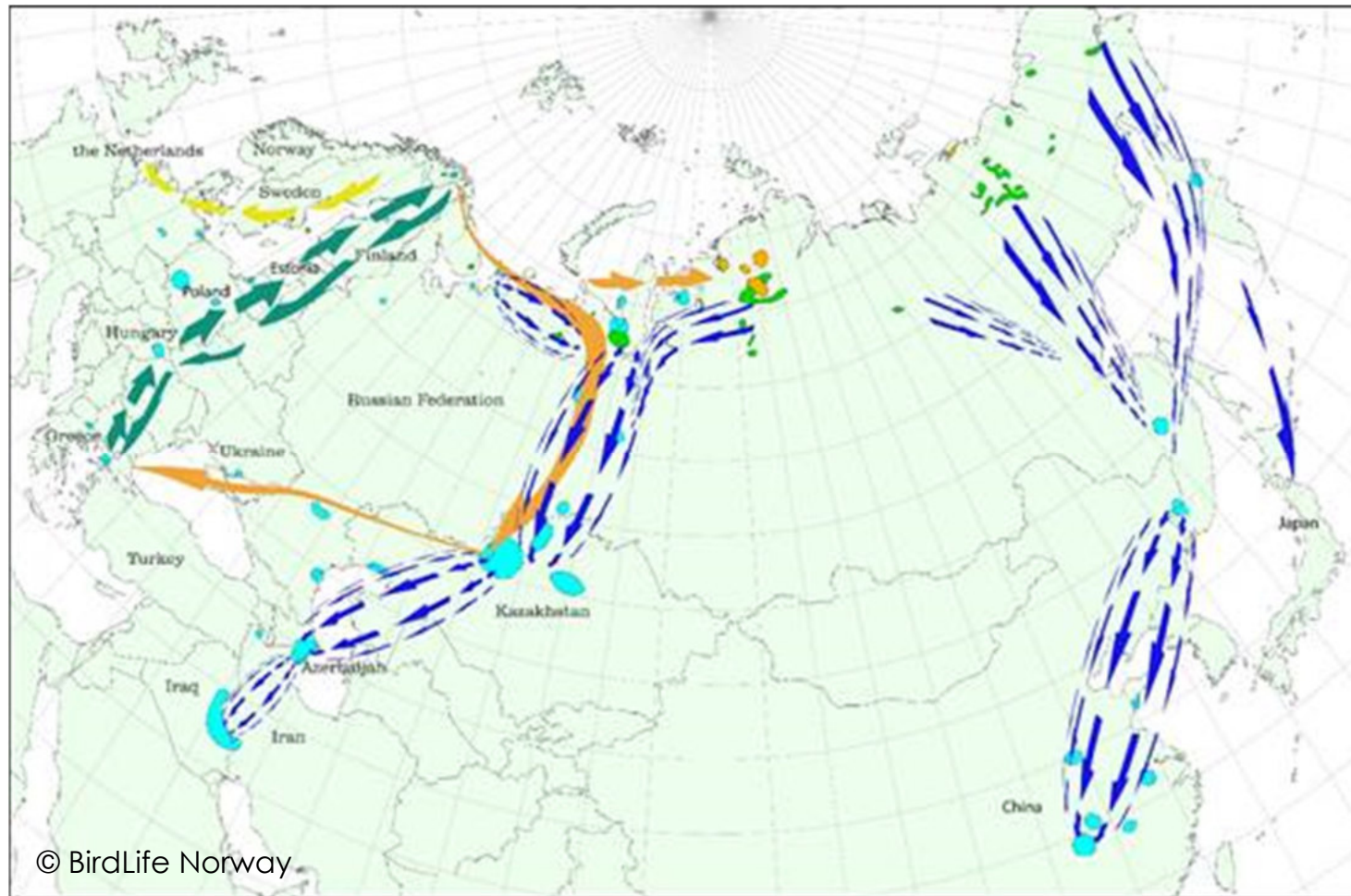
## Lesser White-fronted Geese – a species in trouble

- One of the **rarest goose species in the world** and one of the **most threatened waterbirds in Europe** (Red List: 'Critically Endangered' within the EU, and 'Vulnerable' globally);
- **Massive decline** – particularly in Europe.





## Populations and migratory routes



# Threats & conservation challenges

- **Illegal killing/accidental shooting** (look-alike species) – main cause of direct mortality;
- **Habitat loss/degradation** (habitat specialist);
- **Predation in breeding areas** (expansion of Red Fox range);
- **Knowledge gaps** (many key sites remain unknown – rendering full flyway protection impossible);
- **INCREASING: Climate change** (particularly changing migratory patterns)



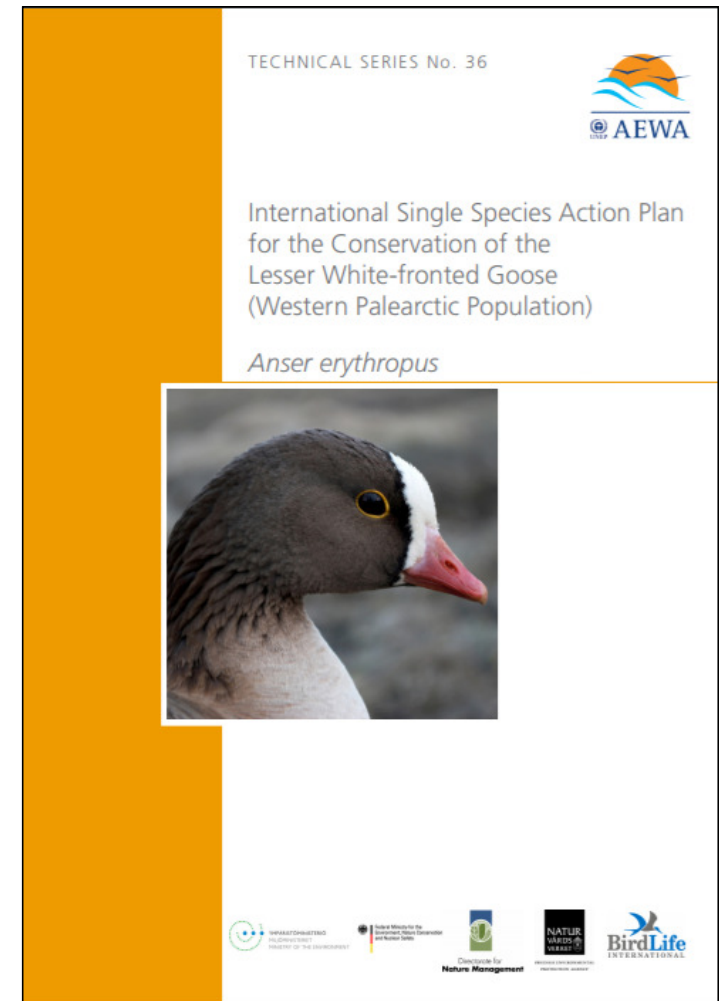
# International conservation framework

- Set up under **AEWA**: regional legally-binding multilateral environment treaty that applies to all **migratory waterbirds ecologically dependent on wetlands** for at least part of their annual cycle within the African-Eurasian flyway;
- The foundation of AEWA is **the flyway approach** (conservation and sustainable use of migratory waterbirds along the entire length of their flyways);
- Lesser White-fronted Goose a **priority species under AEWA**;
- Our conservation framework under AEWA consists of:
  - **International Action Plan**
  - **AEWA LWfG Working Group**
  - **Wider LWfG community**



# AEWA Single Species Action Plan

- Adopted in 2008 at the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Parties;
- Provides the internationally agreed conservation framework for the species;
- Covers all the range states in the Western Palearctic;
- Legally binding for AEWA Parties (to an extent);
- **Long term goal**: restore the Lesser White-fronted Goose to a favourable conservation status within the Agreement area





### Bringing it down to the national level - NAPs

- Key countries encouraged to develop and adopt **National Action Plans**;
- Bring the agreed international goals and actions down to the national/local level;
- **Ensures long term government engagement** (including resources) and establishes who is responsible for what at home;
- 8 National Action Plans adopted to date - including in Kazakhstan and Iran.





# AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group

- Established in 2009;
- AEWA Species Working Groups consist of **government representatives** and **species experts** designated by the range states of the species (+invited observer organizations);
- Working Groups **include all Principle Range States** identified in the respective Plan – regardless of whether they are a Party to AEWA yet or not;
- Groups have the responsibility to **coordinate implementation across the flyway, to decide on priority activities and to monitor implementation progress as well as the status of the species**;
- **Coordinator**, who facilitates the work.



# Working Group: implementing priority action

- One key benefit of Working Groups: **flexibility to coordinate and adjust conservation priorities** within the remit of the Plan;
- Working Groups **agree on priority activities** based on the overall action framework and use **rolling workplans** as a flexible tool to plan work in more detail (What are we going to do in the next 2-3 years? What can be done nationally and what do we need to do together? Who is doing what? What resources do we need? Are we going to apply for new projects?);
- Respond to new research and/or possible changes in the status of the species.



### Link to CAFF and AMBI

- Lesser White-fronted Goose a priority species under the **Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative** (AMBI), as a flagship species for activities addressing **illegal killing and over-harvest**;
- AMBI **supports the implementation of the workplan** adopted under the AEWA LWfG IWG;
- LWfG is also suggested to be included in AMBI 2.0, the next workplan under the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative which is currently being drafted.

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# The international Lesser White-fronted Goose community

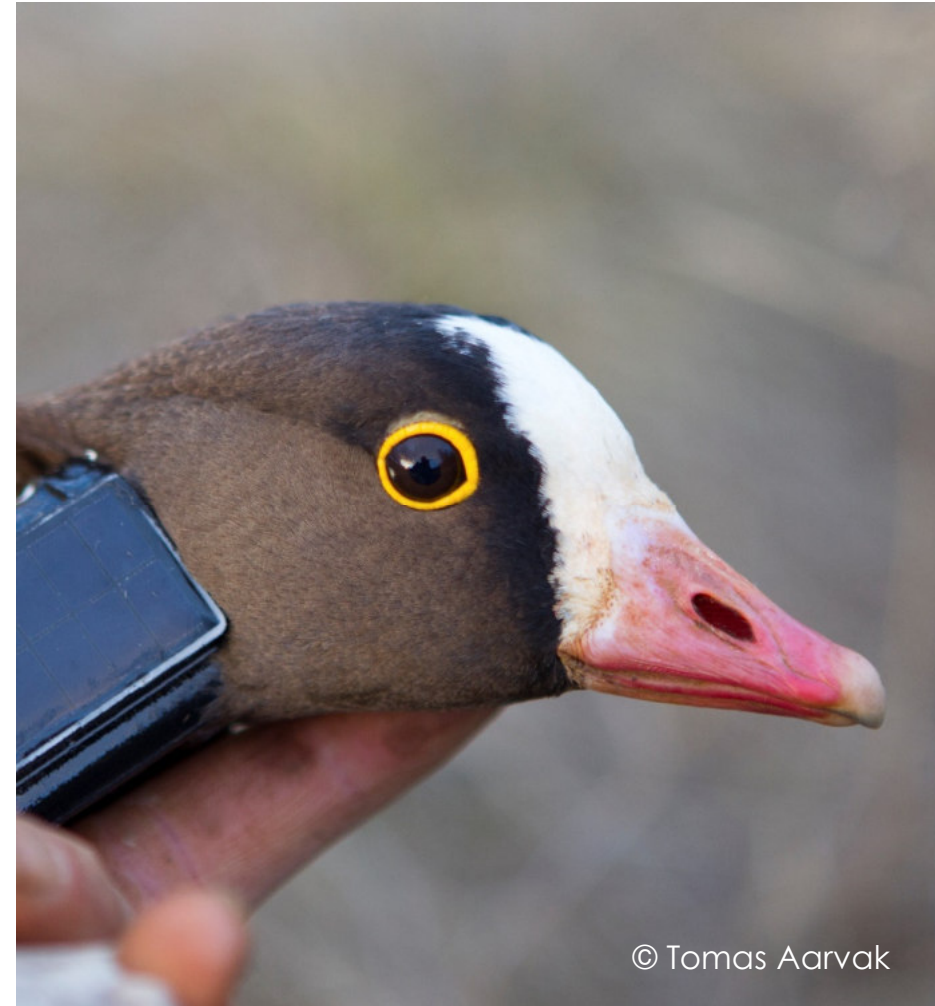
- **One of the most important and valuable cornerstones of this work is our network of dedicated people across the flyway;**
- This **core group of people are the engine** behind all the work;
- **You really need to invest in engaging people** – because you need dedicated people who are motivated to keep pushing the work.



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### What are we actually doing?

- Wide range of activities: a mix of countries implementing actions nationally + large scale multi-year projects (EU LIFE) + many small(er) scale international projects and initiatives;
- Expeditions and/or conservation projects in Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, Syria, Serbia and Poland to look for key sites and to monitor the birds and build national capacity;
- Continued satellite-tracking of both Fennoscandian and Western main populations;
- Studies on diet, habitat use etc. etc.

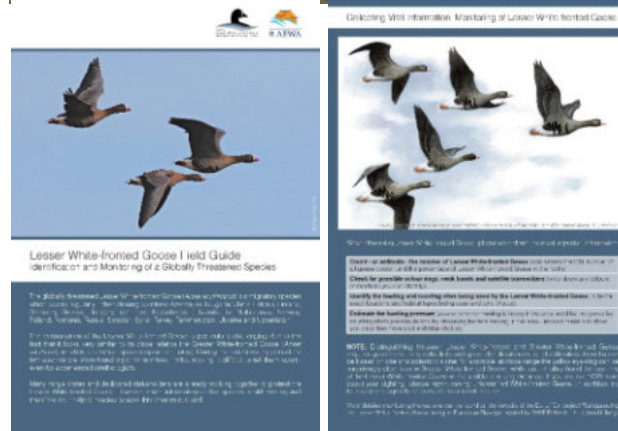


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## Establishment of a common monitoring scheme

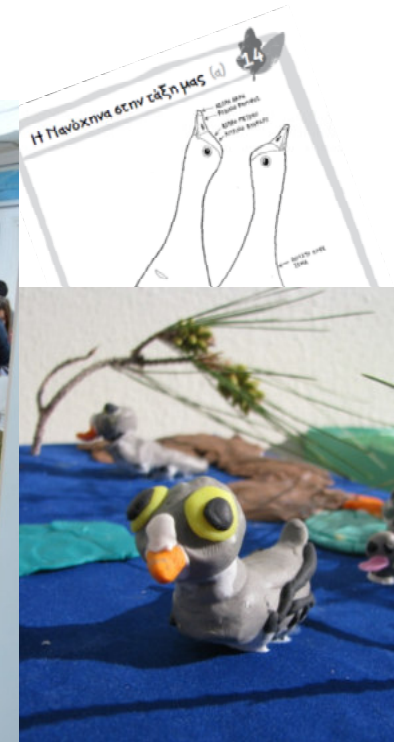
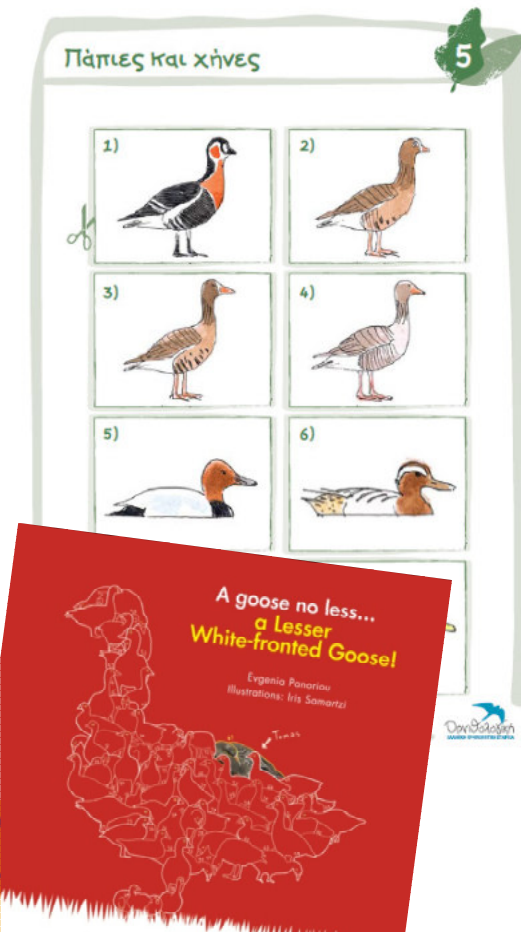
- Developed and adopted **identification and monitoring guidelines and protocols**;
- Organized **field training workshops** to **establish national LWfG monitoring teams**;
- 36 people trained from 15 countries;
- **Monitoring mailing list** – instant updates on when and where the birds are moving;
- Reporting on a **common database** (piskulka.net).



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# Investing in LWfG long term: School based environmental education programmes



- Environmental Education Programme for the LWfG incorporated in the local schools' curriculum in Greece
- 100 schools – 400 educators – 6.000 children
- Materials being produced in Norwegian – Russian – Farsi

### Successes

- **Halted the decline of the Fennoscandian population** (current trend is even slightly increasing);
- Better understanding of both the **population status and migration routes of the two target populations**;
- **Expanded and strengthened the network** – now have partners/collaborators (at some level) in each range state;
- Established the **common monitoring scheme**;
- **Identified new critical sites**, where conservation and management action is now ongoing/starting (Aras Water Reservoir on Azerbaijan/Iran border with 7,600 birds!);
- **Reduced the threat of illegal killing**: implemented flexible hunting schemes in Russia, involved in the push to close spring hunting in Kazakhstan; awareness-raising amongst hunters; started to identify main drivers behind illegal/accidental killing at various sites throughout the flyway.



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## Challenges

- The population decline may have levelled off – **but the species is still far from safe;**
- **Illegal killing and accidental hunting remain acute threats;**
- **Lacking government engagement in many key countries;**
- **Huge knowledge gaps remain** (particularly in relation to key sites and the impacts of climate change)





### Conclusions

- **Coordinated international conservation along the entire flyway is absolutely crucial** for a migratory species like this;
- **Conservation of threatened species takes time** – you need **long-term commitment and investment to bring species back from the brink** (not just in terms of people but also funds);
- We are working with nature: **things evolve all the time!**
- Have to keep up the actions and activities **but also have to be vigilant, keep monitoring the situation and be ready to adapt!**
- You need your **network of dedicated people** who are not only implementing projects and follow-up but also **alerting you to new challenges.**



### Conclusions cont.

- Recommend to set up some form of agreed **(international) cooperation structure** that will provide you with an overall framework;
- Ensure **government involvement** (look for champion countries, regions, municipalities, national parks etc.) – expert engagement alone is not enough to bring about conservation change in the longer term;
- Remember to engage with **local communities** (“spread the love”);
- **INVEST IN YOUR NETWORK!!!**





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Many thanks for listening!

Please join our network!

[lesserwhitefrontedgoose.aewa.info](http://lesserwhitefrontedgoose.aewa.info)

(International Working Group)

[piskulka.net](http://piskulka.net)

(Database, observations, research,  
science)

[wwf.fi/en/lwfg/](http://wwf.fi/en/lwfg/)

(LIFE project)

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