

Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose

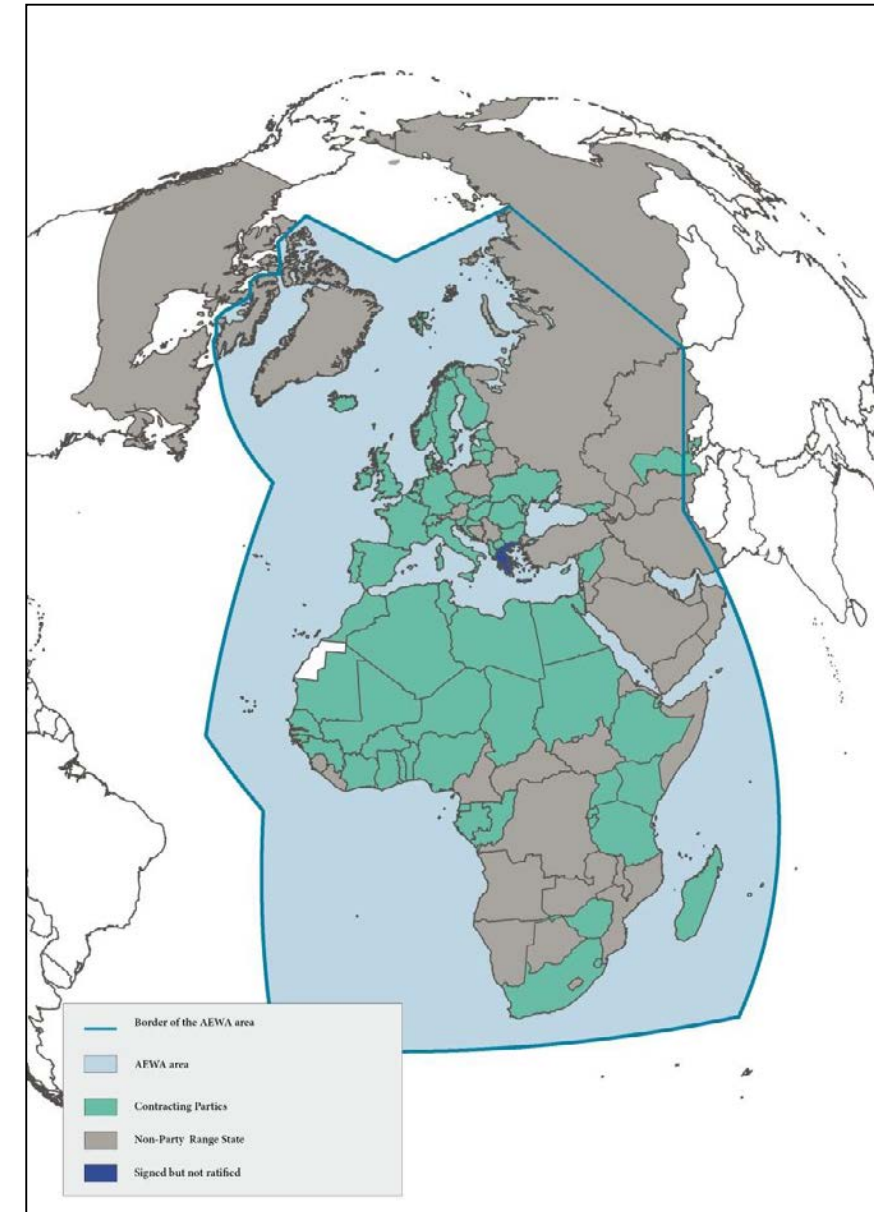
- A LIFE success story -



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What is AEWA?

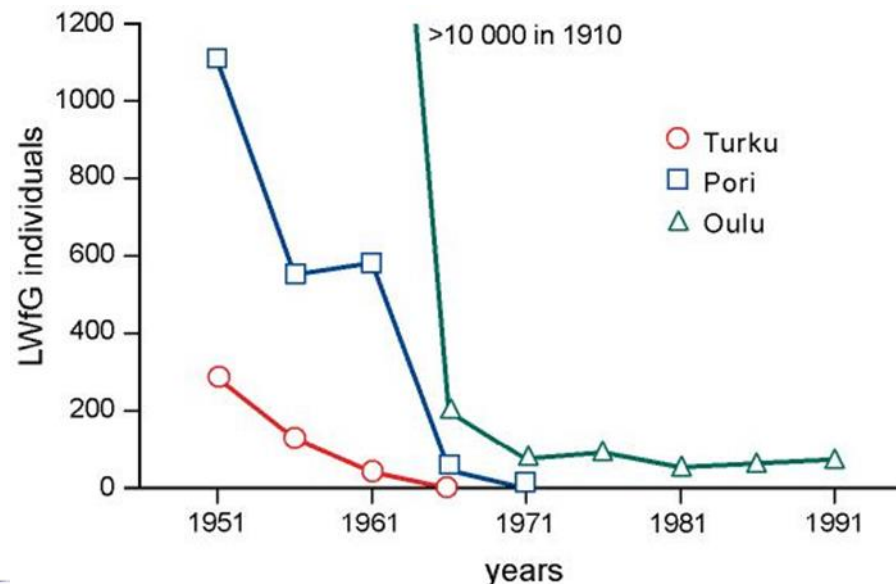
- African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement;
- regional legally-binding multilateral environment treaty which applies to all **migratory waterbirds ecologically dependent on wetlands** for at least part of their annual cycle within the African-Eurasian flyway;
- entered into force in 1999 and covers **119** countries in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa + Greenland and the NE tips of Canada (**77 Parties** and the **European Union** have ratified AEWA so far);
- The foundation of AEWA is **the flyway approach - conservation and sustainable use** of migratory waterbirds along the entire length of their flyways;
- AEWA was negotiated under the provisions of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and Secretariat is based at UN Campus in Bonn, Germany – administered by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP);



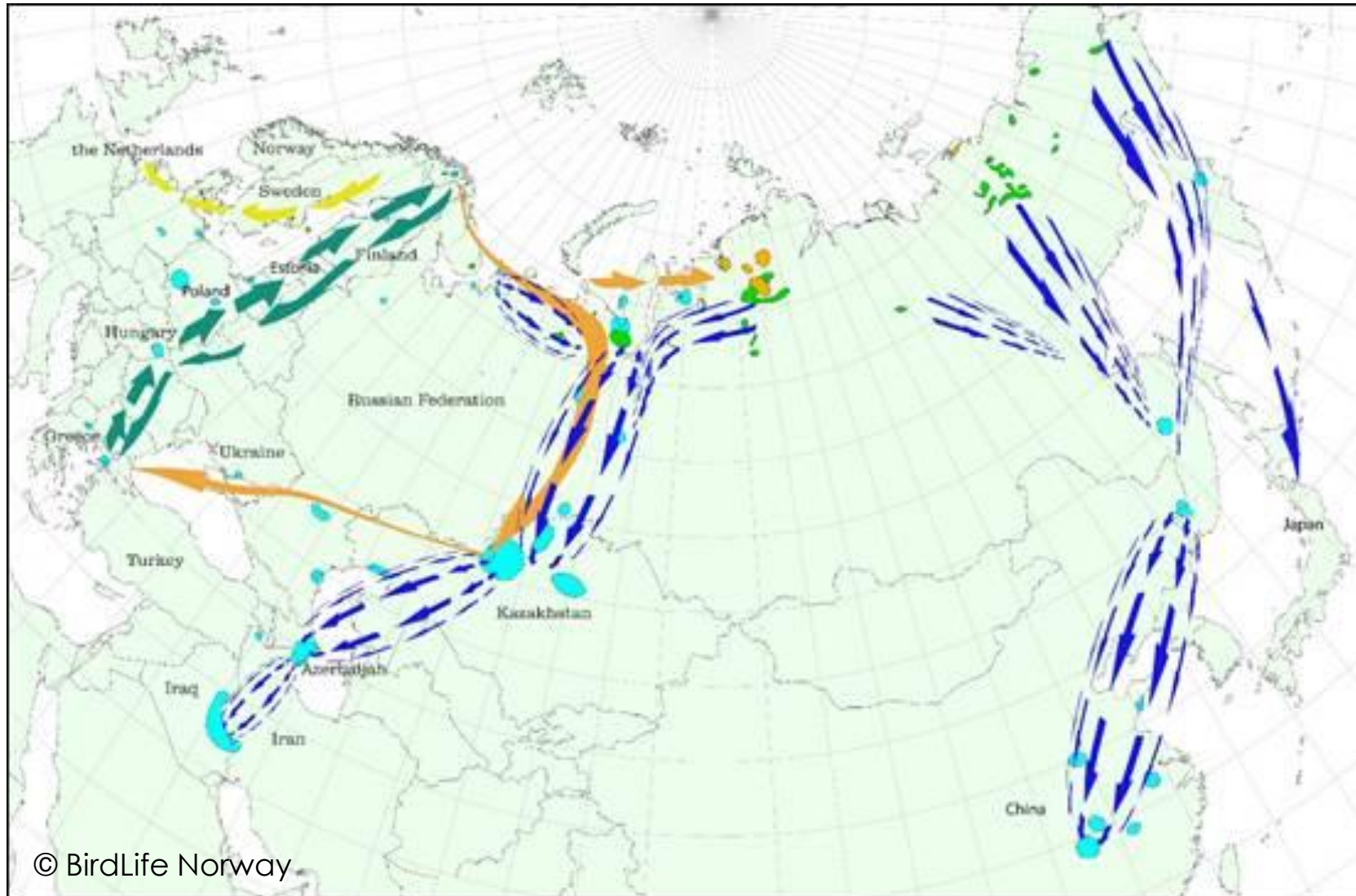
Lesser White-fronted Goose a priority species under AEWA.

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) - species of Community Interest;
- **Massive decline** – particularly in Europe!



Populations and migratory routes



Threats & conservation challenges

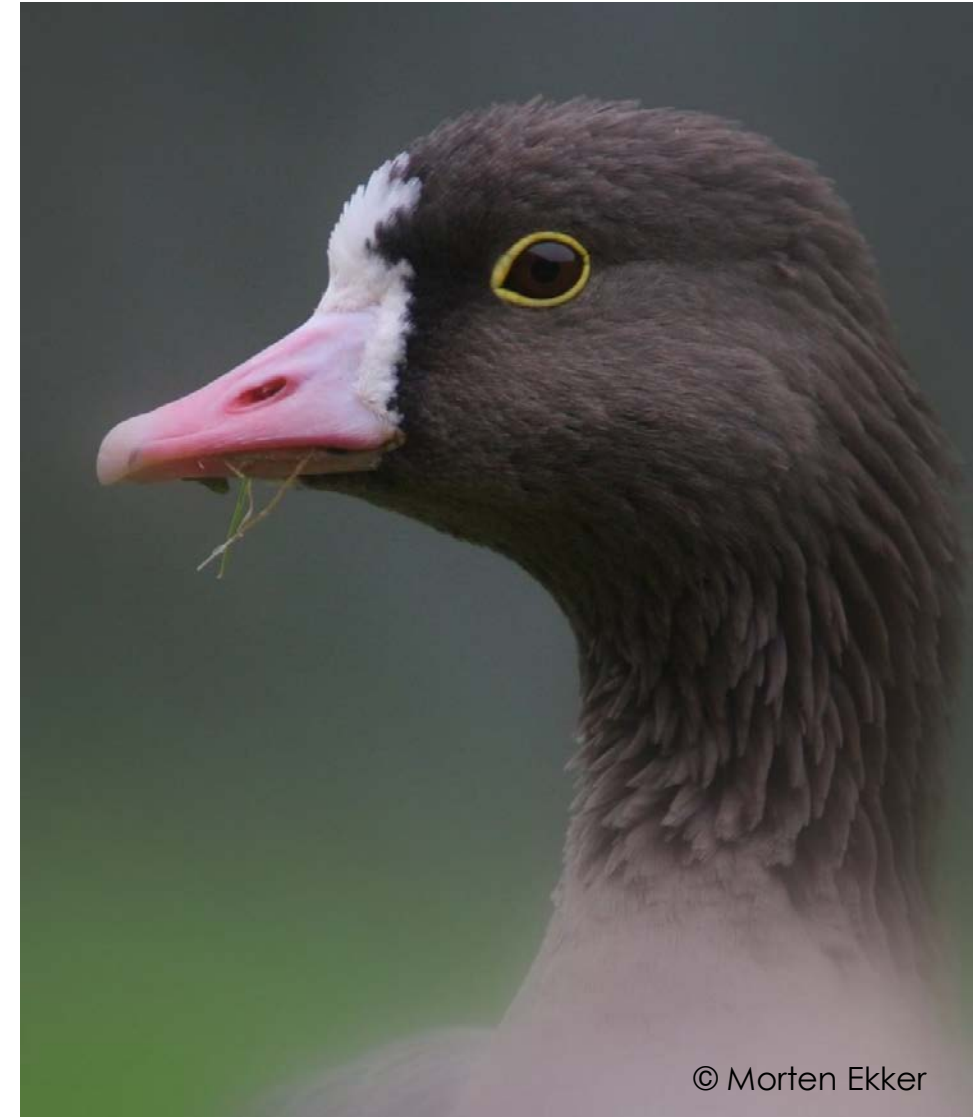
- **Illegal killing/accidental shooting** (look-alike species) – main cause of direct mortality;
- **Habitat loss/degradation** (habitat specialist);
- **Predation** (expansion of Red Fox range);
- **Knowledge gaps** (many key sites remain unknown – rendering full flyway protection impossible);
- INCREASING: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



Lesser White-fronted Geese and LIFE

Story of Lesser White-fronted Geese and the LIFE programme already started in 1997:

- **1st LIFE project:** 1997-2000 ("Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Finland");
- **2nd LIFE project:** 2005-2009 ("Conservation of the LWfG on the European migration route" LIFE05 NAT/FIN/000105);
- **3rd LIFE project:** 2011-2017 ("Safeguarding the Lesser White-fronted Goose Fennoscandian population in key wintering and staging sites within the European flyway" - LIFE10 NAT/GR/000638).



1st LIFE project (1997-2000)

Main actions/objectives:

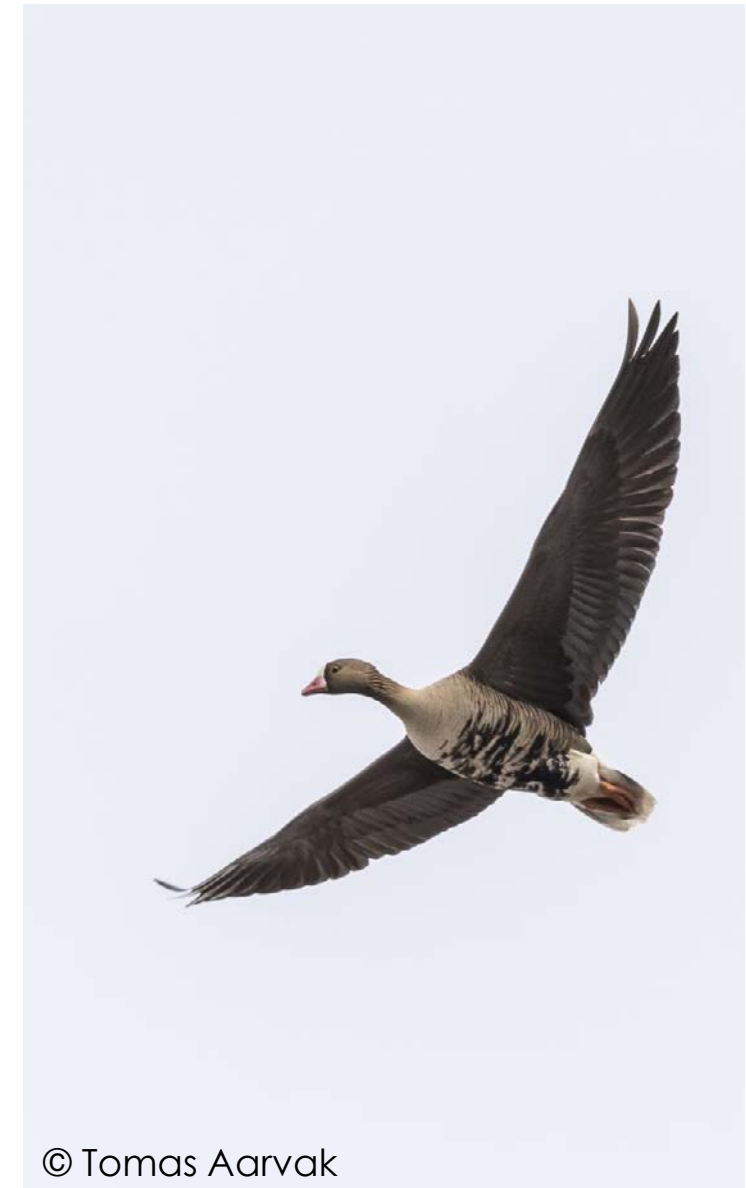
- Identify migration routes through satellite-tracking and ringing to establish protected areas in LWfG staging and wintering areas and to target international conservation efforts to these key areas;
- to form hunting-free zones around roosting lakes;
- monitor and produce accurate estimates of LWfG subpopulations, especially for the Fennoscandian highly endangered population;
- to improve public awareness on the endangered status of the LWfG, especially among hunters;
- to include all Finnish breeding and staging areas in the Natura2000 network;
- to stop the decline of the Western Palearctic population and turn it towards an increase and to enable a recovery of the Fennoscandian population of the LWfG.



2nd LIFE project (2005-2009)

Main actions/objectives:

- stop the decline of the Fennoscandian population
- satellite-tracking and colour ringing of LWfG to map the key sites;
- preparation of national Action Plans for the species in Norway, Finland and Estonia;
- habitat restoration and management to keep LWfG in safe and favourable sites in Estonia and Hungary;
- public awareness campaigns, most of all for hunters and farmers in the key areas, to reduce the risk for LWfG of being shot;
- Partners in all of the known (at the time!!!) key countries for the Fennoscandian population – apart from Russia: Norway, Finland, Estonia, Hungary and Greece;
- Took the flyway approach to the next level & expanded the network further still.



3rd LIFE project (2011-2017)

Main actions/objectives:

- to reduce mortality rates which relate to hunting along the European flyway, considered to date as the most significant threat for the species;
- to provide suitable foraging and roosting habitats for the species in wintering and staging grounds;
- to increase knowledge and awareness of the species in wintering and staging grounds;
- to maximize international co-operation and networking in countries hosting key wintering/staging grounds along the European flyway of the species;
- 8 partner organisations from Finland, Greece, Hungary and Bulgaria + the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat.



What's happening beyond LIFE?

- LIFE projects aren't taking place in isolation – in parallel an **international conservation framework** has been set up for LWfG in the Western Palearctic;
- The LIFE projects have contributed to the establishment of this framework and vis versa – it's a dynamic process: the projects feed into the wider international framework (information, outputs etc.) but also deliver against the overall goals and objectives;
- This framework is what keeps conservation for the species running beyond the LIFE projects themselves:
 - **International Action Plan, Working Group & core LWfG community**



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 another LIFE project?);
- Respond to new research and/or possible changes in the status of the species.



Working Group - What's happening right now?

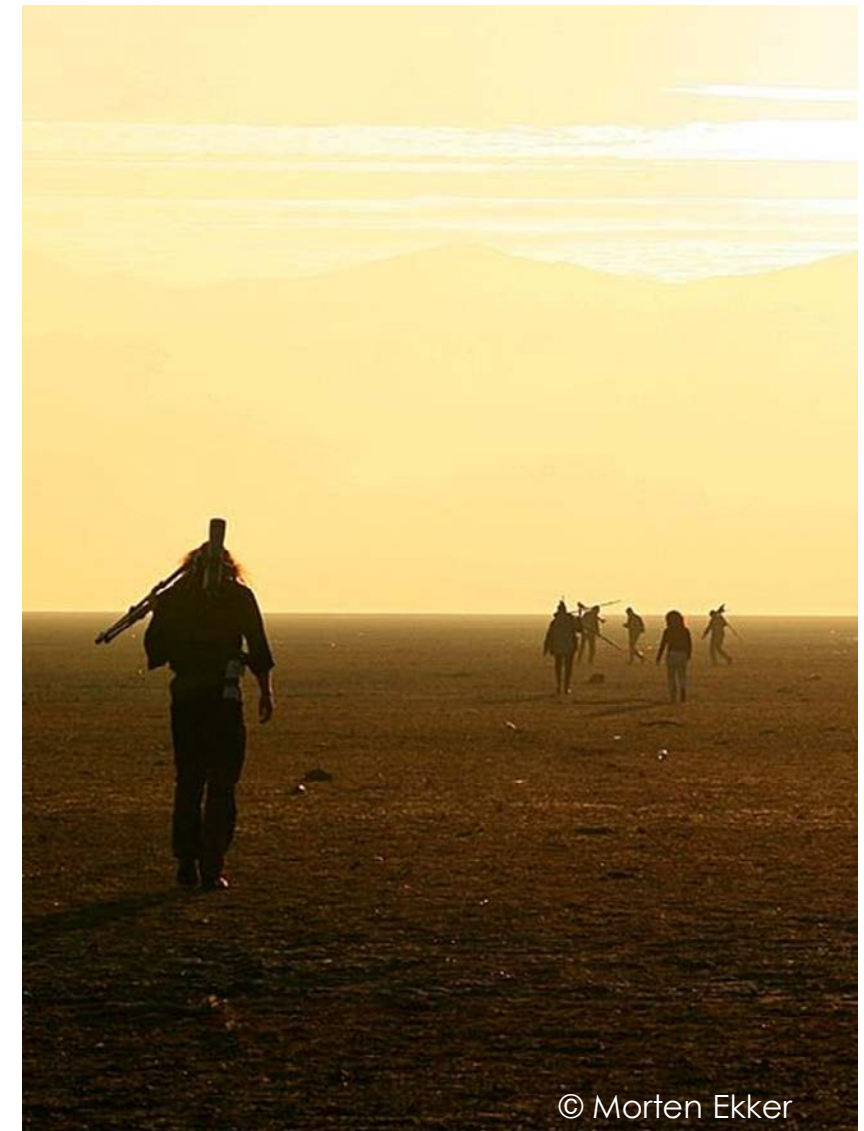
- Countries are implementing actions nationally;
- Expeditions to monitor LWfG organized in Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Poland during winter/spring 2017/2018;
- Conservation projects scheduled to be implemented in Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Kazakhstan in 2018;
- Satellite-tracking efforts continue;
- Monitoring of Fennoscandian population is ongoing (all observations reported on common database);
- Next meeting of the Working Group foreseen for 2019 (in Iran?!)



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The international Lesser White-fronted Goose community

- Last but not least, **one of the most important and valuable outcomes of the LIFE projects has been their role in the establishment of a 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 after a project ends, you need people to keep pushing the work.



Conclusions

- The LIFE projects **have had a profound impact on the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose**: both in terms of halting the decline of the Fennoscandian population AND in terms of influencing and supporting the wider international conservation agenda;
- Without LIFE we could very possibly already have lost the Fennoscandian population;
- LIFE contributed to the development of a whole range of additional activities for the species beyond the projects themselves – the **catalyst effect has been monumental** and reaches beyond the EU (also shaping conservation of migratory waterbirds in general);
- **Coordinated international conservation along the entire flyway absolutely crucial** for a migratory species like this – without LIFE it would not have been possible on such a larger scale.



Conclusions cont.

- **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) - thankful that the Commission has recognized this and for the continued support;
- We are working with nature: **things evolve all the time!**
- Challenge: **difficult to fund research**, but research is essential for appropriate conservation action;
- Have to keep up the actions and activities **but also have to be vigilant, keep monitoring the situation and be ready to adapt!**
- After a project you need your **network of dedicated people** who are not only implementing project follow-up but also **alerting to new challenges** (example: climate change effects on Fennoscandian population).



Conclusions cont.

- Recommend to set up some form of **(international) cooperation structure** that will carry on the work after a project – and link up to wider conservation of species/habitat in question;
- Ensure **government involvement** (look for champion countries, regions, municipalities, national parks etc.);
- Set-up **reporting and follow-up** within the cooperation structure – adds pressure on countries to continue implementation;
- Engage with **local communities** throughout the lifetime of the project (“spread the love”);
- **INVEST IN YOUR NETWORK!!!**



Many thanks for listening!

wwf.fi/en/lwfg/

(LIFE project)

lesserwhitefrontedgoose.aewa.info

(International Working Group)

piskulka.net

(Database, observations, research,
science)

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/LesserWhitefrontedGoose/>

