

OUTCOMES OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

“GOOSE MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES 2015”

27-29 October 2015, Gram Slot, Denmark

Introduction

The impact of increasing migratory and sedentary goose populations in Europe on economic activities and natural ecosystems continues to grow, becoming increasingly acute in many countries. Additionally, populations of some huntable migratory species are in decline and require coordinated international measures to restore their favourable conservation status. To tackle these urgent issues and move towards the long-term sustainable use of all huntable migratory waterbirds in Europe, it is proposed to establish an over-arching framework for goose management – a European Multi-species Goose Management Platform – ideally under the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

To discuss the growing challenges linked to goose management within Europe, the Danish Nature Agency, Danish Ministry of Environment and Food and Aarhus University hosted a three-day international conference at Gram Slot, Denmark. The meeting was attended by national and regional government representatives, managers and experts from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, the UK and the USA as well as the Wadden Sea Forum, the European Commission and the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat.

Background/Discussion

Six of the 25 recognised goose populations within the AEWA Agreement area are declining and require actions to restore them to a favourable conservation status; 18 are creating societal conflicts because of increasing population levels and expanding ranges.

As geese have benefitted from the abundance of food provided by intensive agriculture, so growing populations have reduced some crop yields, impacted on biodiversity, elevated airport airstrike risk and created health and nuisance issues in urban areas. Yet, geese provide important consumptive and non-consumptive values to other sectors of society, have cultural importance and have long been the focus of past conservation activity. The resolution of these and other societal conflicts created by goose abundance requires structured decision-making, as well as coordinated interventions, especially because all populations move between multiple countries during their annual cycles.

The conference reviewed the way in which those countries present currently attempt to resolve these conflicts nationally as well as the various levels of satisfaction across stakeholder groups with the outcomes. The meeting agreed that internationally coordinated management plans were essential for effective integration and delivery of conflict resolution at all scales.

These were most effective when based on evidence-based decision-making frameworks resulting in clear management objectives, and preferably organised within adaptive management frameworks.

The example of the AEWA Pink-footed Goose International Single Species Management Plan demonstrated the value of setting favourable reference values (e.g. a socially constructed target population size range). The meeting also recognised the need for the effective implementation of these population plans at national, regional and local levels. It is of fundamental importance to engage all stakeholders from the outset to establish clear objectives, transparent governance, and effective and integrated monitoring mechanisms to enable effective follow-up and adjustments of actions taken.

Conclusions/Recommendations - Establishment of a European Multi-species Goose Management Platform

- The overall goal is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of all goose populations listed under AEWA.
- International flyway solutions are needed for the management of both decreasing and increasing huntable goose populations in Europe - regardless of whether harvest is used as a management tool (including derogation shooting) or not.
- There was unanimous support from those countries present for the development of a European Goose Management Platform under AEWA (although subject to the commitment of other relevant Range States). It was agreed that any approach should be flexible - allowing for modification to ensure that the process delivers on objectives and future additional species/populations.
- Long-term commitment to the adaptive harvest management processes for the various populations will be required from all Range States along the flyway(s) before their development can begin. Government representatives were encouraged to promote the establishment of the platform to the Range States not present - in particular those outside of the EU, such as Russia.
- In addition to the already established process for Pink-footed Geese and the AEWA Single Species Action Plan developed for Taiga Bean Geese, the meeting supported developing AEWA International Management Plans for Barnacle Geese (three populations) and northwest European Greylag Geese as proposed by Denmark and France, respectively. These six populations will be the initial focus of the European Multi-species Goose Management Platform.
- Regarding the collection of annual population data necessary for running adaptive harvest management processes, it was stressed that much of the relevant data for the countries present at the meeting was already available and merely required compilation from individual countries and data-holders.
- The lack of information on harvest bag numbers in many countries - a crucial component to any adaptive harvest management process - was highlighted as an issue of concern. It was agreed that assistance from FACE and the hunting community was essential to ensure that relevant and comparable harvest bag data was available. Involvement of the hunting community and managers in goose monitoring, harvest reporting and the adaptive harvest management process was seen as essential.
- The meeting requested that the costs of the establishment and running of the Goose Management Platform be presented in the context of the very significant current and

potential future national subsidies/compensation costs for damage in the face of increasing goose populations.

- The meeting recognized the increasing pressure in many countries – particularly in Denmark and the Netherlands – to reduce the number of conflicts related to Barnacle Geese as well as to reduce the amount of subsidies/compensation paid.
- It was recommended that all three Barnacle Goose populations (breeding in Greenland, Svalbard and Russian/Baltic/North Sea, respectively) as well as resident breeding populations be included in any future International Management Plan – although the objectives and management approaches would have to be tailored to each population. Separate management planning processes should be run for each population and they should not be inter-dependent timewise.
- Initial discussions on possible objectives for the Russian/Baltic/North Sea Barnacle Goose population suggested a step-by-step approach, setting a relatively high initial population target to avoid the potential risk of overexploitation. Population targets set within the adaptive harvest management process could be adjusted over time, depending on the population trends of each population and related conflict resolutions.

The following actions were agreed:

- Seek a mandate for the development and establishment of a European Multi-species Goose Management Platform from the 6th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to AEWA in Bonn, Germany (9 - 14 November 2015).
- Secure buy-in and the long-term commitment from all relevant Range States to the process - including financial commitment - on the basis of further detailed planning in early 2016.
- Establish an adaptive harvest management process in early 2016 for the Taiga Bean Goose following adoption of the Action Plan at MOP6.
- Initiate the management-planning processes for the Barnacle and Greylag Goose once Range State commitment has been secured (in the course of 2016).
- Engage in legal discussions with the European Commission on derogations with respect to hunting and other management measures for the Barnacle Goose (which is currently on Annex I of the Birds Directive) in the EU Member States.
- Launch the European Multi-species Goose Management Platform in the course of 2017.
- Incorporate both the Pink-footed Goose and Taiga Bean Goose plans under the European Multi-species Goose Management Platform.