



The Lesser White-fronted Goose — victim of deadly folly

The Norwegian stock of Lesser White-fronted Geese is so small that researchers are on first-name terms with the birds. Still, there is some hope for one of our most threatened species.

Standing, literally, on the edge of a precipice should not be so dangerous for a bird, but in the case of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*) it is, figuratively speaking, of significance. The position of this species is such that there is serious doubt about whether it will be able to continue to fly in the future. The gravity of this situation is underlined by the fact that the Lesser White-fronted Goose is also threatened globally. As with all other species, once the last specimens vanish, the species is gone forever.

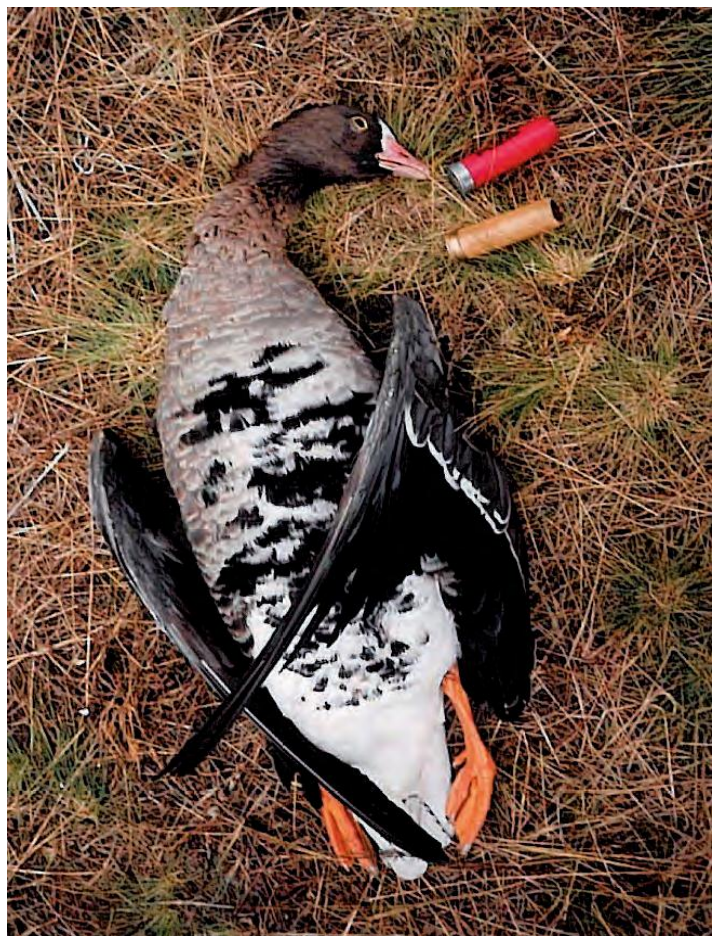
Easy to shoot

The situation was quite different just 100 years ago. The Lesser White-fronted Goose was a common sight in the mountain regions from Nord-Trøndelag northwards. From early 1900s onwards, the population was the subject of vulnerable to intensive hunting, and they gradually decreased in numbers.

Currently, problems encountered along the species flight paths mean that stocks have been unable to recover. In recent years, numbers have decreased, slowly but surely, so that now only a few pairs remain. These pairs probably all nest within a few square kilometers of Finnmark.

A high mortality rate among adult birds is the main explanation for the decline in the population of Lesser White-fronted Geese, with regards to the number and spread of the birds. Unintentional killing, where the hunter does not recognise the species or is not aware of its situation, combined with illegal hunting, are considered to be the most significant reasons for this high mortality rate.

In addition, the Lesser White-fronted Goose behaves in a way that makes it particularly vulnerable to hunting. It flies higher than other geese. When the first shot from the hunter frightens the flock of geese and the birds take flight, Lesser White-fronted geese circle in order to gain height. This means that the birds that are not initially shot, return for the hunters to take another shot.



Unintentional and illegal hunting are the reasons why the Lesser White-fronted Goose has become an endangered species. This one was shot illegally in Kazakhstan. Photo: Tomas Aarvak, Birdlife



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT



*Adult Lesser White-fronted Geese have white forecrowns.
Photo: Ingar J. Øien*

Lesser White-fronted Goose from Nordens Ark Breeding Centre

The plight of the Lesser White-fronted Goose is worrying, but there is a glimmer of hope. The Norwegian Ornithological Society is collaborating with the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate on a project where Swedish Lesser White-fronted Goslings from the Nordens Ark breeding centre are being fitted with satellite transmitters and released on Valdakmyra near the Porsanger Fjord in Finnmark. The goal is that, in the winter, they will migrate southwards to Greece together with wild Lesser White-fronted Geese. It seems that Lesser White-fronted Geese that do not breed successfully in Finnmark, take a detour via Russia before they fly south. This provides us with information about Lesser White-fronted Geese that have fallen prey to snipers and ended up in Russian game stews.

Satellite transmitters on Lesser White-fronted Goslings from Nordens Ark will give us more information about where the geese travel and how stocks are developing. In addition, the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate is monitoring and controlling the Red Fox in the nesting sites, which has also given this endangered bird a new chance.

Lesser White-fronted Goose on the Mayor's chain of office and on stamps

There is no doubt that mankind has been a “silly goose” in the case of the Lesser White-fronted Goose. The tragic fate of this beautiful avian species has now received a lot of attention from the media, researchers and politicians. This has led to various activities from international research projects to the Lesser White-fronted Goose appearing on the Mayor of Porsanger Municipality's new chain of office. The municipality has been given special responsibility for the species by the Norwegian Minister of the Environment. Norway Post has also honoured the Lesser White-fronted Goose by putting it on one of its stamps in the “Norwegian Birds III” series. A Lesser White-fronted Goose was valued at NOK 1.30, but that was as far back as 1981.



Satellite transmitters from Lesser White-fronted Goslings will give us more information about the species. Photo: Tomas Aarvak, Birdlife

The Sami calls the Lesser White-fronted Goose the “calf nose goose”, because like reindeer calves, it has a white “nose”. It remains to be seen whether the future will be bright for this species.

What is being done?

The Lesser White-fronted Goose has been designated as a **prioritised species** in a regulation under the Norwegian Nature Diversity Act.

The taking, damaging or destruction of prioritised species is forbidden. If necessary, legislation governing the area in which the species live can be drafted. The State can provide subsidies for measures to look after prioritised species.

Action plan

The Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management has prepared an action plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*).

<http://www.dirnat.no/content/424/Ha ndlingsplan-for-dverggas>

Contact

The Norwegian Ministry of the Environment
E-mail: postmottak@md.dep.no
Telephone: + 47 22 24 90 90

The Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management
E-mail: postmottak@dirnat.no
Telephone: + 47 73 58 05 00

Published at regjeringen.no
20 May 2011