

**3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Committee for Captive Breeding, Reintroduction and  
Supplementation of Lesser White-fronted Geese in Fennoscandia (RECAP 3)**

7 – 8 October 2010, UN Campus Bonn, Germany

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**MEETING REPORT**



## Introduction

AEWA Executive Secretary and RECAP Committee Chair Bert Lenten opened the meeting by welcoming all participants to the UN Campus in Bonn. He concluded that there were again many important items on the agenda to be discussed by the Committee.

## Adoption of the Agenda

*Decision:*        *The agenda (Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.1) was adopted.*

## Independent Review of Lesser White-fronted Goose Genetics

As requested by the Committee, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat had commissioned an expert to undertake an independent scientific review of Lesser White-fronted Goose genetics based on available scientific and peer-reviewed literature. The review was conducted by Dr. George Amato, Director of the Sackler Institute of Comparative Genomics situated within the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Unfortunately Dr. Amato could not attend the meeting in person but was available online for answering questions from Committee members. Mikander (UNEP/AEWA Secretariat) briefly went through the main conclusions of the Executive Summary of the review (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.2*) provided for the meeting:

- At present the only captive breeding population suitable for augmentations of the wild populations is the one based on birds from the Western main population at Nordens Ark (in Sweden). Molecular data support the taxonomy of LWfG and GWfG as goose species that do not naturally hybridize in nature – so this should, therefore, be avoided in management programs.
- A supplementation of the Fennoscandian population should be undertaken as soon as possible. As one of three geographically separated subpopulations its loss would be significant and could possibly endanger the LWfG species. This should be done using individuals from the Western main population / birds from Nordens Ark which would bring a halt to the decline of genetic variation in the subpopulation.
- As for the free-ranging sub-population in Sweden: there does seem to have been some level of hybridization in the captive flocks before individuals were released into the wild. However, the published data does not allow an accurate estimate of the original levels of hybridization or of the current persistence of introgressed genes. Capturing wild birds and attempting to quantify this more accurately would not be a priority for the recovery of the LWfG (Trying to discern which individuals have a hybrid ancestry is very difficult beyond the first generation). Even with more detailed genotyping methods available, the logistics and resources necessary to try to purge this population of introgressed genes is unwarranted. Specifically, the threat of a small subpopulation of LWfG containing some introgressed genes seems quite low in terms of their possible impact on other recovering subpopulations. For this reason, no action needs to be initiated in terms of screening wild birds for evidence of hybrid genes or in removing birds from the ecosystem where they currently fill an ecological role. . If additions are made to this population from captive individuals of the Western Main/Nordens Ark birds it will reduce even further any concerns about the initial release of birds with introgressed genes since this will help “swamp them out” with LWfG genotypes.

*Discussion:*

Sweden agreed with the conclusions made by Amato, but thought the conclusions should also mention that a low level of hybridization between LWfG and GWfG cannot be ruled out with the genetic data due to insufficient sample sizes.

WWT asked whether it is Amato's recommendation that the Swedish population be supplemented to decrease hybridization, or whether this can be done but is not seen as absolutely necessary. Amato (via email): *"There is no compelling reason to supplement the Swedish population - especially if it is experiencing rapid growth. But additional supplementation would in fact decrease any remaining concerns about introgressed genes from their founders."*

Sweden commented that the level of GWfG genes would be low in the current Swedish LWfG population due to genetic drift since only 5-10% of the released birds in the population supplementation during 1981-1999 were estimated to potentially carry some GWfG genes. Through the supplementation with western Russian birds the GWfG genes will decline even further, as pointed out also by Amato.

Finland also agreed with the conclusions in Dr. Amato's paper and considered that they should be followed. The purging approach to the Swedish population is very difficult from many points of view and Finland does not see that it would be worth the time and money to do it. The birds available for supplementation from Nordens Ark are very few, and Finland considered that they should be used in a concentrated manner for the supplementation of the Norwegian population. Sweden replied that it is its intention to expand the captive breeding population so that more birds will be available for release.

Norway also agreed that the recommendations in the Executive Summary were acceptable. Norway questioned that whilst Amato considers the hybridization in the Swedish population to be a negative factor (which will weed out possible hybrids over time through natural selection), it could also be seen as a "positive" factor. The Swedish LWfG, for example, have learned to feed on agricultural fields in the wintering grounds. This is something that GWfG do, whereas other LWfG populations prefer different types of feeding grounds. The LWfG is known to be a habitat specialist (study on this will soon be published). Amato (via email): *"It is indeed a possibility that introgressed genes could be selected for. We know that the first two scenarios are more likely -- since the likelihood of introduced genes being of selective advantage is just numerically less likely -- but we can't preclude that this is a possibility. In my review, I only raised it as a reason to not spend a lot of time or resources worrying about the LWfG in Sweden. I still believe this is not as much of a concern as mitigating other threats. But it is important to consider."*

The Secretariat commented that the issue of habitat preference is very interesting for the overall conservation of the species and should be kept in mind. Sweden added that the draft Swedish National Action Plan for the species includes activities which strive to restore or manage areas for LWfG in its original habitat. In this respect climate change poses a challenge as to how habitats can in future be managed in order to ensure that LWfG will find suitable habitats in the face of climate change.

*Decision: All RECAP Committee countries agreed with the conclusions and recommendations of the review.*

## **WWT Feasibility Study**

Rebecca Lee/WWT presented the final conclusions and recommendations of the WWT feasibility study for a reintroduction/supplementation programme for the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Norway (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.3*). The main conclusions of the study are that whilst supplementation will be difficult, it is possible and therefore feasible. However, should the current wild population go extinct, a re-introduction would not be feasible at this time without further evidence that the factors causing the population decline have been diminished or removed. WWT stresses that supplementation and re-introduction measures are only feasible as part of a wider conservation programme and are – on their own – not enough to save the population.

WWT estimates that 10-20 captive bred birds would be a good number to supplement the wild flock with at a time. Establishing migratory habit in the captive birds will pose a significant challenge. WWT does not recommend taking birds from the Norwegian population to start up a new captive breeding population. Successful

supplementation will depend on there being an adequate number of wild birds left – the current number of wild birds is probably as low as the population can be for supplementation.

*Discussion:*

Sweden inquired whether WWT had found more information/research on successful releases. Lee answered that there is not much literature available on the subject, but that all sources found are listed in the references of the study. The biggest problem is getting the birds to continue to migrate on their own after their release.

Sweden commented that a 10% increase in annual survival rate in adults and juveniles is needed in order to increase the population size. Mortality threats can therefore not be rated as “not applicable” when justifying the supplementation. Lee explained that the criteria “mortality threats” doesn’t work as a criterion for supplementation. Sweden added that an alternative migratory route could also have been included as an option in the study in order to cover all options to eliminate or sufficiently reduce the cause(s) of decline (IUCN 1998). Norway commented that successful breeding pairs and their young choose a flyway with significantly less poaching and hunting, and that actions to enhance breeding success thus have a similar effect. The Chair suggested that a footnote be included explaining why the mortality threats along the flyway were not applicable as a criteria for justification of the supplementation. Cranswick/WWT added that the argumentation and reasoning behind the exclusion of this criterion was perhaps not clear enough in the text. As for the alternative flyway issue, it was agreed with Norway from the outset that only supplementation/re-introduction along the current flyway should be considered. Sweden added that supplementation of the current wild population would also enhance its genetic variation.

Germany inquired how much hunting affects the mortality rate. Sweden replied that there is a 15% difference in the mortality rate between the Swedish and Norwegian flyways. Finland commented that the small size of the Norwegian population makes it extremely vulnerable to stochastic events. Norway added that the long term monitoring of the Norwegian population has shown that it is stable followed by a drop in numbers of 20%-30%. This can for example be caused by increased predation in years when there are only few lemmings. Therefore the red fox culling being undertaken in Norway is so important: not only is the breeding success larger but the successful breeders then also avoid the more dangerous eastern migration route. Sweden agreed that protective hunting of red foxes is an effective measure as it increases the breeding success. Sweden will also implement hunting of red fox as a conservation measure.

Norway concluded that the Norwegian country activity update will cover many of the issues discussed in more detail. Norway plans to try and find a way forward on the basis of the WWT conclusions and recommendations. The situation is urgent and supplementation measures should be started now.

*Decision: The Committee accepted the WWT feasibility study.*

### **Finland – Country Activity Update**

The implementation of the Finnish National Action Plan for the LWfG is being carried out. The control of red fox numbers is being continued in the potential breeding areas. Management plans are in place for the old core breeding areas. No birds have been sighted during the annual surveys of the breeding areas, but Finland is still optimistic with an estimate of 0-5 breeding pairs. Surveys of peat lands are also being conducted in an area which used to be a major molting site for LWfG. At the staging areas still used by LWfG today the goal is to protect all known sites as nature reserves. Management activities are being carried out in an attempt to attract LWfG to these areas. The annual monitoring conducted in 2010 counted 21-26 individuals in the staging areas during spring migration. There is a fluctuation in numbers every year. These staging areas are also used by other endangered species. Finland is applying for a new EU LIFE project for the better protection of these sites.

A good relationship with the hunters has been established within the framework of the Action Plan for Hunting. A voluntary early-warning system has been set up and within one day all hunting organizations can spread the word to their members that rare species have been sighted and that hunters should exercise caution.

The captive breeding and most likely also re-introduction activities of the Finnish NGO Friends of the Lesser White-fronted Goose are still ongoing. The authorities are pursuing different approaches to stop the release of LWfG using Barnacle Geese as foster parents.

A national coordinator for the implementation of the NSSAP has been appointed. His name is Tuomo Ollilla from the Metsähallitus (Finnish Forestry Service). The work of the Finnish LWfG task force also continues. Matti Osara will, however, remain the national focal point for the LWfG in the RECAP Committee as well as in the International Working Group.

### **Norway - Country Activity Update**

The current budget for LWfG conservation activities is in the range of 500,000-600,000€ per year. These funds are not only limited to national conservation measures. The Norwegian conservation approach has thus far been cautious, but now new recommendations for conservation activities are available with the completion of the WWT study. Norway is focusing on the traditional migration route currently used by the remaining population. Fifty-eight individuals were counted at Valdak in 2010.

A trial supplementation with four male goslings received from Nordens Ark was carried out during the summer. The goslings were two months old at the time of release. The results were not optimal but future supplementation efforts will build on the lessons learned. Amongst other things, feeding practices should be looked into. The birds received more nutritious food at Nordens Ark and were perhaps unprepared for the less nutritious food at Valdak. The different migration behavior between males and females also needs to be taken into account. Two of the four goslings were equipped with satellite transmitters before release. Of the satellite tagged birds one is now close to Stockholm and the other satellite tag is sending signals from the breeding area in Norway – presumably the bird is dead. Efforts are being made to reduce mortality caused by satellite transmitters by not using packs but collars. The introduced birds all have leg rings so that they can be identified. Two individuals are still unaccounted for will hopefully be spotted in the wild.

Norway has also been increasing its awareness raising and information efforts. In general the LWfG programme including the supplementation project has been received well by the public. Currently there is an application for a high-voltage power line suggested to be built directly through the breeding grounds. The main breeding area is not a protected nature area per se, but as it is being used by an endangered species, any activity in the area is subject to permits. The Directorate and the Norwegian Ornithological Society are opposing the project and will make sure that no permits are given.

At present Norway does not have plans to establish its own LWfG captive breeding facility. Birds at a facility at Valdak, for example, could not be kept outside in winter due to the arctic temperatures. Norway does not oppose establishing a new facility in Norway in the future but would at present prefer to use offspring from Nordens Ark.

The situation in Greece continues to be troubling and activities need to be taken in the sites used by the geese there. The Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management will continue to make funds available to the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat for LWfG activities. The RECAP countries should continue working together along the rest of the flyway.

#### *Discussion:*

Sweden inquired whether a letter to the European Commission concerning the situation in Greece might be helpful in highlighting the Committee's concern. This suggestion was echoed by the other Committee members.

Germany asked if goose hunting is regulated in Norway to which Norway replied that there is a general hunting ban in place on all species in the LWfG staging and breeding areas.

*Decision: The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat will send a letter to the EU Commissioner for the Environment concerning the situation in Greece.*

### **Sweden – Country Activity Update**

The Swedish draft National Action Plan has been sent out for comments. Sweden is continuing its captive breeding programme. A second breeding facility will be built in order to be able to host more birds. Sweden will reinforce the Swedish population with captive-reared birds based on wild LWfG from the Western main population. Activities such as the restoration of former habitat and the hunting of red foxes are also included in the draft NAP. Satellite tracking of birds will also be possible if needed. The NAP also highlights the importance of international cooperation as well as yearly monitoring. Sweden funded the independent genetic review and has also reserved funds for the upcoming review on LWfG flyways.

Low numbers during spring counts of the Swedish LWfG population at stop-over sights indicate that fewer birds returned to breed this year. Five broods with a total of nine young were sighted; the current population estimate is approximately 130 individuals. At Nordens Ark three pairs produced 13 young, bringing the total stock to 45 birds. In addition nine birds are waiting at Moscow Zoo to be transported to Sweden. Sweden also released captive-reared birds this summer as a test. In future further testing of release methods is needed. It should be noted that LWfG seem to be very picky breeders and need to have a choice of partners, making captive breeding even more challenging.

In addition Sweden wishes to see corrections made to the international SSAP, as information concerning the Swedish population is erroneous, for example the Swedish population has never been nationally red listed as extinct (RE) and is thus supplemented and not reintroduced.

*Discussion:*

WWT inquired whether Nordens Ark had tried double-clutching the LWfG in order to increase the number of chicks. Sweden replied that experience has shown that this does not work well with LWfG, probably due to an evolutionary adaptation to the short arctic summers not allowing re-clutching in the wild.

Norway inquired whether Sweden would be interested in funding conservation activities along the other flyways. Sweden responded that if the Committee now decides that no further testing of LWfG genes is necessary, the funds put aside for that could also be used for other activities. Sweden could for example be interested in bilateral work in Russia, if the Secretariat can recommend suitable projects.

### **Germany – Country Activity Update**

The German environmental fund Allianz Umweltstiftung will make a final decision on the Aktion Zwerggans project proposal in December 2010. Depending on the decision by the RECAP Committee, Allianz will either continue to support the project or withdraw its funding and the NGO will be forced to sell the two ultralight planes. In addition to the permission granted by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (*note: see below*) the Bundesland of North Rhine-Westphalia that is responsible for governing the Lower-Rhine area, has also issued a statement in support of the project (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.8.3*). The German Federal Ministry of the Environment wishes to stay neutral in this process.

## Aktion Zwerggans Project – Discussion

The Chair introduced the topic and referred to a letter from the German NGO Aktion Zwerggans addressing the Committee and asking for a decision in favor of their proposed two year pilot project for the reintroduction of LWfG using ultralight aircraft (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.8.1*).

Sweden explained under which restrictions Aktion Zwerggans has been granted permission by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) to conduct their proposed pilot project (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.8.2*). One of the main criteria is that the birds to be used must be of pure genetic LWfG origin. Sweden stressed that the SEPA does not own the captive breeding birds at Nordens Ark. They are property of the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management who will have to give their permission as to how the birds – if any – are used. Sweden sees the Aktion Zwerggans project as an experiment through which more information for the conservation of the LWfG can be derived. Valuable new insights could be gained regarding local re-introduction, alternative sites, and whether or not captive-reared young survive better when following an ultralight aircraft than when trying to associate with and follow wild conspecifics during migration etc.

Norway inquired whether a feasibility study has been done for the project. Germany replied that no feasibility study is needed to assess the situation in Germany in the Lower-Rhine area, as it is well protected. WWT commented that a comprehensive feasibility study should be done for any project of this nature. Such a study would not necessarily be very expensive.

The UNEP/AEWA Secretariat remarked that projects must serve conservation needs and asked the Committee to consider the link between the Aktion Zwerggans project and the flyway review. Aktion Zwerggans would be creating a new flyway. Sweden countered that migration routes can be flexible over time and that flyways do change. It is a sad situation if not enough can be done on the flyways concerning the hunting pressure. There is a need to be more flexible in order to save the species, for example via a second modified flyway. WWT commented that it is a question of when to start creating new flyways. The first priority must be to preserve the currently existing flyways. Sweden expressed its concern that the mortality along the historic flyway evidently remains too high. Norway responded that whilst a new alternative flyway could be an option in the future if the Fennoscandian population goes extinct, it is not an option at present.

Finland added that supplementation always also brings with it the risk of disease which should be considered. Germany did not consider disease/health issues to be such a risk.

The Chair reminded the Committee that even without the question of the validity of the proposed flyway the problem remains that there are currently not enough birds available from Nordens Ark. And even if there were birds available for the Aktion Zwerggans project, the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management has not made the decision to supply the project with birds.

Sweden responded that the first priority for the use of Nordens Ark captive-reared birds is of course the Swedish population. A demographic analysis done by WWT suggests that 20 birds may be available in 2012. As mentioned before, Sweden views the project as an opportunity to look at alternatives in order to find the best way of doing things. If this opportunity is not used we will, for example, not know whether the use of ultralight planes would work better than releases where captive-reared young have to be adopted by the wild flock. WWT commented that tests are usually conducted in a controlled environment. This would not be the case in the Aktion Zwerggans project. WWT expressed concern that this should actually be seen as the start of a new re-introduction/supplementation project and the start of a new sub-population.

Germany asked whether it would be possible to catch the released individuals when the project ends. Sweden replied that the birds would be equipped with specific markings, so they can be identified and caught. Sweden reiterated that it is unsentimental about the project and views it as an experiment. The project would have to prove that the method, sites and flyway used are better than the ones currently used for it to have an impact on

Swedish conservation activities. Germany added that the argument in favor of endorsing the project now is that the cost of the aircraft would be covered by Allianz Umweltstiftung.

The Chair explained there are two vital unanswered questions from the viewpoint of the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat concerning the project: 1) Limited number of suitable birds available for release from Nordens Ark and three proposed uses for these birds (the Swedish project, the Norwegian supplementation project and the Aktion Zwerggans project) & 2) the question of the previous existence of a flyway from Swedish Lapland to the Lower-Rhein area in Germany.

Germany countered that at the CMS Scientific Council meeting in 2005 the information on which the Council's decision was based was different than the information which we have today. If the genetic issue has been solved there is no reason to block the project. There is evidence of a flyway from Scandinavia to Germany and scientific studies document, that the lower Rhine area is part of the natural range of the LWfG.

The Chair clarified that the Secretariat will not block the project if suitable birds are available and used, as this is indeed what had been previously agreed. However, if the flyway review to be commissioned on behalf of the Committee determines it unlikely that the flyway proposed by the project is indeed a former flyway of the Fennoscandian LWfG, then the project cannot be endorsed by the Secretariat as a nature conservation project (no stamp of approval from AEWA). Constructing an unnatural flyway cannot be considered nature conservation as long as there are still other natural flyways used by the species. Allianz might also wish to reconsider if it turns out that the project has failed to receive the support of the international conservation community. Germany commented that there is the risk of a too restricted definition of what should be considered a natural flyway range and highlighted the natural presence LWfGs in the area for as long as records exist. The numbers recorded would be even higher if the LWfG populations weren't so low.

The Chair asked the Committee to make a recommendation as to which project of the three mentioned should be prioritized when it comes to the use of the captive bred birds. Norway suggested not to start the Aktion Zwerggans project now. Of the two projects besides the Swedish one, the priority should be on the remaining Norwegian birds. Norway is definitely interested in working together with Sweden and in continuing the supplementation efforts next year. For these efforts to be successful more than four birds per year would probably be needed. The Secretariat repeated that according to the SSAP the wild (indigenous) population should remain the first priority for conservation activities - including supplementation. Any available birds should therefore go to Norway, as the Norwegian supplementation project directly contributes to the survival of the wild (indigenous) population.

*Note: the discussion was continued following the presentation of the project by Aktion Zwerggans.*

### **Aktion Zwerggans Presentation**

Dr. Johan Mooij and Dr. Wolfgang Scholze from the German NGO Aktion Zwerggans joined the meeting in order to present their pilot project for the release of LWfG using microlight aircraft. Aktion Zwerggans believes that using microlight aircraft can be a promising method to re-introduce Lesser White-fronted Geese in Fennoscandia and subsequently wishes to test the effectiveness of the method by implementing two test flights. In the scope of the test flights it is planned, during two subsequent years, to guide up to 25 genetically pure Lesser White-fronted Geese (offspring of Russian wild birds) annually from the former breeding areas in Swedish Lapland along a traditional migratory route along the Swedish Baltic coast across northern Germany to the Lower-Rhine area in western Germany. Monitoring the birds for two to three years to see how they survive. It is proposed that the project would run from 2012-2013.



*Discussion:*

Germany asked if there had been any counts of LWfG in the Lower Rhein area during the 1970:s. Mooij replied that as no systematic counts for LWfG were undertaken it is not possible to say exactly how many frequented the area. Sweden commented that the birds would need to be equipped with metal and color rings before being released in Sweden, which was affirmed by Aktion Zwerggans.

The Chair inquired how many birds would be needed. Mooij explained that the requested number of 25 birds is not that high. The project would not make sense with only one or two birds. Aktion Zwerggans estimates that a minimum of 15 birds is needed for the migration. Scholze added that NGO needs a general decision from the Committee now that the project can go ahead when a sufficient number of suitable birds are available in order for Allianz not to withdraw their support. Germany inquired how many birds the French scientist Christian Moullec used for his similar project in 1999. Scholze explained that the Frenchman had 27 birds of which 21 arrived at the final destination. Sweden cited the recommendation made by Amato that only birds from Nordens Ark should be used for any future reintroduction projects and added that there is currently a ceiling on how many birds are available for release.

Norway commented that the general approach of using ultralight aircraft appears to be feasible. If the Fennoscandian LWfG population were to go extinct, there would most likely be several range states willing to fund such a project. Allianz is not the only option for funding. Scholze replied that it is not just a matter of funding and told Committee members not to underestimate the number of people needed for such a project. The preparations alone require two years. In addition, the aircraft used do not exist as such; they need to be designed and modified explicitly for this purpose. They need to be able to fly at a very low speed in order to not lose the birds. If the project does not receive the endorsement of the RECAP Committee now, Allianz will require that the planes already purchased are sold. Therefore Aktion Zwerggans needs a general acceptance of the project from the Committee now, so that it can be conducted at a later stage when enough birds are available.

Norway asked if a feasibility study has been done for the project. Scholze replied that a feasibility study was done for a previous LIFE project proposal and is available online. As it was done some time ago, certain things might need to be updated.

The Chair thanked Aktion Zwerggans for presenting their project to the Committee. The Secretariat will convey any comments and possible decision of the Committee to the NGO.

*Internal discussion continued:*

Sweden commented that even if the flyway is not an original one, Sweden does not view the release of 15-25 birds as a problem. They can also associate with other LWfGs along the flyway, which to a large extent is the same as that of Swedish conspecifics. Thus the flyway and overwintering area with the highest survival and return rate of birds will eventually prevail. The real limitation to this project is ultimately the number of available birds. Norway reiterated that it would at this stage prefer to save the eastern route rather than support the start of a new flyway. Finland agreed with Norway.

Norway stated that it is 100% opposed to a full re-introduction through the Aktion Zwerggans project. If the project takes place, it has to be stopped after two years. The RECAP Committee would have to review the annual reports submitted to Sweden by Aktion Zwerggans. In addition a full independent feasibility study would be needed. Germany commented that a feasibility study appears in this case not to be necessary taking into consideration that the area is the most important geese staging site inside Germany and in any case a traditional staging site for LWfG.

The Chair concluded that regardless of the flyway issue the problem remains that there are not enough birds for the Aktion Zwerggans project and there is no certainty on when the number of birds needed would be available.

All available birds should not be given to Aktion Zwerggans as there would be no birds left for other projects. The Chair suggested that the decision on whether a new feasibility study is needed or not should be postponed. The Secretariat will circulate the feasibility study conducted by Aktion Zwerggans and countries can then decide whether they think a new one is needed or not or where new information appears necessary.

*Decision: No decision was reached on the Aktion Zwerggans project proposal.*

*The Secretariat will send the feasibility study done by Aktion Zwerggans to the Committee members. The Committee can then decide whether a new feasibility study is deemed necessary for the project.*

### **Independent review of LWfG flyways – Terms of Reference**

The Committee discussed the Terms of Reference for an independent scientific review of LWfG flyways on the basis of the draft provided by the Secretariat and the written comments submitted by Sweden. In general it was agreed that the review should cover former flyways in Europe and that certain literature should in particular be subject to critical review. The Secretariat will commission the review to an independent expert. Sweden informed the Committee that it has reserved some funding for the review. The review will be commissioned as soon as possible.

*Decision: The Secretariat will revise the ToR on the basis of the comments made and send out the new draft for adoption after the meeting. Participants were specifically requested to submit further literature for review and/or for information to be mentioned in the ToR.*

### **Funding Opportunities for Conservation Activities in the Nordic Countries**

Mikander /UNEP/AEWA Secretariat presented a draft overview of funding opportunities for LWfG conservation in the Nordic countries; an agenda item put on to-do-list at the first RECAP meeting (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.5*). The compiled overview aimed to list possible sources of funding outside the usual framework of ministries and other government entities dealing directly with nature conservation. One of the main criteria for selection was that funding mentioned should also be available for conservation projects and LWfG research conducted outside of the Nordic countries, as the main bulk of funding will be needed in countries outside of Europe. The Nordic countries all have a strong link to the East – especially to Russia – which means that there are some bilateral funds etc. worth looking into. In general, however, there are very few funding opportunities specifically aimed at nature conservation projects. Project proposals would have to be drafted to highlight certain key criteria, such as “cooperation with Russia” or socio-economic benefits.

*Discussion:*

The Chair added that the CMS family is considering the possibility of setting up GEF projects for different migratory species, habitats, flyways etc. Camillo Ponziani of the WOW project will most likely be commissioned to help with the application procedure.

Sweden commented that the Swedish Research Council mentioned in the draft no longer has funding for conservation research. The research fund of the Swedish Environment Protection Agency gives money to seminars etc., also to bring in participants from abroad. WWF Sweden could be contacted for more information on Swedish funding and/or co-funding opportunities.

Germany added that the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety is dedicating voluntary contributions to the Bern Convention for their efforts to combat illegal hunting and to UNEP/AEWA Secretariat for World Migratory Bird Day.

The Secretariat commented that it is currently trying to focus efforts on projects in Iraq and Azerbaijan. Norway added that Dagestan is equally important for the LWfG, to which the Secretariat added that as it lies on the flyway to Azerbaijan, these two could perhaps be combined. Sweden inquired how the number of birds migrating to these countries can be assessed. The Secretariat replied that estimates about most of the wintering population distributions are indeed deficient. However, information is received for example through the BirdLife International Office in Jordan. Even in Iraq there are people who are monitoring waterbirds.

Norway added that the CIC project proposal to estimate the hunting pressure on key stopover sites in Russia should be kept on the table. In addition a fruitful meeting a few years ago between Finnish and Norwegian LWfG experts and officials from the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ecology resulted in a list of all the key LWfG sites in Russia. This should also be followed up. The Secretariat commented that due to recent personnel changes at CIC there currently seems to be no interest in pursuing the project, but that efforts in Russia should of course be continued.

### **Report on the Implementation of the International Single Species Action Plan**

Mikander made a short presentation on the implementation of the International SSAP in 2010 (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.6*). In general implementation efforts increased in 2010 with many conservation activities and projects carried out along the flyway, in countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Syria. In addition a new LIFE+ project application was submitted to the European Commission for the European flyway in September. The upcoming meeting of the International Working Group will hopefully bring further focus and drive to the implementation process as representatives will be asked to prioritize the most important conservation activities in their countries.

The relatively large number of projects and activities so far have been made possible due to the generous contributions made by the RECAP countries – in particular the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management. Funding for urgent conservation activities will in future continue to be crucial for the implementation of the SSAP. Efforts to secure funding from international sources must be enhanced.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group**

Mikander briefly presented the preliminary agenda and objectives for the first meeting of the Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group (LWfG IWG) taking place in Helsinki on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November and 1<sup>st</sup> of December (*Doc. LWfG RECAP 3.7*).

#### *Discussion:*

There was general agreement between the Committee members that a country outside of the group of Nordic countries should be chosen to chair the IWG. The Secretariat will try to identify a possible Chair and will circulate a list of attendees to the RECAP Committee.

Sweden announced that it had requested the addition of a new item to the IWG agenda concerning erroneous information about the Swedish population contained in the International Single Species Action Plan. Sweden explained that the original Swedish population was never reported as extinct, meaning that the Swedish LWfG project was in fact a supplementation, not a reintroduction. Eight independent observers saw birds in the area where the captive bred birds and foster parents were released. Edited texts to this effect were sent to the Secretariat during the drafting of the SSAP, but they were not taken into consideration.

The Secretariat replied that whilst there may well have been a few wild birds remnant of the wild population present, the question is whether it is enough that some birds were seen in the release area for the release to be considered a deliberate supplementation. Sweden responded that in the late 1970:s there were no guidelines on with definitions of “re-introduction” vs. “supplementation”. In 1979 and 1981, unringed adults with young were seen by independent observers in the release region. The IUCN guidelines make no distinction in the definitions

(supplementation/reintroduction) if a flyway has been changed. As described for supplementation in the IUCN guidelines, Sweden had a local regional population in place when starting to release the color-ring-marked captive-reared birds and foster parents in 1981. Therefore the SSAP text is simply not correct.

The Secretariat responded that the SSAP was adopted by the AEWA MOP – also by Sweden – and that it cannot be changed just like that. The Chair suggested that Sweden send all the relevant information to the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat upon which the Secretariat will come back with a proposal. Changes to the goals, actions etc. in the SSAP would have to go through the whole Action Plan revision process and ultimately be adopted by the MOP. Sweden replied that changes to the terminology and the background information about LWfG in Sweden might be enough to cover Sweden's concerns. Sweden will check the SSAP and inform the Secretariat of the extent of changes it deems necessary.

The Secretariat suggested that this item should be kept as an information point on the agenda of the international meeting, and not be opened for discussion there. The issue should instead be discussed within the RECAP Committee.

*Decision: The Secretariat will circulate the preliminary list of participants to the RECAP Committee members.*

*Participants agreed that RECAP Committee issues such as LWfG genetics and the flyway review should not be discussed at the IWG meeting. The genetic review will be made available to the IWG participants as an information document. The status of the Swedish population will be included on the IWG agenda as an information point.*

## **LWfG PR-Strategy**

Mikander briefly presented the agenda point. The idea for a PR-strategy to raise awareness and to help boost fundraising was put on the RECAP Committee to-do list during the first Committee meeting in 2008. As quite a substantial amount of information material (PR-video, website/workspace, logo, stickers, posters in different languages etc.) is in the pipeline, Mikander suggested that at present there isn't a need for a specific strategy with budget outline etc. News items concerning the implementation of the LWfG SSAP are also featured regularly on the AEWA news page. In addition the draft logo for the LWfG IWG was presented to the Committee for comments. The logo was commissioned to Mr. Uwe Vaartjes at the Museum König in Bonn, who has amongst other things designed many of the AEWA posters.

*Discussion:*

Concerning the logo, participants commented that the eye-ring should have a stronger yellow color (veering into orange – not pink) and that the blue colors should be clearer. The Chair added that Luxembourg is looking into the possibility to fund the production of some new stickers. Germany suggested that the production of postcards could also be a good idea.

*Decision: No international PR-strategy is needed at present. If such a strategy should become necessary, it should be developed under the IWG. The Secretariat will discuss the color changes to the logo with the designer.*

## **Next Meeting – Conclusion**

The Chair thanked all Committee members for their participation and for the fruitful meeting. He particularly welcomed the agreement reached on the genetics issue. The next RECAP meeting will be held when the flyway review is available.