

# IUCN SSC Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group



**CHAIR**  
Hywel Glyn Young  
Durrell Wildlife  
Conservation Trust

**RED LIST AUTHORITY  
COORDINATOR**  
BirdLife International  
(Focal point Hywel  
Glyn Young)

**NUMBER OF MEMBERS**  
88

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE**

Facebook: Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group  
Website: <https://threatenedwaterfowlsg.org>

**Mission statement**

To conserve the world's most threatened waterfowl by focusing on direct action; developing, demonstrating and disseminating best conservation practice and processes; and actively promoting and encouraging information exchange on threatened waterfowl monitoring, research, conservation and public awareness worldwide. We will do this through producing and implementing international action plans, incorporating in situ and ex situ conservation tools, as necessary; by providing advice to policy makers, international conventions and practitioners; and encouraging information exchange and cooperation amongst threatened waterfowl conservationists and with other relevant conventions and organisations.

**Projected impact 2021–2025**

By the end of 2025, the Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group (TWSG) will have greatly increased its network of threatened waterfowl experts and enthusiasts, facilitating communication freely between a wide range of individuals and institutions. This network will cover all global regions and each of the taxa of interest to the group: 43 full species, 22 subspecies and 12 other populations. Collaboration and support for specific projects in Eurasia, Russia, China, Myanmar, Africa and Madagascar will highlight important

locally-run programmes for, in particular, Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*), Blue-winged Goose (*Cyanochen cyanoptera*), Baer's Pochard (*Aythya baeri*), Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innotata*), Pink-headed Duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*), Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), Scaly-sided Merganser (*Mergus squamatus*), Pacific Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) and Spectacled Eider (*Somateria fischeri*), to increase understanding of these highly threatened taxa and to see positive results in their numbers.

**Targets 2021–2025**

**ASSESS**

**T-001** Continue long-term monitoring of Spectacled Eider (*Somateria fischeri*) in Chaun Delta (the only monitoring site in Asia).

**T-014** Undertake coordinated mid-winter census of Baer's Pochard (*Aythya baeri*) across flyway in January 2022.

**T-016** Assess protected areas in India for threatened waterfowl species.

**T-017** Assess population status, threats and conservation of the Blue-winged Goose (*Cyanochen cyanoptera*) in Ethiopia.

**PLAN**

**T-006** Conduct surveys for the world population of Scaly-sided Merganser (*Mergus squamatus*).

**T-012** Develop a National Action Plan for Baer's Pochard in Myanmar.

**T-022** Develop and adopt a National Species Action Plan for the Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) in Romania and Kazakhstan.

**ACT**

**T-003** Reintroduce captive-bred Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innotata*) at Lake Sofia, Madagascar.

**T-005** Continue long-term monitoring of Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) in Chaun Delta (the only monitoring site in Asian breeding grounds).

**T-007** Implement Scaly-sided Merganser artificial nest programme.

**T-008** Survey Pink-headed Duck (*Rhodonessa caryophyllacea*) in Kachin state, northern Myanmar: permanent ongoing observations from ten camera traps in ten isolated locations for two years.

**T-009** Distribute colour plates and pamphlets in the area of the Pink-headed Duck survey.

**T-010** Continue short-term monitoring of Pacific Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) in Apapelgino (the only monitoring site in Asian breeding grounds).

**T-013** Undertake site management and protection activities at Pyu Lake, Paleik Inn and Banaw Inn in partnership with local community groups.

**T-015** Maintain captive breeding population of Madagascar Pochard in Madagascar.



Madagascar Pochard with ducklings at Lake Sofia, October 2021. Floating feeding station can be seen in background  
Photo: Jocelyn Rafaly

**T-018** Assess global status of Red-breasted Goose through intensive monitoring and satellite tracking at staging and wintering areas.

**T-019** Support recovery of the Red-breasted Goose population through reduction and mitigation of poaching and illegal hunting impact at key staging and wintering areas.

**T-020** Investigate changes in migration route and dynamic and search for possible new staging and wintering areas of the Red-breasted Goose through satellite tracking.

#### NETWORK

**T-002** Launch new group website.

**T-004** Increase group membership.

#### COMMUNICATE

**T-011** Develop basic guidelines for the management of wetlands and conservation of Baer's Pochard.

**T-023** Raise awareness about Red-breasted Goose and threatened waterfowl at key staging areas in range countries.

### Activities and results 2021

#### ASSESS

##### Research activities

**T-001** (KSR 5)

**Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region:** 1

**Result description:** Fieldwork in the Chaun Delta during 2021 showed continuous decline of nesting Spectacled Eiders ( $P=0.0009$ ). Bird abundance index (in birds/observer from daily observations) is also declining with years accordingly with decline in nest density (correlation is 0.927). The nesting population in Chaun Delta is under



Madagascar Pochard (*Aythya innotata*) floating feeding station and release aviary at Lake Sofia, Madagascar. December 2021  
Photo: Roland Digby

the threat of disappearance. The state of other Asian (Russian) breeding populations is unknown. The monitoring in Chaun Delta will be continued in the following years. A large-scale aerial survey for all eider species in the Russian Arctic was implemented in 2019–2021 by Dr Sofia Rozenfeld, Institute of Ecology and Evolution. The results will be processed and published in the near future.

**T-014** (KSR 5)

**Number of scientific publications about species research that acknowledge SSC affiliation:** 0

**Result description:** Funding has been secured by China Bird Watching Association and the survey is being planned, due to go ahead in January 2022. Richard Hearn will be writing a small news item on this for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) in late 2021.

**T-017** (KSR 5)

**Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region:** 0

**Result description:** 2021 has proven a difficult year to undertake activities as per the predetermined schedules. The team is trying their level best to collect field data to estimate the current population status and threats of the Blue-winged Goose in Sululta plain, one of the Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) of Ethiopia, through total counting techniques. We are also undertaking direct inventories, questionnaire surveys and interviews to assess the possible conservation threats to the species as well as its habitats. Currently, we have started the field work and collecting population data for the dry season.

#### PLAN

##### Planning

**T-006** (KSR 8)

**Number of conservation plans/strategies developed:** 1

**Result description:** A spatial model of the breeding range was built in 2019 (Xu, W. et al. 2021). Modelling suitable breeding habitat and GAP analysis for the endangered Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*: Implications for conservation. *Bird Conserv. Int.* 31:1-12.) and the range-wide surveys of 2019–2021 confirmed the model findings. Among 93 rivers supporting breeding Scaly-sided Mergansers in Russia there were 46 rivers surveyed in 2019–2021. Preliminary results indicate the world population number in 2019–2021 is lower than estimated previously for 2003–2013 (lower than 4,660 birds; Solovyeva, D. V. et al. 2014). The population size and breeding range of the Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*. *Bird Conserv. Int.* 24: 393-405).

##### Policy

**T-022** (KSR 9)

**Number of documents provided to support/guide policy making (reviews, recommendations, policy briefs):** 0

**Result description:** The Romanian Action Plan is on the way to passing public hearings and is expected to be adopted by the Ministry of Environment by October 2022. The Kazakhstan Action Plan has been drafted and discussed by the national goose working group and needs finalisation and should be adopted by October 2022.



Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*)  
Photo: Gary Kramer



Red-breasted Goose being tagged  
in Kazakhstan for LIFE project  
Photo: ACBK/LIFE for Safe Flight project

## ACT

### Conservation actions

T-003 (KSR 10)

**Number of conservation translocations conducted:** 3

**Result description:** Thirty-five (35) captive-bred Madagascar Pochards, reared in 2020 and 2021, were transferred to Lake Sofia in four groups (nine, nine, nine and eight birds) in October–November 2021 and released onto the lake in four groups in October–December. All 35 birds appear settled and have learnt to feed from special feeders that birds must dive under water to enter. As of December 2021, eight of the birds released in 2018 and five birds bred wild at Lake Sofia from released birds are visiting the release site and mixing with newly released birds. Several ducklings have hatched from older released birds and of their young in 2021, nine have fledged. The ability of freshly hatched ducklings to access feeders for released birds may be crucial to their survival.

T-005 (KSR 10)

**Number of threatened species benefiting from in situ conservation action:** 1

**Result description:** Nest density and abundance index both indicated a stable breeding population of Long-tailed Duck in Chaun Delta. High fluctuations in nest density are typical for this species. The monitoring in Chaun Delta will be continued in the following years.

T-007 (KSR 10)

**Number of threatened species benefiting from in situ conservation action:** 1

**Result description:** There were 27 Scaly-sided Merganser nests in artificial nest sites in 2021. It seems this number of active nests is the maximum possible with reasonable efforts to maintain artificial nests. Among 53 pairs counted in the

Kievka River basin, 16 were nesting in artificial nests in 2021. Thus, the number of pairs using artificial nests for nesting was 30.2% of population.

T-010 (KSR 10)

**Number of threatened species benefiting from in situ conservation action:** 1

**Result description:** Early summer surveys showed the site supports 1,750 individuals, while 1% threshold for the subspecies is 1,700. The monitoring will be continued as a PhD project.

T-013 (KSR 10)

**Number of threatened species benefiting from in situ conservation action:** 0

**Result description:** Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) are continuing to do this as much as they can, but activities have been reduced in the recent period.

T-015 (KSR 10)

**Number of threatened species benefiting from ex situ conservation action:** 1

**Result description:** As of 20 December 2021, the captive population of Madagascar Pochard in two Antsohihy conservation breeding centres stands at 110 birds (63 males and 47 females); 34 birds hatched in 2021 (three of these did not survive); 35 birds bred at the centres during 2020 and 2021 were released at the reintroduction site, Lake Sofia, in October–December.

T-018 (KSR 10)

**Number of technical documents provided to support conservation actions:** 1

**Result description:** To date, the wintering coordinated counts between Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine have proved to be inadequate for population status estimate. 50–60% of the presumed global population has been registered during coordinated counts across the three countries and no new wintering areas have been found via

telemetry studies. However, in 2021 a successful autumn monitoring expedition was conducted in partnership with the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Secretariat, co-funded by AEWA and the EU LIFE Programme. The results are due end-January, but should provide an update on the population status and numbers of the species – the first since 2016. In addition, the TWSG coordinator for Europe has contributed to the assessment of the IUCN status of the species and has made considerable corrections to the proposed population numbers and status.

T-019 (KSR 10)

**Number of species with increased or prevented decrease in population or range size, as a result of conservation actions:** 1

**Result description:** Since January 2021, the whole area around Lake Manych Gudilo in Kalmykia (Russia) has been set up with no spring hunting and makes a safe staging area for the species. It is a key staging site for the species in spring and this will significantly reduce exposure to illegal/accidental killing during hunting season on the way to breeding sites. In addition, Aydam 2012 Ltd has expanded its non-hunting zone within the hunting estate of Kulykol Lake, Kazakhstan, to cover 35% of its territory. Thus, a key autumn staging site for the species, through which the whole global population of the species passes and is a key feeding area, is safe for the Red-breasted Goose. These two actions will help to significantly reduce illegal killing during hunting season. In Bulgaria, the non-hunting zone around the key roosting lakes along the coast has been extended from 100 m around shoreline to 350 m. Further, in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine, active mixed patrolling is organised in cooperation with authorities to reduce illegal killing and poaching. In Kazakhstan, regular raids are

organised with state inspectorate on game control and last year a poacher was prosecuted for killing a Red-breasted Goose. However, illegal killing during hunting season and poaching still pose a big problem for the species; some hunting estate owners and managers in Kazakhstan do continue to practice illegal activities and evidence of killed Red-breasted Geese exists. The planned population status report will shed more light on the improvement or stabilisation of the species population.

## NETWORK

### Membership

T-002 (KSR 2)

Website online: 1

**Result description:** The website is now up and live at <https://threatenedwaterfowlsg.org/>.

T-004 (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 1

**Result description:** The email group has 135 members as of December 2021. The Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1507832869398959>) has 1,940 members. As of 20 December 2021, 65 members had joined/re-joined SSC Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group 2021–2025.

## COMMUNICATE

### Communication

T-011 (KSR 13)

Number of print communications materials distributed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 0

**Result description:** Plans need to be completed and will be available in the near future.

T-023 (KSR 13)

Number of digital communication outputs developed in relation to specific taxonomic groups: 5

**Result description:** An interactive exhibit has been designed and produced in four national languages for Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. It tells the story and depicts the migration of the species and the challenges it faces, from displacement by investment projects, through change of land management and climate change challenges. The exhibit has been shown in key cities and towns in all four range countries and has been visited by over 25,000 people, including children and the general public in the four countries. A set of awareness and information materials has been produced and distributed

amongst stakeholder groups, i.e. hunters and local communities, including information materials about the status and migration of the species, identification guides for hunters to separate different goose species and information materials about the restrictions in hunting and zonation of certain areas. Two short videos about the species have been produced and were distributed around World Bird Migratory Days: Emilia's Story The Migration of a Red-Breasted Goose and The Migration of the Red-breasted Goose – Flight Connecting Countries. Both videos have been seen by thousands of viewers around the globe. The species has been depicted and showcased by the AEW Secretariat during World Bird Migratory Days both in 2020 and 2021. The AEW Red-breasted Goose Working Group and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) Life project Facebook pages were followed by over 5,000 people and news items there have been reaching 3–10,000 people on Facebook. The pages were hacked last year and a new Life project Facebook page has been set up which slowly grows, but some news items have reached over 10–15,000 viewers. The Facebook pages of the Goose Specialist Group and TWSG are also used to share information on work and activities for the species. The case of the killing of the goose Emilia in Romania made first page news in the country and publications and coverage on the issue by Romanian Ornithological Society (SOR)/BirdLife Romania reached over 1,000,000 people in the country. Television coverage of the first successful tagging of Red-breasted Goose in North Kazakhstan in 2019 was covered by national and regional media in Kazakhstan and viewed by an audience of over 700,000 people. Russian partners – the Working Group in Anseriformes of North Eurasia and Chernie Zemly Reserve management – have produced two videos on the species viewed by thousands of people and shown on regional television stations.

## Acknowledgements

TWSG would like to thank members for their regular updates and points of interest on the many taxa of concern to the group. We are particularly grateful for the ongoing support of projects from Yihenew Aynalem, Richard Hearn, Nicky Petkov, Floriot Randrianarimangason, Felix Razafindrajao, Tarun K. Roy, Diana Solovyeva and Richard

Thorns. Many partner organisations have been involved across the projects and we are indebted to the support of Asity Madagascar, Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, Augsburg Zoo (Germany), Baer's Pochard Task Force, BirdLife International, Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) BirdLife Myanmar, Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), Changjiang Conservation Foundation, China Birdwatching Association, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), Institute of the Biological Problems of the North, Kinross Gold (Russia), Life Programme, Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable (Madagascar), Romanian Ornithological Society (SOR), Saving the Madagascar Pochard, SEE Foundation (Society of Entrepreneurs and Ecology), State Atomic Energy Corporation 'Rosatom', The Conservation Leadership Programme Team, The Peregrine Fund, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and Working Group on Anseriformes of Northern Eurasia (WGG). S. Imad Cherkaoui, Will Duckworth, Bruce Dugger, Igor Fefelov, Tony Fox, Andy Green, Ricardo Matus and Eileen Rees have given the group support throughout. Gary Kramer has kindly allowed us to use his exceptional photographs and Dan Wright has maintained the group's website.

## Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 22

Geographic regions: 3 Africa, 12 Asia, 13 Europe

### Actions during 2021:

Assess: 3 (KSR 5)

Plan: 2 (KSR 8, 9)

Act: 8 (KSR 10)

Network: 2 (KSR 2)

Communicate: 2 (KSR 13)

### Overall achievement 2021–2025:

