



Eileen Rees

Chair

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Red List Authority Coordinator

BirdLife International (focal point: Eileen Rees)

Location/Affiliation

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge,
Gloucester GL2 7BT, UK

Number of members

310

Social networks

Website: www.swansg.org



Mission statement

The Swan Specialist Group (SSG) is an international network of swan specialists who undertake monitoring, research, conservation and management of swan populations. Its mission is to facilitate effective communication between members and others with an interest in swan management and conservation worldwide, in order to improve national and international links for cooperative research, to identify gaps in knowledge and to provide a forum for addressing swan conservation issues.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we will have undertaken a further census of the Northwest European Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) population to determine whether we have achieved the initial target of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) Bewick's Swan Action Plan, of halting the ongoing decline in the Northwest European population and, if necessary, begin recovery of the population to its 2000 level. By 2020, we also envisage having a better understanding of the environmental factors contributing to the decline, and to have started addressing these where necessary. For the other swan species, which are currently classed as Least Concern by IUCN, we will maintain our monitoring of population trends, or collect such information where the monitoring is being undertaken by other organisations, to identify any conservation issues that may arise for the swans.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Research activities: (1) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: reasons for the population decline identified; (2) population monitoring: international censuses of migratory swan populations in the Northern Hemisphere.

Plan

Planning: (1) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: implementation workshop held; (2) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: actions to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans put in place; (3) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: population decline halted and reversed.

Policy: provide information and technical advice in support of the programmes of IUCN SSC, Wetlands International, BirdLife International, Ramsar and others as necessary.

Act

Conservation actions: implementation of AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: actions to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans put in place.

Network

Membership: improve knowledge of population trends and threats to swan species in the Southern Hemisphere.

Communicate

Communication: (1) publish *Swan News* newsletter annually: four issues in years 2017–2020; (2) launch Swan Specialist Group website; (3) maintain Swan Specialist Group listserv.

Scientific meetings: Swan Specialist Group Symposium: convene 6th International Swan Symposium.

Research activities: Swan Specialist Group Symposium: publish 6th International Swan Symposium proceedings.



Eileen Rees introduces the AEWA Bewick's Swan workshop at the 6th ISS
Photo: Leho Luigujõe



Leho Luigujõe (6th ISS conference organiser) presenting the updated National Action Plan for Bewick's Swans in Estonia
Photo: Eileen Rees



Julia Newth presenting on the Swan Champions Project during the International-Swan-Symposium
Photo: Kane Brides

Activities and results 2019

Assess

Research activities

i. Five papers addressing the reasons for the Bewick's Swan population decline were published, including on: (1) winter food supply, which was found not to be a limiting factor (Wood, K.A., et al. (2019). Are long-term trends in Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* numbers driven by changes in winter food resources? *Bird Conservation International* 29:479–496. [DOI: 10.1017/S0959270918000382]; Wood, K.A., et al. (2019). Seasonal variation in energy gain explains patterns of resource use by avian herbivores in an agricultural landscape: Insights from a mechanistic model. *Ecological Modelling* 409:108762. [DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolmodel.2019.108762]), (2) species misidentification leading to shooting of protected populations (Newth, J.L., et al. (2019). Conservation implications of misidentification and killing of protected species. *Conservation Science and Practice* 1:e24. [DOI: 10.1111/csp2.24]), and (3) species distribution (Rozenfeld, S.B., et al. (2019). The Bewick Swan (*Cygnus bewickii*): an expansion of Asian populations to the west, does it exist? *Zoologicheski zhurnal* 98:302–313. [DOI: 10.1134/S0044513419030139]; Beekman, J., et al. (2019). Long-term population trends and shifts in distribution of Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* wintering in northwest Europe. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:73–102). (KSR #32)

ii. Annual surveys of the two Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) populations – the Eastern and Western populations – in North America coordinated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service continued in 2019. Results of the 5-yearly international censuses of the Northwest Mainland European Whooper Swan population (*Cygnus Cygnus*; Laubek et al. 2019. Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* January popula-

tion censuses for Northwest Mainland Europe, 1995–2015. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:103–122; available at https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2707/pdf_175) and the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population (Beekman et al. 2019. Long-term population trends and shifts in distribution of Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* wintering in northwest Europe. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:73–102; available at https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2706/pdf_174), undertaken by the Swan Specialist Group in liaison with Wetlands International, were published in *Wildfowl* Special Issue No. 5 (proceedings of the 6th International Swan Symposium; further information provided below). The proceedings also included a paper reviewing census results over several decades for the five Northern Hemisphere swan species: Trumpeter (*Cygnus buccinator*), Tundra, Whooper, Bewick's and Mute (*Cygnus olor*) Swans (Rees et al. 2019. Conservation status of the world's swan populations, *Cygnus* sp. and *Coscoroba* sp.: a review of current trends and gaps in knowledge. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:35–72; available at https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2705/pdf_173). (KSR #12)

iii. The conservation status of swan species/populations in the Southern Hemisphere was included in a review undertaken by swan experts from each region, published in the Swan Symposium Proceedings (see Rees, E.C., et al. (2019). Conservation status of the world's swan populations, *Cygnus* sp. and *Coscoroba* sp.: a review of current trends and gaps in knowledge. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:35–72; available at https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2705/pdf_173). (KSR #12)



Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*
Photo: James Lees - WWT

Plan

Planning

- i.** Sixteen range states continued establishing activities to reduce threats to the Northwest European Bewick's Swan, including maintaining key site networks and legislation protecting birds from illegal hunting. (KSR #18, 29)
- ii.** Results of the January 2015 census indicated that the rapid decline in the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population recorded between 1995 and 2010 may have halted. Plans were put in place for a January 2020 census and the results should confirm whether the decline has been stemmed/reversed or whether it is continuing. The census has also been extended to include wintering areas traditionally used by the Caspian-wintering Bewick's Swan population, to assess potential population interchange. (KSR #16)

Policy

- i.** The Chair of the Swan Specialist Group attended the IUCN SSC Leaders' Meeting in Abu Dhabi in October 2019 and contributed to a range of workshops, including the Birds Specialist Groups session. (KSR #27)

Act

Conservation actions

- i.** Several activities planned for the "Swan Champions" project in the Russian arctic were progressed. Notably: preparation and distribution of a leaflet to hunters, a travelling exhibition on swans and the importance of arctic wetlands, school programmes, workshops, and use of social media. (KSR #18, 29)

ii. An update on the movements of Bewick's Swans tracked in relation to wind farms was presented in a seminar on the UK government's Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for offshore renewable energy, held in London in March 2019. The 2019/20 tracks were also presented in an Interim Report to the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Rees, E.C., Griffin, L.R., Wood, K.A., Nolet, B.A. and Nuijten, R.J.M. 2019. Modelling Bewick's Swan telemetry data to assess collision risk for the birds migrating across Europe: a cumulative impact assessment), prior to modelling the collision risk to Bewick's Swans of offshore and terrestrial wind farms across Europe scheduled for 2020. (KSR #18, 29)

Communicate
Communication

i. *Swan News* 15 was published on schedule and made available online (<http://www.swansg.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Swan-News-15.pdf>). (KSR #28)

ii. The Swan Specialist Group website (<https://swansg.org>) provides information on all swan species, and was updated with news items throughout 2019. (KSR #28)

iii. The ssg-forum listserv, hosted by Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), continues to be the main method for maintaining communication between Swan Specialist Group members, along with the annual newsletter. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. Eleven presentations at the 6th International Swan Symposium, on a range of subjects including population trends and delineation, habitat/resource use, demography, threats and recent tracking studies, were published as proceedings of the meeting in a special issue of the *Wildfowl* journal (*Wildfowl* Special Issue No. 5). The proceedings also include a synthesis of the meeting, overviewing current trends and

future directions in swan research (Wood et al. 2019. Current trends and future directions in swan research: insights from the 6th International Swan Symposium. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 5:1–35; available at <https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2704>). The journal is open access, and papers can be downloaded from its website at <https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/issue/view/297>. (KSR #28, 32)

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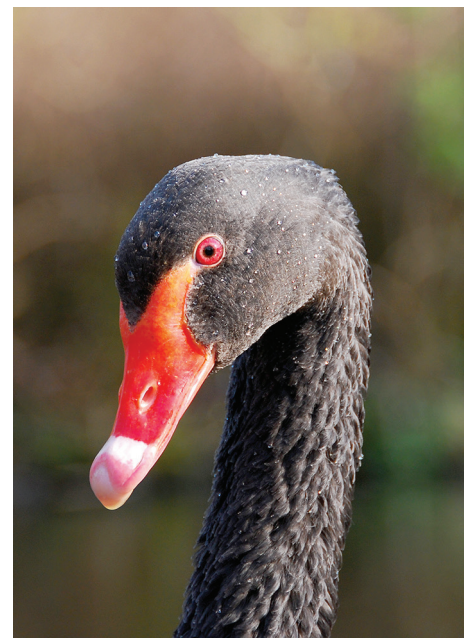
Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

Assess	3	
Plan	3	
Act	2	
Communicate	4	

Main KSRs addressed: 12, 16, 18, 27, 28, 29, 32

KSR: Key Species Result



Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*
Photo: Emlyn Jones - WWT