



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 (retired)

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: identify reasons for the population decline; (2) population monitoring: conduct international censuses of migratory swan populations in the Northern Hemisphere; (3) gap-filling: improve knowledge of population trends and threats to swan species in the Southern Hemisphere.

Plan

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

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: put actions to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans in place.

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.

Trumpeter Swan, *Cygnus buccinator*,
coming in to land
Photo: Margaret Smith



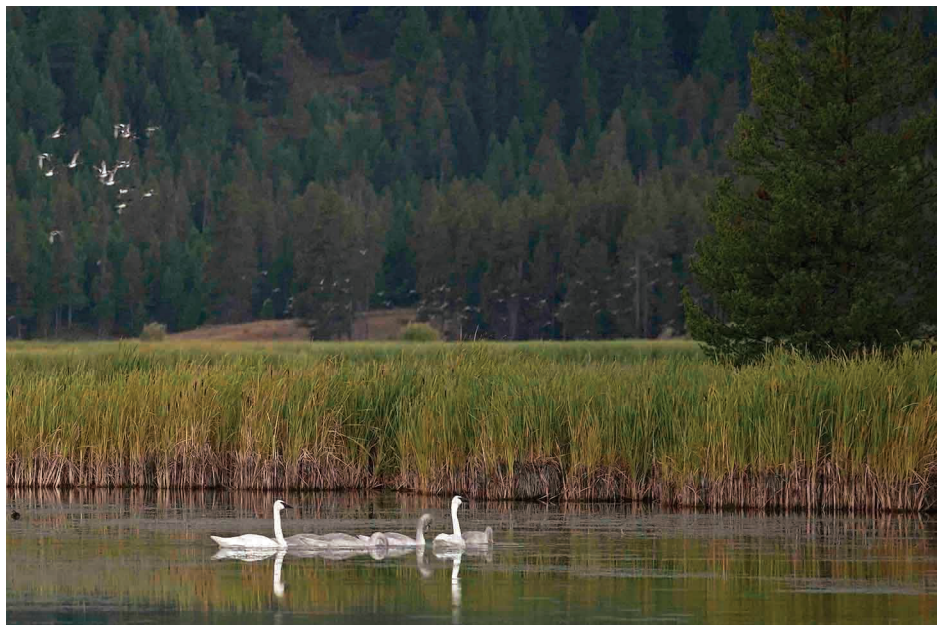
Activities and results 2020

Assess

Research activities

i. Information on changes in migratory patterns and potential reasons for the reduced breeding success of Northwest European Bewick's Swans was published via a suite of papers: (1) Nuijten, R.J.M., et al. (2020). 'Concurrent shifts in wintering distribution and phenology in migratory swans: Individual and generational effects'. *Global Change Biology* 26:4263–4275. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.15151>; (2) Nuijten, R.J.M., et al. (2020). 'Apparent breeding success drives long-term population dynamics of a migratory swan'. *Journal Avian Biology* 51:e02574. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jav.02574>; (3) Rees, E.C. and Rozenfeld, S.B. (2020). 'Cygnus columbianus Tundra Swan'. In: V. Keller, et al. (eds.) *European Breeding Bird Atlas 2: Distribution, Abundance and Change*, pp.105. Barcelona: European Bird Census Council & Lynx Edicions. Two more manuscripts were submitted. (KSR #32)

ii. Censuses of (1) Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) and (2) Tundra Swan (also known as Whistling Swan, *Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) populations were carried out annually by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), with results published in reports and summarised in: 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. The 5-yearly censuses of (3) Icelandic Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) population, (4) Northwest Mainland Europe Whooper Swan population, and (5) Northwest European Bewick's Swan population were undertaken on schedule in January 2020, with counts also extending to Bewick's and Whooper Swans in the Caspian and Black Sea region. Additionally,



Trumpeter Swans, *Cygnus buccinator*,
with cygnets at Silver Lake, Idaho
Photo: Jeff Snyder



Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, adult
Photo: Colin Butters



Girls with Tundra Swan, *Cygnus columbianus columbianus*, cygnet on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska
Photo: Craig Ely



Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*,
on her nest with downy cygnets
Photo: Cathy Kerr



Nyambayar Batbayar's team, with Whooper Swans, *Cygnus cygnus*, caught in Mongolia for ringing and tracking in 2017
Photo: Otgonbayar Tsend/WSCC of Mongolia

internationally coordinated counts of Bewick's, Whooper and Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) in East Asia were analysed and published in three papers: (6) Fang, L., et al. (2020). 'Two distinctive flyways with different population trends of Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* in East Asia'. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 6:13–42.; (7) Ao, P., et al. (2020). 'Migration routes and conservation status of the Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* in East Asia'. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 6:43–72.; and (8) Meng, F., et al. (2020). 'The migratory Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* population in East Asia'. *Wildfowl* Special Issue 6:73–96. (KSR #12)

Plan

Planning

i. Range states continued established activities to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans, including maintaining key site networks and legislation protecting birds from illegal hunting. (KSR #18, 29)

ii. The international census of the Northwest European Bewick's Swan population was completed on schedule in mid-January 2020. Subsequent collation of the data and population status assessment was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but most counts are now in. A concurrent census was also undertaken of Caspian Bewick's Swan population across its wintering range, for the first time, to assess total numbers wintering in the Caspian and Black Sea regions, provide a basis for future monitoring of this population, and inform future studies of population interchange. (KSR #16)

Policy

i. Letters expressing IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group concern were sent regarding: (1) proposed redefinition of the scope of the US Migratory Bird Treaty Act (the 'MBTA Rule'), and (2) Icelandic government debate on issuing hunting permits for Whooper Swans. We advised BirdLife International of a recently published paper (Rees et al. 2019) assessing the conservation status (including gaps in knowledge) of swan species/populations globally. (KSR #27)

Act

Conservation actions

i. Virtual bilateral (Anglo-Russian) 'Swan Champions Project' meetings continued online. A film on Bewick's Swan conservation, with a particular focus on the Russian arctic, is now in development. Initial analysis of the collision risk posed by wind farms and powerlines to Bewick's Swans across Europe was completed. (KSR #18, 29)

Communicate

Communication

i. *Swan News* 16 is in full draft. It will be finalised and circulated in 2021. (KSR #28)

ii. The ssg-forum listserv, hosted by the 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)

Acknowledgements

The IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group is grateful to its members for their continued active and enthusiastic involvement in swan research and conservation work during 2020 which, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been an unusual and particularly difficult year in many regions. We thank the IUCN SSC Secretariat for its support and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) for hosting the Swan Specialist Group website. The WWT and Wetlands International also co-funded swan survey work in the north Caspian region, which contributed to the international swan censuses. The Chinese Academy of Sciences kindly supported analysis and publication of data on the flyways, population trends and conservation challenges for Anatidae, including swan species, in East Asia.

Summary of activities 2020

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

Assess	2	
Plan	3	
Act	1	
Communicate	2	

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

KSR: Key Species Result