



Safeguarding wintering feeding grounds for Red-breasted Goose by ensuring access of farmers to financial support under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

- Interim Report -

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EAFRD – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

LAG – local action group

MARD – Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

NRDP – National Rural Development Programme

RbG – Red-breasted Goose

RBGIWG – Red-breasted Goose International Working Group

SOR – Romanian Ornithological Society – BirdLife Partner in Romania

SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

TDD – Tulcea - Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation LAG

1. OVERVIEW

The Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) is a charismatic, globally threatened species, highly dependent on wetlands and farmed areas. In the last 50 years, the location of its wintering grounds has changed dramatically for reasons yet unknown. This species has a small wintering range, with 80-90% of the population concentrated at just five roost sites, within an area of less than 20,000 km² in Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. Romania represents one of the most important wintering places; especially the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex (a component of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation) is the main winter feeding area. The geese feed predominantly on winter wheat, barley, maize, some pasture grasses and split grain, and they have also been observed in rape fields.

Large flocks of Red-breasted and other threatened geese feeding on farmland brings them into conflict with farmers. Farmers receive no compensation for damage to their crops, and thus have developed techniques to scarce the geese and protect their crops. Many of these practices are not sympathetic to the geese and/or are environmental unfriendly, e.g. incorrect application of pesticides, scaring birds, crop regimes unfavourable to the geese, and poisons to protect the crops.

Given their extensive use of farmland habitat, agriculture policies play a crucial part in the conservation and fortunes of wintering RbG. Since joining the EU on 1 January 2007, Romania has been subject to EU legislative requirements, including the Birds and the Habitats Directives, and the implementation of EU agricultural policy. These instruments are inextricably linked. The development and implementation of national agricultural policies and programmes should therefore be sympathetic to the needs of widespread farmland birds, of Annex 1 species under the Birds Directive and of those deemed priority species according to European agricultural and inland wetland conservation strategies prepared by BirdLife International, including RbG.

The Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has recently prepared a new approach for the development of rural areas, a fundamental objective of which is the improvement of the environment and countryside through the support of land management, in accordance with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Under the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) for 2007-2013, Romania will therefore need to ensure such support contributes to EU sustainable development objectives by encouraging farmers to employ land-use methods that are compatible with the need to preserve the natural environment and landscape and protect and improve natural resources (Axis 2). Key issues to be addressed include biodiversity and Natura 2000 site management, for which the implementation of appropriately designed and targeted agri-environment schemes will be critical.

The fourth Axis (LEADER) allows forming a 'bottom-up', public-private partnership approach to meeting local development needs in rural areas, thereby achieving the objectives of other axes, including Axis 2. The fundamental elements of this approach are the involvement of local action groups (LAGs), the formulation of local development strategies and cooperation projects thereof. Based on these requirements, the MARD is now engaged in the process of preparing guidelines and training programmes, the aim being to have a formally recognized network of LAGs by the end of

2009. In the interim period, LAGs are elaborating their own strategies, which will be later used in projects financed under the NRDP for 2007-2013.

On this basis, it is clear that LAGs could play a major part in developing local projects and schemes under the NRDP that deliver financial support to farmers where adopting practices beneficial for RbG and other threatened species (i.e. agri-environment schemes under Axis 2). An integral part of this would involve the dissemination of environmental information and active engagement of farmers at the decision-making level.

The project proposal that follows is therefore aimed at providing advice to ensure the preparation of an appropriate local environmental strategy to meet the needs of the Razelm-Sinoe lakes complex in terms of RbG conservation. The input of expert advice and information concerning the needs of the RbG is both an opportunity and a necessity for ensuring the effective partnership of local actors, the protection of the environment and biodiversity, and provision of financial support to relevant beneficiaries.

Also, by including the proposed agri-environment schemes actions in the local strategy for rural development of the key areas will help the local farmers to apply successfully for agri-environment payments and so to ensure safer winter feeding areas for the geese.

2. OBJECTIVES

The goal of the present project is to safeguard the feeding grounds of Red-breasted Goose in Romania through positive engagement and provision of assistance to local communities, especially farmers, to raise awareness and facilitate access to NRDP funds for employing appropriate land management practices.

A. DEVELOPING A REALISTIC APPROACH FOR THE RED-BREASTED GOOSE CONSERVATION IN THE STRATEGY OF THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP

Objective: Developing a realistic approach for Red-breasted Goose conservation in the local strategy for rural development of the Local Action Group which covers the feeding territories of the Red-breasted Goose.

Activity 1. Support for the development of the LAG strategy that shall include clear targets for RbG conservation: this shall include an initial workshop and regular meetings of the LAG strategy working group, starting with a baseline analysis of the economic and environmental status, a SWOT analysis focused on RbG habitats, drawing up of farming requirements in coherence with specific objectives for RbG protection.

STATUS: in progress

The LAG which covers the most important parts of the Romanian RbG wintering grounds, represented by the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex, is the “Tulcea - Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation LAG” (TDD). This LAG is a public-private partnership which is formed in order to meet local development needs in rural areas and is focused on the Danube Delta and surrounding areas. The TDD is composed by partners from the Romanian administration sector represented by Tulcea County and Danube Delta

Biosphere Reserve, local NGOs concerned with monitoring the administration sector of the region (represented by Association of Local Administrations from Danube Delta), fishing activities and fishermen associations, and with companies which are developing activities in tourism and fisheries. The area covered by TDD is presented in ANNEX 1.

In order to achieve the present project objectives a partnership was built between the Romanian Ornithological Society and the TDD. Several meetings between the coordinator of TDD, Mr. George Roşca and the assistant, Mr. Paul Székely were carried out. On these technical meetings were discussed and analyzed the actions needed for the RbG conservation in the area and how can be these included in the local strategy as the development of the local strategy itself.

A major drawback in the implementation of this project's actions proved to be the severely delayed development process of the LAG's designation and especially of the elaboration process of the local strategies not sooner than the end of 2009 not only in this area but in the whole Romania. Because of this, the local strategy, which should have been already developed by the TDD, was not finalized yet and so the target actions for the RbG conservation could not be included. For this, a major improvement represented the technical meetings mentioned above. After numerous discussions, we concluded that a workshop between the TDD, MARD representatives and our team is absolutely necessary for the local strategy development process. And so, on 13.10.2008 we managed to organize a workshop, held in Bucharest at the MARD headquarters. This workshop was attended by MARD representatives who are in charge with the implementation of the NRDP (especially Axis 2 and 4, LEADER), the coordinator of TDD, the mayors of the most important RbG wintering localities from the area and our, project implementation team (SOR). The meeting focused on the development of the TDD's local strategy and of the targeted RbG agri-environment scheme. Pictures from this workshop are presented in ANNEX 2. As a result, several issues regarding the elaboration of the local strategy were clarified making the implementation process easier. Also, the MARD representatives recorded all the problems and difficulties with which the TDD had and have to deal for the development of the local strategy. More important, at this meeting we presented the proposed targeted RbG agri-environment schemes which will be, hopefully, accepted by the MARD and whose actions will be also, included in the developing local strategy.

Further more, based on the information gathered, through the coordinator of TDD, from the project area, we finalized the SWOT analysis focused on the habitats of RbG and other threatened species. This is presented in ANNEX 3. The analysis was conducted by taking in consideration the habitat requirements of RbG flocks, the project area's special features and the farming methods deployed.

B. INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Objective: Increasing awareness of the local community, and especially of the farmers, to apply environmentally friendly activities and practices that support the conservation of Red-breasted Goose and other threatened species.

Activity 2. Technical workshops and meetings with the local farmers and their representatives needed to raise awareness of the project objectives, to prepare a list of

priority farmers that should receive support according to the core areas of RbG habitats, and to develop and refine the technical requirements of the agri-environment scheme.

STATUS: in progress

The link between the project implementation team and the local farmers was the coordinator of TDD and the local mayors, who provided us with vital information about the overall status of the project's area. At this point no technical meetings were organized directly with the farmers as the special requirements and other details regarding the compensatory payments for farmers, that should receive support, were not clarified and also, because the Farm Guideline has not been finalized yet as was depending on the data mentioned above. The implementation of this activity will be the main objective in the remaining project time as several workshops are organized and planed to be held in the next few months.

Before any meetings or workshops could be organized we needed additional information about the project area: where are the most important RbG agricultural lands, what is the trend of the agricultural practices in the area, which are the most frequent crop types etc. For this, detailed, centralized data on land use in the wintering area (Tulcea and Constanța counties) was collected from the Centre of Statistics of Tulcea and Constanța. Despite the fact that our activities and actions are concentrated on the wintering area from Tulcea county (which is the most important and covered by the TDD), we also collected data from Constanta county because, if it will be possible, we will also try to disseminate the existing information there too. Based on the gathered information, maps with the distribution of the most important RbG localities were created (see ANNEX 4). These are the localities where in the following months workshops will be organized and so the information and farm guideline will be disseminated for the local farmers, with the help of TDD and the mayors.

The received information from the Centre of Statistics and the local mayors was also very useful in the elaboration of the list with the farmers that should receive technical assistance and support. However, the list is only partially finalized as the existing data is very scarce, especially because of the unclear and confuse situation of the landownership in the area due to the obsolete and incomplete cadastral system. We hope that after the local workshops we will have a clearer image and a more accurate situation of the most important farmers in the area.

Activity 3. Elaboration and dissemination of a Farm Guideline, which shall include all the requirements necessary to ensure RbG conservation on the agriculture lands, consistent with EAFRD objectives and requirements.

STATUS: in progress

This activity, as the whole project implementation process, was negatively influenced and so, delayed by the slow implementation process of the NRDP in Romania. Because of this, important details which should be included in the guideline, such as the data related to the funding eligibility, needed management requirements and restrictions to be employed and respected by farmers, deadlines and money amounts etc. were not available until recently.

Fortunately, by now, the Farm Guideline is finalized, and it is sent to the MADR for the final corrections and additions. In ANNEX 5 is presented the Farm Guideline's draft. This Farm Guideline is developed especially for the farmers who own agricultural lands in the geese wintering area, setting out clearly the target area, details of the funding eligibility, the packages of the existing grassland agri-environment schemes under Axis 2 (created to support other threatened bird species) which are suitable for them and most important how they can employ a geese friendly land management. After the approval, the guideline will be edited and printed as a leaflet or brochure and disseminated at the following workshops with the farmers. Additionally, we will help the implementation of NRDP in the area by distributing the official MADR leaflet (if it will be finalized by the end of the project), regarding the financial support related to the available grassland agri-environment measure.

C. DEVELOPING A TARGETED RED-BREASTED GOOSE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME

Objective: Developing a targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme and securing funds under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

Activity 4. Workshops and meetings organized with the local and central authorities from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. A priority objective of such meetings will be to encourage the MARD to include and promote a targeted agri-environment measure under the National Rural Development Programme, the focus of which shall be the RbG (and other threatened geese species).

STATUS: in progress

From the beginning of the project implementation a good cooperation existed between our team and the MARD representatives. As mentioned above, the first workshop was organized in Bucharest at the MADR headquarters. At this meeting a first version of the agri-environment scheme was presented and discussed. Important recommendations and advice were provided by the participants and especially by the mayors from the project's area. The present version of the agri-environment scheme is presented in ANNEX 6. This scheme contains the special farming requirements for the agricultural lands and pastures which must be met in order to achieve the RbG protection objectives. Also, are described the special features of those agricultural lands which can be suitable for the geese and so eligible to receive financial support. Further lobby will be carried out in the remaining time to assure the acceptance and implementation of this geese oriented agri-environment scheme by the MADR.

Activity 5. Development of a standardised strategy for the geese monitoring.

STATUS: completed

The geese monitoring strategy was developed after intense discussions between the members of the Red-breasted Goose International Working Group and the coordinator of this group, Miss Lavinia Răducescu. Also, important additions were made at the annual SOR workshop (regarding the planning of the organization's future conservation activities) held on 21-22 May 2008 in Comana, near Bucharest. For the elaboration of the

strategy we used the already existing monthly, synchronized geese monitoring strategy which is ongoing under the RBGIWG coordination for all the RbG flyway, and adapted it to the special requirements of the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex and the Romanian monitoring team. The final version of the geese monitoring strategy is attached to the present report (see ANNEX 7).

3. OUTCOMES

- The SWOT analysis was successfully finalized and it is attached to the present report. This analysis was very useful for the designation process of the target areas, which are the most important RbG agricultural lands in the project area, and how to approach and solve the existing problems.
- The Farm Guideline was finalized but we are waiting for the MADR's approval and possibly suggestions, corrections to print it as a leaflet or brochure. The organization and planning of the following workshops with the farmers is directly influenced by the development of this guideline as we consider this an essential tool to disseminate the information on the field.
- The list of farmers that should receive technical assistance and support is only partially completed, additional, more accurate data needed for its completion. We hope that during the following workshops with the farmers we will gain a better understanding of the real situation, regarding the ownership of agricultural lands, in the project's area.
- The standardized geese monitoring strategy was successfully finalized and it is attached to the present report. It is already in use, the monitoring providing us with essential information about the present situation of the RbG population.

Information regarding the project can be found on the RBGIWG website: www.brantaruficollis.org.

4. NEXT STEPS

In the remaining project implementation time our priority it will be to organize the workshops with the local farmers. We plan to organize one workshop for every two neighboring localities (see ANNEX 4) from the TDD's area, and so a total of three meetings, by the end of the project. If they will prove to be successful than we will try to organize additional workshops in other localities or in the neighbor county, Constanța,

were the southern part of the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex is located and which is also an important area for the geese conservation.

For the efficient dissemination of the information at these workshops will be imperative to print, in a form of a leaflet or brochure, the Farm Guideline. This will be done probably by the middle of December, which means that at the beginning of January we can organize the first workshops for the farmers.

As a direct result of the following workshops, we hope to gain additional and more accurate information about the ownership of the important agricultural lands in the project's area and so to finalize the list with the farmers that should receive technical assistance and support.

And finally, additional lobby at the MADR to accept our geese friendly agri-environment scheme will be carried out by the end of the project and after that. We already have the confirmation that this issue is discussed by the MADR and possible solution for the acceptance of this scheme and a way to include it in the NRDP is sought.

As for the future, we are looking to secure funding for additional activities regarding the dissemination of information and the increasing awareness of the local community (especially of the farmers) related to the financial opportunities of the existing grassland agri-environment schemes and possible future ones. By doing this, we hope to contribute to the conservation of the Red-breasted Geese and other wild geese wintering grounds. Also, we are in the process of creating a Geese Wintering Centre in the most important wintering sites from the project's area, were we hope, it will be possible to combine the geese conservation activities with the local economic ones and the tourism.

5. FINANCIAL DETAILS

All expenditure in RON (local currency) has been converted to CHF using the exchange rate which was the official one for the 1st day of every month, according to the European Central Bank website www.ecb.int.

Activity	Total Budget	IUCN Contribution		SOR Contribution		Total Expenditure
		RON	CHF	RON	CHF	
Office (rent, internet, telephone, toner, paper, CDs)	3,756	4,531.61	1,969.27	-	-	1,969.27
Project management	3,326	-	-	8,728	3,830.40	3,830.40
LAG strategy development	7,015	1,667.1	709.65	-	-	709.65
Workshops & meetings with local farmers	6,851	-	-	-	-	0
Meetings with MARD	1,663	-	-	241.75	96.68	96.68
Elaboration of Farm Guideline	4,013	-	-	-	-	0
Development of the standardized geese monitoring strategy	166	191.48	85.43	-	-	85.43
Salary for the assistant	6,186	13,307	5,787.77	-	-	5,787.77
TOTAL	32,976	19,697.19	8,552.12	8,969.75	3,927.08	12,479.20

6. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – The area covered by the Tulcea - Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation LAG

ANNEX 2 – Pictures from the workshop held on 13.10.2008 in Bucharest

ANNEX 3 – The SWOT analysis focused on the habitats of the Red-breasted Goose and other threatened species (in Romanian)

ANNEX 4 – Distribution of the most important geese wintering localities from Tulcea and Constanța counties around the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex

ANNEX 5 – Draft of the Farm Guideline for the farmers (in Romanian)

ANNEX 6 – The targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme (in Romanian)

ANNEX 7 – The standardised geese monitoring strategy (in English)