

Wildfowl 67

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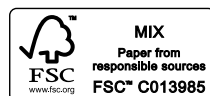
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Photograph: A pair of Greenland White-fronted Geese flying in western Iceland during spring 2013, by Tony Fox.

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Wildfowl 67: Editorial

Much of our current understanding of waterbird populations is based on long-term monitoring and research programmes, sometimes spanning several decades. It is therefore gratifying to see papers in the current issue of *Wildfowl* based on observations made by dedicated researchers over many years, including a review of recent analyses undertaken to determine reasons for the decline in Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* numbers from 1999 onwards. Readers may be aware that the Greenlandic subspecies of the Greater White-fronted Goose was first described by Peter Scott with Christopher Dalgety in 1949, so it seems particularly appropriate to have a synthesis of current knowledge on the drivers of population trends for these birds presented in WWT's scientific journal. This particular paper focuses on geese wintering at Wexford in southeast Ireland, where a catching, marking and resighting programme has been underway since 1983, and indicates that a reduction in productivity in recent years may be an important reason underlying the population change. The authors noted however that further studies are required to confirm the reason for non-breeding or breeding failure once the birds reach Greenland, and also that the demography of other Greenland White-fronted Goose wintering flocks (especially those wintering on Islay, northwest Scotland, the second-largest wintering area for the subspecies) should be quantified to throw light on the demography of the population as a whole.

Long-term studies also provide an invaluable base upon which to develop informative shorter-term research programmes. As such, hypotheses regarding the morphology of Lesser Snow Geese *Anser caerulescens caerulescens* in southwest Louisiana, analysed and presented here, were derived from earlier studies of their different feeding habitats in this part of the wintering range. Surveys repeated at intervals also provide valuable insight into population change, although reasons for the change may be more difficult to identify. For instance, a comparison of the sex ratio of the Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* recorded across Europe and parts of North Africa in winter 2015/16 with results of a previous survey carried out over the same area in winters 1988/89–1989/90 (published in *Wildfowl* 46, accessible on-line at wildfowl.wwt.org.uk) found that, whilst there was a preponderance of males in both surveys, the proportion is significantly higher now than *c.* 25 years ago. In the same vein, monitoring at intervals of heterospecific brood parasitism (HBP) among duck species breeding in South Bohemia, Czech Republic, since the 1970s indicate that rates of HBP are lower in the 21st century than back in 1975–1980, when duck breeding populations in the region were higher. Interestingly, we also now learn that Tufted Duck seems to be the most suitable host species as well as the most successful of five Anatidae species considered in parasitising other birds' nests.

Wildfowl has a strong tradition of publishing research on endangered species, including for example on the Laysan Teal *Anas laysanensis* which is classed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (www.iucnredlist.org). For instance, factors affecting the onset of breeding and nesting phenology for these birds on Laysan Island in the Hawaiian

archipelago were described by Michelle Reynolds and co-authors 10 years ago in *Wildfowl* 57. Forty-two Laysan Teal were translocated from Laysan Island to Midway Atoll (also one of the Hawaiian islands) during 2004–2005, after which numbers increased to 661 individuals before dropping by 37% following an outbreak of botulism in 2015. A paper presented in the current issue of the journal considers methods for monitoring the abundance of Laysan Teal, and potentially other reintroduced species of conservation concern, which may be similarly susceptible to catastrophic population declines. Elsewhere, the island of Madagascar has three endemic duck species classified by IUCN as Endangered or Critically Endangered, and since 2010 several areas have been protected to secure key habitat for these birds, including the one site at which the Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* occurs. Felix Razafindrajao and co-authors therefore present here the results of their modelling of bird and habitat distribution data for Madagascar Teal *Anas bernieri* and Meller's Duck *A. melleri*, to estimate the extent of suitable habitat for these endangered species, determine whether this coincides with areas already protected, and thus provide a focus for future survey work and site protection.

As always, I am hugely indebted to the great team of individuals involved in the production of *Wildfowl*. A higher number of papers than usual were submitted to this year's issue of the journal, so I am particularly grateful not only to the authors for considering *Wildfowl* for publication of their work but to the referees for giving their time to peer-review the manuscripts, sometimes at very short notice. Tony Fox (Associate Editor for *Wildfowl*) and Editorial Board members Jeff Black, Bruce Dugger, Andy Green and Matt Guillemain have provided vital support and sound scientific advice throughout the process. I also thank Ellen Matthews (EM Typesetting) for preparing the proofs, Paul Marshall for designing the cover, the staff at Henry Ling Ltd for the printed copies and Maggie Sage, Linda Dickerson and Jane Gawthorne-Dover for kindly providing administrative support. I hope that readers will be as interested as I am in the papers published in *Wildfowl* 67, and that the findings not only enhance your appreciation of the birds but also of the exceedingly diverse conditions that they encounter in different parts of the world.

Eileen Rees

**Editor: *Wildfowl*
WWT Martin Mere**