

***Wildfowl* 73: Editorial**

The year 2023 has been challenging for many of us but also for the *Wildfowl* journal. Editor-in-Chief Eileen Rees was tragically bereaved while on a walking holiday in Georgia, when her life-long partner Ronald Graham accidentally fell and died instantaneously. Thanks to the fortitude of the Editorial Board (Jeff Black, Bruce Dugger, Andy Green, Matt Guillemain and Chris Spray), our outstanding production team, and the amazing resilience of Eileen herself in the latter part of the year, we have been able to produce *Wildfowl* 73 on time as usual, but with our thanks to the authors for their forbearance under difficult circumstances.

Once again, we are proud to present a very wide range of subjects, as listed in the contents of the latest volume. Especially welcome are the results of recently established monitoring programmes for geese in general, but particularly for Red-breasted Geese *Branta ruficollis* in the Black Sea region and specifically in Romania. With numbers on the wintering grounds falling short of totals estimated at staging areas elsewhere, there remains the intriguing prospects that other wintering areas exist for this population. Alternatively, the reality may be that the global total numbers of this iconic species are lower now than in the recent past, perhaps due in no small measure to the war currently raging in that part of the world. Either way, this underlines the need for more information and ideally more individual (GPS) tracking studies of this important, charismatic goose species.

The Red-breasted Goose is renowned for nesting in close association with Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* on the arctic tundra, but a new assessment of recent breeding records of Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus* throughout their Russian range shows that this small goose exhibits a similar pattern. *Wildfowl* 73 also examines the determinants of breeding success in Greenland Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, exploiting David Cabot's long-term monitoring data. Introduced, self-sustaining populations of alien species are a cause for great concern at present, but the Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* introduced to Britain is of interest because of the moult migration traditions that the birds have established for themselves, some described here for the first time by Kane Brides and coauthors. Greylag Geese *Anser anser* feature in two articles. The first contributes vital information to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) International Single Species Management Plan for the Greylag Goose (Northwest/Southwest European population), by using ring recoveries and encounters with marked individuals to illustrate the complexity of describing the timing and passage of migrant geese from neighbouring countries, in relation to the movements of resident birds, even in a small country like Denmark. The second uses tracking devices to examine the frequency, nature and duration of "sanding expeditions" made by Greylag Geese (tagged in Denmark) whilst wintering on the Guadalquivirs of Coto Doñana, southern Spain, where the birds visit the famous sand dunes to collect grit to help their digestion of tough marsh plants consumed on the site. This behaviour has been observed regularly over several decades at the site, but this is the first time that it has been described using modern telemetry devices.

The declining numbers of Greylag Geese travelling from breeding areas in northern Europe to winter in Spain is testament both to climate change and the illegal extraction of water from Doñana aquifers for horticultural purposes, one consequence being that the “sanding” behavioural phenomenon by geese may be extinct within a matter of a few years. Regrettably, for the same reason, this may also be the fate for the Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* nesting in Coto Doñana, on the very southern edge of their breeding range. A study of the birds’ breeding biology in the Guadalquivir marshes (which includes the Doñana National Park) found that breeding parameters for Pintail nesting in the area are similar to those recorded elsewhere, but that their reproductive success is associated with high water levels, which can be influenced not only by rainfall but by irrigation programmes at the site.

We also bring you the application of relatively new technologies, such as new generation sequencing for a dietary study of the rare and threatened Laysan Teal *Anas laysanensis*. Mitochondrial DNA and genotypic data at microsatellite loci were analysed to determine genetic relationships and connectivity between the disjunct group of Velvet Scoters *Melanitta fusca* which breed in Georgia, in relation to those from the much larger northern breeding population wintering in the Baltic, whilst geolocation was used to reveal previously unknown year-round movements of individual Common Scoters *Melanitta nigra* from the Scottish-breeding population. *Wildfowl* remains proud of the role that it plays in publishing analyses that support conservation. In this edition, we are therefore delighted to bring contributions which can be used to underpin the effective safeguarding and management of sites. For instance, identification of key sites used by Scaly-sided Mergansers *Mergus squamatus* staging in South Korea, which is important for protecting these areas, whilst the monitoring incubation behaviour of dabbling ducks breeding in Canada can contribute to our understanding of the effects of habitat cover and landscape-level disturbance on productivity in common boreal-nesting species.

As always, we are deeply grateful to the Editorial Board for their help and support, and to everyone else involved with the production of *Wildfowl* 73. Not least to the authors, for submitting their work for publication in this substantial issue of the journal.

Tony Fox
Associate Editor: *Wildfowl*