

***Wildfowl* 74: Editorial**

Last year's issue of the journal (*Wildfowl* 73) was prepared in very difficult circumstances, following the unexpected loss of my wonderful, deeply loved, lifetime partner Ronald Graham whilst we were holidaying in Georgia in May 2023. Although Ron spent most of his career as a solicitor, specialising in pensions law at the multi-national Eversheds Sutherland until his retirement from the firm in December 2019, he took a 6-year break from his legal training during his 20s to work in aviculture at the Wildfowl Trust (now the WWT) at Slimbridge, UK. He never lost his deep connection to the natural world; nor his enduring friendships with the diverse range of people devoted to the research and conservation of wildfowl. I'm most grateful for many kind memories and messages of support sent from across the globe, noting his intellect, humour and caring nature, which have been immensely helpful to me and a great tribute to him. Here, in *Wildfowl*, I wish to extend particular thanks to Tony Fox and all *Wildfowl* Editorial Board members, who from "Day 1" picked up the baton in taking forward publication of *Wildfowl* 73, which turned out to be a substantial volume. This was an immense achievement, involving the Editorial Board taking on the role of "Handling Editors" and I'm exceedingly grateful to them. My thanks therefore go to them, and also to our amazing production team, for the publication of an excellent issue.

One item, however, that did slip timewise, was the publication of *Wildfowl* Special Issue No. 7. This, the Proceedings of the 7th International Swan Symposium/26th Trumpeter Swan Society Conference held in Jackson, Wyoming, USA in October 2022, convened by the IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group, the Ricketts Conservation Foundation, and The Trumpeter Swan Society, was originally due to appear in autumn 2023. Following a short break, and with the sympathetic understanding of the ITSS (sponsors of the Proceedings), work on papers resumed earlier this year and I'm pleased to confirm that this now being published at the same time as *Wildfowl* 74.

As for *Wildfowl* 74 itself, once again we are proud to present a fascinating set of papers on a wide range of issues and species. These include two review papers – one on Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* nesting (or historically not nesting!) on offshore islands; the other on changes in Eastern Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis middendorffii* breeding distribution in eastern Russia – both based on careful compilation and assessment of early publications by the authors. Standard papers cover several conservation initiatives and important outcomes of monitoring programmes, including one on the Madagascar Pochard *Aythya innotata* (one of the most endangered of the world's wildfowl) which was thought to be extinct until 2006 when c. 20 individuals were found on one lake and a major collaborative conservation programme was initiated to save the species. Factors affecting the pochard's breeding success remain poorly understood, and a paper in this volume describes the generally low duckling survival from 2010 onwards, but with three years of unusually high survival (in 2017–2019) resulting in numbers increasing to 60 birds. Several variables thought to be affecting survival rates therefore are reconsidered and discussed in light of these findings. New information was also

obtained on another globally threatened species – the Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* – with counts made on the breeding grounds increasing population size estimates for the Eastern Population to potentially *c.* 26,000–27,000 geese. Monitoring of Lesser Snow Geese *Anser caerulescens caerulescens* in Japan, where the species was almost extinct by the end of the 19th century, found a steady population growth following implementation of the “Restoration of Lesser Snow Goose to East Asia Project” from 1993 onwards, although in the absence of information on the precise location of the breeding grounds and migration routes, the extent to which the increase was attributable to the restoration efforts remain unclear.

For other species and flyways, the news is more concerning. Severe declines have been recorded in the number of male American Common Eiders *Somateria mollissima dresseri* counted in spring on the Bay of Fundy, Canada since 1991, thought to be a consequence of recent, rapid hydroclimatic changes in the Gulf of Maine (including the Bay of Fundy) affecting all trophic levels in the ecosystem, which could influence the abundance and distribution not only of eiders but other species in the food chain. The Atlantic Brant Geese *Branta bernicla brota* population which breeds in the Canadian arctic is also in long-term decline, in contrast to other migratory geese (*e.g.* the Lesser Snow Geese and Cackling Geese *Branta hutchinsii*) nesting in the same area. The decline of the Brant has been attributed to various forms of competition with other sympatrically-nesting species including apparent competition – *i.e.* when the presence of one species leads to a reduced densities of another through differential predation by a predator of both species. In this issue of *Wildfowl* we read about an artificial nest experiment developed to assess apparent competition among geese nesting on Southampton Island, Nunavut, Canada. Such information again highlights the importance of analysing the various reasons underlying changes in abundance and distribution, for informing conservation, harvest and habitat management decisions.

As always, I’m immensely grateful to *Wildfowl*’s Editorial Board members for their invaluable help and support in producing *Wildfowl* over the years, but on this occasion particular mention should go to Prof Bruce Dugger who is standing down after serving for 14 years on the Board. We will miss his humour, expertise and constructive contributions on various matters relating to the journal, but no doubt will maintain good communication into the future. At the same time, I’m delighted to report that we’ve recruited a new Editorial Board member – Dr Kevin K. Clausen of Aarhus University, Denmark – who will be joining us from December 2024 onwards. My personal thanks again go to Ellen Matthews (EM Typesetting) and the printing team (including Andrew Hopwood) at Henry Ling Ltd, for their great skill and efficiency in ensuring that the journal is published to a high standard and on schedule. Thanks also to Paul Marshall, for his artistic ability in once again preparing an impressive cover design. Last, but by no means least, I thank the referees for giving their time and expertise in reviewing papers as they come in, and the authors for submitting their work to *Wildfowl* 74, which has resulted in another informative issue of journal.

Eileen Rees
Editor: *Wildfowl*