

Goose Specialist Group meeting at Ladakh, India

The Goose Specialist Group of Wetlands International and the IUCN-Species Survival Commission seeks to strengthen contacts between those that undertake research on the migratory goose populations in the northern hemisphere, for improved knowledge and conservation of these species. Historically the focus of the Group was on migratory geese in the Western Palearctic, with a database of counts made during goose censuses from the Western Palearctic being maintained by a network of national co-ordinators. More recently, contacts with researchers in North America have become more firmly established, and the tri-annual North American Arctic Goose Conferences (NAAG) are now visited regularly by European and Asian goose workers. Dr Ray Alisauskas (Ray.Alisauskas@ec.gc.ca) based at the Canadian Wildlife Service in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, is the liaison officer for North America. Links with goose researchers in East Asia are maintained by Dr Masayuki Kurechi of the Japanese Association for the Protection of Wild Geese (son_goose@sky.plala.or.jp) in Wakayanagi, Japan.

Goose Specialist Group meetings, which have been held on a near-annual basis since the first meeting was held in Poland in 1995, remain an important forum for maintaining communication and developing collaborative projects within the group. The 11th meeting of the Goose Specialist Group took place in Leh, Ladakh from 22– 25 May 2008. Despite the difficulties in organising a meeting in such a remote place as the high mountains of Ladakh, in an area where the borders between India, China and Pakistan have still not been settled, 34 delegates from 12 different countries attended the meeting. Goose researchers from Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Estonia, France, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine gathered at an altitude of 3,500 m (11,500 feet). The focus of the meeting was the Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*, which flies at high altitudes over the Himalayas during migration between its main breeding areas on the Tibetan plateau and wintering sites in the wetlands of India, Burma and Pakistan. Ladakh is the only nesting area within India for the species; at least 500 pairs are estimated to breed in the area and during the post-conference excursion to Tso Moriri (Lake Moriri) delegates found some hundreds of Bar-headed Geese which had just started to lay eggs on 26 May.

This meeting was the second Goose Specialist Group meeting to be held in Asia, following the meeting at Matsushima, Japan, in 1999. It is also the third international scientific meeting on geese ever to be held in Asia, with the first Asian goose meeting having been convened by Aleksandr Andreev in Magadan, Russia, in September 1990. The Ladakh meeting would not have been possible without the hard work of Prakash Gole and his team from the Ecological Society from Pune in preparing and organising the meeting. The Ladakh Wildlife Department also kindly provided financial support towards the meeting.

Three resolutions were adopted during the Ladakh meeting, based on the information presented: 1) to reconcile the increase in human activity on the high altitude plains of Ladakh with nature conservation in the area, 2) to address the high level of goose hunting activity in

Bulgaria, and 3) to address the decrease in the level of protection provided for geese wintering and nesting in the Netherlands. Additionally, a strategic working group has been established to take forward communication within the Goose Specialist Group. Key items include improved management of the Goose Specialist Group website (<http://www.geese.org/gsg>), the revival of a Goose Bulletin (electronic version), improved forward planning for future meetings, and strengthening ties with the Russian Goose, Swan and Duck Study Group of Northern Eurasia (GSDSG).

Given the location of the meeting, it is appropriate that many presentations at the meeting were on goose populations in Asia, and I'm delighted that a number of these are being brought together for publication in this edition of *Wildfowl*. These include two papers on the Bar-headed Goose, as well as new information on the Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* and Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* populations within Asia. The valuable insights into the trends in numbers, distribution and migration routes for the different populations will help not only to form our current knowledge of these species but to identify any conservation issues that may need to be addressed in the future.

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Photograph: Participants in the 11th Meeting of the Goose Specialist Group, Ladakh, India, by Doortje Ebbinge-Dallmeijer.