

The Kostanay region in northern Kazakhstan is extremely important for the LWfG

When the Polar Ural bird “3502” now in April 2007 returns to the Kostanay area on spring migration, it again demonstrates how extremely important this area is for migrating lesser white-fronted geese of the whole Western Palearctic population of the species. The breeding distribution of this population, estimated at 8,000-13,000 individuals, is stretching from Taimyr in Siberia to Fennoscandia. The Kostanay region is probably the only area where almost all birds stop for a shorter or longer period during both spring and autumn migration.

As a result of field research since 1996, the wetlands of Kostanay region in Kazakhstan have proved to be extremely important as a staging area for lesser white-fronted and red-breasted geese. Hundreds of thousands of arctic geese pass through the area during the seasonal migration. In autumn, the arctic geese (i.e. white-fronted, red-breasted and lesser white-fronted geese) stage in the area for several weeks from late September to late October.

It has been assumed previously, that the part of the Fennoscandian population that migrates from Kanin Peninsula to Kazakhstan would migrate further south to the Caspian Sea region and Middle East for winter along with the Russian breeding population. However, as a result of the satellite tracking of three Lesser White-fronted Geese of the Fennoscandian breeding population in autumn 2006 by the lesser white-fronted goose EU-LIFE project, it was found that the Fennoscandian lesser white-fronts staging in northern Kazakhstan end up in the European wintering sites in Greece.

The list of the important wetlands of Kostanay and North Kazakhstan region, not only important as staging places for arctic geese, but also very important breeding areas for a rich wetland bird fauna, includes e.g. the lakes Kulykol, Ayke, Zharsor-Urkash, Small and Big Sankebai, Sarykopa, Aksuat and other Naurzum wetlands, Kushmurun, Koybagar, Tyuntyugur–Zhanshura–Biesoygan, Bozshakol, Neklyudovo, Shoshkaly, Teniz-Karakamys, Kamyshovoye–Zhamankol, Sultan–Aksuat group of lakes, Zhaltyr–Zharken group of lakes, Maybalyk group of lakes, and Lebyazhye (Kamyshovye). Important staging areas of lesser white-fronted geese and red-breasted geese are also known in the surrounding areas in Russia (e.g Lake Ayke region and Lake Shelkar-Igis-Kara) as well as in the Astana (Lake Qarasor) and Aktyubinsk regions (Lake Chelkar-Karasha) of Kazakhstan. Adequate legal protection, as well as hunting control at these sites is of vital importance for both of these endangered goose species.

In the years 1999–2003, WWF in co-operation with the local NGO “Naurzum”, carried out a project to improve the conservation status of the Kostanay region wetlands, with the lesser white-fronted goose as a flagship species. In 2002 a large seminar was held. The seminar emphasised the global importance of these wetlands in an official resolution paper that was signed by all participating organisations. The seminar resolution emphasised the necessity to urge the process of the Republic of Kazakhstan joining the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and Convention on Migratory species (CMS - Bonn convention). This important step in the process of giving the wetlands in the Kustanay region status as Ramsar sites (Wetlands of international importance) was fulfilled in January 2007.

During the two years 2003 and 2005 spring hunting of geese and waterfowl was forbidden in Kostanay region by the decision of the Department for forestry and game management of the Kostanay Oblast. This should be implemented as a permanent measure to protect the threatened Lesser White-fronted Goose from extinction.

More details on this very important area can be found in the in the Fennoscandian LWfG conservation project report 2001-2003, [pp 41-43](#)).



Conservation of *Anser erythropus* on European migration route
LIFE 05 NAT/FIN/000105