



**Conservation of *Anser erythropus* on European migration route**  
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WWF Finland

**Astonishing new information on the flyways of the endangered Lesser White-fronted Goose**

As a result of the on-going satellite tracking of three Lesser White-fronted Geese (*Anser erythropus*) of the critically endangered Fennoscandian breeding population, it has newly been found out that the Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronts may end up in the wintering sites in northern Greece by performing a loop-migration via Kazakhstan and the Black Sea. Mapping the flyways and staging areas is essential for successful conservation of the species.

The previously known main flyway of the geese from the breeding grounds in the Fennoscandian mountains to the wintering site in the Evros River delta on the border of Greece and Turkey leads via the Russian Kanin Peninsula and eastern Hungary. It has been known already for a decade, that part of the Fennoscandian Lesser White-fronts use another flyway from the Kanin Peninsula to northern Kazakhstan. Before the new satellite tracking results it has been assumed, that this part of the Fennoscandian population would migrate further south to the Caspian Sea region and even as far south as the Mesopotamian Marshes in Iraq for winter along with the Russian breeding population. The new results of the satellite tracking show, on the contrary to the earlier belief, that these two flyways are not separate.

The present satellite tracking is part of the international EU LIFE Nature project “*Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose on the European migration route*”, lead by WWF Finland and participated by nine more organisations in Norway, Finland, Estonia, Hungary and Greece, including three national BirdLife partners. The aim of the project is to halt the decline of the Fennoscandian breeding population by the year 2009.

The Lesser White-fronted Goose is at the moment the most endangered breeding bird species in Fennoscandia, with only some 20-30 breeding pairs remaining in the Nordic countries. The species is classified as vulnerable globally; the world population is estimated at ca 25,000 individuals. The most important threat for the species is hunting and poaching.

**Detailed information on the present satellite tracking**

In the end of May 2006, the Lesser White-fronted Goose (LWfG) LIFE project managed to attach three miniature satellite transmitters on LWfG at the Valdak Marshes, northern Norway.

All the three birds, an adult pair named as Finn (male) and Nieida (female), and an adult male named as Imre, spent the period from late May 2006 till late June 2006 in a breeding area in

Finnmark, Norway. Before the present satellite tracking, no exact breeding sites of the wild Fennoscandian LWfG were known. For conservation reasons, the location of the breeding area is kept secret.

The names were chosen from over a thousand suggestions in a competition organized by WWF Finland. Imre is a Hungarian boy's name, Nieida comes from Sami language and stands for girl. Finn is a Norwegian boy's name but also means Finnish.

For an unknown reason, the breeding of the satellite tracked birds was interrupted in the end of June, and all the three birds performed a moult migration to Arctic Russia in the beginning of July. Imre left the breeding area on 29 June and arrived at the Russian Taimyr Peninsula on 6 July. The pair Finn and Nieida left the breeding area on 6 July and arrived on the Taimyr Peninsula on 8 July. Nieida, that was originally colour ringed in Norway already in May 2002, was known to follow the European migration route down to the Evros Delta in Greece, and thus a moult migration this far east was amazing.

In the end of August 2006 all the three birds started the autumn migration from the moulting areas, and all of them chose the flyway of the Western main population of LWfG; i.e. they migrated along the Ob River towards the staging areas in northern Kazakhstan. From Kazakhstan they moved in mid-October to the Volgograd region, Russia. On 24 October the pair Finn and Nieida was located in Ukraine, at the base of the Crimean Peninsula.

And, finally, on 31 October, Finn was located at Lake Kerkini, Greece. The place is known as a traditional staging place of the Fennoscandian LWfG. By December, the LWfG use to move further from Lake Kerkini to the final wintering site at the Evros Delta. On 1 November, Mr. Thodoros Naziridis (local field researcher of the LWfG LIFE project) managed to spot a flock of 20 LWfG at Lake Kerkini, and he could see an antenna (of the satellite transmitter) on the back of two birds in the flock. Thus it was confirmed in practice, that also the female (Nieida) had arrived in Greece together with the male.

**For more information, contact:**

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**Lesser White-fronted Goose EU LIFE project:** [www.wwf.fi/lwfg](http://www.wwf.fi/lwfg)

**Satellite follow-up on Internet:** [www.piskulka.net/Fennoscandia%202006-2007.htm](http://www.piskulka.net/Fennoscandia%202006-2007.htm)