



# Wetlands International's Goose Specialist Group convenes at Doñana, December 2002

20 December 2002



## 7th Annual Meeting of the Goose Specialist Group of Wetlands International

After having been hosted by several northern countries (or at least colder in the winter ones - Poland, UK, Bulgaria, Japan, Belgium and Estonia, in chronological order), the annual meeting of the Goose Specialist Group of Wetlands International finally ended up in the unusual (for the goose specialists) warm winter climate of southern Spain. The meeting was ably organized by the Doñana Biological Station, assisted by the Doñana National Park Authority and supported by several other organizations. The venue of the meeting was in the magnificent village of El Rocio, famous for its 1000-year tradition of pilgrimage, where around 1.5 million people gather together each year for four days in May or June. El Rocio borders the Doñana National Park (a Ramsar site as well) and among all other merits it is a wintering site for tens of thousands of Greylag geese.

The meeting took place from 13 to 18 December and was attended by some 90 participants from 24 countries of Europe, Asia and America. Welcome speeches were given by the Director General of the Andalusian Environmental Administration, the Director of the Doñana National Park, the Vice-director of the Doñana Biological Station, the Mayor of Almonte, and a representative of Wetlands International. The core of the meeting started with short reports on the last year and a half from the several species task forces existing and acting under the auspices of the Group (the Bean Goose, the Red-breasted Goose, the Bar-headed Goose, the Dark-bellied Brent Goose, the Lesser White-fronted Goose and the Greylag Goose Task Forces) and by the Age-ration Task Force. During the meeting, around 45 oral presentations were given (divided into a general session, a hunting impact session, a migration strategies session, and a Greylag Goose session) on various aspects of geese ecology, as well as on field trips investigating the status of some populations or bits of their ranges, hunting practices and interaction with geese populations and also on some hot conservation issues. In addition 24 posters were presented there.

Special attention was paid to the Greylag Goose and also to hunting, so discussion sessions were devoted to both issues. Most of the species task forces had their own meetings, notably the Lesser White-fronted Goose Task Force which, as usual, had more than one lively discussion on contentious topics. At the end of the annual meeting, the GSG adopted four resolutions addressed to the respective authorities of several countries where adverse plans or ongoing developments are threatening the existence of geese populations or their sustaining habitats. The chair of the GSG together with two more contributors will finalize those resolutions and direct them to their recipients in due time.

One of the days of the meeting was spent outside where the participants experienced the Doñana National Park from weird-looking, but extremely well going on the sandy "roads" 4WD coaches. As far as Doñana at this time of the year had high enough water levels, it offered unforgettable scenes and pictures. This unspoilt bit of nature is a home for some of the rarest animals in the world, notably the Iberian Lynx with just over 100 individuals and the Spanish Imperial Eagle with some 150 breeding pairs. While the lynx remained unseen (not more than 35 individuals inhabit

the park), the eagles were quite evident and several times birds were showing off from the top of some pine (up to 8-10 pairs regularly breed in the park). The evening after the excursion was devoted to cultural aspects of wetlands (just to underline once again that Doñana is one of the 38 Spanish Ramsar sites), and participants visited the Town Museum of Almonte (located in the outskirts of Doñana) where all the traditional means of utilization of wetland resources are well shown and described. Undoubtedly the entire life of people from around the Ramsar site is firmly connected to the wetland.

Next meeting of the Goose Specialist Group was kindly invited to Odessa (Ukraine) in 2004 (still under deliberation whether in autumn or in spring) and organisers should really make a lot of efforts to offer something better than the Spanish hospitality, that is difficult to forget, because it is not only spoiling you delicious food and inspiring wines[]

See you next time in Odessa, and meanwhile you can check the Group's Web site (<http://www.wetlands.org/networks/Goose/Goose.htm>) and the Portal to the Lesser White-fronted Goose ([www.piskulka.net](http://www.piskulka.net)), where you can also find other useful links.

-- reported by Sergey Dereliev, Ramsar

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