



Conservation of *Anser erythropus* on European migration route  
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**Critically endangered Lesser White-fronted Goose shot in protected area in Greece**  
Fennoscandian population is on the brink of extinction

***A serious case of poaching of one of Europe's most endangered bird species has been confirmed in Greece. An adult male Lesser White-fronted Goose named as Mánnu, individually colour-ring-marked close to its breeding area in northern Norway, was found dead within a strictly protected area at Lake Kerkini, Greece where hunting is prohibited. An autopsy confirmed that the bird was killed with a shotgun. The Lesser White-fronted Goose is protected under the EU Birds Directive. Furthermore, it is also fully protected by national legislation in Greece. The main part of the Fennoscandian population winters in Greece, in the protected areas at Lake Kerkini and in the Evros Delta.***

In Fennoscandia and in the EU, the Lesser White-fronted Goose is critically endangered. Loss of one single adult male represents ca 5 per cent of the breeding males of the Fennoscandian population. "This is dramatic, because loss of adult reproductive birds has significant negative impact on the recruitment of the small population", says Dr. Ingar Jostein Øien in BirdLife Norway. "So much effort has been invested in the conservation of the species in Norway and internationally, and now it seems that poaching, also in Greece, is jeopardizing the conservation efforts. In 2006, we lost another adult male, named as Imre, in Russia, so this is already the second bird confirmed shot of the seven individuals colour ringed by the LIFE project".

Since the ring-marking in May 2006, the male Mánnu and its ring-marked mate named as Máddu, were monitored along their migratory route from the breeding grounds in northernmost Norway via the stop-over sites in Estonia and Hungary to the regular wintering sites in northern Greece. In November 2007, the pair returned to Greece to winter. In December, the male Mánnu was found dead in the Kerkini Wildlife Refuge.

As an ultimate effort to rescue the species, various conservation actions are being implemented in Norway, Finland, Estonia, Hungary and Greece as part of the EU LIFE Nature project "Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose on the European migration route", lead by WWF Finland. In Greece, the national LIFE project partner is the Hellenic Ornithological Society HOS (BirdLife Greece). In Norway, the project is being implemented by the Norwegian Ornithological Society NOF (BirdLife Norway) and the Directorate for Nature Management (DN).

"Greece could be a safe winter refuge for the species and in that way contribute essentially to its rescue. However, the inability to prevent illegal hunting even in protected areas, the lack of law enforcement, and the lack of training for hunters make the species vulnerable to hunting, which is the main cause for the population decline in Europe and globally", says Petteri Tolvanen, conservation officer of WWF Finland.

"This is probably the most serious case of poaching in Greece in the recent years but also one of the most alarming cases in Europe", says Yannis Tsougrakis, coordinator of the LIFE project in Greece. The Greek state has the obligation, based on the EU Birds Directive, to effectively protect the Lesser White-fronted Goose from poaching and accidental shooting. "In practice this will require a ban on goose hunting, regarding all goose species, at the wintering sites at Lake Kerkini

and in the Evros Delta. BirdLife Greece appeals to the Greek State to take immediate measures for effective wardening against poaching. In Greece, the national Action Plan for the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose was completed by another EU LIFE project already in 1999, but it has never been implemented due to negligence by the Greek State.

### **Background information**

The Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*) is a Palearctic species that breeds in the low-arctic tundra and forest-tundra zone from the Fennoscandian mountains to eastern Siberia. The stronghold of the world population (ca 25.000 individuals) breeds in central Siberia. The species is classified vulnerable globally. The highly endangered Fennoscandian population is considered as a separate management unit. A hundred years ago the Lesser White-fronted Goose was a common breeding bird in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish Lapland with thousands of breeding pairs but now only some 20 breeding pairs are left in the area.

The Lesser White-fronted Goose resembles very much the Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*), which is a common and numerous species. In a hunting situation it is practically impossible to distinguish between the species. This is one of the main challenges in the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose – the White-fronted Goose is an important quarry species in many counties within the range of the Lesser White-fronted Goose, including Greece.

The autopsy of the bird shot in Greece was performed by the Finnish Food Safety Authority Evira.

The names of the pair are Samish. The name of the male Mánnu means Moon. The name of the widowed female Máddu comes from Samish mythology, where Máddu is the foremother and protector of all animals.

### **Life history of the pair Mánnu and Máddu:**

- May 2006: Ringed as adults at the Valdak Marshes, Finnmark, Norway
- August 2006: Back at the Valdak Marshes after breeding season. They had produced one gosling.
- September 2006: Staging at the traditional site in Hortobágy, Hungary.
- February – March 2007: Wintering in the Evros Delta, Greece.
- March 2007: Staging in Hortobágy, Hungary, in a large flock of Lesser White-fronts.
- May 2007: Back at the Valdak, Norway, preparing for the breeding season in the mountains..
- August 2007: Back at the Valdak Marshes after breeding season. They had no goslings this autumn.
- September – October 2007: Staging in Hortobágy, Hungary.
- November – December 2007: Wintering at Lake Kerkini, Greece. Mánnu found dead inside the Wildlife Refuge on 12 December. The female Máddu stayed at Kerkini until about mid-February and then moved to Evros Delta until mid-March when it departed with the rest of the flock for spring migration.

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