



AEWA LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP



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3rd Meeting of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group

12-14 April 2016 - Trondheim, Norway

Report on the implementation of the AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (Western palearctic population)

Introduction

In 2015 the AEWA Secretariat conducted a limited review of the implementation of eight of the 20 International Single Species Action and Management Plans adopted under the Agreement, which was presented to the 6th Meeting of the AEWA Parties in November 2015. The AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Action Plan was one of the eight Plans included in the review.

Information from the range states on the status of implementation was collected through questionnaires prepared and distributed by the Working Group Coordinator. A total of 15 of the 22 Principal Range States (68%) identified in the Lesser White-fronted Goose Action Plan responded to the questionnaire.

The main recommendations from the general review were adopted by the AEWA Meeting of the Parties as an annex to the Resolution on the Adoption and Implementation of International Single Species and Multi-species Action and Management Plans (AEWA Resolution 6.8). Those recommendations most relevant for the further implementation of the Action Plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose have been included below.

The full review and relevant AEWA resolution are available on the AEWA website¹.

Action requested from the LWfG IWG

The Working Group is invited to take note of the progress made and conclusions presented and to take these into account when finalizing the revision of the AEWA International Action Plan for the Lesser White-fronted Goose as well as when preparing and adopting the Working Group workplan for the next inter-sessional period.

¹ Review on the implementation of AEWA Species Action and Management Plans: http://www.unep-aewa.org/sites/default/files/document/mop6_16_aewa_ssaps_review_rev1.pdf

AEWA Resolution 6.8: http://www.unep-aewa.org/sites/default/files/document/aewa_mop6_res8_speciesplans_en.pdf



Implementation of the AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose ISSAP

1. Introduction

The Lesser White-fronted Goose remains globally threatened and listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN and as Critically Endangered within the European Union according to the 2015 European Red List Assessment. The species is listed in Column A Table 1 of the AEWA Action Plan. The AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose (Western Palearctic populations) was adopted at the 4th Meeting of the AEWA Parties in 2008².

The goal of the Action Plan is to restore the Lesser White-fronted Goose to a favorable conservation status within the AEWA Agreement area, i.e. neither of the wild populations within the Agreement area should be classified as threatened according to the IUCN Red List, with neither population declining and the Western main population exceeding 25.000 individuals and the Fennoscandian population exceeding 1.000 individuals.

The AEWA Lesser White-fronted Goose International Working Group (LWfG IWG) was convened by the AEWA Secretariat in 2009, and has had two face-to-face meetings in November 2010 (Helsinki, Finland) and November 2012 (Lake Kerkin, Greece). A Working Group Coordinator is funded by the Norwegian Environment Agency and is currently situated at the AEWA Secretariat.

2. Response rate

A total of 15 of the 22 Principal Range States (68%) identified in the Action Plan responded to the questionnaire. Of the six countries which did not submit any information Azerbaijan, Iraq and Lithuania are particularly considered to be of crucial importance to the species. The countries that did not submit reports are taken into account in parts of the implementation summary below and are identified as having provided "no information".

<i>Response received</i>	<i>AEWA CP</i>	<i>No response by deadline</i>	<i>AEWA CP</i>
Bulgaria	Yes	Azerbaijan	No
Estonia	Yes	Iraq	No
Finland	Yes	Lithuania	Yes
Greece	No	Poland	No
Hungary	Yes	Syrian Arab Republic	Yes
Iran, Islamic Republic of	No	Turkey	No
Kazakhstan	No	Germany*	Yes
Netherlands	Yes		
Norway	Yes		
Romania	Yes		
Russian Federation	No		
Sweden	Yes		
Turkmenistan	No		
Ukraine	Yes		
Uzbekistan	Yes		

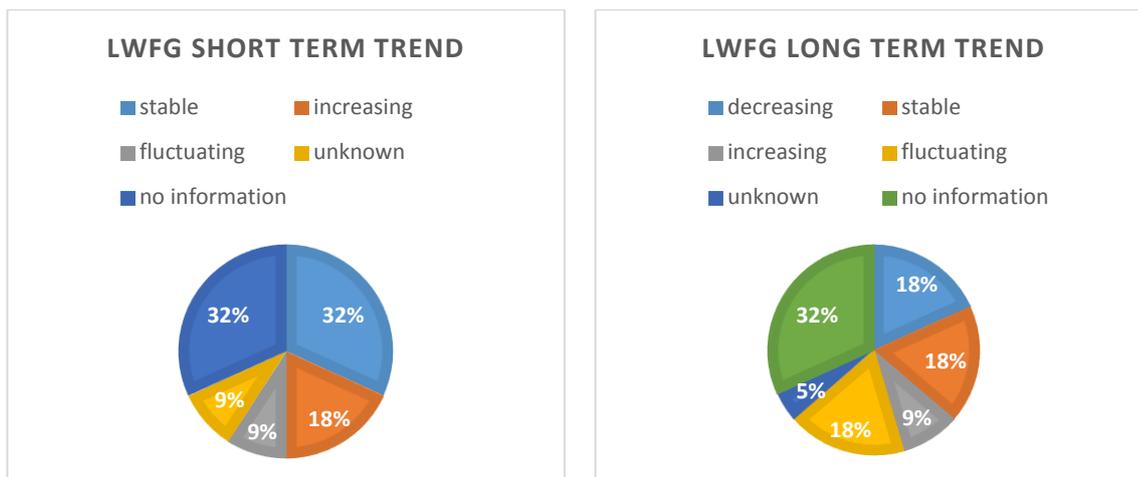
*Information submitted by Germany was not provided in the correct format and could therefore not be included in the review.

3. Species trend and estimate

No country reported a short-term decreasing trend with 50% of responding countries reporting the short-term trend to be either stable or increasing. In the case of the small Fennoscandian population, which is very closely monitored, a stabilization and (slight) increase in numbers since 2009 is well documented. However, a robust overall population estimate for the Western main population is still lacking, and its actual status remains uncertain. The long term species trend still paints a different picture with only six countries reporting the

² The AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose is available in English and Russian on the AEWA website: <http://www.unep-aewa.org/en/publication/international-single-species-action-plan-conservation-lesser-white-fronted-geese-western>.

populations as stable or increasing. The species estimates reported by the individual range states are presented in the table below.

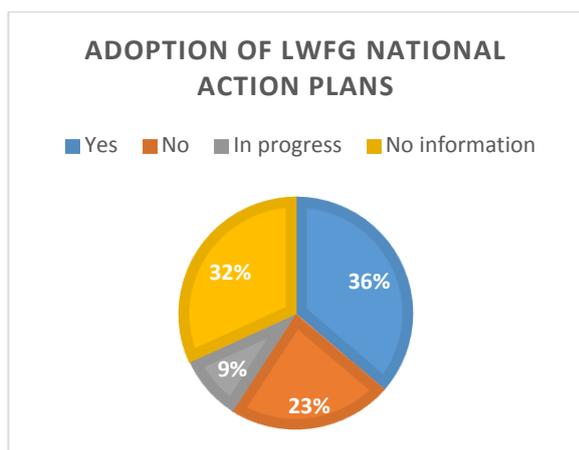


Reporting range state	Total minimum estimate	Total maximum estimate	Unit	Year	Baseline population
Bulgaria	2	100	Individuals (wintering)	-	-
Estonia	29	33	Individuals (passage)	2014	10 000 (1964)
Finland	0	5	Pairs (breeding)	2009	-
	-	58	Individuals (passage)	2014	-
Greece	53	53	Individuals (wintering)	2015	40 (1974)
Hungary	1	82	Individuals (passage)	2008-2014	Fennoscandian pop. ca. 80 ind.
	1	40	Individuals (wintering)	2008-2014	Mainly Western Main Pop. 8-13000 ind.
Iran	2750	3000	Individuals	2014	Unknown
Kazakhstan	-	19,963	Individuals (passage)	2014	-
Netherlands		ca 10 birds of feral origin	Individuals (breeding has been reported)	2005-2009	n/a
	46	67	Individuals (wintering)	2012/2013 - 2014/2015	>20 (1989/1990, 120-127 (2003/2004)
Norway	20	25	Pairs (breeding)	2014	-
Romania	10	30	Individuals (passage)	2014	31-50 (1990-2000)
	20	30	Individuals (wintering)	2015	31-50 (1990-2000)
Russia	20.000	30.000	Individuals (breeding)	2014	6.000 (2004)
	35.000	40.000	Individuals (passage)	2014	25.000 (2004)
	4	220	Individuals (wintering)	2010/2011	n/a
Sweden	51	66	Individuals (breeding)	2014	n/a
Turkmenistan	4	63	Individuals (wintering)	2012, 2015	590 (1976)
Ukraine	0	100	Individuals (passage)		

	0	1000	Individuals (wintering)	2015	0-1000 (2010)
Uzbekistan	50	9.000	Individuals (passage)	2005-2011	1000 (2011)
	30	300	Individuals (wintering)	2005-2014	100 (2012)

4. National implementation structures

Eight range states reported having adopted National Action Plans whilst two range states are in the process of drafting and/or adopting such plans. Good progress has also been made in the establishment of National Working Groups, with almost half of the range states reporting that National Working Groups for the LWfG are in place.



5. Implementation of Action Plan activities

5.1. Result 1 – Mortality rates are reduced

This implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as an **essential priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
1.1. Hunting legislation, in principle, affords adequate protection to Lesser White-fronted Geese.	59%
1.2. Sufficient human and financial resources allocated for enforcement of hunting legislation and resources are deployed to control hunting effectively.	23%
1.3. Sufficient human and financial resources have been allocated for identification of the traditional flyway and stop-over sites, and making that flyway safe for the geese.	45%
1.4. Goose hunting has been banned at all key sites for the Lesser White-fronted Goose during the period when they are usually present.	33%
1.5. Adequate no-hunting zones (covering both roosting and feeding sites) have been established at all Lesser White-fronted Goose IBAs, SPAs and Ramsar sites.	29%
1.6. Lure crops have been planted to direct Lesser White-fronted Geese away from areas where hunting pressure is known to be high.	0%
1.7. Efforts have been made to redirect hunting from adults to juveniles where Greater and Lesser White-fronted Geese occur together. (Kazakhstan and Russia)	0%
1.8. Obligatory training for goose hunting as outlined by the Hunting Charter of the Bern Convention (Nov 2007) has been implemented for hunters particularly in Eastern European countries. (signatories to the Bern Convention, European Commission)	28%
1.9. Information campaign has been carried out to engage local and European hunting organizations and conservation NGOs. (question applies to Norway and the EU Member States)	25%

Average implementation rate: 27%**5.2. Result 2 – Further habitat loss and degradation is prevented**

This implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as a **high priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
2.1. All key sites for the Lesser White-fronted Goose have been afforded appropriate protected area status at national and international levels.	32%
2.2. All key sites for the Lesser White-fronted Goose have management plans that address the conservation requirements of the species.	9%
2.3. Habitat quality in the breeding range is being monitored to ensure that anthropogenic pressures - including potential impacts of climate change - are identified as early as possible. (Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden)	0%
2.4. Measures are being taken to restore and/or rehabilitate Lesser White-fronted Goose roosting and feeding habitat.	25%

Average implementation rate: 17%**5.3. Result 3 – Reproductive success is maximized**

This implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as a **medium priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
3.1. Measures are being undertaken to avoid infrastructure development and other sources of human disturbance. (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden) <i>(reported by Russia as non-applicable)</i>	100%
3.2. Measures are being undertaken to avoid overgrazing and nest trampling if/where this is known to be a problem. (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden) <i>(reported by Russia and Sweden as non-applicable)</i>	50%
3.3. Measures are being undertaken, where feasible, to minimise predation, where this is shown to be a significant limiting factor. (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden) <i>(reported by Russia as non-applicable)</i>	67%
3.4. Measures being taken to eliminate waterbird hunting on the breeding grounds and in all staging areas close to the breeding grounds. (Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden)	100%

Average implementation rate: 79%**5.4. Result 4 – No introgression of DNA from other goose species into the wild population occurs as a result of further releases and DNA introgression from already released birds from captive breeding programmes is minimised**

This implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as a **high priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
4.1. Steps have been taken to ensure that releases of captive-bred birds have only involved individuals from wild-caught stock. (question applies to Finland, Norway, Sweden) <i>(Finland reported the action as non-applicable)</i> .	100%
4.2. Apparent hybrid geese been removed from the existing Swedish sub-population, subject to findings of a feasibility study. (question applies to Sweden)	0%
4.3. Has the long-term future of all captive breeding programmes been reviewed (question applies to Finland, Norway, Sweden) <i>(Finland reported the action as non-applicable)</i> .	100%

Average implementation rate: 67%

5.5. Result 5 – Key knowledge gaps filled

This implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as an **essential priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
5.1. Undertake efforts to locate sources of possible financial support for further conservation-orientated research.	23%
5.2. Use satellite-tracking and/or field surveys to locate the breeding grounds for the bulk of the Western main population. (Russia)	100%
5.3. Assess the hunting pressure at key sites.	40%
5.4. Use combination of satellite-tracking and/or field surveys to locate the key breeding, staging and wintering sites for the Fennoscandian population. (applies to range states of the Fennoscandian population)	31%
5.5. Carry out a Population Viability Study (PVA) for the remaining wild Fennoscandian population. (applies to range states of the Fennoscandian population)	0%
5.6. Use satellite-tracking and/or field surveys to locate the key staging and wintering grounds for the Western main population.	27%
5.7. Undertake further field surveys of suitable breeding habitat and staging areas on the Kola Peninsula been undertaken to update the estimate for the Fennoscandian population (applies to range states of the Fennoscandian population)	0%
5.8. Participation in coordinated counts of Lesser White-fronted Geese.	55%
5.9. Evaluate spatial use patterns at habitat level to identify areas where hunting directly threatens Lesser White-fronted Geese.	14%
5.10. Undertake efforts to refine genetic knowledge and the techniques deployed for genetic assessments.	0%
5.11. Develop a strategy for the genetic management of the species both in the wild and in captivity. (applies to range states of the Fennoscandian population)	9%
5.12. Assess current status of key sites for Lesser White-fronted Geese with regard to the species' ecological requirements.	32%
5.13. Undertake efforts to increase knowledge of breeding site fidelity for males and females and exchange with other populations. (applies to Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden)	0%
5.14. Undertake studies on predation by White-tailed Eagles. (applies to Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden)	50%
5.15. Investigate the importance of small mammal cycles on the reproduction of the Lesser White-fronted Goose been investigated. (applies to Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden)	25%

Average implementation rate: 27%

5.6. Result 6 – International cooperation maximized

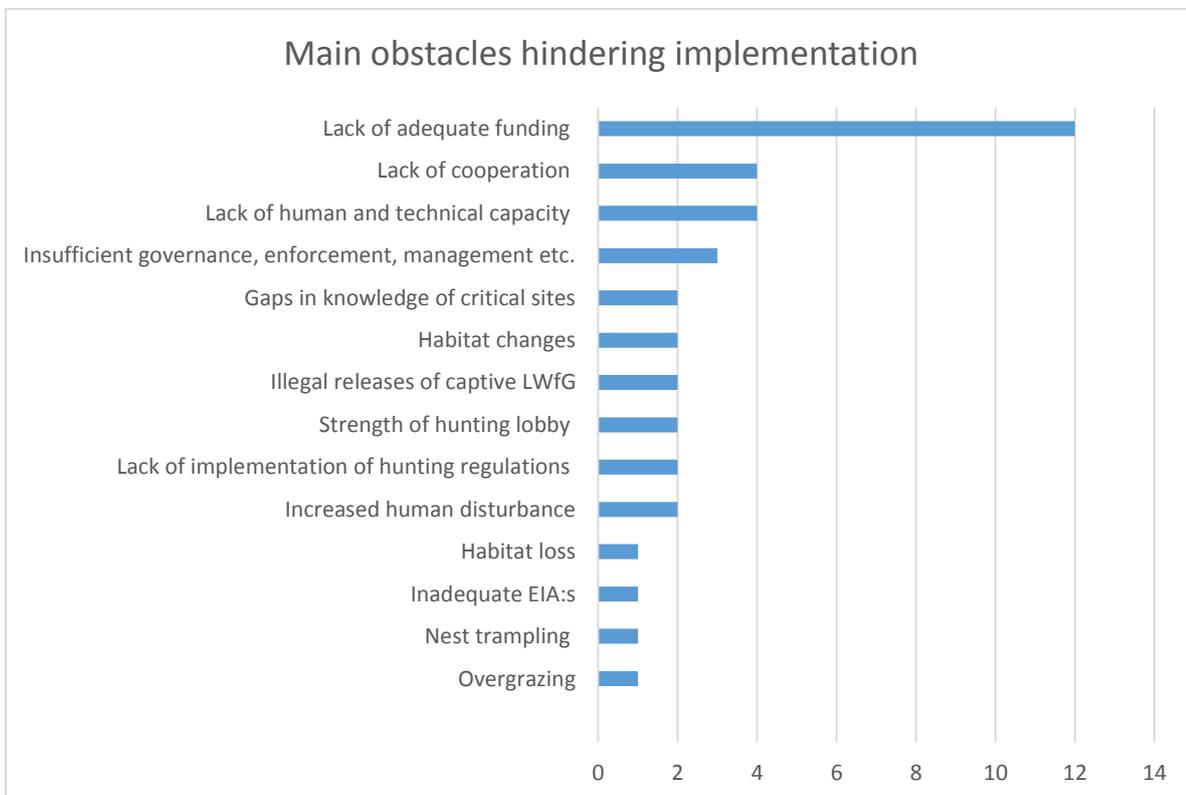
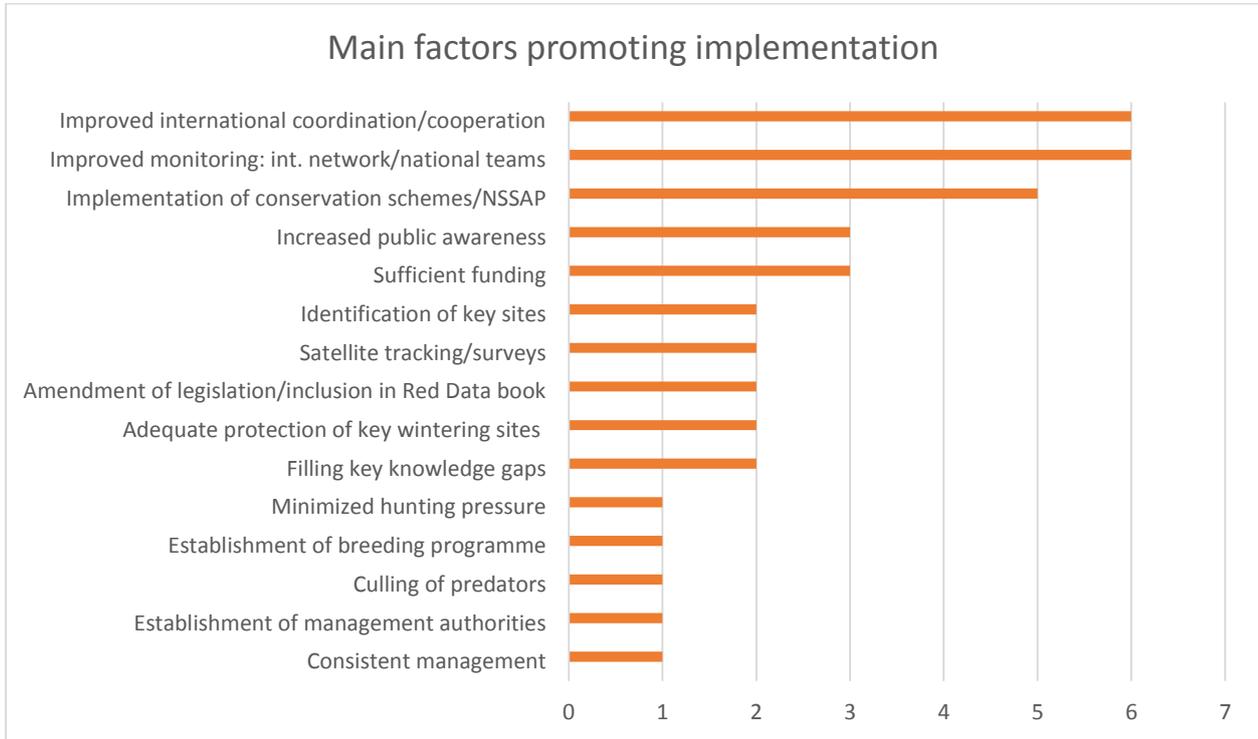
The implementation of this result was rated in the Action Plan as an **essential priority**.

Activity	Implementation rate
6.1. Has your country become a Contracting Party to AEWA? (Azerbaijan, Estonia, Greece, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkey, Turkmenistan)	11%
6.2. Has your country become a Party to CMS? (Azerbaijan, Iraq, Russian Federation, Turkey, Turkmenistan)	0%
6.3. Has your country become a Party to the Bern Convention? (Russian Federation)	0%
6.4. Has your country become a Party to CBD? (Iraq)	100%
6.5. Has your country become a Party to the Ramsar Convention? (Turkmenistan)	100%

Average implementation rate: 42%

6. Main actions promoting and obstacles hindering implementation

Range states were also requested to name the top three actions promoting as well as hindering effective implementation of the Action Plan. These are summarized in the tables below.



7. Conclusions

Progress made on reaching short term goals

Seven years following the 2008 adoption of the AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Lesser White-fronted Goose, most countries **reported having made some progress** with regard to the implementation of Action Plan activities, with an **average implementation rate of 43%** for all results outlined in the Plan. The average implementation rate for essential and high priority results was slightly lower at 36%. It is also a positive development that **none of the range states reported the short-term trend as decreasing**, although the **long-term trend has yet to change**.

The implementation of International Species Action Plans as well as achieving changes in the conservation status of species' targeted with such Plans are long-term and slow processes. Assessing the actual impact of the Action Plan on the status of the Lesser White-fronted Goose is difficult and is not possible solely on the basis of such a limited review. The review does not, for example, take into account that many of the actions listed within the current plan have later been given a lower priority by the Working Group. On the other hand there was no capacity to verify implementation progress against the independent indicators listed in the Plan.

Based on the reports submitted we can say, however, that **progress has been made on reaching the short term goals of the Plan: i.e. the rate of decline has been halted or reduced and a recovery of at least one of the populations has started** - although a long road still remains to achieving the overall goals and objectives.

Implementation gaps still remain

Despite these positive steps, **serious gaps in the implementation of conservation actions still remain**. Illegal killing and habitat loss/destruction are still the most critical threats to the species. In addition to stepping up the implementation of conservation actions as outlined in the Action Plan, there is a clear need to step outside of the 'conservation bubble' and to increase cooperation, exchange and engagement with experts from other fields as well as relevant government and economic sectors. Some of the threats facing Lesser White-fronted Geese are too multi-faceted to be tackled with species conservation tools alone.

In addition, **key gaps in knowledge** such as the exact status and wintering sites of the Western main population remain, hampering effective conservation. The LWfG monitoring network and common observations database are steps in the right direction, but there is still room to build on these in combination with dedicated monitoring expeditions etc. to close these crucial knowledge gaps.

There is also **room for improvement regarding the prioritization and planning of international conservation activities implemented under the Working Group**, including fundraising. Currently many projects and activities are put together on a more ad hoc basis - depending on the availability of funds - and thus often lack planning of next-steps and longer-term targets.

Insufficient funding, cooperation (mainly national) as well as **insufficient human and technical capacity** continue to hamper countries in their implementation of the Action Plan. The reported **lack of government interest, commitment and capacity** with regard to the Plan are also amongst the most serious issues standing in the way of achieving the Action Plan goals and objectives. This links directly to the reported lack of funding as well as insufficient human and technical capacity, as government support and commitment to implementation processes should ideally lead to (some) national resources being made available. It should be reiterated that the **main responsibility of implementing the Action Plan lies with the governments of the Principal Range States**. Although conducting invaluable work, NGOs and other international and national conservation organizations and stakeholders alone are not able to provide for long-term Action Plan implementation.

As some of the most crucial activities require implementation in range states that are currently not yet Parties to AEWA, there is an **urgent need to increase efforts to promote their accession to the Agreement** by all stakeholders involved (i.e. through bilateral government channels of AEWA Contracting Parties, international and national aid agencies, other international meetings and fora, the Working Groups, the AEWA Secretariat etc.). This applies, in particular, to **countries in Central Asia and the Middle East**.

8. Recommendations

Urgently step-up efforts to implement the Action Plan by:

Essential priorities:

- **revising the current Action Plan** to ensure that proposed actions and results correspond with updated conservation priorities reflecting progress made as well as new available knowledge;
- **developing and adopting an inter-sessional workplan to ensure a more strategic and focused approach** - concentrating on concrete priority actions expected to deliver the outlined results and long-term goal of the Plan (including timelines for delivery, expected funding needs, expected outputs etc);
- **sourcing more funding for focused and prioritized work** as identified in the workplan;
- **strengthening and making better use of available human capacity and technical know-how** as well as the **LWfG expert network** (for example with regard to monitoring);
- **increasing cooperation and exchange with other relevant international, government and economic sectors as well as experts**, in particular with regard to hunting and habitat use/management;
- **ensuring active Working Group membership of all Principal Range States**, with a particular focus on **strengthening government involvement and commitment in key countries** and engaging them in the international LWfG network;

High priorities:

- **stepping-up the recruitment of new Contracting Parties to AEWA** (in particular Azerbaijan, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan);
- ensuring that **adopted AEWA guidelines** – such as the Translocation Guidelines - **are taken into account** during the revision of the Action Plan as well as during its implementation.