



## Current Status of the Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* in Iran

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### Abstract

The Lesser White-fronted Goose is a species of conservation concern and considered to be globally threatened with extinction. Since the 1960s, the species has been reported from a total of 22 sites throughout Iran, but in the period 1992–2008, mid-winter counts of the species were received from only 16 sites. The status of the species in Iran is reviewed, and a map has been prepared showing the location of all the sites at which the species has been recorded. The highest number of birds recorded in Iran since the 1960s was a flock of 6,650 individuals in Miankaleh Protected Area in December 1972, while in 2007 and 2008, the total numbers recorded in Iran were only 264 and 26 individuals respectively.

### 1. Introduction

Iran spans an important migration flyway and stopover zone for many species that breed in areas to the north and east of Iran and winter in Africa and Arabia to the south and southwest (Scott 1975). Some 42 bird species recorded in Iran are considered in the IUCN Red List categories. Many of these species have undergone substantial, even dramatic declines in recent years, and among them the Lesser White-fronted Goose is of particular concern. Following a preliminary survey of the status of the species in Iran (Mansoori 2001), the present survey focused on its recent status in the country.

### 2. Study Areas and Methods

Annual mid-winter counts of waterbirds have been carried out at wetlands throughout Iran almost without break since the late 1960s. All the documents pertaining to these counts have been examined and the data on Lesser White-

fronted Goose have been extracted. A map of the distribution of the Lesser White-fronted Goose has been prepared (Fig. 1). The data in Table 1 are the results of mid-winter counts of the Lesser White-Fronted Goose in Iranian wetlands during the month of January in 1992–2008. An attempt was made to verify the counts, but in some instances no detailed information or proper count was available.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In recent years, the Lesser White-fronted Goose has been observed at 16 sites (Table 1), bringing the total number of sites at which the species has been recorded in Iran to 22 (Fig. 1). The highest counts were of 122 individuals in Arjan and Parishan in January 1996 (observed by H. Farhadpour, B. Darreh-Shoori, and Mr Abidi), 84 individuals in Kanibarazan Marsh in January 2007 (observed by R. Salmanzadeh) and 70 in Fereidoun-Kenar in January 2002 (observed by M. Bathaei) (Table 1).

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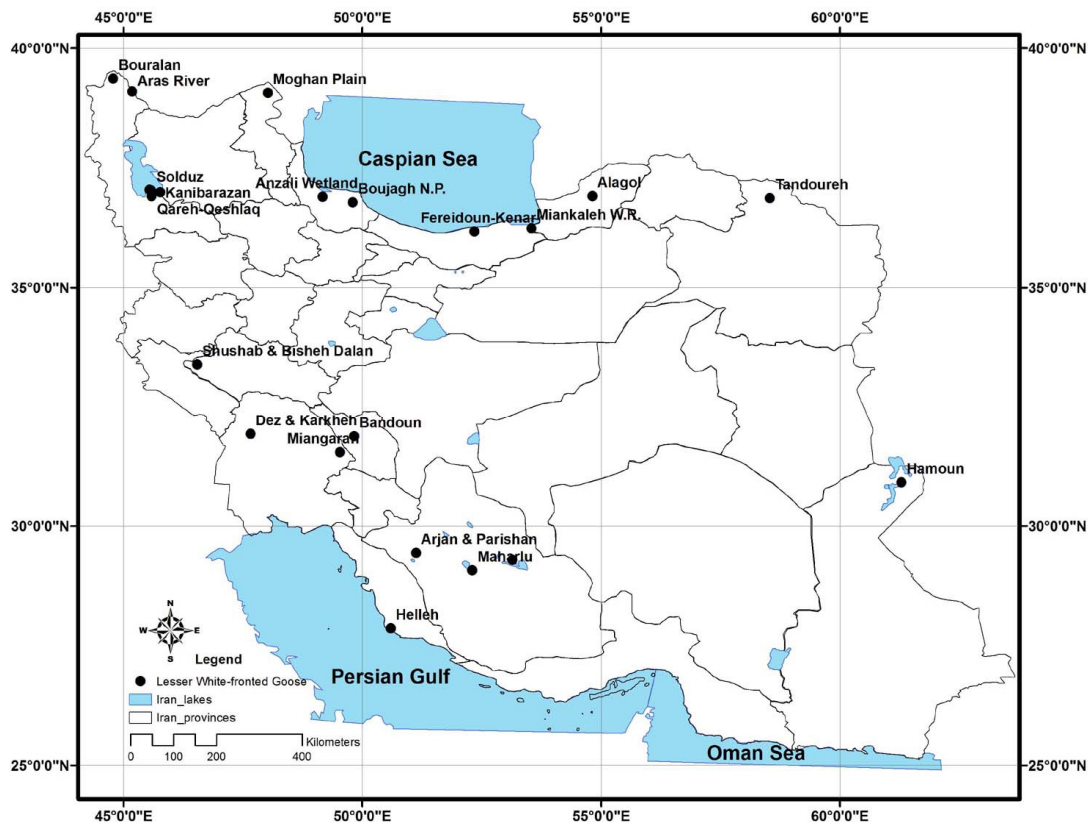


Fig. 1. Sites at which the Lesser White-fronted Goose has been recorded in Iran.

Table 1. Mid-winter counts of the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Iran during the 1992–2008 period.

Site name	Coordinates	Area size (ha)	1992	1993	1996	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Boursalan Marsh	39°20'N, 44°28'E	350	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	0
Aras River	39°40'N, 45°01'E	River	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34	0
South Urumiyeh Lake	37°10'N, 45°28'E	2,500	0	39	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Solduz marsh	37°02'N, 45°34'E	250	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32	0
Qareh Qeshlagh	37°02'N, 45°40'E	1,800	33	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	0	0	0	11
Kanibarazan Marsh	36°59'N, 45°46'E	907	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	84	0
Boujagh	37°25'N, 49°28'E	300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	4	0	0
Fereidoun-Kenar	36°35'N, 52°31'E	1,700	11	0	20	5	0	0	25	70	20	7	0	2	1	0
Miankaleh	31°50'N, 50°20'E	96,000	0	0	20	20	20	0	25	0	6	3	0	0	0	0
Tandoureh N.P.	36°55'N, 54°50'E	>50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Bondoun marsh	31°50'N, 49°47'E	1,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Shushab & Bisheh Dalan	32°45'N, 48°40'E	1,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mianganaran	31°52', 49°53'E	2,250	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0
Arjan and Parishan	29°37'N, 52°21'E	6,200	0	0	122	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	0
Bakhtegan	29°10'N, 52°50'E	227,820	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Helleh	29°36'N, 50°31'E	42,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	0
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>44</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>26</b>

The figures in Table 1 reveal that in recent years the number of Lesser White-fronted Geese wintering in Iran fluctuates greatly from year to year. When compared with counts made in the late 1960s and early 1970s (D.A. Scott, unpubl. data), it is clear that there has been a substantial decline in the number of birds wintering in Iran. It also seems that the geese have changed some of their wintering and refueling places, as they have not visited some of their former habitats in recent years. In the 1970s, this species was reported in Dasht-e Moghan (133 individuals), Anzali (1,000 individuals), Dez and Karkheh (up to 190 individuals), plains south of Shushtar (up to 300 individuals), Lake Alagol (150 individuals) and Lake Maharlu (up to 50 individuals) (Table 2), but has not been seen at these sites since then. However, in recent years it has been recorded at eight new sites: Aras River, Solduz, Kanibarazan and Bouralan marshes in West Azarbaijan Province, Bondoun Marsh in Charmahal & Bakhtiari Province, Shushab & Bisheh Dalan in Lorestan Province, Tandoureh National Park in North Khorasan Province and Miangaran Marsh in Khuzestan Province.

The decline in the wintering population of the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Iran began many years ago. In his book “Wild Chorus” published in 1938, Peter Scott wrote enthusiastically about 30,000 or more Lesser White-fronted Geese wintering on the plains south of Gorgan Bay in Mazandaran. Nielsen and Speyer (1967) observed 7,000–8,000 individuals on the plains c. 5 miles south of Bandar Turkmen on 2 February 1961. The number of Lesser White-Fronted Geese recorded during the mid-winter (January) counts in the early 1970s were 1,986 in 1970/71, 3,704 in 1971/72, 3,474 in 1972/73, 1,867 in 1973/74 and 5,249 in 1974/75 (Scott 2010), and a single flock of 6,650 was observed in the marshes at the west end of Gorgan Bay on 21 December 1972. However, due to the pressure of population growth, destruction of habitat, development of infrastructure and even illegal hunting and poaching the wintering population has declined dramatically (Table 1, D.A. Scott, unpubl. data) and the species is now confined to just a few areas as shown in the distribution map (Fig. 1).

In the mid-winter count of 2005, only one bird was recorded in Iran. The mid-winter counts in the year before and in the following year were also low. It seems that this decline in the number of Lesser White-fronted Geese reaching Iran in winter may be related to the decline in the world population as a whole. However, we are trying to define this decline clearly, to enable us to implement a conservation plan as soon as possible. It is important to add that, due to the drought in recent years, some changes have occurred in the wetland areas. However, we also need to know whether or not the migration route of the bird has changed.

It is important to find out more about hunting pressure on this bird in our neighboring countries. This should be investigated as soon as possible and measures should be taken to reduce it. One of the biggest problems is the lack of information and public awareness. It is vital to implement effective education programmes for local people, hunters and the authorities to make them understand that the bird is in danger of extinction and should be protected as an important part of biodiversity.

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