Doc. AEWA/EGMIWG11.24
Date: 15 May 2026

AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM

11th MEETING OF THE AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP
16-18 June 2026, Skövde, Sweden

EGMP AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON MIGRATION DYNAMICS OF GREYLAG GEESE: ROADMAP ON KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND FUNDING NEEDS

Prepared by Johan Månsson and Matthieu Guillemain, co-leads of the Ad Hoc Working Group

Summary:

The European Goose Management International Working Group agreed at its 10th meeting (EGM IWG10) in 2025 to establish an ad hoc working group mandated to "further investigate the short-stopping behaviour of Greylag Geese identify knowledge gaps as well as possible needs for funding to better understand the declining number of Greylag Geese in Spain and France during winter". EGM IWG10 requested this group to report its findings to EGM IWG11. This report describes the process for establishing the Ad Hoc Working Group and presents a roadmap of identified knowledge gaps and funding needs, together with a workplan outlining the steps required to deliver a management brief to EGM IWG13.

Action requested from the EGM IWG:

Take note of the roadmap and agree on the mandate, timeline and deliverables of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

1. Introduction

The European Goose Management International Working Group agreed at its 10th meeting (EGM IWG10) in 2025 to establish an ad hoc working group mandated to further investigate the short-stopping behaviour of Greylag Geese. The group's tasks included identifying key knowledge gaps and assessing potential funding needs in order to improve understanding of the declining wintering numbers of Greylag Geese in Spain and France. The Ad Hoc Working Group was requested to report its findings to the 11th meeting of the EGM IWG (EGM IWG11).

This report describes the process for establishing the Ad Hoc Working Group and presents a roadmap of identified knowledge gaps and funding needs, together with a workplan outlining the steps required to deliver a management brief to EGM IWG13.

2. Background

While investigating ways to improve the management guidance for the NW Europe (br) population of Greylag Goose, the European Goose Management Platform (EGMP) has identified emerging patterns in the migratory behaviour of Greylag Geese causing difficulty in the assessment of population size for each of the defined Management Units (MUs). Firstly, these birds are increasingly tending to abandon migratory behaviour and become sedentary at higher latitudes (a process termed "short-stopping"). Secondly, the increasing use of GPS tags now allows for unexpected migration movements to be discovered, such as birds crossing the assumed flyway boundaries and moving over vast regions between seasons, and birds previously considered largely sedentary actually engaging in long moult migrations, sometimes in opposite directions to what one would expect (i.e. moulting north of their breeding grounds).

Such movement between established MUs, as well as the changes in migration/sedentary strategies may have profound consequences for conservation, monitoring and management strategies, hence directly affecting the EGMP's capacity to manage the population at MU-level and implement an adaptive harvest management framework envisaged in the International Single Species Management Plan for the NW Europe (br) population of the Greylag Goose (GG ISSMP):

- Short-stopping leads to declining numbers of wintering Greylag Geese at the southern end of their annual geographic range. This increases the risk of the population falling below the Favourable Reference wintering Population size (wFRP) defined at national level for the southern Range States, and of the current range becoming smaller than the Favourable Reference Range (FRR) defined at population scale. The Favourable Reference Values (FRVs) represent the minimum levels of population size, range and habitat necessary to consider a population being in favourable conservation status. The FRVs for the NW Europe (br) population of Greylag Goose were defined in the Adaptive Flyway Management Programme for NW Europe (br) population of Greylag Goose (GG AFMP) and agreed by EGMP Range States.

- Recurrent flyway boundary crossings suggest that the historical flyway delineation may have been inappropriate or may have changed over time. This questions the scale at which management actions should be undertaken, including whether the current monitoring program is encompassing (only) the birds belonging to the NW Europe (br) population as described in the GG ISSMP and the associated AFMP.

- As birds migrate to moulting sites in late spring, individuals from distant parts of the flyway arrive in areas occupied by local breeders, leading to substantial mixing between moulting and breeding birds. For example, individuals breeding in France moult in the Netherlands and individuals originating in Poland moult in Sweden. This means the summer counts in these areas may actually pool unknown proportions

of local and distant Greylag Geese, hence the difficulty in assigning numbers or observed breeding success (i.e. age-ratios) to the sedentary and migratory migration units.

- Previous work from the EGMP Data Centre and Modelling Consortium has provided a range of possible scenarios to reduce the Greylag Goose population size to the agreed target. These scenarios differ in the extent to which they rely on leisure hunting vs. derogation culling, as well as the timing (winter vs summer) and location (north vs south) of offtake along the flyway. Short-stopping causing wintering numbers in the south to plummet may already make some scenarios unrealistic, and the influx of birds from the Central European flyway during moult may cause unnecessary pressure on managers to significantly reduce numbers in the NW/SW European flyway.

3. Establishment of the Ad Hoc Working Group

At its 10th Meeting in June 2025, the EGM IWG decided to establish an ad hoc working group under the EGMP. After consultations with the Greylag Goose Task Force (GG TF), Johan Månsson (Sweden) and Matthieu Guillemain (France) were invited to serve as co-leads of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

Subsequent preparatory meetings were held in November 2025, in consultation with the Task Force Coordinator. As a result, a concept note was prepared outlining the proposed scope of work, timeline, and composition of the Ad Hoc Working Group. Experts with relevant experience in Greylag Goose ecology, migration and population monitoring were contacted by the co-leads and invited to contribute insights, analyses and data in support of the group's objectives. The concept note and an update on progress were presented to the GG TF on 27 January 2026.

4. Composition

The Ad Hoc Working Group is composed of the following scientists with expertise on research and monitoring of Greylag Goose, including bird counts, individual marking (neck collars) and GPS tracking:

- Nelleke Buitendijk (NL)
- Andy J. Green (ES)
- Luca Guitink (NL)
- Thomas Heinicke (DE)
- Henning Heldbjerg (DK)
- Hálfdán Helgi Helgason (IS)
- Bartosz Krąkowski (PL)
- Helmut Kruckenberg (DE)
- Blas Molina (ES)
- Petr Musil (CZ)
- Jorge Orueta (ES)
- Antti Piironen (FI)
- Ryan Germain (DK)
- Iben Hove Sørensen (DK)

5. Timeline and Roadmap

The group met for the first time on 18 February 2026 and agreed on its main goals and future work. Members were asked to confirm their willingness to contribute to the joint work and explain the data they could provide for the analyses. A second meeting occurred on 20 April 2026 to formally agree on the current roadmap of identified knowledge gaps and funding needs. An interim meeting occurred on 20 March 2026 with the EGMP Data Centre to discuss the likely consequences of the current changes in Greylag Goose migration and the way the Data Centre may use the results of the Ad Hoc Working Group to facilitate its annual reporting on Greylag Goose population status.

Currently, the members of the group can provide: all International Waterbird Census data per site in order to assess how latitude affects the local trends in wintering Greylag Goose numbers, life histories of several hundred neck collared individuals, as well as the GPS-tracks of ca. 200 Greylag Geese.

It was agreed that the work of the group should aim at answering the following questions:

- Population short-stopping
  How have patterns of short-stopping in Greylag Geese changed across the Iceland/British Isles, NW/SW Europe and Central Europe flyways during the period 1965-2025 (as inferred from mid-January site-level counts)? What are the consequences of these behavioural changes for the population ranges and management/conservation scenarios?

- Individual variation
  To what extent do individual Greylag Geese change wintering sites between years, and how often do the same individuals alternate between short-stopping and long-distance migration strategies?

- Moult migration
  When do Greylag Geese arrive at and depart from moulting sites and what are the implications of this timing for the current monitoring programme, more specifically the summer population counts, and for estimating offtake (hunting and derogation) levels?

- Crossing between MUs
  How frequently do Greylag Geese move between established MUs and during which periods of the annual cycle do such cross-boundary movements occur?

Work on the short-stopping issues may be carried out on current Ad Hoc Group Members' worktime. An outline of necessary analyses will be drafted during spring 2026, and the study initiated as early as possible. The study of individual movements through GPS tags is often time consuming because such datasets typically require more preliminary cleaning and alignment, and modern analytical tools require both advanced expertise and long computing time. This therefore requires more work than the group's members can provide at present, but funding of their time could allow those who possess the necessary skills to undertake such work. It is estimated that approximately four months of salary for a postdoctoral/junior researcher (ca. EUR 20,000), for example hired by the EGMP Data Centre or one of the group members' labs, would be sufficient for conducting this study. Some PhD students working with Ad Hoc Group members already work on GPS track data and may provide some help with data preparation. An outline of the necessary analyses will be drafted during late summer/early autumn 2026, and the proper study will be initiated when funding is secured.

The current document will be presented at the EGM IWG11 in Sweden in June 2026. Funding permitting, the analyses could be performed during autumn/winter 2026-2027, with the objective of using the results to feed the Integrated Population Model work of the EGMP Data Centre. The results will be summarized in a

management brief including recommendations for consideration by the EGM IWG, planned for submission to the EGM IWG13 in June 2028.