

AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM



**9th MEETING OF THE
AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP**



18-20 June 2024, Tromsø, Norway

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF BARNACLE GOOSE EAST
GREENLAND/SCOTLAND & IRELAND AND SVALBARD/SOUTHWEST SCOTLAND
POPULATIONS TASK FORCE FOR 2023/2024 AND DRAFT WORKPLAN FOR 2024/2025**

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Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force*

Summary:

This document provides an overview of the status and key activities that the Barnacle Goose Task Force for the East Greenland/Scotland & Ireland and Svalbard/South-west Scotland populations has undertaken from June 2023 until May 2024. In addition, a proposed list of recommendations is included as well as the proposed annual workplan for 2024/2025. It should be noted that some work has not taken place due to the impact of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) and availability of resources.

There are no activities reported for the Svalbard/South-west Scotland population since the AFMP has not been developed yet. It was agreed at EGM IWG7 that the development of the AFMP would be postponed until we have a better understanding of the impacts of HPAI on the population.

The Task Force will follow the agreed workplan set out in Section 5. The recommendations of this report cover several aspects. In the first place, it is recommended that Iceland and Scotland reduce the offtake to levels as close as possible to zero offtake due to the high probability of falling below the FRP and that both Range States establish and implement a coordination mechanism to ensure adherence to those levels. Further to that, continue the work related to the IPM of the Greenland population, taking into account the data from the flyway census and additional impacts of HPAI. There is no agreement to date on who leads the work on the Svalbard IPM and how it will be funded. Norway and the UK have prepared the impact model for the Greenland and Svalbard Barnacle Goose populations. New and ongoing work will consider the impacts of HPAI and any associated research. The Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force proposes to continue to support the implementation of the ISSAP and AFMP, following the workplan of previous years and recommended activities.

New work will include considering the impacts of HPAI on both populations and how this might impact on the AFMP and agreed management activities. Meetings will be organised as necessary, especially for the evaluation of the IPM.

Action requested from the EGM IWG:

Take note of the Task Force report and recommendations and adopt the annual workplan.

Introduction

According to Rule 29 of the European Goose Management International Working Group (EGM IWG) Modus Operandi, the EGM IWG may establish species and/or thematic Task Forces, as necessary, to deal with the preparation and coordination of decision papers and background documents, as well as to deal with other specific tasks. The EGMP Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force was established in 2020 following the recommendations of the 5th Meeting of the EGM IWG in June 2020. The first meeting of the Task Force took place on 7 October 2020.

This document provides an overview of the work that has taken place since the EGM IWG8 and the recommendations and workplan for the implementation of the AEWA International Single Species Management Plan (ISSMP) for the Greenland Barnacle Goose for 2023/2024. The agreed aims of the Task Force are: 1) Assist the EGM IWG in coordinating and catalysing the implementation of the ISSMP for the Barnacle Goose and its corresponding AFMPs for the respective populations under the EGMP; 2) Assist the EGM IWG in stimulating and supporting Range States in the implementation of the ISSMP for the Barnacle Goose and its corresponding AFMP for the respective population(s); and 3) Monitor and report on the implementation of these activities to the EGM IWG, as appropriate.

1. Status of the Task Force Membership

The Task Force is made up of 15 representatives from 4 Range State and 6 NGOs and is supported by the EGMP Secretariat and Data Centre.

A full list of Task Force members is detailed in Annex 1.

2. Meetings

Since the previous Task Force report submitted to EGM IWG8 in June 2023, the Task Force has participated in three joint meetings of the EGMP Task Forces on 19 June 2023, 26 September 2023 and 4 March 2023. We have also participated in a meeting arranged by the Data Centre to discuss data flow and modelling projections on 5 March 2023. A further Task Force meeting was held just prior to EGM IWG9 on 6 June 2024 to discuss the decline in the Greenland Barnacle Goose population and the co-ordination of offtake between the Range States.

Task Force members have also participated in the Goose Monitoring Workshop organised by the EGMP Data Centre in Dragør, Denmark in November 2023.

3. Report of key activities and outcomes

The main work of the Task Force over the past year has been to consider how the Greenland Barnacle Goose population model will be used to inform the Adaptive Flyway Management Plan for the population. This work had been delayed due to resource implications during the HPAI outbreak and whilst we collated all of the population census data from February 2023. However, the work has now progressed with modelling done by the Data Centre.

The population census carried out, using ground and aerial surveys, across Ireland and Scotland in February 2023 found that the total population count was 62,159 geese, which represents a 15.3% decline from the

previous census in March 2020 when 73,391 geese were counted. This leaves the population close to the FRV of 54,000 wintering individuals.

In Scotland, the census counted 48,332 birds, a decline of 16.9% compared to the counts made in March 2020. In Ireland, the census counted 13,827 individuals in 2023, a decline of 9.4% (1,429 individuals) compared to 2020. Derogation hunting in Scotland has been very low over the past few seasons, due to restricting the bag in the midst of the HPAI outbreak, with 58 shot on Islay in 2022/23 and 36 shot on Islay in 2023/24. Iceland has also reported lower bag returns as hunters avoided shooting barnacle geese during the HPAI outbreak.

Breeding success for the Greenland population on Islay was 3.5%¹ indicating a second very poor breeding season in succession.

Beginning in autumn 2021, there was a serious outbreak of HPAI within goose populations in Scotland. The largest impacts were in the Solway area, where 30% (c.13,200) of the Svalbard Barnacle Goose population are estimated to have been lost. In winter 2022/2023 and 2023/24, the population has shown signs of recovery with the productivity reported to have been the highest for over 20 years. Very few Svalbard barnacle geese were affected by HPAI over winter 2022/2023 and no positive tests were recorded in winter 2023/24. Initial findings from blood samples taken from non-infected birds in February 2023 through to March 2024 indicated that antibodies were present in these birds. Impacts on other goose species in the area remained relatively low.

HPAI was detected in the Greenland Barnacle Goose population in Islay in early 2022. Estimates of total losses are difficult as sick geese were subject to intensive predation by white-tailed eagles. However, the census data and counts in Scotland suggest that around 10,000 birds were killed by HPAI across the range. In Ireland, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 birds died as a result of HPAI during winter 2021/22.

NatureScot is collaborating with Edinburgh University to examine blood samples from non-infected birds on Islay and in the Solway over the previous two winters. Early analysis of these samples indicates the presence of antibodies in around 60% of the birds tested.

There are no management plan activities reported for the Svalbard/South-west Scotland population, since the AFMP has not been developed yet. It was concluded that for the most part of the workplan, the work is ongoing but there have been delays due to HPAI and lack of data availability.

Iceland and the UK held a bilateral meeting in Reykjavik in March 2024 to discuss actions for monitoring and managing the Greenland Barnacle Goose population. It was agreed that both Range States would meet regularly to coordinate actions, which may include limiting hunting activity, should the population decline further. With regard to monitoring, Ireland expressed their willingness to discuss any changes to the current agreed monitoring schedule.

In early June 2024, the Task Force convened to discuss the population trend projections from the Data Centre, which indicated that the population is approaching the Favourable Reference Population (FRP) value and that there is a certain probability that it may be already below the FRP. Following the meeting, the Task Force

¹ Ogilvie, MA. Breeding success in 2023 of Barnacle Geese wintering on Islay and of Greenland White-fronted Geese wintering on Islay and Kintyre

members agreed, through correspondence, on an offtake reduction recommendation to EGM IWG, which was then added to this report.

4. Recommendations

The Task Force will follow the agreed workplan set out in Section 5.

The Task Force has agreed on the following recommendations to EGM IWG:

1. Because of the proximity of the population to the FRP and the elevated probability that it is already below this threshold, tighter coordination of offtake between Iceland and Scotland is necessary to ensure the population does not fall below the FRP, in contravention of Article II.1 of AEWA. In the scenarios presented by the EGMP Data Centre, only extremely low offtake rates resulted in relatively low probabilities of the population falling below the FRP by 2026.

The Task Force recommends that Iceland and Scotland implement measures to reduce levels of offtake to as close as possible to zero offtake. To this end, it is recommended that the relevant authorities in Iceland and Scotland reach agreement on the maximum level of offtake to be permitted, if any, and the split between the two Range States (taking into consideration the projections of the EGMP Data Centre), and that such agreement be concluded before the start of Iceland's 2024/2025 hunting season. It is further recommended that these two Range States develop and implement a coordination mechanism to ensure adherence to these limits.

2. The Range States are recommended to follow up the IPM for the Greenland population, taking into account data from the flyway census and additional impacts of HPAI, with an IPM for the Svalbard population. There is no agreement to date on who leads the work and how it will be funded. New and ongoing work will take into account the impacts of HPAI and any associated research.
3. The Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force proposes to continue to support the implementation of the ISSAP and AFMP, following the workplan activities of previous years and recommended activities.

New work will include considering the impacts of HPAI on both populations and how this might impact on the AFMP and agreed management activities.

Meetings will be organised as necessary, especially for the evaluation of the IPM.

5. Draft Workplan 2024/2025

Table 1. Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force Workplan for 2024/2025

Type of action	Actions from the ISSMP	Priority	Timescale	Greenland/Svalbard Task Force
	4.2 Assess periodically, and report to the AEWA EGM IWG, the cumulative impact of derogations (as well as hunting in Range States in which derogation is not required) on the development of the population, the likelihood of serious damage to agriculture and risk to air safety and to other flora and fauna (including the Arctic ecosystems), and the non-lethal measures taken to prevent damage/risk, as well as the effectiveness of these. If necessary, coordinate the derogation measures between Range States to avoid risk to the population and to enhance effectiveness of the measures.	Essential	Short	Impact model update / review and preparation of documents going to EGM IWG / providing recommendations
	A.1 Produce and update periodically, spatially explicit population size estimates based on agreed international monitoring	Essential	Short / Rolling	Consultation
	A.2 Maintain an annually updated bag statistics database including geese taken by any means (whether under derogations or, in those Range States in which it is permissible, hunting)	Essential	Ongoing / Rolling	Consultation
	A.3 Maintain a spatially explicit database on goose damage to agriculture, other fauna and flora and fauna and risk to air safety	Essential	Medium / Rolling	Consultation
National	2.2. Provide accommodation areas to reduce risks and conflicts at sensitive areas through e.g. subsidies [2]	Medium	Medium/ Rolling	Information exchange
National	2.3 Apply scaring and/or land management techniques to reduce the attractiveness of sensitive areas to geese, monitoring the implications of such local displacement for conflicts at wider scale [3]	High	Short / Rolling	Information exchange

	3.2 Establish an internationally coordinated programme to assess agricultural damage including monitoring and assessment protocols	High	Short	Consultation
National	3.3 Liaise with farmers affected by goose damages to reduce agricultural conflicts	High	Short / Rolling	Information exchange
	4.3 Improve effectiveness of derogation measures through experimenting with different timing and methods and better understanding the relative efficacy of lethal versus non-lethal scaring techniques	High	Medium	Information exchange - Liaise with other TFs
	4.4 Promote best practices of goose population adjustment including timing to minimize damage and significant disturbance to other species	Medium	Medium / Rolling	Information exchange - Liaise with other TFs
National	4.5 Maintain low crippling rates	High	Medium / Rolling	
	4.6 Improve derogation shooting techniques to further reduce crippling	Medium	Long / Rolling	Information exchange - Liaise with other TFs
	A.4 Collect demographic (mortality, reproduction, differential migration and connectivity) data from an agreed representative sampling framework across the range	High	Short / Rolling	Consultation
	C.1 Develop and implement a communication strategy and plan	Medium	Short / Rolling	Liaise with other TFs

6. Annex 1. Members of the Greenland/Svalbard Barnacle Goose Task Force as of May 2024

Country	Representative	Affiliation
European Commission	Iva Obretenova	Directorate-General for Environment
Iceland	Sigurdur Tharinsson	Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources
	Snorri Sigurdsson	Icelandic Institute for Natural History
	Svenja Auhage	Icelandic Institute for Natural History
Ireland	Seán Kelly	National Parks and Wildlife Service
Norway	Ingunn Tombre	NINA
United Kingdom	Rae McKenzie	NatureScot (TF Coordinator)
	Jessica Shaw	NatureScot
British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC)	Peter Clark	BASC Scotland Director
FACE	Cy Griffin	Senior Conservation Manager
Nordic Hunters' Alliance	Johan Svalby	Senior Advisor for International Affairs
Wetlands International	Szabolcs Nagy	Senior Advisor

EGMP Data Centre	Iben Hove Sørensen	Aarhus University
	Fred Allen Johnson	Aarhus University
UNEP/AEWA Secretariat	Bruno Leles	EGMP Coordinator
	Shenay Huseynova	EGMP Programme Assistant