

Red-breasted Goose Monitoring Strategy
for the Main Wintering Sites from Dobrogea, Romania



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Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Aims, objectives and the value of Red-breasted Goose monitoring</u>	<u>3</u>
Aim of Red-breasted Goose Monitoring Strategy	
Objectives of Red-breasted Goose Monitoring Strategy	
Why monitoring Red-breasted Goose	
<u>Monitoring methodology</u>	<u>4</u>
Measures for monitoring	
Key sites	
Minimum monitoring priorities	
Additional observations	
Data recording methods and sheets	
<u>Coordination of Red-breasted Goose monitoring</u>	<u>5</u>
Coordination of RbG monitoring	

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RbG- Red-breasted Goose

RBGIWG-Red-breasted Goose International Working Group

SOR-Romanian Ornithological Society

WWT-Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Introduction

The Red-breasted Goose, *Branta ruficollis*, is one of the most charismatic species of birds, qualified as Endangered in the IUCN Red List. In order to protect this species an informal group of expert organization has been formed-the Red-breasted Goose International Working Group.

The aim of the RBGIWG is to implement the International Species Action Plan for *Branta ruficollis*.

Romania, together with Bulgaria is the stronghold for the species in winter. As part of the RBGIWG, Romanian Ornithological Society – the BirdLife partner in Romania needs to monitor the specie during winter.

Aim, objectives and the value of monitoring

Aim of Red-breasted Goose Monitoring Strategy

To identify the information required to ensure that the management of the winter sites is adequate to Red-breasted Geese needs and to identify short-term trends in species global population.

Objectives of monitoring strategy

- To gather data on the numbers of Red-breasted Geese at its main wintering sites in Romania and their breeding success;
- To identify the current population size together with colleagues from Bulgaria and Ukraine;
- To identify the main foraging areas for Red-breasted Goose in Dobrogea;
- To help reduce illegal and accidental shooting of birds and control hunting pressure;
- To determine if the agriculture practices are meeting the needs of Red-breasted Geese.

Why monitoring Red-breasted Goose

The Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) is a Globally Threatened Species, classified as “Vulnerable” (BirdLife International, 2000), with a global population of about 88,000 birds. In recent years, due to extreme weather at the wintering grounds and poor breeding conditions in the tundra, the species global population has suffered a noticeable reduction within a very short period of time. Thus the species is now qualified as “Endangered” in the updated IUCN Red List (IUCN, 2007).

Romania is the stronghold of the Red-breasted Goose in winter, especially for December. During the last decade of the 20th century over 50% of the global population has been observed in the country. The main wintering site is the complex Razelm-Sinoe Lakes, as well as the extensive crop fields to the west of them. In recent years the RbG numbers have gone down reflecting a decrease in the species population resulting from a number of combined factors acting together – poor breeding success, low survival during the winter due to harsh unfavorable conditions etc. Regular winter monitoring is a crucial source of data on population size and trends together with winter monitoring and an assessment of the utilization of crop fields.

Monitoring methodology

Measures for monitoring

Monitoring can measure:

- Population size/ index in Romania during winter;
- Breeding success – by determining the age ratio;
- Threatening processes – those known and/or suspected to have negative impact on the RbG populations, for example: disturbance level, habitat shrinkage;
- To assess the crop fields utilization.

Key sites

Priorities for the selection of monitoring sites should focus on:

- Significant roosting sites known to be under threat;
- Winter sites located on the Danube Lower Corridor;
- Sites which are located farther from the coastal zone;
- Control roosting sites with little disturbance.

Minimum monitoring priorities

To have at least 6 counts per year during the dates identified as priorities by the RBGIWG coordinator. The monitoring will measure the Red-breasted Goose population size for Romania. The counts will take place at the main wintering sites identified for Red-breasted Goose in Dobrogea.

The data gathered will provide information in order to estimate the peak count for each winter.

Additional observations

A structured programme which minimizes the amount of monitoring required does not preclude additional information about RbG population which winters in Romania.

Data recording methods and sheets

The counts are done in early mornings at take-offs from the roosting sites. The volunteer teams are separated in groups (2 to 4 persons) on predetermined counting points around the lakes Razelm and Sinoe. The teams registered on data forms the geese that take off from the roosting sites towards the crop fields.

The data are recorded in forms and contains the information as: date, weather report, point, participant, hour, all geese, Red-breasted Goose.

A standardize data base for the Red-breasted Goose International Working Group has been established together experts from Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in order to include RbG data in the same format and to make it available at the flyway level.

Coordination of Red-breasted Goose monitoring

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The Romanian Ornithological Society, the BirdLife partner in Romania conducted monitoring of Red-breasted Goose population as partner for the implementation of the Red-breasted Goose Common Monitoring and Research Programme. The programme started in winter 2003/04. A National Focal Point is appointed. His role is to coordinate the teams for winter counts together with other conservation activities for RbG.