



# **Safeguarding wintering feeding grounds for Red-breasted Goose by ensuring access of farmers to financial support under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**

**- Final Report -**

**Reporting Date: 09.07.2009**

<b>Specialist Group Name: Threatened Waterfowl Specialist Group</b>
<b>Applicant/Contact Name: Lavinia Răducescu</b>
<b>Address: Bd. Mihail Kogălniceanu, nr. 49, sc. 2, et. 1, ap. 8, 050108, Sector 5, București, ROMANIA</b>
<b>E-mail: <a href="mailto:lavinia.raducescu@sor.ro">lavinia.raducescu@sor.ro</a></b>
<b>Telephone: (+4)-031-425 5657</b>

# LIST OF CONTENTS AND ANNEXES

<b>1. OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. OBJECTIVES</b> .....	<b>4</b>
A. Developing a realistic approach for the Red-breasted Goose conservation in the strategy of the Local Action Group .....	<b>4</b>
B. Increasing awareness of the local community.....	<b>6</b>
C. Developing a targeted Red-breasted Goose Agri-environment Scheme .....	<b>7</b>
<b>3. OUTCOMES</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>4. CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>5. ANNEXES</b> .....	<b>11</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**EAFRD** – European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

**LAG** – Local Action Group

**MAFRD** – Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development

**NRDP** – National Rural Development Programme

**RbG** – Red-breasted Goose

**RBGIWG** – Red-breasted Goose International Working Group

**RSPB** – the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/BirdLife Partner in U.K.

**SOR** – Romanian Ornithological Society/BirdLife Partner in Romania

**SWOT** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

**TDD** – Tulcea - Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Local Action Group

# 1. OVERVIEW

The Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) is a charismatic, globally threatened species, highly dependent on wetlands and farmed areas. In the last 50 years, the location of its wintering grounds has changed dramatically for reasons yet unknown. This species has a small wintering range, with 80-90% of the population concentrated at just five roost sites, within an area of less than 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. Romania represents one of the most important wintering places; especially the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex (a component of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve) - the main winter feeding area. The geese feed predominantly on winter wheat, barley, maize, pasture grasses and split grain. The birds have also been observed in rape fields.

Large flocks of Red-breasted Geese and other threatened geese species feeding on farmland brings them into conflict with farmers. Farmers receive no compensation for damage to their crops, and thus have developed techniques to scarce the geese and protect their crops. Many of these practices are not sympathetic to the geese needs and/or are environmental unfriendly, e.g. incorrect application of pesticides, scaring birds, crop regimes unfavourable to the geese, and poisons to protect the crops.

Given their extensive use of farmland habitat, agriculture policies play a crucial part in the conservation and fortunes of wintering Red-breasted Goose. Since joining the EU on 1 January 2007, Romania has been subject to EU legislative requirements, including the Birds and the Habitats Directives, and the implementation of EU agricultural policy. These instruments are inextricably linked. The development and implementation of national agricultural policies and programmes should therefore be sympathetic to the needs of widespread farmland birds, of Annex 1 species under the Birds Directive, including Red-breasted Goose.

The Romanian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFRD) has recently prepared a new approach for the development of rural areas. A fundamental objective is the improvement of the environment and countryside through the support of land management, in accordance with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Under the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) for 2007-2013, Romania will therefore need to ensure such support contributes to EU sustainable development objectives by encouraging farmers to employ land-use methods that are compatible with the need to preserve the natural environment and landscape and protect and improve natural resources (Axis 2). Key issues to be addressed include biodiversity and Natura 2000 site management, for which the implementation of appropriately designed and targeted agri-environment schemes will be critical.

The fourth Axis (LEADER) allows forming a 'bottom-up', public-private partnership approach to meeting local development needs in rural areas, thereby achieving the objectives of other axes, including Axis 2. The fundamental elements of this approach are the involvement of Local Action Groups (LAGs), the formulation of local development strategies and cooperation projects thereof. Based on these requirements, the MAFRD is now engaged in the process of preparing guidelines and training programmes, the aim being to have a formally recognized network of LAGs by the end of 2009. In the interim period, LAGs are elaborating their own strategies, which will be later used in projects financed under the NRDP for 2007-2013.

On this basis, it is clear that LAGs could play a major part in developing local projects and schemes under the NRDP, beneficial for Red-breasted Goose and other threatened species which deliver financial support to farmers. An integral part of this would involve the dissemination of environmental information and active engagement of farmers at the decision-making level.

The project proposal that follows is therefore aimed at providing advice to ensure the preparation of an appropriate local environmental strategy to meet the needs of the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex in terms of Red-breasted Goose conservation. The input of expert advice and information concerning the needs of the Red-breasted Goose is both an opportunity and a necessity for ensuring the effective partnership of local actors and provision of financial support to relevant beneficiaries.

Also, by including the proposed agri-environment schemes actions in the local strategy for rural development of the key areas will help to ensure safer winter feeding areas for the geese.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

The goal of the present project is to safeguard the feeding grounds of Red-breasted Goose in Romania through positive engagement and provision of assistance to local communities, especially farmers, to raise awareness and facilitate access to NRDP funds for employing appropriate land management practices.

### **A. DEVELOPING A REALISTIC APPROACH FOR THE RED-BREASTED GOOSE CONSERVATION IN THE STRATEGY OF THE LOCAL ACTION GROUP**

**Objective:** Developing a realistic approach for Red-breasted Goose conservation in the local strategy for rural development of the Local Action Group which covers the feeding territories of the Red-breasted Goose.

**Activity1.** Support for the development of the LAG strategy that shall include clear targets for Red-breasted Goose conservation: this shall include an initial workshop and regular meetings of the LAG strategy working group, starting with a baseline analysis of the economic and environmental status, a SWOT analysis focused on Red-breasted Goose habitats, drawing up of farming requirements in coherence with specific objectives for Red-breasted Goose protection.

**STATUS: partially completed**

The LAG which covers the most important parts of Romanian Red-breasted Goose wintering grounds, represented by the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex, is “Tulcea - Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve LAG” (TDD). This LAG is a public-private partnership which is formed in order to meet local development needs in rural areas and is focused on the Danube Delta and surrounding areas (ANNEX 1). The TDD is composed by partners from the Romanian administration sector represented by Tulcea County and Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, local NGOs developing activities with farmers, local NGOs concerned with monitoring the administration sector of the region (represented by

Association of Local Administrations from Danube Delta), and companies which are developing activities in tourism and fisheries.

In order to achieve the project objectives a partnership was built between the Romanian Ornithological Society and the TDD. Several meetings between the coordinator of TDD, Mr. George Roşca and the assistant, Mr. Paul Székely were carried out. On these technical meetings were discussed and analyzed the actions needed for the Red-breasted Goose conservation in the area and how can be these included in the TDD's strategy.

A major drawback in the implementation of project's actions proved to be the severely delayed development process of the LAG's designation and especially of the elaboration process of the local strategies (not sooner than the end of 2009), not only in this area but in the whole Romania. Therefore, the local strategy was not finalized yet, and the target actions for Red-breasted Goose conservation could not be included.

A major improvement represented the technical meetings mentioned above. After numerous discussions, we concluded that a workshop between the TDD, MAFRD representatives and our team is absolutely necessary for the local strategy development process. Therefore, on 13.10.2008 we organized a workshop, held in Bucharest at the MAFRD headquarters. This workshop was attended by MAFRD representatives who are in charge with the implementation of the NRDP (especially Axis 2 and 4, LEADER), the coordinator of TDD, the mayors of the most important Red-breasted Goose wintering localities from the area and the project implementation team (SOR). The meeting focused on the development of the TDD's local strategy and targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme. As a result, several issues regarding the elaboration of the local strategy were clarified, making the implementation process easier. Also, the MAFRD representatives recorded all the problems and difficulties with which the TDD had and have to deal for the development of the local strategy. More important, at this meeting we presented the proposed targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment schemes which will be accepted by the MAFRD (ANNEX 2).

Further more, based on the information gathered, through the coordinator of TDD, from the project area, we finalized the SWOT analysis focused on the habitats of Red-breasted Goose and other threatened species. The analysis was conducted by taking in consideration the habitat requirements of Red-breasted Geese flocks, the project area's special features and the farming methods deployed (ANNEX 3).

In 2009 the collaboration between the TDD and SOR was continued, mostly through the participation at the local technical meetings of the project assistant and of Mr. Petrescu Eugen (the coordinator of the SOR office from Tulcea). A few meetings with our contact person from the MAFRD were also organized in Bucharest.

Additionally, a special meeting was organized in Bucharest between 27 and 28 April, at the SOR's office, where experienced consultants from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) shared with us their knowledge regarding the EU legislative requirements, EAFRD land management policies, local development strategies and agri-environment schemes.

Despite the fact that during the project implementation time successful activities were carried out to include clear targets for Red-breasted Goose conservation in the TDD's strategy, we consider this action only partially completed as the LAG's strategy is not yet finalized. However, we are confident that, when the strategy will be completed

(probably by the end of 2009), it will contain our recommendations regarding the Red-breasted Geese conservation in the area.

## **B. INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

**Objective:** Increasing awareness of the local community, and especially of the farmers, to apply environmental friendly activities and practices that support the conservation of Red-breasted Goose and other threatened species.

**Activity2.** To organize technical workshops and meetings with the local farmers and their representatives in order to raise awareness of the project objectives, to prepare a list of priority farmers that should receive support according to the core areas of Red-breasted Goose habitats, and to develop and refine the technical requirements of the agri-environment scheme.

**STATUS: completed**

Our activities and actions were mainly concentrated on the Red-breasted Goose wintering sites from Tulcea County, which is the most important area for geese and also covered by TDD.

The first workshop was held on 20 March 2009 in Luncavița and was attended by 35 participants from the neighboring localities such as Măcin, Rachelu, Isaccea, I.C. Brătianu, Văcăreni, Garvăn, Jijila and Hamcearca. The second and third workshops were held on 26 March 2009 in Ceamurlia de Jos and Mahmudia and were attended by more than 30 persons from the following localities: Baia, Ceamurlia de Jos, Lunca, Sarichioi, Slava Rusă, Slava Cecheză and Mahmudia (see ANNEX 4, 5 and 6). At all the workshops were presented the mayors, agricultural consultants and, most important, farmers from the local areas. To assure a good attendance at these workshops a poster was printed and posted at the mayoralties before the meetings (see ANNEX 7).

During the workshops were presented details about the Red-breasted Goose needs, its presence in Dobrudja, the importance of the agricultural lands for geese conservation, as well as detailed presentation of the available agri-environment packages, the special requirements and when and how to apply in order to obtain financial support. Also, the participants were invited to contribute with their experience and advice to the development and refinement of the special, Red-breasted Goose oriented agri-environment scheme and to fill out a simple questionnaire (see ANNEX 8) dealing with the localization of their lands and the type of crops cultivated. At all meetings the Farm Guideline and the official MAFDR brochure were distributed.

The link between the project implementation team and the local farmers was the coordinator of TDD and the local mayors. They provided us with vital information about the overall status of the project's area. Additional information about the project area: where the most important Red-breasted Goose agricultural lands exists, what is the trend of the agricultural practices in the area, which are the most frequent crop types etc. were gathered together with detailed data on land use in the wintering area (Tulcea and Constanța counties). The centralized data from both counties was collected from the Centre of Statistics of Tulcea and Constanța.

The received information from the Centre of Statistics and the local mayors was also very useful in the elaboration of the list with the farmers that should receive technical assistance and support. The list was only partially finalized as the existing data was very scarce, especially because of the unclear and confuse situation of the landownership in the area due to the obsolete and incomplete cadastral system. However, by the end of the project we compiled a more detailed list, with additional help from the local farmers.

Based on the gathered information, maps with the distribution of the most important Red-breasted Goose localities were created. These localities were targeted when the workshops were planned (see ANNEX 5).

**Activity3.** Elaboration and dissemination of a Farm Guideline, which shall include all the requirements necessary to ensure Red-breasted Goose conservation on the agriculture lands, consistent with EAFRD objectives and requirements.

**STATUS: completed**

By January 2009 the Farm Guideline was finalized and in February 2009, 3,000 brochures were printed. See ANNEX 9.

The Farm Guideline was developed especially for the farmers who own agricultural lands used by geese during winter. The brochure sets out clearly the target area and contains information on the funding eligibility, the packages of the existing grassland agri-environment schemes under Axis 2 (creating support to other threatened bird species) and, most important, how can farmers employ a geese friendly land management.

These brochures were disseminated at the organized workshops with farmers. With help from mayors and mayoralities, the Farm Guideline was distributed in all the major localities important for Red-breasted Goose (see ANNEX 5). By the end of April, the project implementation team distributed all brochures, not only in Tulcea but also in Constanța County (see ANNEX 4).

Additionally, the project helped with the implementation of NRDP in the area. The official MAFDR brochure, with information on the available grassland agri-environment measures was also distributed to the farmers in the project area.

### **C. DEVELOPING A TARGETED RED-BREASTED GOOSE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME**

Objective: Developing a targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme and securing funds under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

**Activity4.** Workshops and meetings organized with the local and central authorities from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development. A priority objective of such meetings will be to encourage MAFRD to include and promote a targeted agri-environment measure under the National Rural Development Programme, the focus of which shall be the Red-breasted Goose (and other threatened geese species).

**STATUS: completed**

From the beginning of the project implementation a good cooperation existed between our team and the MAFRD representatives. As mentioned above, the first workshop was organized in Bucharest at the MAFDR headquarters. At this meeting, a first version of the agri-environment scheme was presented and discussed. Important recommendations and advice were provided by the participants and especially by the mayors from the project's area. See ANNEX 2

The scheme contains the special farming requirements for the agricultural lands and pastures which must be met in order to achieve the Red-breasted Goose conservation objectives. Also, the scheme describes the special features of those agricultural lands which can be suitable for the geese and so eligible to receive financial support. See ANNEX 10

In 2009 several meetings were held in Bucharest with our contact person from the MAFRD and in 23 March we participated at a special meeting in Tulcea at the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority's headquarters. The main theme was the possibility of acceptance and implementation of this geese oriented agri-environment scheme by the MAFDR. We already have the confirmation that this issue is discussed by the MAFDR and possible solution for the acceptance of this scheme and a way to include it in the NRDP are sought. As a conclusion, before the new geese oriented agri-environment scheme can be accepted, the MAFDR must assess first the effectiveness of the existing schemes. That's why it is very important to carry on the lobbying activities and so, to assure a big number of farmers willing to apply for the existing grassland agri-environment schemes packages.

**Activity 5.** Development of a standardised strategy for the geese monitoring.

**STATUS: completed**

For the strategy elaboration was used the already existing monthly, synchronized geese monitoring strategy which is ongoing under the Red-breasted Goose International Working Group coordination for the Red-breasted Goose wintering grounds, and adapted it to the special requirements of the Razelm-Sinoe Lakes Complex and the Romanian monitoring team.

Also, important additions were made at the annual SOR workshop (regarding the planning of the organization's future conservation activities) held on 21-22 May 2008 in Comana, near Bucharest (ANNEX 11)

### 3. OUTCOMES

- The SWOT analysis was successfully finalized. This analysis was very useful for the designation process of the target areas, the most important Red-breasted Goose agricultural lands;
- Workshops and several technical meetings were organized, with participants from TDD, MAFRD and the project implementation team. The main objective of these meetings was to develop the TDD's local action group strategy;
- The list of farmers that should receive technical assistance and support was completed;
- The Farm Guideline was finalized and 3,000 copies were printed and distributed. This guide was developed especially for farmers who own agricultural lands used by geese during winter;
- Meetings with local farmers and local authorities were organized. The importance of the agricultural lands for geese conservation and of the available agri-environment packages was presented. In order to increase the awareness of the local community, especially to apply environmentally friendly activities and practices that support the conservation of wild geese, numerous travels at the local mayoralities were done not only in Tulcea but also in Constanta County;
- A special, targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme was created. This scheme contains the special farming requirements for the agricultural lands and pastures which must be met in order to achieve the Red-breasted Goose conservation objectives. Meetings and workshops were organized, with the participation of the MAFDR, to assure the acceptance and implementation of this scheme;
- The standardized geese monitoring strategy was successfully finalized and it is already in use, the monitoring providing us essential information about the present situation of the Red-breasted Goose population in Romania;
- A webpage presenting the project was created on the Red-breasted Goose International Working Group website: [http://www.brantaruficollis.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=category&id=52](http://www.brantaruficollis.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=category&id=52)
- The project '*Farming for biodiversity in Romania: awareness raising and facilitating access to rural development funds*' was submitted to the Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation and the Carpathian Foundation – FDEC Romania, European Economic Area Financial Mechanism – NGO Fund at 24 June 2009 in order to secure funds for future similar activities in the project area.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

We consider that the project is successful with achieving the main objectives as an important portion of the local community and especially the farmers were informed and helped to access NRDP funds for employing appropriate land management practices. By doing so, we made important steps towards the main goal of this project: safeguarding the main feeding grounds of Red-breasted Goose in Romania.

Our experience gained during the workshops and local meetings with the farmers showed us that the implementation of the National Rural Development Programme is not going according to the plan, being severely delayed, in many cases the people were not even properly informed about the existing opportunities.

It is very important to continue the public awareness activities and by doing so to ensure that an important proportion of the local farmers will apply for the existing agri-environment schemes and will employ a geese friendly land management. Also, the inclusion of our new targeted Red-breasted Goose agri-environment scheme in the NRDP is totally dependent on the success of the existing grassland agri-environment scheme packages.

Therefore, the project *'Farming for biodiversity in Romania: awareness raising and facilitating access to rural development funds'* was submitted to the Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation and the Carpathian Foundation – FDEC Romania, European Economic Area Financial Mechanism – NGO Fund at 24 June 2009 in order to secure funds for future similar activities in the project area during next year.

## **5. ANNEXES**

**ANNEX 1** – The area covered by TDD

**ANNEX 2** – Pictures from the workshop with MAFRD

**ANNEX 3** – SWOT analysis

**ANNEX 4** – Important bird areas

**ANNEX 5** – Location of the workshops and of the localities where the Farm Guideline was distributed

**ANNEX 6** – Pictures from the workshops with the farmers and the meetings with the local authorities

**ANNEX 7** – The poster used for the workshops with the local farmers (in Romanian)

**ANNEX 8** – The questionnaire used at the workshops and meetings with the farmers (in Romanian)

**ANNEX 9** – The final version of the Farm Guideline (in Romanian)

**ANNEX 10** – Red-breasted Goose Agri-environment Scheme

**ANNEX 11** – Red-breasted Goose Monitoring Strategy