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Welsh Government

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Welsh Government

## Consultation Document

# Consultation on banning the shooting of White-fronted Geese in Wales

Date of issue: **11 February 2013**

Action required: Responses by **19 April 2013**

## Overview

The purpose of this consultation is to seek views on the proposal to impose a statutory ban on the shooting of White-fronted Geese (WfG) in Wales throughout the year (including in the 'open season'). The statutory ban would come into force on 01 September 2013.

Two types of White-fronted Geese (WfG) occur in the UK. The Eurasian (or European) race and the Greenland race. The global population status of the two races is significantly different. Eurasian White-fronted Geese (EWfG) are very much more numerous whereas the global population of Greenland White-fronted Geese (GWfG) is categorised as "Endangered".

Despite the current high conservation concern regarding GWfG, WfG are listed on Annex II, Part B of the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC meaning that, in respect of the UK, hunting of WfG may be authorised under article 7(3) of the Directive. This part of the Directive is transposed into domestic law under section 2, and Part 1 of Schedule 2, of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA). This means WfG may be killed or taken outside of the 'Closed Season' in England and Wales. The closed season being 1 February – 31 August each year or, in relation to wild ducks and wild geese, in or over any area below high-water mark of ordinary spring tides between 21 February – 31 August.

## How to respond

Please respond to this consultation either by;

email:

[natureconservation@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:natureconservation@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

or

post:

Nature, Landscape and Outdoor Recreation  
Branch  
Welsh Government  
Rhodfa Padarn  
Llanbadarn Fawr  
Aberystwyth  
SY23 3UR

## Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.

## Contact details

Nature, Landscape and Outdoor Recreation  
Branch  
Welsh Government  
Rhodfa Padarn  
Llanbadarn Fawr  
Aberystwyth  
SY23 3UR

email: [natureconservation@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:natureconservation@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

telephone: 0300 062 2253

## Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used.

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

## **Contents**

<b>1.</b>	<b>What are the main issues?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Where are we now?</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Evidence for change</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Proposals</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Consultation Response Form</b>	<b>7</b>

## What are the main issues?

Two types of White-fronted Geese (WfG) (*Anser albifrons*) occur in the UK. The Eurasian (or European) race (*Anser albifrons albifrons*) and the Greenland race (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*). The global population status of the two races is significantly different. Eurasian White-fronted Geese (EWfG) are very much more numerous whereas the global population of Greenland White-fronted Geese (GWfG) is categorised as “Endangered”. The most recent estimate for the GWfG world population (April 2011) is 25,756<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the current high conservation concern regarding the Greenland race, WfG are listed on Annex II, Part B of the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC meaning that, in respect of the UK, hunting of both races of WfG may be authorised under article 7(3) of the Directive. This part of the Directive is transposed into domestic law under section 2, and Part 1 of Schedule 2, of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (WCA). This means WfG may be killed or taken outside of the ‘Closed Season’ in England and Wales. The closed season being 1 February – 31 August each year or, in relation to wild ducks and wild geese, in or over any area below high-water mark of ordinary spring tides between 21 February – 31 August.

The UK is important for GWfG. It is estimated that about half the world population occur here in winter. Whilst only small numbers of GWfG regularly over-winter in Wales, Welsh wintering birds are crucial to the maintenance of the national (and international) distributional range of the population. A number of historical wintering sites in Wales have already been lost<sup>2</sup>. Failing to take appropriate steps to reduce as far as possible GWfG adult mortality eg: through the prohibition of hunting, could be seen as a failure to meet both international and domestic conservation obligations.

GWfG adult mortality is a concern for two reasons:

1. Evidence indicates that GWfG are highly site-loyal to wintering areas (Wilson *et al.* 1991<sup>3</sup>, Warren *et al.* 1992)<sup>4</sup> and demonstrate a very traditional use of sites at all times of the year (Fox *et al.* 2002)<sup>5</sup>. This means that once sites are ‘lost’ they may not be re-occupied as occupancy is learned as a consequence of young birds returning with parent to these locations in their first winter.

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, A.D., Francis, I.S. & Walsh, A. 2011. *Report of the 2010/11 international census of Greenland White-fronted Geese*. Greenland White-fronted Goose Study & National Parks and Wildlife Service. 18 pp.

<sup>2</sup> Fox, A.D. & Stroud, D.A. (1986). The Greenland White-fronted Goose in Wales. *Nature in Wales (New Series)* 4: 20-27).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, H.J., Norriss, D.W., Walsh, A., Fox, A.D. & Stroud, D.A. 1991. Winter site fidelity in Greenland White-fronted Geese: implications for conservation and management. *Ardea* 79(2): 287-294.

<sup>4</sup> Warren, S.M., Fox, A.D., Walsh, A. & O'Sullivan, P. 1992. Age of first pairing and breeding amongst Greenland White-fronted Geese. *Condor* 94: 791-793.

<sup>5</sup> Fox, A.D. & Stroud, D.A. 2002. [Anser albifrons flavirostris Dalgety & Scott 1948, Greenland White fronted Goose](#). *Birds of the Western Palearctic Update* 4(2): 1-22.

2. The population has low productivity, which in most of the last ten years has not balanced mortality, causing a year-on-year reduction of numbers. The ultimate cause of the low productivity remains unknown, but could relate to increased late winter/spring snow falls on the breeding grounds in recent years and/or to the consequence of inter-specific interactions on the breeding grounds with Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*)<sup>6</sup>.

## Where are we now?

The global population of GWfG is categorised as “Endangered” using the IUCN’s (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) global Red List criteria. GWfG are also listed on Table 1, column 2\* of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) Action Plan; Appendix II of the Bonn Convention (Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); and on Annex I of the EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive). They are also a section 42 priority action species under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC). Priority species were those that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the former UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). An action listed under the UK BAP was to remove WfG from Schedule 2 part 1 of the WCA in Wales. The UK BAP has been succeeded by the UK Post-2012 Biodiversity Framework<sup>7</sup>. The UK list of priority species, however remains an important reference source. Under NERC Welsh Ministers are obliged to take such steps as reasonably practicable to further the conservation of the living organisms and types of habitat included in any list published under section 42.

Eurasian/European White-fronted Geese (EWfG) breed in arctic Russia and migrate across Eastern Europe to overwinter in southern England and Wales. Greenland White-fronted Geese (GWfG) breed in western Greenland, and migrate via Iceland to overwinter at a small number of traditional haunts in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The main winter population in Wales occurs on the Dyfi Estuary (west Wales). GWfG are a qualifying feature for the Dyfi Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA). See figure 1 & 2.

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<sup>6</sup> AWEA; Draft international single species action plan for the conservation of Greenland White Fronted Geese on [http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5\\_docs/pdf/mop5\\_27\\_draft\\_ssap\\_gwfg.pdf](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5_docs/pdf/mop5_27_draft_ssap_gwfg.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6189>

Figure 1. Distribution of EWfG across Wales from WeBS data between 1990-2012.



Figure 2: Distribution of GWfG across Wales from WeBS data between 1990-2012.



### African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement (AWEA)

The African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement (AWEA) is an intergovernmental treaty, to which the UK is a contracting party, dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats across Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Greenland and the Canadian Archipelago. AWEA brings together countries and the wider international conservation community in an effort to establish coordinated conservation and management of migratory waterbirds throughout their entire migratory range<sup>8</sup>.

The status of GWfG under the AWEA means *hunting may continue on a sustainable use basis where hunting of such populations is a long-established cultural practice. This sustainable use shall be conducted within the framework of special provisions of a species action plan at the appropriate international level<sup>9</sup>.*

An international species action plan for GWfG was formally agreed by the fifth Meeting of Parties to AWEA in May 2012. The plan was developed by experts and stakeholders in all range states and involved an international workshop in Scotland in 2009 to develop consensus on necessary conservation actions for the population.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unep-aewa.org/about/introduction.htm>

<sup>9</sup> AWEA Status of the populations of migratory waterbirds - Table 1 on [http://www.unep-aewa.org/documents/agreement\\_text/table1-overview.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/documents/agreement_text/table1-overview.htm)

One of the top priorities in the AWEA species action plan for the conservation of GWfG is minimising additional sources of mortality; (*Take all possible steps to eliminate avoidable sources of mortality and disturbance, particularly shooting and collisions with man-made structures*)<sup>10</sup>. The species action plan also notes the conclusion of the 2009 AWEA International Workshop *that hunting cannot currently be undertaken on a sustainable basis and any kill would exacerbate the current unfavourable conservation status of the population.*

In relation to reducing mortality associated with hunting an explicit action in the GWfG species action plan is to introduce and/or maintain protection from hunting throughout the year whilst the population has its currently 'unfavourable conservation status' (or put simply, the population numbers are not stable or increasing over it's natural range in the long-term).

In Scotland and Northern Ireland all WfG are fully protected at all times by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

In relation to reducing mortality associated with collision with man-made structures the GWfG species action plan recommends that any wind-farm and similar infrastructure developments where there is collision risk are subject to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

## **Evidence for change**

Knowledge of numbers and distribution of GWfG prior to the 1950s is generally poor. Information suggests that world population declined by around 18-28% during the 1950s - late 1970s (Ruttledge & Ogilvie 1979)<sup>11</sup>. Following implementation of conservation measures on the wintering grounds, (including prohibitions on hunting) and in Greenland in the early 1980s, numbers more than doubled<sup>12</sup>

Since 1995 however, reproduction has been markedly lower than in previous years and during 1999-2007 overall numbers declined by over a third<sup>13</sup>.

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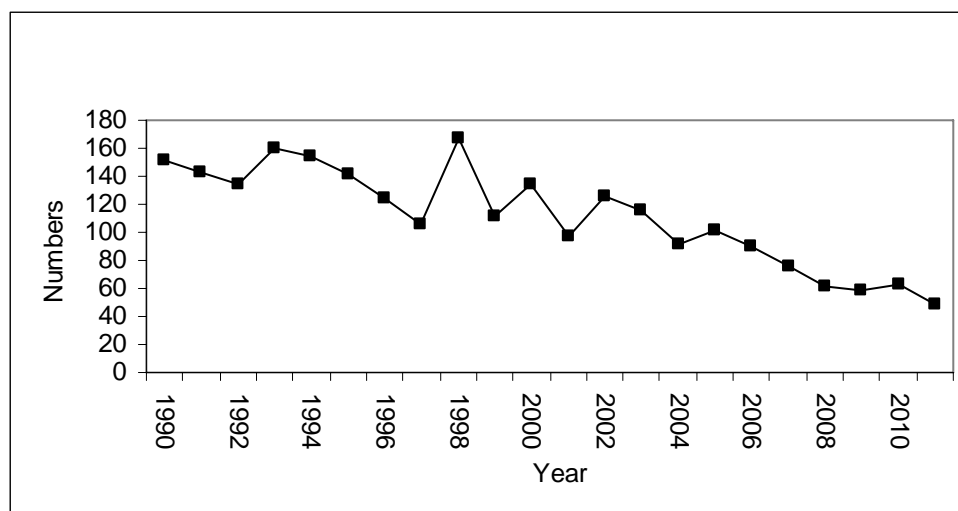
<sup>10</sup> Draft International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose – see Mop 5.27 on [http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5\\_docs/mop5\\_docs.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5_docs/mop5_docs.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Ruttledge, R.F. & Ogilvie, M.A. 1979. The past and current status of the Greenland White-fronted Goose in Ireland and Britain. *Irish Birds* 1: 293-363.

<sup>12</sup> Annex 1. Population estimates for Greenland White-fronted Geese see Mop 5.27 on [http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5\\_docs/mop5\\_docs.htm](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5_docs/mop5_docs.htm) and Fox, A.D., Norriss, D.W., Stroud, D.A. Wilson, H.J. & Merne, O.J. (1998). The Greenland white-fronted goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris* in Ireland and Britain 1982/83-1994/95: Population change under conservation legislation. *Wildlife Biology* 4: 1-12. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/bhwpog>

<sup>13</sup> Fox, A.D., Francis, I.S. & Walsh, A. 2009. [Report of the 2008/09 international census of Greenland White-fronted Geese](#). Greenland White-fronted Goose Study & National Parks and Wildlife Service. 18 pp.

Figure 3 – Graph showing numbers of GWfG counted on the Dyfi Estuary between 1990 - 2011 (Data from Dr A.D. Fox (2012)<sup>14</sup>)



Studies show that in the absence of hunting mortality, the population is generally long-lived but under all circumstances shows very low reproductive output. The species can therefore buffer periods of low reproduction, but the overall population size is very vulnerable to relatively small changes in annual survival. This makes the sustained maintenance of long-term survival rates an important management objective during periods of population decline. Reduction of the contribution from hunting is therefore thought to be very important<sup>15</sup>.

Due to the decline in population size the need to protect GWfG in Wales has been recognised for some time. Since the 1970s there has been a voluntary ban on shooting of GWfG by the local wildfowling club on the Dyfi Estuary (main Welsh haunt). The BASC (British Association for Shooting and Conservation) Wildfowling Code of Practice<sup>16</sup> notes a voluntary moratorium on the shooting of White-fronted Geese in Wales. In 2012 BASC successfully won the support of all wildfowling clubs in North Wales for a voluntary moratorium on shooting GWfG in view of conservation concerns until such time as the population recovered. BASC believes this moratorium is working effectively.

## Proposal

In view of the poor and declining status of Greenland White-fronted Geese globally and the significant proportion of the UK population of GWfG which over-winter in, and over-fly, Wales the Welsh Government is proposing to impose a statutory ban on the shooting of White-fronted Geese in Wales throughout the year starting from September 2013 (the end of the current 'closed season').

<sup>14</sup> Dr A D Fox – pers comm

<sup>15</sup> International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose – see Mop 5.27 on [http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5\\_docs/pdf/mop5\\_27\\_draft\\_ssap\\_gwfg.pdf](http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop5_docs/pdf/mop5_27_draft_ssap_gwfg.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> BASC Wildfowling code of practice on <http://www.basc.org.uk/en/codes-of-practice/wildfowling.cfm>



The proposal means that it would be a criminal offence to take or kill WfG in Wales at any time of the year.

This proposal recognises the difficulty of distinguishing the two races under field conditions, and would translate into law the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) voluntary moratorium described above on GWfG

This proposal also reflects legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland where WfG are fully protected at all times by Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

This proposal also reflects the status of GWfG as listed under Table 1, Column 2A\* of AWEA's Action Plan; it is a legal requirement for the UK to give protection to GWfG.

**Consultation  
Response Form**

Your name:

Organisation (if applicable):

email / telephone number:

Your address:

**Question 1. Do you agree with our conclusion that the population of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Wales requires further protection? (Yes, Mainly, Not at all).**

**Why/Why not? What is your evidence to support your view/s?**

**Question 2: Do you support the proposal to ban the shooting of White - fronted Geese in Wales throughout the year? (Yes, Mainly, Not at all).**

**Why / why not? What is your evidence to support your view/s?**

**Question 3: Are there any alternative approaches which could be implemented to protect the population of GWfG in Wales with the same degree of clarity and certainty as set out in the Welsh Government proposal?**

**What are they? What is your evidence to support your view/s?**

We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Please enter here:

Responses to consultations may be made public – on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be kept confidential, please tick here: