IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group

2016-2017 Report

Eileen Rees

Chair

Eileen Rees

Red List Authority Coordinator

Eileen Rees

Location/Affiliation

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BT, UK

Number of members

370

Social networks

E-mail forum:
ssg-forum@wwt.org.uk
Website:
http://www.swansg.org/

SWAN SPECIALIST GROUP

Mission statement

The Swan Specialist Group (SSG) is an international network of swan specialists who undertake monitoring, research, conservation and management of swan populations. Its mission is to facilitate effective communication between members and others with an interest in swan management and conservation world-wide, in order to improve national and international links for cooperative research, to identify gaps in knowledge and to provide a forum for addressing swan conservation issues.

Main activities by Key Priority Area (2016 & 2017)

Communications

■ Communication

i. Issues 12 and 13 of *Swan News* newsletter. (KSR #28)

ii. Online SSG-forum distribution link was maintained. (KSR #28)

iii. Swan SG logo agreed by members.

iv. The SSG website was developed and can be previewed at http://www.swansg.org/. It will be officially launched in February-March 2018. (KSR #28)

Conservation action

■ Conservation activities

i. Conservation project "Flight of the Swans" in which Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's Sacha Dench flew by paramotor from the Bewick's Swans' (*Cygnus çolumbianus*) breeding grounds in the Russian arctic to their long-established wintering site at Slimbridge, SW England, provided a focus for a range of initiatives across the flyway to address the decline the NW European Bewick's Swan population. Events organized by partners in ranges states included seven conservation workshops, 51 school visits and 15 community events. There were >700 articles published in the press, c.1,000 reports on TV/radio, and the project was honored as "Campaign of the Year" at the 2017 ENDS Environmental Impact Awards. (KSR #37)

■ Research activities

i. Results of the censuses of migratory swans were collated and distributed. Trumpeter Swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) survey reports and data are available at: https://www.fws.gov/birds/surveys-and-data/reports-and-publications.php. Paper on the Icelandic Whooper Swan (*Cynus cygnus*) population can be found at https://wildfowl.wwt.org.uk/index.php/wildfowl/article/view/2645/1761.

ii. Demographic reasons for decline in the NW European Bewick's Swan population identified. Paper on variation in Bewick's Swan breeding success published: Wood et al. 2016, in *Journal of Avian Biology* 47: 597–609. Paper on Bewick's Swan survival rates accepted for publication: Wood et al., in Ibis: doi: 10.1111/ibi.12521. Paper on the migration routes of Bewick's Swans fitted with GPS-GSM collars on the Yamal Peninsula published: Vangeluwe et al. 2017, in *Zoological Journal* 96 (10): 1230-1242 (in Russian). Paper comparing aggression levels in swans with those in other water birds published: Wood et al. 2017, in *Animal Behaviour* 126: 209-216. (KSR #32)

iii. Sub-lethal threat of lead poisoning to swan species assessed. Paper on the effects of ingested lead on swans' body condition was published: Newth et al. 2016, in *Environmental Pollution* 209: 60-67. (KSR #32)

iv. Tracking swan migration in relation to wind farm development completed. Movements of twenty two swans caught in southern England in winters 2013/14–2014/15 were tracked in relation to wind farm development along the migration route, with particular reference to offshore wind farm sites proposed for the North

Whooper Swan (*Cynus cygnus*) in Spring
Photo: Leif Nilson

Sea between Britain and continental Europe. Data recorded up to spring 2016 were analyzed and published in a report to the Department of Energy and Climate Change. (KSR #32)

v. Range expansion of Trumpeter Swan assessed. Paper published on range expansion and migration for Trumpeter Swans reintroduced in Ontario: Handrigan et al. 2016, in *Wildfowl* 66: 60–74. (KSR #32)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank those who have generously donated to work being taken forward within the Bewick's Swan Action Plan, including the Peter Scott Trust for Education and Research in Conservation, Peter Smith Charitable Trust for Nature, Olive Herbert Charitable Trust, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, N. Smith Charitable Settlement, Robert Kiln Charitable Trust, estate of the late Professor Geoffrey Matthews OBE, the NWO grant 866.15.206 and all those who supported WWT's 'Hope for Swans' appeal. Ringing in the Netherlands (from 2005 onwards) was financed by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO; grant 851.40.073) and the Schure-Beijerinck-Popping Fund. The tracking of Bewick's Swan migration in relation to onshore and offshore wind farm sites was funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (now Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) as part of its offshore energy Strategic Environmental Assessment programme. Swan SG members are also immensely grateful to the colleagues, volunteers and host institutes who have supported swan research and conservation programmes in different parts of the world, not only in 2016-2017 but over many years.

Targets for the quadrennium 2017-2020

Communications

Communication: Production of newsletters (1 issue per year) and operative website.

Scientific meetings: 6th International Swan Symposium.

Policy advice: Provide information and technical advice globally.

Conservation action

Conservation activities: African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Bewick's Swan Action Plan – Workshops for action plan implementation and training.

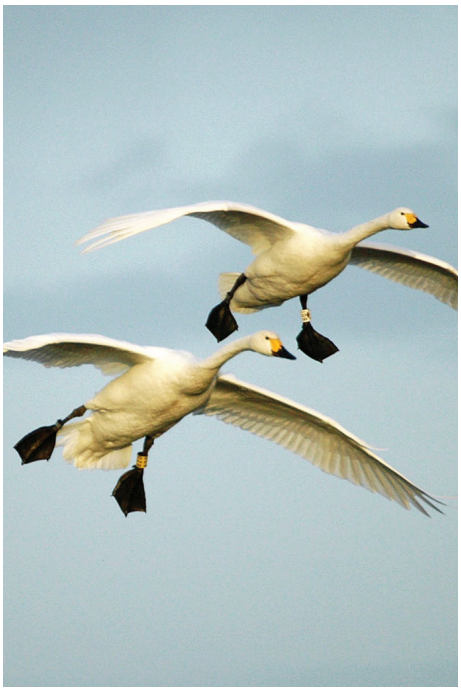
Research activities: survival and distribution population trends for Bewick's Swan and censuses of migratory swan populations in the Northern Hemisphere.

Increasing diversity of SSC

Membership: development of the Swan SG membership in the Southern Hemisphere.

Projected impact for the quadrennium 2017-2020

By the end of 2020, we will have undertaken a further census of the NW European Bewick's Swan population to determine whether we have achieved the initial target of the AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan, of halting the ongoing decline in the NW European population and, if necessary, begin recovery of the population to its 2000 level. By 2020, we also envisage having a better understanding of the environmental factors contributing to the decline, and to have started addressing these where necessary. For the other swan species, which are currently classed as Least Concern by IUCN, we will maintain our monitoring of population trends, or collect such information where the monitoring is being undertaken by other organizations, to identify any conservation issues that may arise for the swans.



Bewick's Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*), Least Concern
Photo: James Lees

Summary of activities (2016-2017)

Key Priority Area ratio: 2/7

Key Priority Areas addressed:

- Communications (4 activities)
- Conservation action (6 activities)

Main KSRs addressed: 28, 32, 37

KSR: Key Species Result