IUCN SSC Swan Specialist Group

2018 Report

Eileen Rees

Chair

Eileen Rees

Red List Authority Coordinator

BirdLife International (focal point: Eileen Rees)

Location/Affiliation

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

Number of members

325

Social networks

Website: 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 worldwide, 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.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we will have undertaken a further census of the Northwest European Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) population to determine whether we have achieved the initial target of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) Bewick's Swan Action Plan, of halting the ongoing decline in the Northwest 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 organisations, to identify any conservation issues that may arise for the swans.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Research activities: (1) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: reasons for the population decline identified; (2) population monitoring: international censuses of migratory swan populations in the Northern Hemisphere.

Plan

Planning: (1) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: implementation workshop held; (2) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: actions to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans put in place; (3) AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: population decline halted and reversed.

Policy: provide information and technical advice in support of the programmes of IUCN SSC, Wetlands International, BirdLife International, Ramsar and others as necessary.

Act

Conservation actions: implementation of AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan: actions to reduce threats to Bewick's Swans put in place.

Network

Membership: improve knowledge of population trends and threats to swan species in the Southern Hemisphere.

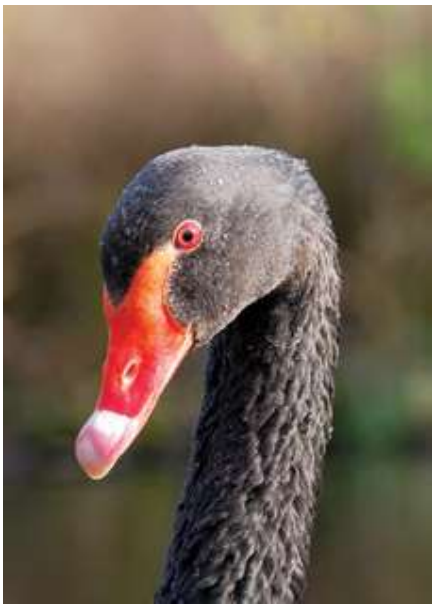
Communicate

Communication: (1) publish *Swan News* newsletter annually: 4 issues in years 2017–2020; (2) launch Swan Specialist Group website; (3) maintain Swan Specialist Group listserve.

Scientific meetings: Swan Specialist Group Symposium: convene 6th International Swan Symposium.

Research activities: Swan Specialist Group Symposium: publish 6th International Swan Symposium proceedings.

Whooper Swans, *Cygnus cygnus*, flying into Martin Mere
Photo: Robert B.J. Falcon - WWT



Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*
Photo: Emlyn Jones - WWT

Bewick´s Swan, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*
Photo: James Lees - WWT

Activities and results 2018

Assess

Research activities

i. Analyses and publication of papers are continuing, with five papers published in 2018–2019 (Wood, K.A., Newth, J.L., Hilton, G.M. et al. 2018. Has winter body condition varied with population size in a long-distance migrant, the Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*)?. *Eur J Wildl Res* 64, 38. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10344-018-1200-3]; Vangeluwe, D., Rozenfeld, S.B., Volkov, S.V. et al. 2018. Migrations of Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus bewickii*): New Data on Tagging the Migration Routes, Stopovers, and Wintering Sites. *Biol Bull Russ Acad Sci* 45, 706–717. [https://doi.org/10.1134/S1062359018070178]), and one more in press for 2019 (Newth, J.L., Wood, K.A., McDonald, R.A., et al. 2019. Conservation implications of misidentification and killing of protected species. *Conservation Science and Practice*. 2019;1:e24. [https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.24[(in press)). (KSR #32)

ii. Compilation of 2015 migratory swan census data for Europe completed in 2018; preliminary results disseminated and analyses underway for more formal publication in 2019. (KSR #12)

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*
Photo: Les Bunyan - WWT

Bewick's Swans, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, in Estonia during post-conference excursion
Photo: Leho Luigujõe

iii. Ongoing monitoring of trends in migratory swan populations in North America, coordinated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), also continued with 2017 census results published in 2018. (KSR #12)

Plan

Planning

i. AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan workshop held during the 6th International Swan Symposium; a review of actions undertaken within each range country was compiled from experts and AEWA focal points during 2018 and presented during the workshop; a list of future actions was generated, to be confirmed and rolled out in 2019–2022. (KSR #15)

ii. National Action Plan for Bewick's Swans in Estonia updated. (KSR #18, 29)

Policy

i. Report on the AEWA Bewick's Swan Action Plan workshop and other actions taken forward under the auspices of the Plan provided to AEWA (see https://www.unep-aewa.org/en/news/showcasing-action-aewa-priority-species-bewicks-swan). (KSR #27)

Act

Conservation actions

i. A collaborative project, tracking and modelling Bewick's Swan flight in relation to wind farms, was agreed by British and Dutch ornithologists, under the UK government's SEA programme. (KSR #18, 29)

ii. The Swan Champions Project, which aims to raise awareness and reduce levels of illegal hunting, is being taken forward by Russian colleagues in Russia (see www.swansg.org/projects/swan-champion-project/). (KSR #18, 29)

Tundra Swans in triumph display
Photo: Craig Ely

Communicate

Communication

i. *Swan News* 14 was published on schedule (see www.swansg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Swan-News-14-high-res.pdf). (KSR #28)

ii. The Swan Specialist Group website launched on www.swansg.org and was updated with news items during 2018. (KSR #28)

iii. The SSG-forum listserve was maintained throughout 2018, hosted by WWT, and used to disseminate information about the 6th International Swan Symposium, call for newsletter items, and other matters. (KSR #28)

Research activities

i. A call for papers was put out during the 6th International Swan Symposium in October 2018. (KSR #32)

Scientific meetings

i. The 6th International Swan Symposium was held from 16–19 October 2018. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

The Swan Specialist Group is grateful to the University of Life Sciences, Tartu, Estonia, for hosting the 6th International Swan Symposium, the Estonian Ornithological Society for co-organising the meeting and the Estonian Environmental Board, the City of Tartu and WWT for financial support. We also thank those funding work within the Bewick's Swan Action Plan, including the Peter Scott Trust for Education and Research in Conservation, Peter Smith Charitable Trust, Olive Herbert Charitable Trust, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, N. Smith Charitable Settlement, Robert Kiln Charitable Trust, estate of the late Prof. Geoffrey Matthews, WWT's 'Hope for Swans' appeal, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Schure-Beijerinck-Popping Fund, Russian Foundation for Basic Research - Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District (RFBR-YANAD), YANAD Department of Natural Resource Regulation, YANAD Department for Science and Innovation, Arktika Interregional Expedition Centre, AEWA, Goose, Swan and Duck Study Group of Northern Eurasia, Royal Institute of Natural Sciences of Belgium, Bird Ringing Centre of Russia and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Analysing Bewick's Swan movement in relation to wind farm sites is funded by the UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Swan Specialist Group members remain immensely grateful to the colleagues, volunteers and host institutes for supporting swan research and conservation programmes.

Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 4/5	
Assess	**3**
Plan	**3**
Act	**2**
Communicate	**5**
Main KSRs addressed: 12, 15, 18, 28, 29, 32	

KSR: Key Species Result