



Safe Ground Redbreasts - Conservation of the wintering population of the globally threatened red-breasted goose (*branta ruficollis*) in Bulgaria

LIFE09 NAT/BG/000230



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#### Project description:

##### Background

An important part of BSPB's work is dedicated to conserving globally threatened species, such as the red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*). The BSPB has monitored the red-breasted goose for 17 consecutive years, constituting the most continuous monitoring of any key species in Bulgaria. It was also one of the organisations that initiated the first international red-breasted goose monitoring scheme, providing valuable knowledge and experience. As well as its monitoring activities, the BSPB also strives to preserve the habitats and favourable ecological conditions for the survival of the goose, through direct conservation measures and by encouraging sustainable development. North-eastern Bulgaria is one of the most important wintering areas for the red-breasted goose. In some years, up to 80% of the global population winters there.

##### Objectives

The Safe Ground Redbreasts project aimed to reduce and prevent threats for the red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*), one of the most threatened goose species in the world in one of its key wintering areas - in the Bulgarian Dobrudzha. It aimed to develop and propose land management that ensures appropriate foraging habitat for the species and safe roosting grounds. The project aimed to stabilise its population in its wintering grounds and to contribute to increasing

numbers in the longer term; this should help to improve the global conservation status of the goose, given the importance of these wintering sites. The project planned to create a land-management scheme to ensure the protection of foraging areas for the redbreasted goose, and to develop a long-term public-private partnership between conservation NGOs and one of the largest land-management companies in coastal Dobrudzha. The strategic planning framework would be strengthened to minimise the detrimental effect of economic development and human activity in the project area.

## Results

The Safe Ground Redbreasts project was the most extensive to date in terms of research and conservation activities within the global flyway range of the red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*). It focused on one of the key sites for the conservation of the species in the Bulgarian part of coastal Dobrudzha. The beneficiary (BSPB) caught 150 red-breasted geese to record individual data from rings, and equipped 22 of them with GPS transmitters. This produced 10 bird months of tracking data, covering the birds' movement during migration and their foraging behaviour in the project territory. This was complemented by regular on the ground roost counts and observations.

The capture and tagging with GPS transmitters to collect data was implemented for the first time in Bulgaria, and was also a first for the red-breasted goose outside of its breeding grounds. This innovative use of GPS tracking provided invaluable information, which helped to determine key and sensitive areas for the species. The project team produced maps visualising roosting sites and foraging areas, and the ecological corridors between them, which were made available to decision-makers in local authorities and local communities. A sensitivity map of Dobrudzha, for example, provided location guidance for onshore wind farms. GPS tracking data, together with data on foraging behaviour, was also used by the beneficiary to develop and test crop rotation schemes in order to determine the most suitable one for the red-breasted goose. Subsequently, a national agri-environmental scheme focusing on the red-breasted goose was developed (as a post-2013 Common Agricultural Policy financial instrument) and provided to the national authorities for adoption. The scheme was included in the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP). In the first half of 2015, 240 farmers had already applied for this goose-friendly agri-environmental scheme.

Extensive consultation work with local farmers, and hunting and fishing communities, reduced the disturbance and direct killing of red-breasted geese to practically zero. For example, new fishing areas were opened, to reduce bird disturbance in key areas in a Natura 2000 site, while a patrol scheme was introduced to prevent illegal shooting and disturbance around Shabla and Durankulak lakes. The project produced management prescriptions which were incorporated into the revised National Species Action Plan, in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of the Environment and Water (MoEW), as well as guidelines and other strategic documents important for red-breasted goose conservation. This included specific guidelines for investors (particularly for investors targeting Natura 2000 sites), thereby mainstreaming red-breasted goose conservation requirements.

The project implemented an extensive public awareness and dissemination programme. To this end, the project team created a comprehensive archive of photographs, video, audio and graphics, without copyright constraints, to maximise the profile of the project with key stakeholders. The project's field conservation work reached a global audience, for example, as a result of being top stories on the Euro news channel and The Guardian online. Through information boards and branding at Natura 2000 sites, the project promoted the red-breasted goose as a flagship for nature generally in Dobrudzha. The project developed a school-based educational programme and materials for teachers, developed a website, disseminated information through various media channels, published two scientific papers on red-breasted goose/agriculture interactions and supported three MSc theses. A Kite Festival dedicated to the red-breasted goose was organised, which attracted many visitors and has become an annual event maintained by Shabla municipality.

Environmental benefits of the project therefore include stabilizing conservation status of the wintering red-breasted goose in Bulgaria and improving its habitats, the production and adoption of strategic management documents, reduced disturbance and poaching, and the development of an agri-environmental scheme. The project demonstrated how conservation can be integrated with the local agricultural practices. The new agri-environmental scheme could also have an influence on the socio-economic development of the region.

The project contributed with measures and initiatives linked to European Bird Species Action Plans(SAPs)under the Birds Directive for *Branta ruficollis*.

Further information on the project can be found in the project's layman report and After-LIFE Communication Plan/After-LIFE Conservation Plan (see "Read more" section).

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Environmental issues addressed:

Themes

Species - Birds

Keywords

endangered species, biodiversity

Target EU Legislation

- Nature protection and Biodiversity
- Directive 79/409 - Conservation of wild birds (02.04.1979)
- Directive 2009/147 - Conservation of wild birds - Birds Directive (codified

version of Directive ...

- COM(2011) 244 final “Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 ...

## Target species

ANATIDAE *Branta ruficollis* *Branta ruficollis*

## Natura 2000 sites

SCI	BG0000241	Srebarna
SPA	BG0000156	Shablenski ezere kompleks
SPA	BG0002050	Durankulashko ezero
SPA	BG0002051	Kaliakra

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## Beneficiaries:

Coordinator	Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
Type of organisation	NGO-Foundation
Description	The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is the Bulgarian partner of BirdLife International.
Partners	Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Bulgaria Royal Society for Protection of Birds, United Kingdom Kirilovi Ltd., Bulgaria Hunting Association in Shabla, Bulgaria

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## Administrative data:

Project reference	LIFE09 NAT/BG/000230
Duration	01-SEP-2010 to 31-MAY -2015
Total budget	2,656,608.00 €
EU contribution	1,990,635.00 €
Project location	Severoiztochen(Bulgaria Balgarija)

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Read more:

Press article	Title: "Risk assessment of lead poisoning and pesticide exposure in the declining population of red-breasted goose ( <i>Branta ruficollis</i> ) wintering in Eastern Europe" (Environmental Research 151 (2016) 359–367) Author: Rafael Mateo <i>et al.</i> Year: 2016 Editor: Elsevier No of pages: 9
Project web site	<a href="#">Project's website</a>
Publication: After-LIFE Conservation Plan	Title: After-LIFE Conservation Plan Year: 2015 No of pages: 17
Publication: Article-Paper	Title: "Biometrics of wild Red-breasted Geese <i>Branta ruficollis</i> " (Wildfowl (2015) 65: 154–166) Author: Carl Mitchel <i>et al.</i> Year: 2015 Editor: Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust No of pages: 13
Publication: Layman report	Title: Layman report
Publication: Technical report	Title: Project's Final technical report Year: 2015 Editor: Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds No of pages: 200

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