

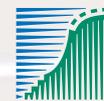
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Waterbirds around the world

A global overview of the conservation,
management and research of the
world's waterbird flyways

Edited by G.C. Boere, C.A. Galbraith and D.A. Stroud

*Assisted by L.K. Bridge, I. Colquhoun, D.A. Scott,
D.B.A. Thompson and L.G. Underhill*



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Cover photography: Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* arriving at Martin Mere, England. Photo: Paul Marshall.
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The Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* research and conservation programme in Russia

Nikolay D. Poyarkov

Lomonosov Moscow State University; Goose, Swan and Duck Study Group of Northern Palearctic, Russia.
(email: Poyarkov@soil.msu.ru)

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Up to the middle of the 20th century, Swan Geese *Anser cygnoides* were quite common in Russia, from Predbaikalie to the Lower Amur (Nizhneye Priamurie), Priamorie region, and northern Sakhalin. Since the 1950s, the range of this species has been progressively shrinking and its numbers declining under increasing anthropogenic impacts.

The Swan Goose is the most vulnerable goose species in East Asia, due to its nesting in densely populated and easily accessible flood plains, and intensive and uncontrolled hunting at its wintering grounds.

In 2000, a Russian-Japanese joint program of Swan Goose research and conservation was initiated with financial support from the Keidanren Science Foundation (Japan), with the goal of developing conservation measures at national and international levels. The main objectives were to: census Swan Geese in

known nesting sites and to study the peculiarities of their biology; mark geese of different populations; establish the need for specially protected areas; raise awareness in local communities about the need for protecting Swan Geese; adjust hunting regulations to avoid accidental shooting of Swan Geese; and develop procedures for restoration of the species within its range.

During the pilot phase (2000-2003) achievements included:

- the establishment, in 2002, of an International Task Force for Swan Geese with the participation of China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Russia;
- the publication of all available original and published data on numbers and biology of Swan Geese (Poyarkov, 2001, 2003);
- the survey of all known and potential nesting sites of Swan Geese in the Russian Far East, with the discovery of some

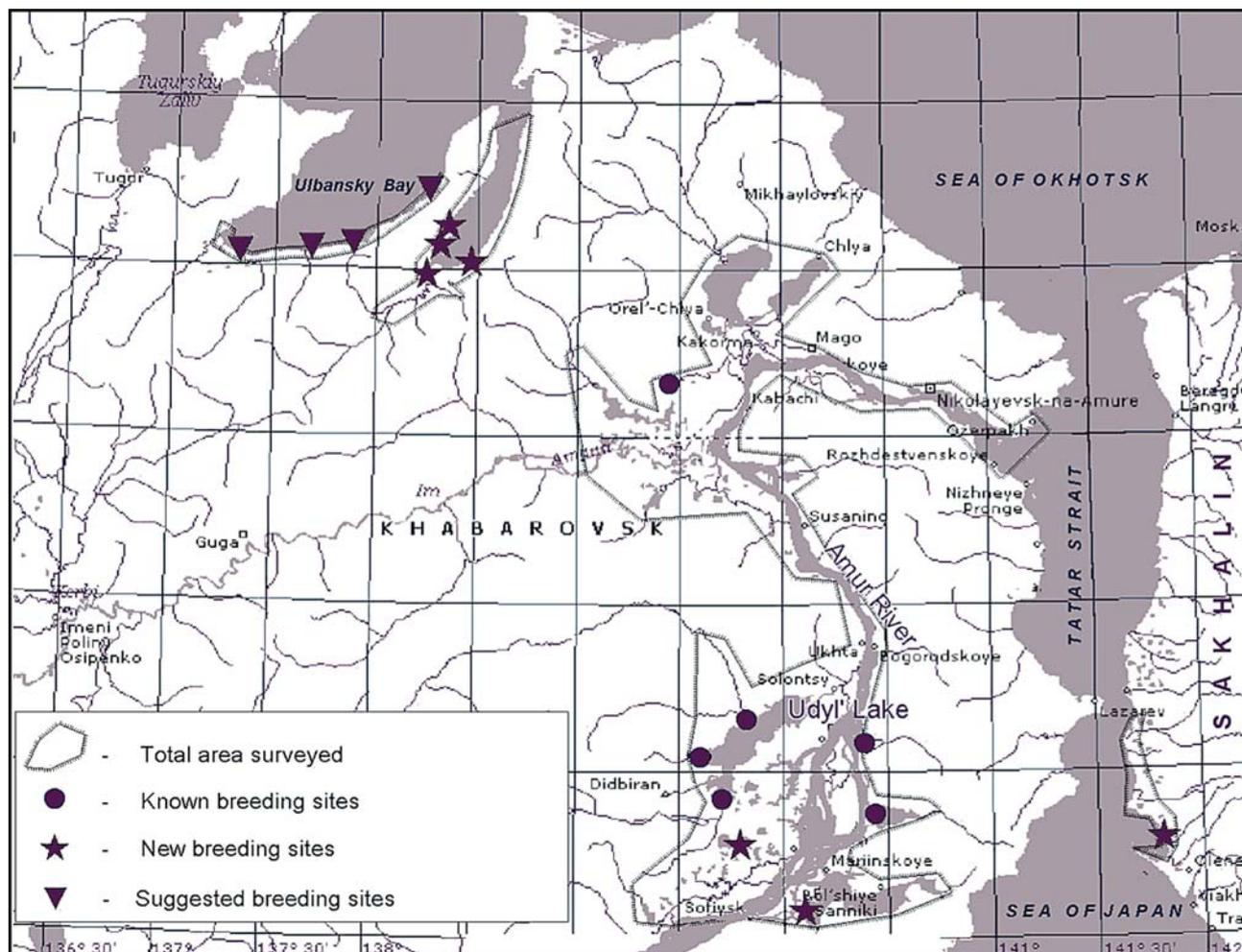


Fig. 1. Total area surveyed and the breeding sites of Swan Geese *Anser cygnoides* in the Priamurie, the Far East.

previously unknown nesting sites (Fig. 1) as well as obviously vacant and poorly occupied sites;

- recognising an increase in goose numbers in Udył' Zakaznik (refuge), identified through the monitoring of Swan Geese population on Udył' lake (Russian Far East), as a result of raising public awareness and education;
- coordination of an Swan Geese research program in the transboundary region of Transbaikalia with Dr. Oleg Goroshko (Daurkiy State Nature Reserve), who undertook research and compiled all available published data and original materials on the status and biology of Swan Geese in the region (Goroshko 2001, 2003a, Goroshko & Liu Sangtao 2003);
- the discovery of some characteristics of the species, including; nesting in different types of habitats, the mobility of populations and brood amalgamations, the relationship between population condition in Dauria and long-term climatic cycles, and the extremely high proportion of non-breeding birds during a drought period (Goroshko 2003b);
- marking of Swan Geese with neck collars at Udył' (139°48'E, 52°10'N) and Torey (115°41'E, 50°00'N) lakes;
- indications that a Korean stopover area is very important for Far Eastern Swan Geese breeding populations from recoveries made at Han River estuary (126°41'E, 37°48'N);
- the establishment of the Zakaznik "Kholan" for the protection of the nesting Swan Geese in the Russian Far East, in 2001;
- implementation of large-scale public awareness and education campaigns targeting local communities with hundreds of stickers, posters, and booklets printed and distributed, radio clips recorded and played as advertisement on radio, and lectures for students;
- the confiscation of nine young Swan Geese from local people, which were taken to Moscow Zoo to be used as basic stock for a captive breeding program of Swan Geese populations; and
- the collection of sample feathers for population structure studies by molecular genetic methods.

Unfortunately, proposals for changing some hunting regulations in the Far East were not supported by the Khabarovsk Department of Game Management.

Besides activities in Russia, the Task Force members have started work in other regions with a review of general information on the status of Swan Geese in Mongolia (Gombobaatar *et al.*, 2003), and China (Liu, 2004), the monitoring of Swan Geese, marking with neck collars and obtaining new data on Swan Geese feeding ecology at its Korean stopover site (Lee, 2004). Based on this data, it appears that the Swan Geese breeding range is divided into two parts: Far Eastern and Daurian. Questions regarding their degree of separation should be the focus of future studies.

Further work on Swan Geese research and protection is planned under the framework of the Task Force:

- monitoring of Swan Geese populations, research into the "bottlenecks" in species ecology and GIS-analysis of the areas inhabited by Swan Geese to reveal and examine potential nesting sites;
- banding of geese and fitting radio and satellite transmitters;
- molecular-genetic analyses of different populations to understand the population structure;
- supporting existing special protected areas and establishing new ones to enhance Swan Goose conservation;
- developing further public awareness and education programmes;
- developing and implementing a restoration program for a Swan Goose population in its former range to guarantee the survival of the species in the winter period; and
- developing a monitoring system of the Russian populations at the wintering grounds in China.

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