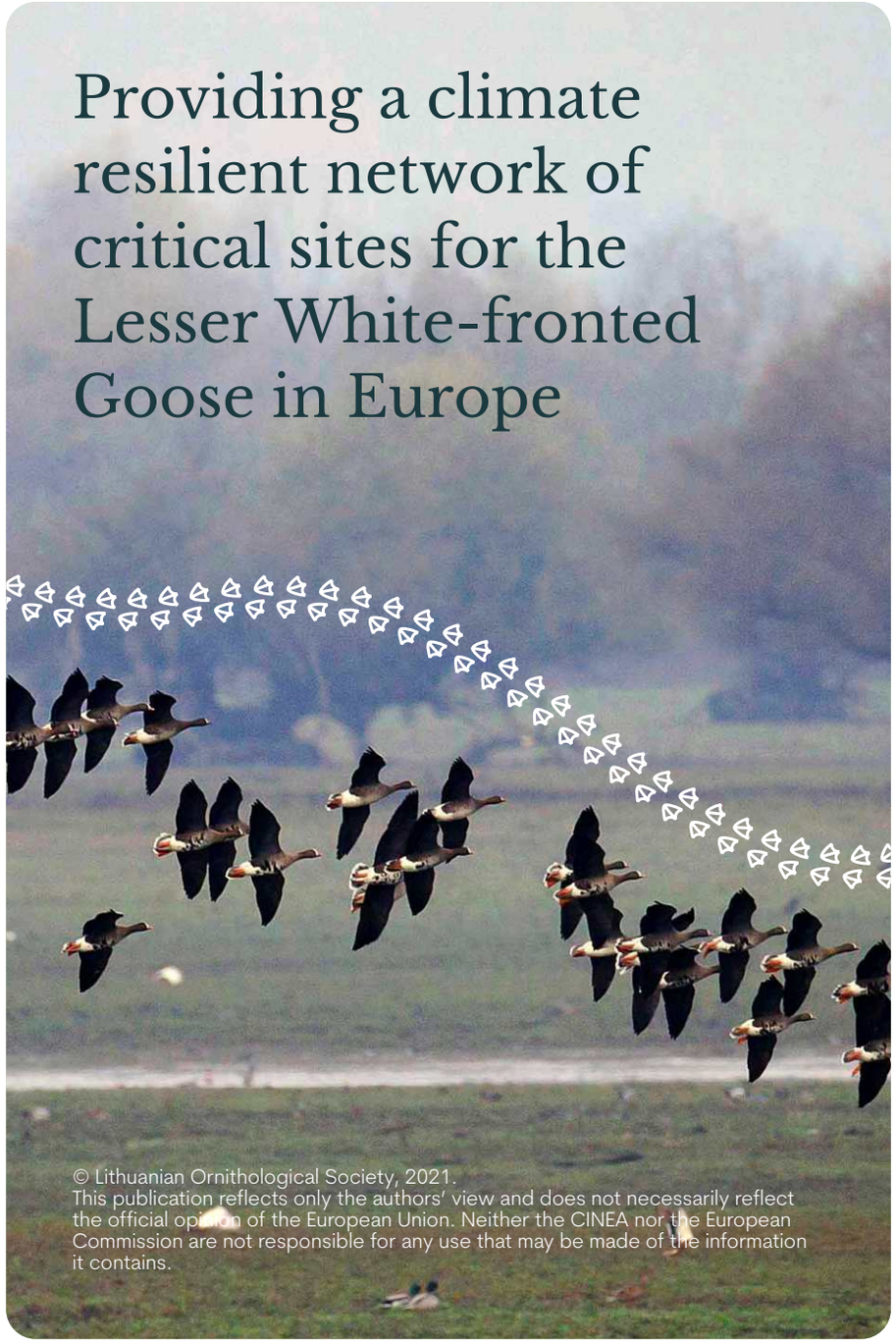
Life Climate

The mission to restore the population of Europe's rarest goose

Printed on 100% recycled paper

Providing a climate resilient network of critical sites for the Lesser White-fronted Goose in Europe



© Kostas Papadopoulos

EU code	LIFE19 NAT/LT/000898
Project areas	Lithuania, Finland, Estonia, Hungary, Greece
Duration	01 SEPT 2020 to 31 AUG 2025
Total budget	5,689,448.00 €
EU Contribution	4,263,543.00 €
Project coordinator	Lithuanian Ornithological Society
Partners	Estonian Ornithological Society, Estonia Hellenic Ornithological Society, Greece Hortobágy National Park Directorate, Hungary NECCA / Management Unit of Evros Delta and Dadia National Parks and Eastern Thrace Protected Areas, Greece Metsähallitus Parks & Wildlife, Finland University of Oulu, Finland WWF Finland
Website	www.wwf.fi/lwfg
Facebook	Safeguarding the Lesser White-fronted Goose

Co-financiers:

Partners:

We are on the mission to restore the population of Europe's rarest goose

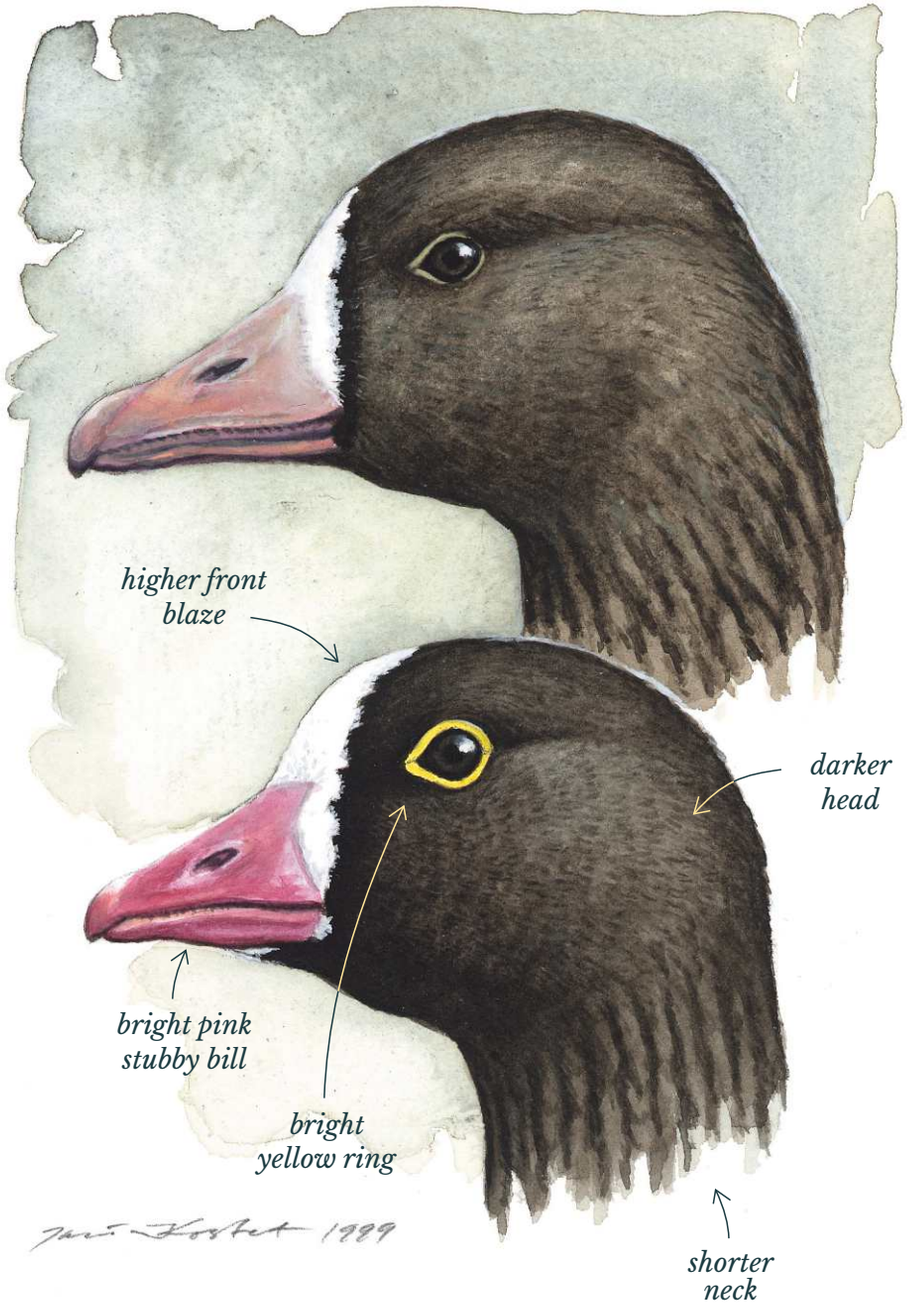
The Lesser White-fronted Goose (LWfG) is a globally endangered species and the Fennoscandian population targeted by this project is rapidly declining. Through the application of concrete conservation actions and awareness raising activities, supported and informed by cutting-edge research and monitoring actions, we aim to contribute to the restoration of the Fennoscandian LWfG population to a favourable conservation status. The actions taken address the major threats that this species faces on the wintering grounds and during migration.

© János Tar

What makes the Lesser White-fronted Goose special?

The Lesser White-fronted Goose (*Anser erythropus*) is Europe's rarest and most endangered breeding goose. The Fennoscandian population, targeted in this project, is estimated to number only 90-120 individuals, or 30-35 adult breeding pairs.

The LWfG is red-listed by the IUCN as a globally vulnerable species. Within the European Union, the species is classified as critically endangered.



Lesser White-fronted Goose vs. Greater White-fronted Goose

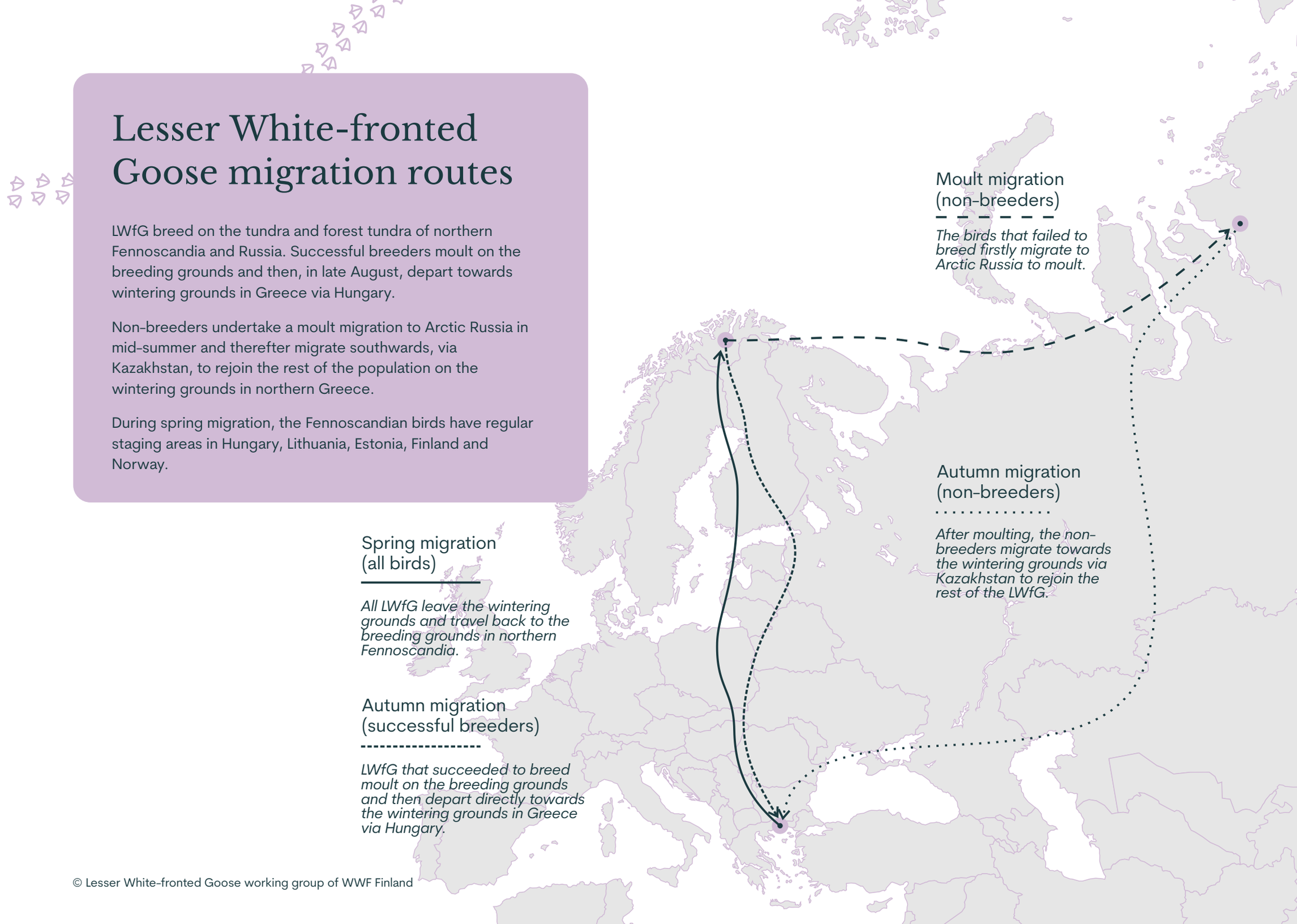
- LWfG always has a bright yellow eye ring.
- LWfG is smaller in size.
- LWfG's bill is shorter, stubby and bright pink in colour, whereas GWfG's bill is longer, slimmer and duller.
- LWfG's white front blaze reaches the crown of the head, whereas GWfG has a smaller blaze.
- LWfG has a darker head and a shorter, thicker neck than GWfG.

Lesser White-fronted Goose migration routes

LWfG breed on the tundra and forest tundra of northern Fennoscandia and Russia. Successful breeders moult on the breeding grounds and then, in late August, depart towards wintering grounds in Greece via Hungary.

Non-breeders undertake a moult migration to Arctic Russia in mid-summer and therefter migrate southwards, via Kazakhstan, to rejoin the rest of the population on the wintering grounds in northern Greece.

During spring migration, the Fennoscandian birds have regular staging areas in Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Norway.



The major threats and challenges to sustaining Lesser White-fronted Goose populations

Poaching or accidental shooting is the major cause for the high mortality of adult LWfG. However, in recent years, both climate change and the abandonment of traditional agricultural practices have affected habitat quality and impacted the migratory patterns of these birds. Windfarm development on the Baltic Sea coast also poses additional challenges. Knowledge gaps concerning the species hamper the implementation of appropriate conservation measures.

We seek to deliver change

A 5% annual average increase in the Fennoscandian LWfG population.

The establishment of a climate-resilient network of critical sites for the LWfG in the EU.

The expansion of suitable habitats and developed guidance for the management of these habitats.

The adoption and revision of LWfG National Species Action Plans in Lithuania and Hungary.

Increased awareness and understanding of LWfG sites and migration patterns through the establishment of new conservation teams.

The involvement of 2,000 stakeholders (hunters, farmers etc.) in the activities of the project, as well as informing 700,000 members of the public about the species and the outcomes of the project.

Meet our experts

"Large flocks of common geese may damage farmers' grasslands. Some farmers may get upset, but some do not mind the damage as they are aware that it is temporary."

Vytautas also notes that when he goes out observing LWfG and other birds in the agricultural areas, many farmers become curious and come up to him to find out what he is looking at. Next time Vytautas arrives, he finds them birdwatching.

"If the farmers were more aware of what species forage on their farms, they would be more willing to collaborate in their protection. Raising their awareness is essential to effective nature conservation."

Vytautas Eigirdas, senior ornithologist at the Lithuanian Ornithological Society and Ventė Cape Ornithological

"During migration, geese stop to feed on farmers' land. However, the results of our research show that geese have little overall impact on harvest. Effective, science-based communication can help reduce conflict between farmers and birds."

The scientist added that regardless of the small amount of damage geese caused, countries would still benefit if there was a governmental subsidy scheme that covered any damage geese do to agricultural fields.

"It is also important to work with hunters and help them improve their goose identification skills, so that they don't shoot rare geese species by accident."

Dr. Péter Gyüre Ph.D., Assistant Professor at the University of Debrecen

Meet our experts

Ms. Makrygianni has been part of a LWfG monitoring team for 15 years. She shared some important principles on the conservation of this species.

"In Greece, we feel responsible for the entire European LWfG population, because these birds spend several months here. LWfG is a habitat specialist that requires high-quality habitat. Special protected areas, such as Ramsar and Natura 2000 sites, play a key role in providing habitat. We must take good care of protected areas and manage them adequately to keep these habitats intact and in good condition. With this project, we will convert abandoned land into wet meadows and thus increase habitat availability for LWfG."

Eleni Makrygianni, Head of Management Unit of Evros Delta and Dadia National Parks and Eastern Thrace Protected Areas

"LWfG habitat in Finland consists of vast wilderness areas and thus finding an extremely rare and elusive bird is nearly impossible. In my work, I do not rely on seeing the birds, but I search for DNA evidence left behind by the geese in their environment. Geese are semi-aquatic birds, so their DNA can be looked for in lake water. Relying on environmental-DNA, I extract DNA from filtered lake water and use a research method that amplifies LWfG DNA, allowing me to screen lakes for the presence or absence of LWfG DNA. If LWfG DNA is found, then these sites can be safeguarded."

Johanna Honka Ph.D, Postdoctoral Researcher at the University of Oulu

Finland

LWfG in Finland

During spring and autumn migration, the Fennoscandian LWfG stage on the Finnish Bothnian Bay coast. 30-35 pairs breed in Finnish Lapland.

Activities in Finland

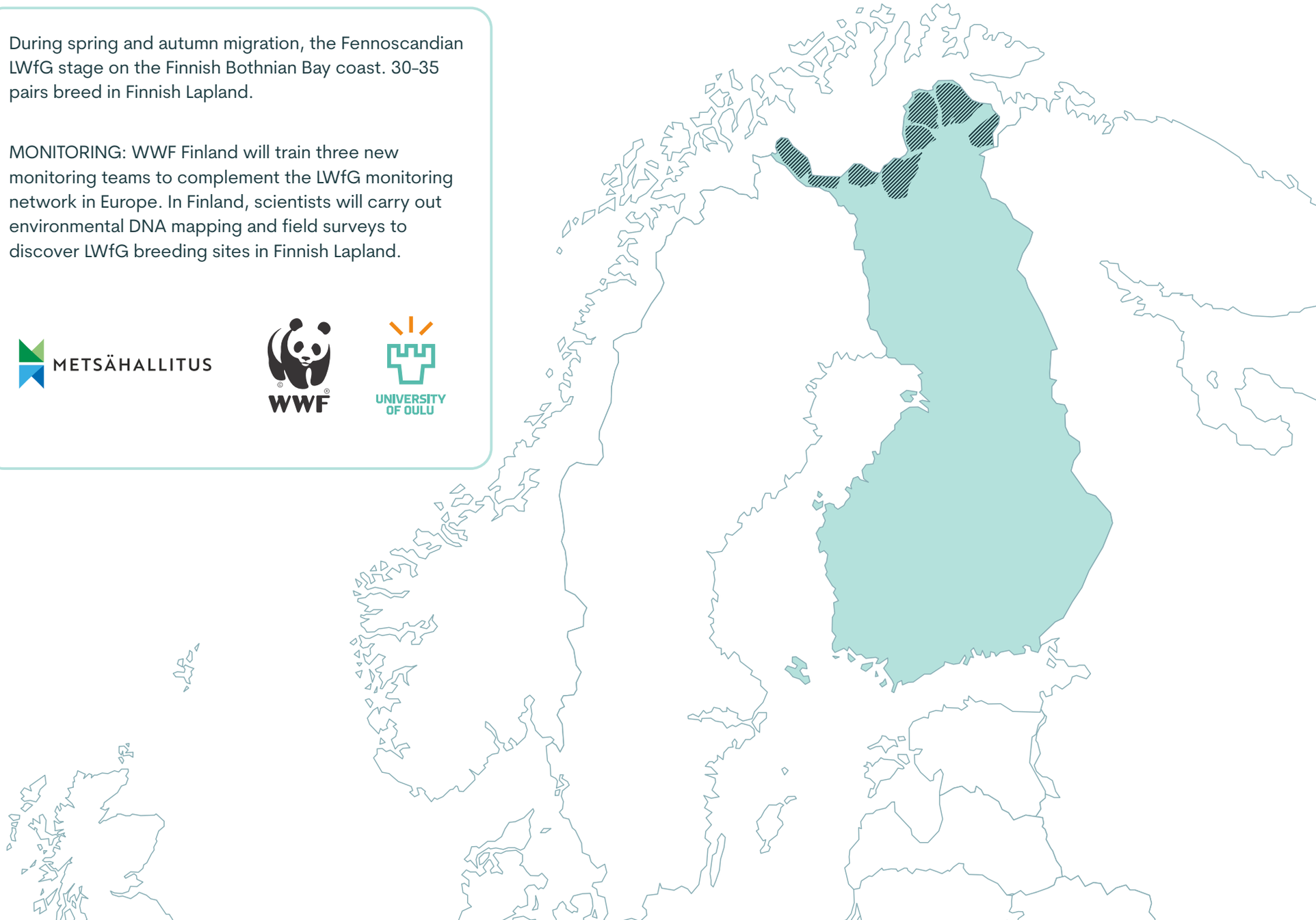
MONITORING: WWF Finland will train three new monitoring teams to complement the LWfG monitoring network in Europe. In Finland, scientists will carry out environmental DNA mapping and field surveys to discover LWfG breeding sites in Finnish Lapland.

Partners

METSÄHALLITUS

WWF

UNIVERSITY OF OULU



Estonia

LWfG in Estonia

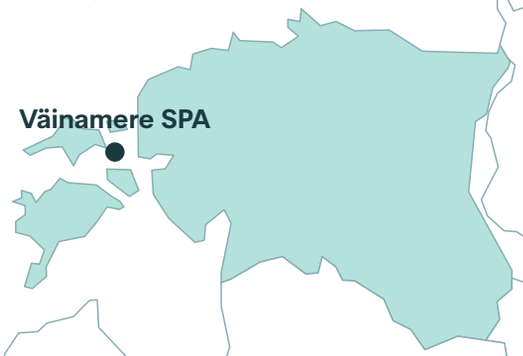
During the spring migration in April and May, the LWfG stops in the coastal meadows and wetlands of Hiiumaa Island, Matsalu National Park and Silma Nature Reserve in western Estonia (in Väinamere SPA).

Activities in Estonia

COMMUNICATION: The aim of the Estonian team is to raise awareness among local stakeholders and to explain the importance of keeping and grazing animals for the conservation of geese and other bird species that use coastal meadows.

Partners

EESTI ORNITOLOOGIAÜHING



Lithuania

LWfG in Lithuania

In March-April, during the spring migration, LWfG stage in the Nemunas Delta and in the SPAs of Senrusnė and Sennemunė Lakes.

Activities in Lithuania

HABITAT RESTORATION: woody vegetation is going to be cleared in the Nemunas Delta and the SPAs of Senrusnė and Sennemunė Lakes to provide open spaces for the geese.

POLICY: a National Species Action Plan for LWfG will be created and LWfG will be included on the list of trigger species in two SPAs.

MONITORING: a monitoring team will be established to help better detect and monitor LWfG.

COMMUNICATION: meetings with key stakeholders should enhance collaboration on LWfG conservation issues.

Partners

LOD

Hungary

LWfG in Hungary

LWfG stage in Hortobágy National Park during spring and autumn migrations.

Activities in Hungary

HABITAT RESTORATION: the team in Hungary will manage hydrological facilities (removing harmful facilities and establishing useful ones) and vegetation in the National Park to establish and expand good quality habitats for LWfG.

POLICY: a revised National Species Action Plan will be adopted.

COMMUNICATION: an environmental education programme is planned to be implemented in the Hortobágy area. The educational programme is particularly aimed at children and teachers to encourage respect among younger generations towards nature and facilitate a long-term change in public perception towards the environment.

Partners

HORTOBÁGYI NEMZETI PARK

Greece

LWfG in Greece

The Evros Delta and Kerkini Lake are the LWfG wintering sites in Greece and can be observed there from mid September until mid March. LWfG can also be (more rarely) observed in other Natura 2000 wetland sites in Northern Greece.

Activities in Greece

HABITAT RESTORATION: Degraded agricultural land is going to be purchased in the Evros Delta in order to extend the available LWfG habitat within the SPA as well as to improve the existing LWfG habitat through hydrological management, management of vegetation and grazing.

PUBLIC AWARENESS & EDUCATION: A mobile exhibition will be created dedicated to the LWfG that will be exhibited in various sites in Northern Greece. There will also be collaboration with artists in the creation of two large murals on public buildings. The public awareness campaign will also be supported by multiple events and communication materials, as well as environmental education seminars and events.

MONITORING: The LWfG will be closely monitored throughout the project duration. Volunteer-based monitoring teams will be trained to locate any new LWfG sites as well as conduct monitoring beyond the main project sites.

ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT: There will be development of LWfG-friendly business opportunities and ecotourism in the Evros Delta SPA.

Partners

Ορνιθολογική
HELLENIC ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

N.E.C.C.A.
Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency

Life LWfG Climate Project Area

Finland

Expanding the LWfG monitoring network in Europe and environmental DNA mapping to discover LWfG breeding sites in Finnish Lapland.

Estonia

Raising awareness among local stakeholders and explaining the importance of keeping and grazing animals for the conservation of geese.

Lithuania

Restoring habitats, raising awareness, expanding the LWfG monitoring network and adopting the National Species Action Plan.

Hungary

Restoring habitats, setting up an environmental education program aimed at children and teachers and revising the National Species Action Plan.

Greece

Expanding the LWfG monitoring network, restoring habitats and enabling LWfG-friendly business opportunities and ecotourism.

AEWA 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.