

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION PLAN FOR *ANSER ALBIFRONS FLAVIROSTRIS*, THE GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

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SUMMARY

The process of the development of an international conservation plan for *Anser albifrons flavirostris* (Greenland White-fronted Goose) is described. The plan has been developed by Greenland, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom and specifically identifies areas for priority action by the countries concerned. The plan is international in scope and it will depend on the individual Range States to implement it. It sets ideal objectives, although these are constrained by a variety of different factors in each country. Achievable, or 'operational' objectives are defined which take into account these constraints. The future success of this initiative will depend heavily on the operation of a Secretariat or other co-ordinating body, to maintain contacts between the Range States and to take forward those actions which require co-ordination at an international level. Some of the key functions of the Secretariat are described.

INTRODUCTION

One method of achieving international co-ordination of conservation action for rare or threatened species is through the production of plans - variously called action, recovery, conservation or management plans. Generally these plans fall into two types.

The first type are expert analyses of conservation requirements that are used as a blueprint for initiating action by a wide range of parties, including governmental and non-government bodies. These plans set an agenda for action but generally precede any widescale commitment to take, or fund actions. Such plans provide a strategic review of conservation needs useful for conservation agencies. Recent examples of such plans are those for *Ciconia ciconia* (White Stork) (Goriup and Schultz 1991); *Oxyura leucocephala* (White-headed Duck) (Anstey 1989); and *Cairina scutulata* White-winged Wood Duck (Green 1992). Synoptic reviews of conservation needs across groups of birds or along migratory flyways can also be included in this category inasmuch as they set agendas for action and make precise recommendations (for example Piersma and Davidson (1992) for *Calidris canutus* (Knot); Lane and Parish (1991) for the Asian-Australasian flyway; Crivelli *et al.* (1991) for Palearctic *Pelecanus* spp.; and Davidson *et al.* (in press) for waders).

Another group of plans are the result of, or result in, the formal working together of the parties responsible for initiating actions. These plans are not only a statement of needs, but also (at least in part) imply some commitment to tackle the problems addressed. They are usually the result of a political process of dialogue between the parties concerned. As a

consequence, they are very often of a more formal or legalistic nature than the former type of plan. Recent examples include: the North American Waterfowl Plan (for example US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) (1986), Patterson (1990) - although here initial and formal funding commitments were weak; the proposed Western Palearctic Waterfowl Agreement under the Bonn Convention (Boere 1990, 1991); the Pacific Flyway Management Plan for *Anser albifrons gambelli* (Tule Greater White-fronted Goose) - Pacific Flyway Council/USFWS/CWS (1991); the *Anser caerulescens caerulescens* (Greater Snow Goose) Management Plan - CWS/USFWS/Atlantic Flyway Council (1981); and the New Zealand *Strigops habroptilus* (Kakapo) recovery plan (Powlesland 1989).

ANSER ALBIFRONS FLAVIROSTRIS, THE GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

This discrete population of the holarctic White-fronted Goose breeds in west Greenland, stages in spring and autumn in south and west Iceland, and winters in Ireland and Britain (Scotland and Wales). Thus the population has only four Range States. In recent years, a high degree of informal co-operation has developed regarding the international research and conservation of the population, stimulated especially following the formation of the British-based Greenland White-fronted Goose Study in 1978 (see review in Greenland White-fronted Goose Study 1990). The population has recovered from about 14,300 - 16,600 in the late 1970s to an April 1991 population of around 29,400 birds.

At the level of the population, there was a clear need to formalise international linkages, if only to lessen the birds dependence on the interests and enthusiasm of a few individuals and to consolidate these gains in the long-term. What in many respects is a success story could also be used to develop a model of international co-operation for other species.

To this end, Greenland and Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom have come together to develop an international conservation plan for the population. The process has been initiated by IWRB, together with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of Ireland. A draft plan (Stroud 1992) was prepared by the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee and was subject to wide international consultation in 1991 and 1992, culminating in an international workshop held in Ireland in March 1992 (Appendix 1). The plan is currently being finalised taking regard of all these inputs.

This paper describes the approach to the planning and outlines the future needs concerning the implementation of the plan objectives at an international level.

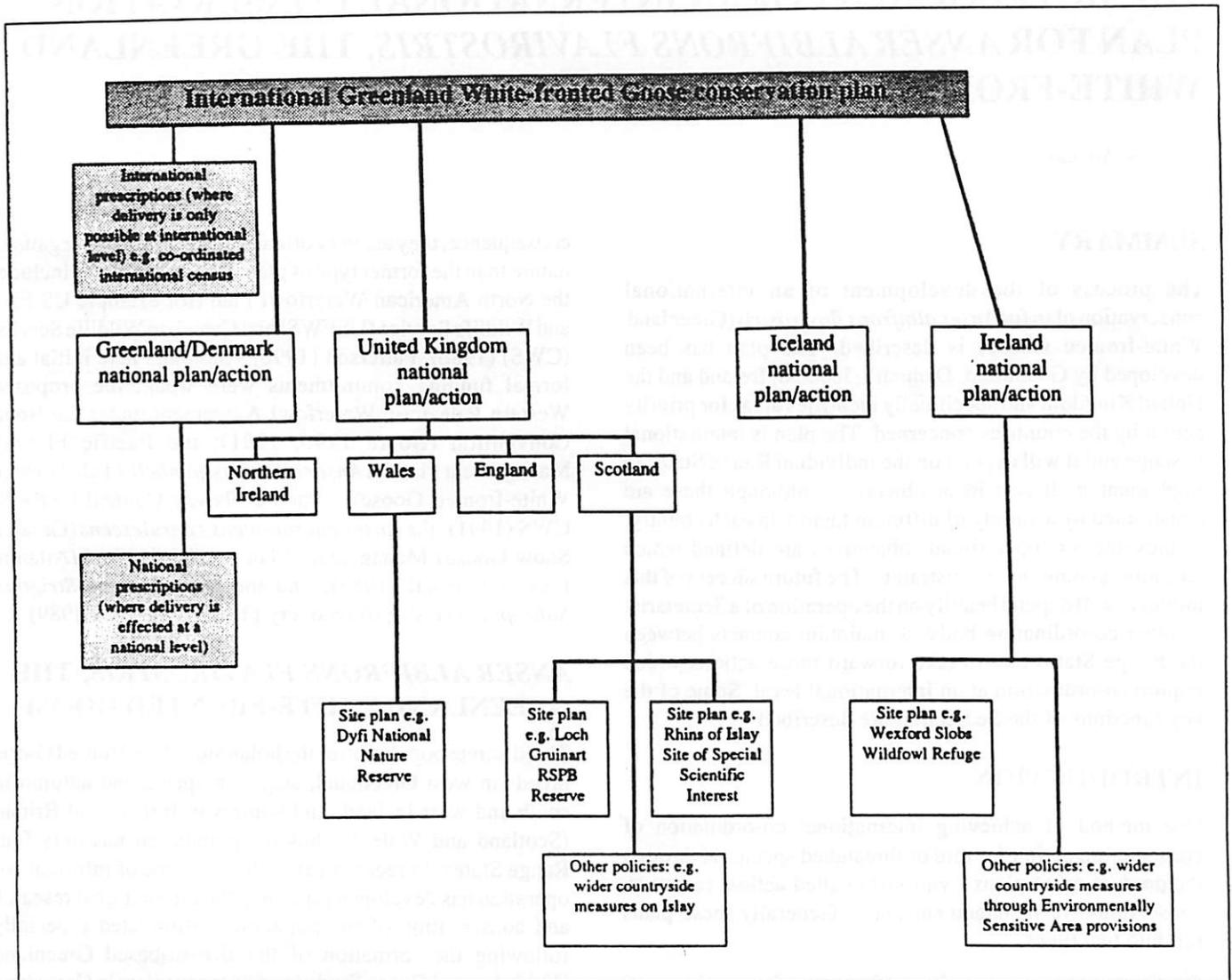


Figure 1. Hierarchical nature of possible actions for conservation of Greenland White-fronted Geese. The present plan is formulated at an international level, and sets common goals to be pursued and delivered at national level through appropriate but differing national legislation and conservation opportunities.

THE CONSERVATION PLAN

The plan draws elements from both the approaches described above. A memorandum of understanding between the Range States (Greenland and Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom) formalises, at governmental level, the intention to work together (see also Appendix 1). This will hopefully be signed by States in 1993.

The plan itself sets an agenda for action. It is formulated at an international level (Figure 1), and specifies broad goals, the achievement of which is to be worked out at national level. Stroud (in press) gives further details of the structure of the plan which is based on a modified version of the site-based management planning system derived by the former Great Britain Nature Conservancy Council (NCC 1991; Alexander in press).

The first part of the plan outlines the descriptive background necessary to assess the conservation needs. Information is laid out according to a number standard headings (Table 1). The benefit of this standardised approach is that it provides a checklist of the information to be considered. Even if not all the

sections are relevant for a particular species, inclusion of a heading in a plan indicates that this has been considered and found not to be important, rather than not considered. Most sections or sub-sections are further subdivided into separate accounts for each of the four Range States.

The second part of the plan (Table 2) evaluates the information presented in Part 1, derives objectives and develops more specific prescriptions at the international level. The process undertaken in Part 2 starts with an evaluation according to standard principles of naturalness, fragility, rarity, typicalness, recorded history, relationship to national or international populations, potential value and intrinsic appeal.

This process initially addresses the fundamental question "why bother?" and from this derives the ideal goals for the population. It is important to stress that the goals are 'ideal' in the sense that they provide an absolute benchmark against which to measure the success of the plan. Stroud (in press) and Alexander (in press) discuss the concept of ideal goals in more detail.

Five ideal objectives for the conservation of the *A. albifrons flavirostris* population have been derived. These are:

- i) To maintain and enhance the population, recognising that the current population size represents an absolute minimum;
- ii) To maintain and enhance viable numbers throughout the present geographic range, and to encourage the re-occupation of formerly frequented areas where the geese are now extinct; and to further avoid the contraction of range to a few centres of population;
- iii) To ensure that any interactions with people are according to the principles of sustainability, and to give special emphasis to the avoidance of agricultural conflicts on the wintering and staging grounds;
- vi) To ensure that any consumptive 'use' of the population should be wisely undertaken on the basis of sustainability; and
- v) To ensure full international co-operation between the Range States in joint programmes of monitoring, research, conservation and liaison to the benefit of *A. albifrons flavirostris*.

The conservation plan then considers, for each country, the constraints that may limit the achievement of these ideas. The constraints are different in each Range State, but generally relate to institutional limitations (including lack of human and financial resources for conservation), legislative constraints and problems of perception and attitude amongst certain sections of society (for example, hunters shooting illegally).

The second part of the plan presents a number of more specific objectives that relate directly to the ideals. These are achievable on defined time-scales.

The plan also considers and sets 'specified limits'. An important part of any management process is to know, not only when actions are going according to plan, but also when things are going wrong. Early knowledge of such events can be used through 'alert limits' to trigger remedial actions at an early stage. This can prevent a problem turning into a crisis which may be very costly in resources to address (Pienkowski 1991). The proposed 'alert' or specified limits for *A. albifrons flavirostris* are given in Table 4. Clearly, as with other elements of the plan, these limits to the acceptable variation or population parameters will require review and possibly revision in due course.

The third part (Table 3) of the NCC management plan structure would normally deal with the derivation of detailed prescriptions and work programmes (Alexander in press). Since the White-fronted Goose plan is international in scope, such detailed planning is undertaken in national plans (Figure 1). Such planning does require co-ordination however, and in the present model, Part 3 of the plan makes provision for a 'Secretariat' or other form of co-ordination. Co-ordination is crucial to the success of any such international initiative.

CO-ORDINATION NECESSARY FOR THE GREENLAND WHITEFRONT PLAN

Meetings

- i) Arrange annual meetings of technical experts for Range States to review or co-ordinate liaison on research programmes;

Table 1. Part 1 of the International Greenland White-fronted Goose conservation plan.

PART 1 - DESCRIPTION	
Chapter 1.1	Geographical Range
1.1.1	Geographic range
1.1.2	Summary description
Chapter 1.2	Species information
1.2.1	Taxonomy
1.2.2	Morphology
1.2.3	Population size and distribution
1.2.3.1	Age and sex structures
1.2.3.2	Range and movement
1.2.3.3	Population structure
1.2.3.4	Census techniques
1.2.4	Population dynamics
1.2.4.1	Productivity
1.2.4.2	Adult survival and mortality
1.2.4.3	Behavioural observations
1.2.5	Diet
1.2.5.1	Vegetation community selection
1.2.5.2	Vegetation utilization (faecal analysis)
1.2.6	Cultural
1.2.6.1	History of human perception/utilisation
1.2.6.2	Current status of human perception/utilisation
1.2.6.3	Past management in nature conservation
Chapter 1.3	Environmental information
1.3.1	Physical
1.3.1.1	Climate
1.3.1.2	Hydrology
1.3.1.3	Geology/Geomorphology
1.3.1.4	Soils and substrates
1.3.2	Biological
1.3.3	Cultural
1.3.3.1	Archeology
1.3.3.2	Land use
1.3.3.2.1	Past land use
1.3.3.2.2	Present land use
1.3.3.2.3	Land tenure systems
Chapter 1.4	Ecological relationships and implications for conservation
Chapter 1.5	Bibliography

- ii) Organise triennial meetings of Range States as required. Full plan review including assessment and re-assessment of objectives.

Information exchange

Undertake, or ensure systems are in place for the exchange of necessary information between Range States relating to:

- i) Designation of new sites;

Table 2. Part 2 of the international Greenland White-fronted Goose conservation plan.

PART 2 - EVALUATION	
Chapter 2.1	Conservation status of the Greenland White-fronted Goose population and its habitats
2.1.1	Habitats
2.1.1.1	Historic interest
2.1.1.2	Present status of habitats
2.1.2	Population
2.1.2.1	Historic interest
2.1.2.2	Present day
Chapter 2.2	Evaluation
2.2.1	Criteria for evaluation
2.2.1.1	Naturalness
2.2.1.2	Rarity (population size)
2.2.1.3	Fragility
2.2.1.4	Typicalness
2.2.1.5	Recorded history
2.2.1.6	Relationship to national/international populations
2.2.1.7	Potential value
2.2.1.8	Intrinsic appeal
2.2.2	Identification/confirmation of important features
2.2.3	The population in wider perspective and implications for conservation [not included in this plan]
2.2.4	Specified limits
2.2.5	Ideal objectives
Chapter 2.3	Factors influencing management
2.3.1	Natural trends
2.3.2	Anthropogenic trends
2.3.2.1	Greenland
2.3.2.2	Iceland
2.3.2.3	Great Britain
2.3.2.4	Northern Ireland
2.3.2.5	Republic of Ireland
2.3.3	External factors
2.3.4	Obligations
2.3.4.1	Relevant international legislation
2.3.4.2	Relevant national legislation
2.3.4.3	Other relevant obligations
2.3.5	Legal constraints
2.3.6	Conservation constraints
2.3.6.1	Greenland
2.3.6.2	Iceland
2.3.6.3	Great Britain
2.3.6.4	Northern Ireland
2.3.6.5	Republic of Ireland
2.3.7	Impact assessment
Chapter 2.4	Operational objectives and options
2.4.1	Rationale
2.4.2	Identification of operational objectives and selection of options and outline prescriptions
Appendix 1.	Listing of sites used by Greenland White-fronted Geese which have statutory protection under national or international legislation
Appendix 2.	Summary of current major policies affecting Greenland White-fronted Geese in each Range State.
Appendix 3.	Summary of suggested major policies for Greenland White-fronted Geese in each Range State.

Table 3. Part 3 of the international Greenland White-fronted Goose conservation plan.

PART 3 - PRESCRIPTION	
Chapter 3.1	Projects
3.1.1	Project register and descriptions
3.1.2	Project groups
Chapter 3.2	Work schedule
3.2.1	Work programme
3.2.2	Annual work programme
Chapter 3.3	Control
3.3.1	Project recording system
3.3.2	Progress reports
3.3.3	Plan review

Table 4. Specified limits which identify points beyond which negative change in the population automatically stimulates emergency action under the Greenland Whitefront plan.

The population is subject to variable breeding success but this has generally occurred within a limited range. Medium term changes in breeding success, and more directly population size, can indicate changing conditions faced by the geese and alert Range States to the need for a review of conservation actions. Variation in mortality (as reflected by rapid changes of population size) and breeding success (proportion of young in autumn flocks) are both of importance.

Three criteria are proposed: the first reflects mortality, whilst the second reflects natality. The third criterion covers unexpected events which cannot be foreseen.

Trend criteria

- If total population size has declined by more than 15% in any period of three years;
- if the proportion of young at main wintering sites is below the long-term average for three consecutive years; or
- if any other major environmental changes occurs within the range of the Greenland White-fronted Goose liable to affect the population.

In the event of any of these criteria being exceeded, an immediate review meeting of the plan should be convened by the Range States.

- Population status and monitoring (international census of population size, breeding performance and so on); and
- Co-ordination of ringing programmes.

Identify major information needs in Range States and co-ordinate the sharing or provision of data through appropriate means.

Reporting

Report achievements and constraints under the plan to the triennial meeting of Range States as well as to other interested parties such as international conservation agencies.

Review

- Review population status relevant to 'alert' thresholds and thus the need to convene emergency meetings of Range States; and
- Collate the necessary information for Range States to plan objectives, especially with respect to new site designations and population monitoring (including monitoring of mortality through co-ordinated ringing studies).

International collaboration

Act as focal point in the establishment of collaborative international links between Range States in respect of:

- i) International programmes of research;
- ii) Training initiatives (including exchange) of conservation agency staff involved with *A. albifrons flavirostris*;
- iii) Exchange of information concerning crop damage and related conservation strategies; and
- iv) Facilitate site-twinning arrangements as required by Range States.

THE FUTURE

The Greenland White-fronted Goose International Conservation Plan has been widely considered as a model for other such single-species international conservation initiatives. It will only be useful as a model if it delivers positive benefits and is seen to drive forward the wise management of the population. It must avoid the twin risks of becoming either overly complex and bureaucratic (a self-serving end in itself) or alternatively too simplistic. The following may be useful 'performance indicators' against which to assess the ultimate success of the plan:

- i) There must be a net movement towards the achievement of each of the ideal objectives for the population, as judged against the conservation status of the population in 1992 (outlined in Stroud 1992);
- ii) The plan must facilitate, rather than hinder, international co-operation;
- iii) The plan must be subject to the formal feedback and review processes; and
- iv) The Secretariat should aid the effective co-ordination of the planning process between the Range States.

There will be additional benefits if the Greenland White-front initiative proves to be a useful model for other species planning at an international level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Greenland White-fronted Goose initiative described has highlighted issues of importance in the development of further international conservation plans. These are:

- i) In situations where conservation initiatives cannot be imposed (eg. through legislative means), wide-scale consultation is necessary among interested parties at all stages of the development of the plan. This is good practice and will enhance the 'ownership' of the plan amongst co-operating bodies and thus increase the level of practical involvement;
- ii) The mechanism of an international workshop of interested parties has proved particularly useful in the drafting and agreement of the international plan;
- iii) There are merits in following a standardised format for a

written plan. The model used is robust and has particular advantages in the clear and logical setting out of necessary information from which to derive conservation priorities;

- iv) A conservation plan must have a clear statement of objectives. These should be clearly separated into ideal objectives - which may never be achievable but set long-term goals, and objectives derived from those that are achievable in realistic time-scales (ie. can be related to organisational work-plans);
- v) A conservation plan is not an end in itself, but rather part of a continuing process. This process involves review and feedback as integral components;
- vi) The planning process should help rather than hinder. Moves to establish international plans will be counter-productive if the process adopted is bureaucratic, inflexible or excessively costly in human or financial resources;
- vii) Once a plan has been agreed, there is a need for continuing the co-ordination between Range States. Provision needs to be made for such co-ordination at the outset;
- viii) The development of a single species international plan has particular benefits for certain species. However, it can be costly in both time and human resources. For some groups of species, or in some geographic regions, plans which cover assemblages of migratory birds with similar habitat requirements (and thus face similar threats), may be a more cost-effective approach (see Davidson *et al.* in press; Myers *et al.* 1987; Hunter *et al.* 1991; Lane and Parish 1991); and
- ix) Published reviews of existing data for species, assemblages or flyways provide an essential basis from which to derive international conservation priorities (see Lane and Parish (1991) for a flyway review and Piersma and Davidson (1992) for an especially good recent example for a single species). The collation and publication of such reviews is an area of activity where IWRB and its Research Groups have a key role.

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Appendix 1.

The Wexford Declaration on the conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*. Wexford, Ireland, 6 March 1992.

REALISING THAT the entire world population of the Greenland White-fronted Goose breeds in Greenland and winters in Ireland and the United Kingdom and that a significant proportion migrates through Iceland;

AWARE THAT the world population of the Greenland White-fronted Goose currently numbers only 30,000 individuals with about two thirds of this total wintering in two localities, and that within the last decade the population has numbered less than 18,000 individuals;

CONSCIOUS THAT individual Greenland White-fronted Geese exhibit a high degree of site fidelity, and that during recent years the disappearance of some local populations has caused a retraction of the traditional range and that other flocks remain vulnerable;

NOTING THAT many natural and semi-natural habitats, used by Greenland White-fronted Geese are threatened by loss or degradation, particularly on their staging and on their wintering areas, and that uncontrolled hunting of the Greenland White-fronted Goose occurs while on migration;

AND FURTHER NOTING THAT the characteristic breeding biology and social behaviour of the Greenland White-fronted Goose, indicates vulnerability compared to other geese;

WELCOMING recent increases in some sections of the population and noting recent ecological adaptability of the bird;

TAKING ACCOUNT of the draft International Conservation Plan discussed at the Wexford Workshop in March 1992;

RECOGNISING THAT Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom must take joint and equal responsibility for the conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose and recognising that farmers, hunters and conservation organisations have a role to play in achieving this objective;

The participants at the Greenland White-fronted Goose Workshop adopted the Declaration and recommended the following actions:

1. That Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom agree and implement long-term co-operative measures, including an International Plan for the conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose.
2. That Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom develop and implement national conservation plans including site plans or statements for the Greenland White-fronted Goose.
3. That Ireland and the United Kingdom take further steps, where necessary, to protect wintering areas and in particular traditional ones, of the Greenland White-fronted Goose.
4. That Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom work to achieve closer integration between environmental policies and human uses, especially agriculture.
5. That Greenland, Iceland, Ireland and United Kingdom ensure that any hunting is carried out at a sustainable and equitable level taking account of the influence of disturbance so that the survival and distribution of the population are not jeopardised.
6. That Greenland be congratulated on the listing of exceptionally extensive areas of the breeding range under the Ramsar Convention.
7. That Ireland be congratulated for bringing together the Range States and other interested parties and for offering to act as co-ordinator for follow-up action.

Following a meeting between representatives of the Range States of the Greenland White-fronted Goose at the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention at Montreux in June 1990, the first International Workshop on the conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose was held in Wexford, Ireland, from 4-6 March 1992 and was organised by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Office of Public Works in Ireland in association with the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB). The workshop which discussed a draft international plan for the conservation of the Greenland White-fronted Goose was attended by 50 specialists, including representatives of governments, international bodies and non-governmental organisations from each of the Range States.