

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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US-USSR SNOW GOOSE PROJECT LAUNCHED

A cooperative research project with the Soviet Union has begun with the live-trapping and marking in the United States of 24 lesser snow geese which summer in Russian Siberia and winter in California's Sacramento Valley, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The distinctively-marked birds were released at Tule Lake and Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuges in California, and Soviet wildlife scientists are awaiting their arrival on nesting grounds in Siberia. The 24 marked geese are wearing extra wide, bright green neck collars to make it easy for the Soviets to spot them among the 200,000 geese that will nest on Wrangel Island in the Soviet Union this summer and later will migrate across Alaska to their wintering grounds.

Greenwalt said, "The project is part of the US-USSR Agreement on Environmental Protection signed last fall in Washington. Soviet scientists expressed concern then over declining populations of lesser snow geese in their country. Soviet bird banding experts are interested in sharing results of American and Soviet bird banding programs and migratory behavior analysis. U.S. data are computer processed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, and Soviet scientists are investigating using a similar

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method so that data on the many species of birds found in both countries can be exchanged. Exchange visits of ornithologists are scheduled this summer. Mutual benefits abound for scientists of both countries."

The lesser snow goose is abundant on the North American continent. Those migrating from the Soviet Union blend with those coming into the Sacramento Valley of California from the Northwest Territories of Canada by the hundreds of thousands each fall.

The next phase of the project, slated for late summer, will be the marking of at least 800 lesser snow geese by Soviet biologists before the fall migration begins. Two hundred birds in family groups will be dyed pink for rapid, easy spotting. Another 200 carrying Soviet leg bands will be identified further with prominent neck collars similar to those used in the recent marking and release. The remaining 400 will be marked only with standard Soviet leg bands.

"This project provides a unique opportunity to establish a precedent for international scientific cooperation in the wildlife field," Greenwalt said. "It also offers excellent possibilities for closer cooperation among American scientists, sportsmen, and conservationists. All can help track these birds in this pioneer effort next fall, and observers should report any sightings to local game officials. One of the immediate objectives of the project is determining the exact wintering areas of the lesser snow geese from Siberia. Then, we want to observe and study the interaction of these geese with similar populations that summer in Canada. Migratory bird behavior is one field of wildlife study that still perplexes scientists as there remain many unanswered questions. We expect that this project initiated by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the one scheduled for implementation by Soviet wildlife specialists will shed additional light on this complex subject."



The distinctive green neck band on the snow goose should afford Soviet wildlife specialists easy sighting of these birds in Siberia. The goose above, held by Refuge Manager Robert Watson of Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, was among those trapped and marked before spring migration.