

XXII. GOOSE OBSERVATIONS IN THE PANNONIC REGION IN OCTOBER—DECEMBER 1980 AND IN MARCH 1981

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Introduction

Several teams counted geese in the Pannonic region between October and December 1980 and one team was there in March 1981. The areas visited were as follows:

<i>Site</i>	<i>Date(s)</i>	<i>Observers</i>
Kopaci rit	19—23 Oct	T Lebret, Dr J Mikuska, G L Ouweneel
Kardoskút	24—25 Oct	T Lebret, G L Ouweneel
Szeged Fehértó		
Neusiedlersee	26—27 Oct	T Lebret, G L Ouweneel
Seewinkel		
Tata	23—24 Oct	G Huyskens, P Maes
Hortobágy area	24—28 Oct	G Huyskens, P Maes
Biharugra	29 Oct—1 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Kardoskút	2—4 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Szeged Fehértó		
Velencei-tó	6—7 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Balaton area	9—10 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Tata	11 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Neusiedlersee	12 Nov	G Huyskens, P Maes
Seewinkel		
Tata	20—24 Nov	LMJ van den Bergh, JNF van den Bergh—van Leeu- wen, D Visser
Danube Valley (East Bank)	25—27 Nov	LMJ van den Bergh, JFN van den Bergh—van Leeu- wen, D Visser
Kardoskút	28 Nov	LMJ van den Bergh, JFN
Szeged-Fehértó		van den Bergh—van Leeu- wen, D Visser
Balaton + two other areas in W. Hungary	2 Dec	LMJ van den Bergh, JFN van den Bergh—van Leeu- wen, D Visser
Tata	28 Feb—6 Mar	LMJ van den Bergh, J Philippona, E C Smith and D Visser
The Danube Valley, Balaton, Kardoskút and Hortobágy		were briefly visited in spring but no geese were found

The autumn observation period lasted 45 days, the spring period 7 days. Some areas were visited several times: Tata 23–24 October, 11 November, 20–24 November, 28 February to 6 March; Kardoskút 24–25 October, 2 November; Seewinkel 26–27 October, 12 November.

Van den Bergh et al. are preparing a special paper on several aspects of the biology of the Tata geese and the very intensive shooting in that area. Huyskens paid special attention to the *Anser fabalis* races. The present report is a compilation of three reports by van den Bergh et al., a report by Huyskens and the authors.

Methods

Geese are easily overlooked when they are feeding in extensive fields with much cover, especially when the days are short, visibility is bad and the observer unfamiliar with the sites. Reliable counts are for the greater part made near the roosts. As the geese may sometimes arrive in almost complete darkness, counts during the morning flight are preferable. A wide scale of weather types may favour or hamper the observations.

There was a full moon on 23 October and on 22 November. Flocks of the order of 300 birds are not mentioned here in the case of the commoner species. Numbers of *Anser erythropus* and *Branta ruficollis* are complete.

Areas

Kopaci rit is a marsh of some 30 000 ha at the confluence of the Drava and Danube. The higher ridges are wood covered but there are many often extensive "jezeros", lakes and oxbows.

Kardoskút – Fehértó: puszta reserve with a very shallow soda lake (fehér means white and tó pond or lake). The name Fehértó is common all over Hungary. It is also Hungarian for Lake Neusiedl. Kardoskút is to the ENE of Hódmezővásárhely.

Szeged – Fehértó: fish ponds and salt lake some 10 km north of Szeged.

Hortobágy area: the well known large-scale plain with large fish ponds.

Virágoskút: a fish pond in the NE of this region.

Biharugra: fish ponds on the Hungarian – Rumanian border near Komádi.

Velencei-tó: near Székesfehérvár ± marsh near Dinnyés railway station.

Balaton

Tata: the roost is on Öreg-tó, to the SE and bordering the town of Tata.

Danube Valley (East bank): Szabadszállás, Hajós – Dusnok and region south of Baja.

West Hungary: Region near Nagyatád and Balaton.

Results

Kopaci rit	21 Oct morning flight	21 500 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
	23 Oct morning flight	20 550 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
Road Hódmezővásárhely-Kardoskút	1600 hours evening flight	of some 3000 <i>Anser albifrons</i>
These birds were flying parallel to road to the southwest, obviously towards Szeged-Fehértó and not to nearby Kardoskút, probably due to the lack of water at the latter locality.		
Kardoskút	24 October	9 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 4 <i>Anser erythropus</i> 3 <i>Branta ruficollis</i>
Lange Lacke, Seewinkel	26 October	23 750 <i>Anser fabalis</i> 4 000 <i>Anser anser</i>
<i>Huyskens & Maes</i> in their report pay much attention to the race of the <i>Anser fabalis</i> observed, stating that these geese all belonged to the race <i>A. f. rossicus</i> ; no flocks of mixed composition occurred.		
Tata	23 October	8 000 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
Hortobágy fishpond	23 October	10 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 70 <i>Anser erythropus</i>
Virágoskút fishpond	26 October	4 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 300 <i>Anser anser</i> 100 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
Hortobágy and west to Tiszafüred	28 October	1 500 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 50 <i>Anser fabalis</i> 10 <i>Anser erythropus</i> 20 <i>Anser anser</i>
Total in Hortobágy area	25 – 28 October	15 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 20 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> is well possible 1 200 <i>Anser anser</i> 150 <i>Anser fabalis</i> 80 <i>Anser erythropus</i>
Biharugra southern ponds	29 October	1 500 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 20 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
Biharugra northern ponds	30 October	4 500 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 750 <i>Anser anser</i> 300 <i>Anser fabalis</i>
Kardoskút	31 October	20 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 300 <i>Anser fabalis</i> 100 <i>Anser anser</i> 30 <i>Anser erythropus</i> 11 <i>Branta ruficollis</i>
Szeged-Fehértó from E (evening flight)	2 November	11 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 2 500 <i>Anser fabalis</i> (local information)
Szeged-Fehértó snow	3 November	30 000 <i>Anser albifrons</i>
Csaj-tó (W of Szentés) (evening flight)	4 November	500 <i>Anser albifrons</i> 500 <i>Anser anser</i>

Velencei-tó	6 November	30 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Velencei-tó	7 November	30 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight)		1 000	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
		1 000	<i>Anser anser</i>
Balaton, SW (in fields)	8 November	6 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight) 5000 to			
Balaton, 1000 to Kis-			
Balaton			
Balatonfenyves	9 November	20 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight)			
Fields South of Siófok	11 November	550	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Local information suggests		4 500	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Total in Balaton region			
then might be		30 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Tata (evening flight)	11 November	35 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Lange Lacke – Seewinkel	12–13 November	22 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight)		3 000	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Tata	20–24 November	14 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(counts at roost)		27 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
			(maxim.)
		1 000	<i>Anser albifrons</i>

Much variation in numbers due to full moon.

Distance to feeding places 10–30 km, in majority of cases feeding on corn fields with high stubble.

Hajós-Dusnok	25 November	1	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>
Dusnok		1 100	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Nearby roost (West of Danube)		2 100	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
		4 700	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Roost west of Szabadszállás	26 November	660	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
		155	<i>Anser anser</i>
		110	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Danube Valley south of Baja	27 November	550	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Szeged-Fehértó	28 November	16 000	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
(morning flight)			
Kardoskút (evening flight)		26 500	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
		175	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
		57	<i>Anser anser</i>
Nagyatád region	1 December	940	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Balatonberény	2 December	5 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(roosts on ice)			
Counts in spring			
Tata Öreg-tó	28 February	40 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight)			
Tata (morning flight)	2 March	50 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Tata (morning flight)	5 March	43 500	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Kocs-Nagyigmánd	5 March	10 000	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
(evening flight)			

One more roost was found west of Komárom and a third near Kocs-Nagyigmánd some 14 km to the west of Tata. On 6 March a neck-banded *Anser fabalis* was observed at the main roost of Öreg-tó and a few hours later near Kocs-Nagyigmánd. Changes from one roost to another may be made frequently.

12 *Anser fabalis* were observed with neckbands fitted in the German Democratic Republic. Van den Bergh had seen three of them before in the Netherlands-Niederrhein. One of these (B 83) had been observed near Salmorth (Niederrhein) on 18 December 1980 and was seen again near Kocs-Nagyigmánd on 6 March 1981.

Tata appears to have far higher numbers during spring passage (over 50 000) than it has in autumn (35 000). This is conceivable as no geese were found in between 28 February and 6 March in the Balaton area and along the Danube south of Budapest. This might indicate that the Tata region is most favourable of the geese in spring, but it may also be less attractive in autumn due to the very intensive disturbance by shooting. Velencei-tó was not visited in March 1981.

Neusiedlersee	7 March	16 000 to 18 000	<i>A. fabalis</i>
Seewinkel			3 500 <i>A. albifrons</i>
			2 500 <i>A. anser</i>

Total by species in autumn 1980	
<i>Anser fabalis</i>	150 900
<i>Anser albifrons</i>	72 250
<i>Anser anser</i>	7 550

No doubt these counts do not give a true picture of the numbers present. In some areas only a proportion of the geese may have been found. In some cases a proportion may have been counted twice. The most important source of error seems that it is unlikely that the visit of the counting teams to a certain area coincided with the maximum number of geese in that area. The Kopaci rit for instance may have 50 000 *Anser fabalis* in November (*J. Mikuska pers. com.*). This is some 30 000 more than the number found there in the end of October but these 30 000 birds may have been counted somewhere in Hungary.

Moreover Kardoskút had a maximum of some 80 000 *Anser albifrons* from 10–13 November 1980 when there were 52 *Branta ruficollis* (*Sterbetz in litt.*). These figures are much higher than those of van den Bergh et al. near the end of the month, even if the Kardoskút count and that of Szeged-Fehértó are combined.

It seems very worthwhile to continue this type of observation in future years, if possible with better coordination.

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