Bar-headed Goose, *Anser indicus*

**Overview**

**Short description of Anser indicus, Bar-headed Goose**

Bar-headed goose is a typical Anser 'grey goose' in size and shape, with a pale greyish body, dark-tipped yellow bill, pale orange legs and a mainly white head. There is a dark bar from eye to eye across the upper nape and a second bar across the lower nape. No other goose show a similar head pattern, making the bar-headed goose distinctive even at long range.

**Description of Anser indicus, Bar-headed Goose status in GB**

Bar-headed geese are present in the wild in GB in small numbers and are most often seen as individuals in mixed flocks with other introduced geese, such as greylags. A few pairs nest in the wild in most years, but no breeding population is established in GB as yet.

**Habitat summary: Anser indicus, Bar-headed Goose**

Bar-headed geese occupy lowland waters and nearby meadows or arable farmland in invaded range. The species breeds in high-altitude zones of central Asia and winters by lowland lakes and rivers. Many migrate high over the Himalayas to reach their wintering zones, which are mainly in India and Pakistan. Bar-headed geese have unique physiological adaptations that enable them to migrate at altitudes of up to 10,175 m asl.

**Overview table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment:</th>
<th>Terrestrial and Freshwater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species status:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native range:</td>
<td>Mongolia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Jammu-Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan, West China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional type:</td>
<td>Herbivore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status in England:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<td>Status in Scotland:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status in Wales:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of first record:</td>
<td>Lancashire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of first record:</td>
<td>1980</td>
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</tbody>
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**Invasion history: Anser indicus, Bar-headed Goose**

**Origin**

The breeding range covers mountainous regions of central Asia in Mongolia, western China, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. From there, birds migrate to a winter range in the lowlands of the Indian subcontinent and southeast Asia. Movements from breeding grounds in western Mongolia across Tibet and the eastern Himalayas to eastern India have recently been tracked by satellite.

**First Record**
Bar-headed geese are known to have been present in GB since at least 1972 and were found breeding in the wild by 1989.

Pathway and Method
The bar-headed goose is very commonly kept in wildfowl collections. Intentional introductions of bar-headed geese for ornamental purposes have not been documented in GB but may be responsible for the presence of larger groups. Accidental introduction of bar-headed geese will have occurred wherever the species is kept in captivity.

Species Status
Little is recorded for the species in GB until 1991, when 85 free-flying birds were counted. The bar-headed goose has been introduced to several countries but has established a substantial breeding population only in the Netherlands, where 100–125 pairs are present. It is thought that, once a critical population level is reached, this species could become invasive across much of Europe.

Ecology & Habitat: *Anser indicus*, Bar-headed Goose

Dispersal Mechanisms
The sporadic nature of records in many parts of GB suggests that some long-distance movements may be occurring. Vagrancy from other European countries is believed to be responsible for sightings in Austria and Romania.

Reproduction
Bar-headed geese in their native range in central Asia nest at high altitude by saline and freshwater lakes and by rivers, sometimes singly but more usually in colonies estimated at over 1000 pairs. Nesting begins in early or mid May, with an incubation period of 27–30 days and a fledging period for young birds of 49–60 days. In captivity in Europe, nesting begins in mid April.

Known Predators/Herbivores
None known.

Resistant Stages
None known.

Habitat Occupied in GB
In GB, the species is found with other geese on lowland waters and nearby meadows or arable farmland.

Distribution: *Anser indicus*, Bar-headed Goose
Bar-headed geese have been recorded in many parts of lowland GB, north to Orkney. Breeding has been reported mainly from southern GB, with instances as far north as Greater Manchester and Nottinghamshire.

Impacts: *Anser indicus*, Bar-headed Goose

Environmental Impact
Introduced bar-headed geese interbreed readily with other geese but, as far as is known, do not produce fertile hybrids. Given the low abundance of this species in GB, it is likely that any ecosystem effects have so far been negligible.

Health and Social Impact
An outbreak of Avian Influenza H5N1 in western China in 2005 was responsible for the death of several thousand bar-headed geese. The outbreak spread north to Mongolia and may have been carried there by migrating bar-headed geese. This incident raised concern that this species could, in theory, carry the disease, which can be fatal to humans, to wetlands close to Indian cities.

Economic Impact
Bar-headed geese feed on agricultural land in India on crops such as barley, rice and wheat but no reports of agricultural damage are known from GB. The species is hunted along its migration flyways and eggs are also gathered for food at some breeding colonies.

References & Links: *Anser indicus*, Bar-headed Goose

Identification

**Biology, ecology, spread, vectors**


**Management and impact**


**General**
