

Data for Waterbirds at Buyr Nuur (Eastern Mongolia)

Oleg A. Goroshko

Daurisky State Nature Biosphere Reserve, Russia, e-mail: root@tasey.chita.ru and goroshko@cinr.chita.su

Information about birds of Buyr-Nuur Lake is very limited. This lake is located on the Mongolian-Chinese state border. During 19-20 July 2003 we made bird observations using a vehicle, binoculars (x8) and telescope (x35). We observed about 70% of the Mongolian part of the shore. Besides the territory closely adjoining the state border, we observed the lowest part of the valley near the mouth of the Khalkhin-Gol river. We also observed about 400 m along the river. The lake has almost fresh water and the water plant *Potamogeton crispus* grows there in large amounts. During our visit *P. crispus* had long stems up to 3 meters. The mouth of the Khalkhin-Gol river is covered by dense and high willow bushes and reeds.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, which nests on the bushes, is a very numerous breeding species at the mouth of the Khalkhin-Gol river. Chicks were big and about half of them were able to fly during our visit. Therefore we counted both adults and juveniles. At noon on 20 July the density of cormorants in the mouth was about 1200 birds (1000-1400) per each 100 m of the river valley. We estimated that about 30,000-96,000 cormorants were located in the mouth in total. During this day we recorded a huge flock (about 20,000-25,000 individuals) of feeding cormorants at the southern part of the lake and thousands of birds on all other parts of the lake that we were unable to count because of the large distance). Our observations are not a complete census, but a very approximate estimation of the total number of cormorants at Buyr-Nuur is about 50,000-160,000 birds.

Bittern *Ixobrychus sp.* We recorded two single adult birds flying over the mouth but we were unable to determine the species.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* are numerous breeding birds at the mouth. They nested mainly on the bushes. An approximate estimation of the total number (adults and juveniles) at Buyr-Nuur is about 3,000-20,000 birds.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*. We recorded 3 single adult birds at the mouth and found one nest (located on a bush) with 3 big chicks. It is the first

record of breeding of this species at Buyr-Nuur L.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*. We recorded 2 single adult birds at the mouth and found one nest (located on a bush) with 4 big chicks. It is the first record of breeding of this species at Buyr-Nuur.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*. 190 non-breeding adults were counted at the southern and south-western parts of Buyr-Nuur. 53% of them were moulting flight feathers. Moulting birds fed on the water near *P. crispus*, non moulting fed in the grass meadows near the lake. Greylag Geese did not make mixed flocks with Swan Geese but comprised single-species flocks of 20-70 individuals.

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*. Moulting Swan Geese gathered in huge flocks at the south-western part of Buyr-Nuur mainly near the big spit (N 47 41; E 117 36). The biggest flock recorded there comprised about 23,600 birds. We made 4 counts of this flock during 19-20 July. Breeding families and small groups of moulting non-breeding birds were distributed along the entire shore. Breeding geese were most numerous near the mouth of the Khalkhin-Gol river. All moulting and breeding geese were located on the water 10-300 m from the shore and were opportune for counting. We counted 29,056 non-breeding geese, 46 breeding adults and 108 goslings. The total estimated number is about 29,800 birds (28,470-31,960). The estimation is very cautious and probably understated. Almost all (more than 99.9%) of Swan Geese at the lake were moulting flight feathers and were unable to fly. They fed on leaves of *P. crispus*. The number of Swan Geese at Buyr-Nuur comprises more than half of the world population estimated at 50,000-60,000 birds (Wetlands International 2002). The high number of moulting Swan Geese at Buyr-Nuur is not typical and is probably related to the very bad forage conditions on the main part of the Daurian steppe territory in 2003 (Goroshko 2003).

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. 168 non-breeding adults were counted at the south-western part of Buyr-Nuur. All were moulting and flocked together with moulting non-breeding Swan Geese

near the big spit and were opportune for counting. Swans fed on the water near *P. crispus*.

Ducks were rare on Buyr-Nuur. At the mouth of the Khalkhin-Gol river we recorded 5 Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos* and 4 Wigeon *Anas penelope*. Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* were absent on Buyr-Nuur, but 100 birds were recorded at a small salty lake located close to Buyr-Nuur. At the same site 70 Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* were seen. On the shore of Buyr-Nuur we also recorded 2 Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, 2 Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, 1 Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, 8 Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, 5 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, about 800 Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, about 200 Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*, about 300 White-winged tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*, 32 Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, about 60 Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and 8 Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. All of these species were non-breeding, except for *Sterna hirundo* which may be breeding.

Buyr-Nuur is a very important site for birds especially for the globally threatened Swan Goose. There are no islands on Buyr-Nuur and so all of the geese are forced to roost and rest on the lake shores. Therefore the geese are very susceptible to disturbance. It is very important to protect Buyr-Nuur and limit human activity there.

References

- Wetlands International. 2002. *Waterfowl Population Estimates – Third Edition*. Wetlands International Global Series No. 12, Wageningen, The Netherlands, 226 pp.
- Goroshko O.A. 2003. 2003 – extremely unfavourable year for Swan Geese in Dauria trans-boundary region (Russia and Mongolia). - 2003 International Anatidae Symposium in East Asia & Siberia Region. Proceedings. Seosan, Korea: 83-92.