

# MARKING GREYLAG GOOSE *ANSER ANSER* WITH COLOUR NECKBANDS IN LATVIA – THE FIRST RESULTS

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**Abstract:** During the breeding seasons of 2021–2024, 55 greylag geese were marked with leg and neck bands (2 adults, 53 juveniles). Since then, 47 resighting records for 19 birds have been obtained. Before the start of the hunting seasons all resightings came from ringing sites in Latvia. Starting from mid-August birds appear to use Nemunas River delta region in Lithuania, from where resightings came from fish-ponds, a natural lake Kroku Lanka and from arable land. From September till December our geese have been reported from Poland, in October and November – from Germany. The resightings lie in SW direction from Latvia and up to 740 km from the ringing sites.

**Key words:** ringing, migration, staging

## Introduction

Greylag goose is a species with increasing regional population in Latvia. In 2013–2018 its population estimate was 200–500 pairs with 44 national breeding bird atlas squares of possible to proved breeding (K̄erus et al. 2021). Prior to this study only 8 greylag geese have been ringed in Latvia and no ring recoveries available. Exact wintering, staging and moulting sites of these birds are unknown.

## Material and methods

The first greylag goose broods in Latvia appear in mid- to late April. By late June – early July they have reached the age when leg size is fit enough for banding, but the birds are still flightless. Also, adults may be flightless at that time. Birds were 1) chased and caught with a dip-net or bare hands or 2) net lines were erected in the reedbeds (96 m total length, mesh size 50–70 mm) and checked every 3 hours.

Geese were marked with leg rings and plastic neck bands (height 55 mm, diameter 45 mm, yellow colour). The neck bands carried a 4-digit letter and number combination, colour black. Bird age and in 2021 also sex according to cloaca examination was registered.

The ringing sites were three NATURA sites and a smaller pond in western Latvia (Figure 1).

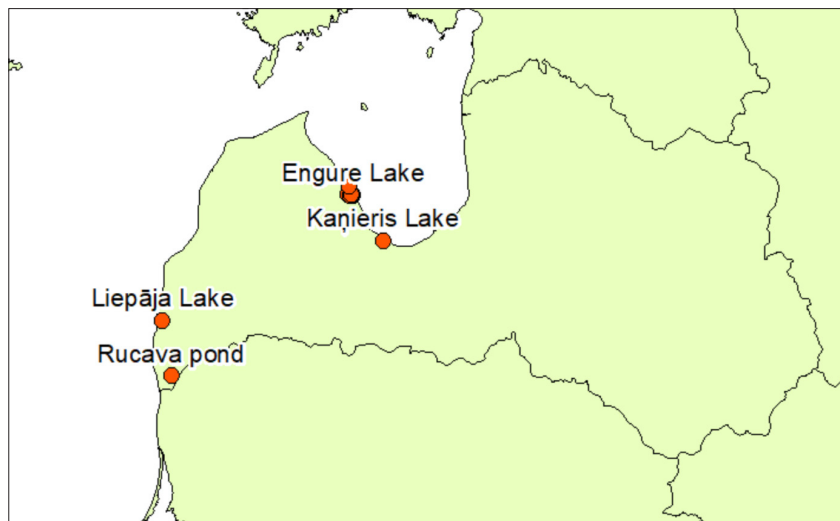


Figure 1. Location of the ringing sites in Latvia.

In total during breeding seasons 2021–2024, 55 birds were marked (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of geese marked at different sites in 2021–2024.

Ringing site	Year				Total
	2021	2022	2023	2024	
Engure Lake	14	1	8	9	32
Kaņieris Lake		1	1	4	6
Liepāja Lake				7	7
Rucava Pauguru pond				10	10
Total	14	2	9	30	55

## Results and discussion

### Resighting countries

Since the beginning of the study, 47 resightings of 19 individuals have been accumulated (Table 2). Till early August all resightings came from the ringing sites in Latvia.

Starting from mid-August birds use Nemunas River delta region in Lithuania, from where resightings come from fish-ponds, a natural lake Kroku Lanka and arable land. From September till December the marked geese have been reported from Poland (most records near seacoast but also up to 200 km inland), in October and November – from Germany (the Baltic Sea coastal lagoons and their vicinity). One family group has been recorded in October still in Latvia.

Resightings from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and following calendar years refer to three birds marked as juveniles in Lake Engure in 2021. A female spent her 1<sup>st</sup> winter, spring and 2<sup>nd</sup> summer in Lithuania (8 reports). One male was spotted twice during the 2<sup>nd</sup> summer in the hatching lake, October the 2<sup>nd</sup> autumn in Germany, and October the 4<sup>th</sup> autumn in Poland. Other male has been spotted at the native lake in spring of its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and in Poland during autumn of its 4<sup>th</sup> calendar year (Figure 3).

Table 2. Resightings of Greylag Geese ringed in Latvia in 2021–2024. Standard country codes used.

Year after ringing	Month	LV	LT	PL	DE	Total
1 <sup>st</sup>	July	5				5
	August	3	1			4
	September		1	1		2
	October	3	4	6	2	15
	November				3	3
	December			1		1
	Total 1 <sup>st</sup> cal. year	11	6	8	5	30
2 <sup>nd</sup>	February		2			2
	April	1	4			5
	May		1			1
	July	1				1
	August		1			1
	October				1	1
	Total 2 <sup>nd</sup> cal. year	2	8		1	11
3 <sup>rd</sup>	April	1				1
	Total 3 <sup>rd</sup> cal. year	1				1
4 <sup>th</sup>	October			4		4
	November			1		1
	Total 4 <sup>th</sup> cal. year			5		5
Total		14	14	13	6	47

### Migration distance

The resightings lie in SW direction and up to 740 km from the ringing sites in Latvia (Figure 2).

Studies from the neighbouring countries demonstrate longer travel distances. Birds from Estonia ringed in 1960ies had been found wintering in Austria (1000 km) and even Algeria (ca 3000 km from nesting site) (Kiscinsky 1979). Birds, nesting in Finland



## Departure time

Two birds were observed already away from Latvia in mid-August. In 2004–2023 waterfowl hunting season in Latvia began on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday of August. Thus in 2021 hunting began on August 14. Four days before this date one of our geese was present on Lake Engure. Four days later it was observed in Lithuania. The other bird has demonstrated similar migration pattern. Although until 2024 greylag goose season began only in September and there was no direct threat till that time, the hunting disturbance could have influenced the departure. The family group that was observed in Latvia still in October, originates from Lake Kaņieris – the ringing site with a complete hunting ban. The coincidence of the hunting disturbance and bird departure has been well marked in literature (Madsen & Fox 1995, Väänänen 2001, Adam et al. 2016, Kleinhenz & Koenig 2018).



*Figure 3.* Greylag Goose LV1C hatched in Engure Lake staging in Poland during its 4<sup>th</sup> autumn. Image courtesy: Bartosz Krąkowski.

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