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Observations of Bewick's Swans in southwest Siberia, Russia

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Abstract

Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* have been very rarely recorded in the southern part of the Urals and Western Siberia. In recent decades there have been no reliable visual records from this area. In October 2015, 2016 and 2017 we conducted waterfowl counts at some wetlands in the Kurgan (2015), Tyumen (2016) and Novosibirsk (2017) regions. All sites were located in the steppe and forest-steppe zones. Binoculars and 20–60x spotting scopes were used for observations and to count the birds. Bewick's Swans were found in the Kurgan and Novosibirsk Oblasts, but not in Tyumen.

Field observations

Kurgan Region. Field surveys were carried out in Kurtamysh District, 30–50 km south of Kurgan (54°32'N, 64°21'E) from 9–15 October 2015. Bewick's Swans were found at three lakes and we observed them every day from 10–14 October 2015.

On 10 October, 53 Bewick's Swans (35 adults; 18 juveniles) were present at Great Gor'koye Lake. The local ranger reported c. 12 Bewick's Swans (4 adults; 8 juveniles) on 11 October, but may have missed the others. On 12 October we counted a total of 60 Bewick's Swans (39 adults; 21 juveniles) at the site, separated into three groups. During our last visit to the lake (on 14 October), eight adult Bewick's Swans were recorded.

The second site, Grachinoe Lake, was 15 km to the northeast of Great Gor'koye Lake. Here, on the outskirts of Ostrova village, we observed a big mixed congregation of waterfowl including 44 Bewick's Swans (33 adults; 11 juveniles) on 11 October. Apart from the Bewick's Swans there were also 182 Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*, five Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* and eight White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons albifrons*, as well as many Wigeons *Anas penelope* and domestic

geese *Anser anser domesticus*. Like other birds in this flock, the Bewick's Swans appeared unafraid of people.

The third site was Great Donki Lake. On 13 October, we observed two flocks of Bewick's Swans flying at a height of 30–40 m over the lake. The first group of 22 adult Bewick's Swans moved southward in direction of Great Gor'koye Lake; the second group of 12 birds (of which three or four were juveniles) flew to the west.

On the basis of these observations, we suggest that the first and second sites held different birds, while the Bewick's Swans seen at Great Donki Lake might belong to either the first or second groups. Thus, at least 104 Bewick's Swans were observed at stopover sites in Kurtamysh District between 10–14 October 2015. Of these, 72 were adults and 32 (30.8%) were juveniles.

Tyumen Region. During 11–20 October 2016 we visited wetland and agricultural sites in the southeastern part of Tyumen Region (Sladkovsky District; 55°32'N, 70°20'E). No Bewick's Swan was found in the area.

Novosibirsk Region. The field survey from 10–19 October 2017 covered the southeast part of the region, focusing on Chistoozyorny District (54°43'N, 76°35'E). Bewick's Swans were recorded on two occasions. On 15 October we saw five Bewick's Swans (3 adults; 2 juveniles) at Repino Lake in Chistoozyorny District, and on 16 October we found two adult Bewick's Swans at Cheryomushnoye Lake, Chanovsky District.

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