

Anser indicus



Common name: Bar-headed goose

Local names: Hans, Rajhans (Hindi), Nangpa, Ngang-kar (Ladakhi)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Anseriformes

Family: Anatidae

Genus: *Anser*

Species: *indicus*

Profile:

The bar-headed goose is one of the world's highest-flying birds. It is a pale grey bird with brownish-grey body and white under-parts. The two black bars crossing the nape give the bird its name. The face and neck are white while the legs and bill are orange. The adult is 71-75 cm in length and has a wingspan of about 170 cm. Sexes are alike, though the males are heavier (1.6-2.2 kg) than the females (1.4 kg). Compared to other species of geese, it is observed to have a slightly larger wing area for its weight. This is believed to help the bird in flying high. Scientists have found that haemoglobin in the blood of this species has higher affinity to oxygen in comparison to other geese, thus enabling them to breathe efficiently in low oxygen conditions. During breeding season, the bird develops a soft mustard facial colouring, giving it a clownish expression. The juveniles look similar to the adults but are slightly paler. The call is a nasal musical honk. The bird is often kept in captivity.

Lifespan: Data unavailable

Distribution: The bar-headed goose has a large range, with an estimated global extent of occurrence of 100,000-1,000,000 km² (IUCN). The species is native to China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is an introduced species in Canada and occurs as a vagrant in countries like Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Guam. The species has breeding grounds in Central Asia (northern India, southeast Russia and western China). During winter, the bird migrates over the Himalayas into India, northern Burma and the wetlands of Pakistan.

Population: 52,000-60,000 individuals (Wetlands International 2002) (Figures are for wild population only)

Behaviour: The bar-headed goose is a gregarious species and congregates in large colonies near mountain lakes during breeding season. In winter they prefer cultivated areas, feeding on wheat, barley and rice crops from the agricultural fields. They nest mainly in the Tibetan plateau. The nest is a depression in the ground, thickly lined with down feathers. The eggs are ivory coloured and thick shelled. Intra-specific brood parasitism is noticed where lower rank females attempt to lay their eggs in the nests of higher ranking females. The female alone incubates the eggs.

- **Diet:** The bird feeds on an almost vegetarian diet of grass, wheat, barley, rice, aquatic plants, tubers and tender shoots.
- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: May-July; Incubation Period: 27-30 days; Clutch Size: 2-8 eggs; Fledging period: 53 days

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Least Concern
 2. CITES 2008: Not listed

- **Threats:**
 1. Large-scale hunting in breeding areas
 2. Drainage of wetlands

- **Conservation practices:**

Non-existent