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The Bewick's Swan (Cygnus bewickii): expansion of the Asian populations to the west. Is this true?

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Over the past 15 years, there has been a decrease by 39.2% observed in the numbers of Bewick's Swans in the northern European wintering sites. At the same time, on the nesting grounds, since the mid-1980's, a rapid numbers increase has been noted. We examine how the opposite trends in the numbers of the Bewick's Swan in the Russian tundra and in the northern European wintering sites are related. In 2014–2017, we conducted aerial surveys and estimated the numbers of Bewick's Swans and the number of cygnets in the broods across the entire breeding range of the northern European population, in Jamal, the Baydaratskaya Bay, the Dvuobye and the Gydan Peninsula. The numbers growth in the nesting areas is hypothesised to be associated with the penetration of birds of the Asian populations further to the west. Our counts data confirm that the swans from the eastern part of the Nenetsky Autonomous Okrug (NAO) can form congestions in the Baydaratskaya Bay, whence they can migrate through the Dvuobye to other wintering areas. Telemetry data show that birds fly from the Baydaratskaya Bay in a very wide front, but do not fly to northern Europe. We assume that the part of the birds living in the NAO is the swans of Asian origins that expand their ranges to the west and reach the breeding range of the northern European population.