

# WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

## survey results 2008/09

### Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

## 1. Abundance

Coordinated spring and autumn censuses of the Greenland White-fronted Goose were carried out in Great Britain and Ireland for the 27th consecutive winter. Censuses were organised by the Greenland White-fronted Study in Britain and by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland

Coverage in Britain was complete, except for Jura; although no were birds were seen here prior to the census in February. Totals of 12,159 and 12,506 Greenland White-fronted Geese were recorded in autumn 2008 and spring 2009, respectively. The autumn total comprised nine birds in England, 61 in Wales and 12,089 in Scotland, of which 6,783 were found on Islay. In spring, nine were recorded in England, 59 in Wales and 12,438 in Scotland, with 6,429 of these birds seen on Islay. The spring count for Islay is the mean of counts undertaken over two consecutive days. There was a large difference between the total number recorded during these counts, which may suggest an under-representation of the actual numbers present on island and hence under-estimates the total British population size.

Complete coverage of Ireland was also achieved. A total of 10,515 and 10,657 were recorded in autumn and spring, respectively, of which 8,100 and 8,034 were recorded in Wexford. Compared with spring 2007, the flock at Wexford had increased in size (7,536 in 2007), as had that at Lough Foyle/Swilly, which holds the second largest concentration of Whitefronts in Ireland (1,107 and 1,157 in 2007 and 2008, respectively).

Combining the results for Britain and Ireland from the spring census gives an overall population estimate of 23,163.

Autumn and spring census counts in Britain and Ireland in 2008/09

Region	Autumn Census	Spring Census
Orkney	58	71
Caithness	229	350
North east Scotland	6	5
Western Isles	267	264
Lochaber/North Argyll	1,163	1,633
South Argyll	3,279	3,310
Islay	6,783	6,429
Dumfries & Galloway	304	375
other sites in Scotland	0	1
Wales	61	59
England	9	9
<b>Britain total</b>	<b>12,159</b>	<b>12,506</b>
Wexford	n/a	8,034
Rest of Ireland	n/a	2,623
<b>Ireland total</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>10,657</b>
<b>Population estimate</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>23,163</b>

## 2. Breeding success

A total of 6,795 birds were aged at 22 sites in Britain during winter 2008/09 and brood size was assessed for a total of 164 families. The overall percentage of young was 10.7% and mean brood size was 2.79 young per successful pair. The percentage of young varied considerably between wintering sites, ranging from 0-26% young. The proportion of young amongst flocks on Islay was slightly higher than the previous winter, and above that for the rest of Britain (11.52% on Islay compared with 9.9% for the rest of Britain).

Age assessments were made at six sites in Ireland, where a total of 5,201 birds were aged and brood size information was collected for a total of 125 families. The overall percentage of young was 10.2% and breeding success was highly variable between sites, ranging from 5.5-24.3% young. The majority of birds were aged at Wexford, where the percentage young was recorded as 10.2% (n = 4,797). Similarly, the proportion of young reported amongst flocks in the rest of Ireland was 10.4%. Overall mean brood size was 3.27 young per successful pair, the highest being recorded at Wexford (3.33, n = 117), whilst elsewhere in Ireland was low (2.38, n = 8).

Percentage of young and mean brood size during winter 2008/09

	% young (n)	Mean brood size (n)
Islay	11.5 (3,220)	3.46 (35)
Britain excluding Islay	9.9 (3,575)	2.60 (129)
<b>Britain overall</b>	<b>10.7 (6,795)</b>	<b>2.79 (164)</b>
Wexford	10.2 (4,797)	3.33 (117)
rest of Ireland	10.4 (404)	2.38 (8)
<b>Ireland overall</b>	<b>10.2 (5,201)</b>	<b>3.27 (125)</b>

## 3. Discussion

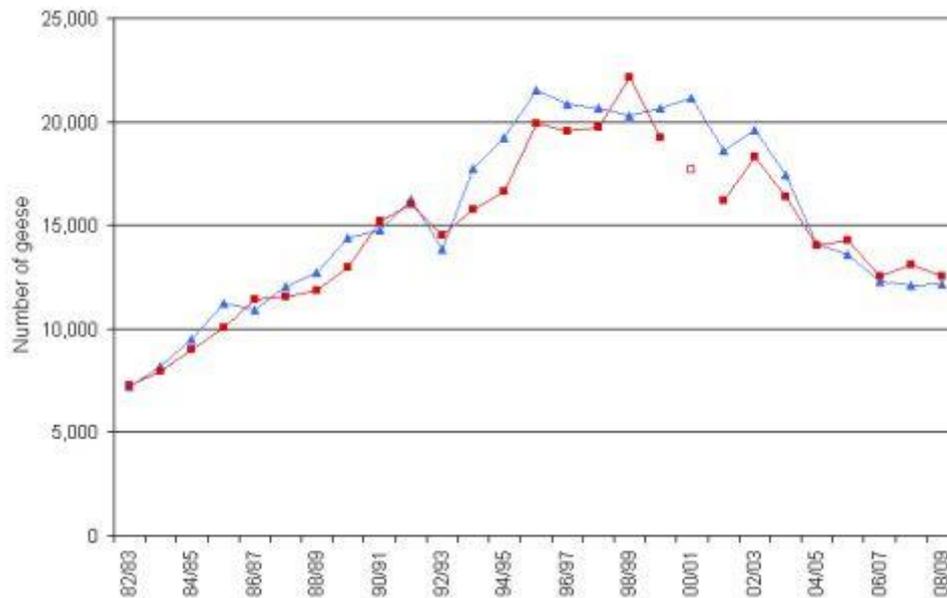
Complete coverage of Britain and Ireland in spring 2009 provided the fourth overall population estimate since 1999. The total estimate was only fractionally lower than in spring 2008 (23,208) but notably lower than in spring 2006 (24,895), 2002 (26,412) and 1999 (35,573).

In 2008/09, numbers in Britain were similar to the previous winter, with the autumn count being only marginally higher than in 2007 (12,122), and the spring count less than 5% lower than in 2008 (13,113).

In spring 2009, numbers in Ireland were higher than the last complete census in 2008 (10,095). Numbers in Wexford were over 5% higher than recorded during the previous spring, whilst counts elsewhere in Ireland were also slightly up compared with the previous year.

Breeding success in Britain and Ireland was slightly better than in the previous season, with several sites reporting higher than 10% young amongst flocks.

Since 2006, Whitefront numbers have remained relatively stable, following the rapid decline that occurred since the peak in spring 1999. It would, therefore, seem likely that the ban of autumn hunting in Iceland (the decision to do so was made in 2006) has contributed to this stabilising of numbers, by removing an additional source of mortality during a long period of poor breeding success. The overall trend of the population does, however, continue to be downward.



Counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Britain, 1982/83-2008/09, showing autumn (open triangles) and spring (filled squares) census results for each season. Note the missing value for spring 2001 (unfilled square) on account of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease that year (from Fox *et al* 2009).

In February 2009, a Greenland White-fronted Goose International Workshop was held on Islay to discuss the future conservation of the sub-species. Further information about the discussions and outcomes from the workshop can be found in the 2008/09 International Census of Greenland White-fronted Geese report (GWGC reports) and on the GWFG - Conservation website .

## 4. References

Fox, TD, I Francis & A Walsh. 2009. *Report of the 2008/2009 International Census of Greenland White-fronted Geese*. Greenland White-fronted Goose Study. Kalo

This report should be cited as:

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# Goose & Swan Monitoring