

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2009/10

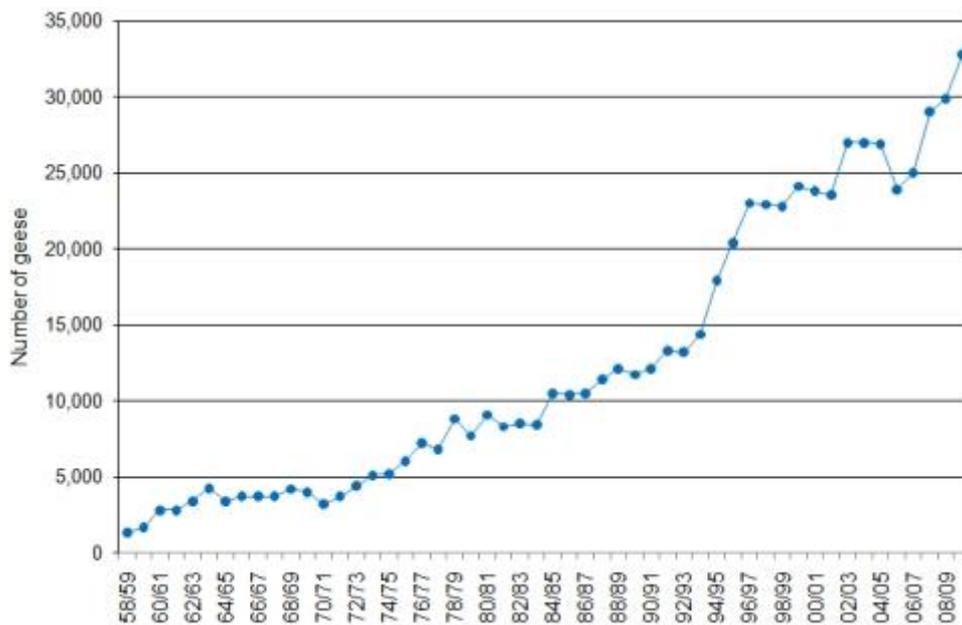
Svalbard Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

1. Abundance

The first Svalbard Barnacle Geese recorded on the Solway were 36 birds on 16 September on the estuary off the WWT Caerlaverock reserve. From 30 September to 11 June, 24 coordinated counts were carried out on both the north (from Cummertrees to Wigtown) and south (Rockcliffe to Grune) sides of the estuary.

Total counts rose rapidly from 1,787 on 30 September to 29,170 one week later. Numbers then fluctuated, as in previous years, mainly in relation to count visibility and goose dispersal. The last birds recorded on the saltmarsh at WWT Caerlaverock was a flock of 16 birds on 28 April (although a single, probably injured, bird remained for at least a week after) and at RSPB Mersehead a flock of 32 remained until the evening of 4 May. As in previous years, up to half the population was residing on Rockcliffe Marsh, Cumbria by the beginning of May, prior to departure, where they stayed until mid-May. On 12 May, just under 15,000 were recorded, followed by mass departures that evening and over the following few days, with 2,250 remaining until 19 May and 16 recorded on 31 May.

As a precaution against the possibility of some of the birds having been counted twice, an adopted total for the population is usually derived by averaging those counts within 10% of the maximum recorded during the winter. In 2009/10 the counts of 31,685 on 28 October and 34,070 (the maximum count recorded) on 16 December fulfil this criterion and are thus averaged to produce an adopted population total of 32,800 Barnacle Geese (rounded to the nearest 100). This is an increase of nearly 10% on the adopted population estimate for 2008/09 (29,900).



Total number of Svalbard Barnacle Geese on coordinated Solway counts during 2009/10 (16 geese were observed on 31 May 2010 and one on 11 June 2010).

2. Breeding success

Age counts were undertaken on the Inner Solway from October 2009 to January 2010, from WWT Caerlaverock in the east to RSPB Mersehead in the west. A total of 14,423 geese were sampled from 18 flocks, with the proportion of young ranging from 1.8% to 11.8%. The overall percentage young was 5.1%, this being slightly lower than in 2008/09 (8.7%) and also the previous ten-year mean ($7.8\% \pm 1.4$ SE), thus representing a below average breeding season.

Across the same area, brood size was recorded for 99 families and the mean brood size per successful pair was 1.8 goslings (ranging from 1-3 young). This is also slightly down on the previous winter (2.0 young per successful pair), although slightly higher than previous ten-year mean (1.91 ± 0.12 SE). A family with at least four, possibly five, goslings was noted during ring reading observation periods. Large families, however, with more than three goslings were notable by their absence in winter 2009/10.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring