

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2012/13

East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

1. Abundance

The abundance of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in the UK during 2012/13 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented in survey reports that are available on the WeBS website.

2. Breeding success

Two age assessments of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese were carried out in October 2012 at Fenham Flats, Lindisfarne, Northumberland. The largest coordinated count of 130 birds aged contained ten juveniles within the flock (7.6%); no brood size data were collected (Figure 1). These counts were part of the annual flyway-wide assessment of breeding success, coordinated by Preben Clausen in Denmark. In Denmark, 1,369 birds were aged, with 10.4% young and a mean brood size of 2.58 (n=36). Combining these data gives an overall estimate of 10.0% young in the population. Later in November, higher proportions of young were found in a flock seen several times at Fenham Mill, Lindisfarne, with up to 46 goslings in a flock of 310 birds (14.8%) and even higher proportions of young in some smaller flocks, suggesting there may have been an influx of families later in the winter. However, it is known that family groups tend to cluster together, and the large combined October 2012 samples from both sides of the North Sea will be used as the official value in the monitoring scheme.

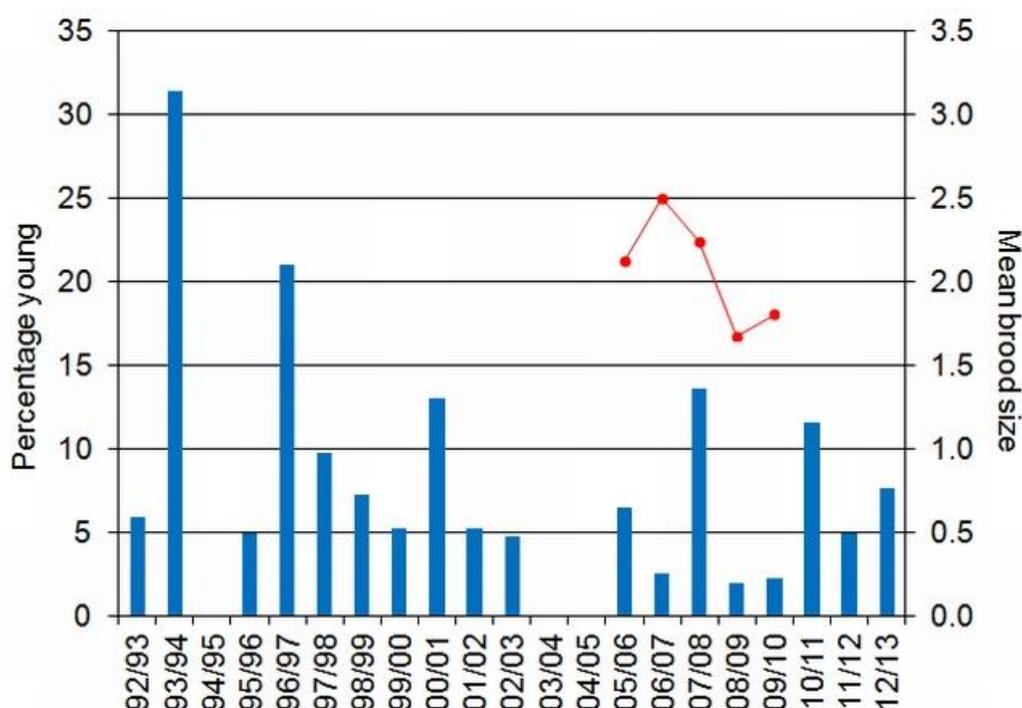


Figure 1. Percentage of young (blue circles) and mean brood size (red triangles) of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese at Lindisfarne, 1992/93 – 2012/13. Note; no data were collected in 1994/95, 2003/04 or 2004/05.

3. Discussion

Internationally coordinated surveys suggested that the population of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese had fallen to below 6,000 birds in spring 2012, whilst the October 2012 count gave an updated population estimate of 6,800 birds (P. Clausen pers. comm.). Britain supports around half of the total population (almost all at Lindisfarne), though numbers fluctuate between years, with Denmark supporting the remainder. Low breeding success in this population is increasingly common and a cause for concern, but the reasons for this are not well understood.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring