

# WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2016/17

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

### 1. Abundance

The abundance of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in the UK during 2016/17 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

### 2. Breeding success

No results for 2015/16 season were available at the time of reporting in summer 2016. However, data received since showed that of 145 geese aged at Lindisfarne (Northumberland) in October 2015 (the largest of the samples assessed), 21.4% were young birds (Figure 1), this being 15.2% higher than the previous year (6.3%). No brood size data were collected in 2015/16.

In 2016, age assessments were undertaken at Lindisfarne in November and December. The largest sample was recorded in December, when 300 birds were aged with the flock comprising 26.7% young (Figure 1), which is 5.3% higher than for the 2015/16 season. No brood size data were collected in 2016/17.

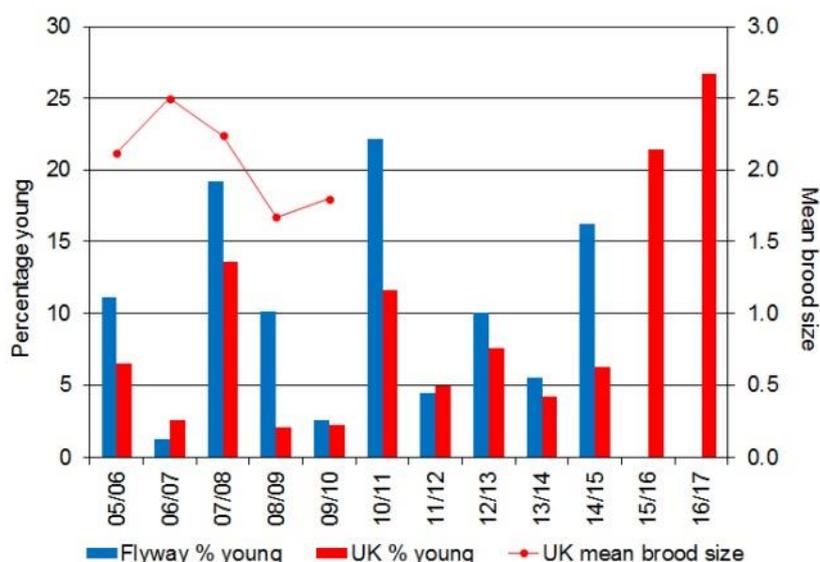


Figure 1. Percentage of young and mean brood size of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in Britain, and the percentage young for the flyway population, 2005/06–2016/17. No brood size data has been recorded since 2009/10. (Data for the flyway provided by P. Clausen)

### 3. Discussion

Results from age assessments of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese wintering in Britain indicate that breeding success was markedly higher in 2015 and 2016 than in the previous decade (ten-year mean 7.6% young  $\pm 2.64$  SE; 2006/07–2015/16). The pattern in breeding success amongst geese wintering in Britain mirrors the results of assessments made elsewhere along the flyway for the population as a whole, with an improvement seen since 2013/14 (Figure 1).

During the mid-2000s, a series of years of below average reproductive success and reduced recruitment in the East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Goose population was noted. However, this has been compensated by three relatively good breeding years recently, which in combination with relatively mild winters and consequent high survival has contributed to an increase in population size (Clausen & Craggs 2017).

It is thought that a major recovery of *Zostera* supplies in Nibe-Gjøf Bredning, Denmark after 2012 (Balsby *et al.* 2017), which is by far the most important current wintering site and spring-staging area (holding >60% of the flyway-population in winter and spring), may in fact also contribute to the very recent rapid recovery, because the *Zostera* would safeguard both better pre-winter and spring-fattening compared to alternative food resources (Clausen *et al.* 2012, Inger *et al.* 2008), and therefore potentially contribute to improved winter survival and successful breeding. The extent of *Zostera* at Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve (Fenham Flats, Holy Island Sands and Budle Bay) also continues to increase (Clausen & Craggs 2017).

#### 4. Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to Andrew Craggs for carrying out age assessments at Lindisfarne and to Preben Clausen for providing information from other areas of the flyway.

#### 5. References

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## Goose & Swan Monitoring