

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2017/18

East Canadian High Arctic Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

1. Abundance

In autumn 2017, the 22nd coordinated count of the East Atlantic High Arctic population of Light-bellied Brent Goose was organised by the Irish Brent Goose Research Group. Counts were undertaken in Iceland, Ireland, Britain and France, with good coverage of all major sites achieved.

A total of 35,042 geese was recorded, which is 4.8% lower than in 2016 (36,811 birds) (Figure 1). The majority of birds at the time of the census were in Ireland (34,164), with the largest concentration recorded at Strangford Lough, Northern Ireland (26,635). Surveys in Iceland recorded a total of 619 geese, with the remainder of the population (259 birds) in Britain and France.

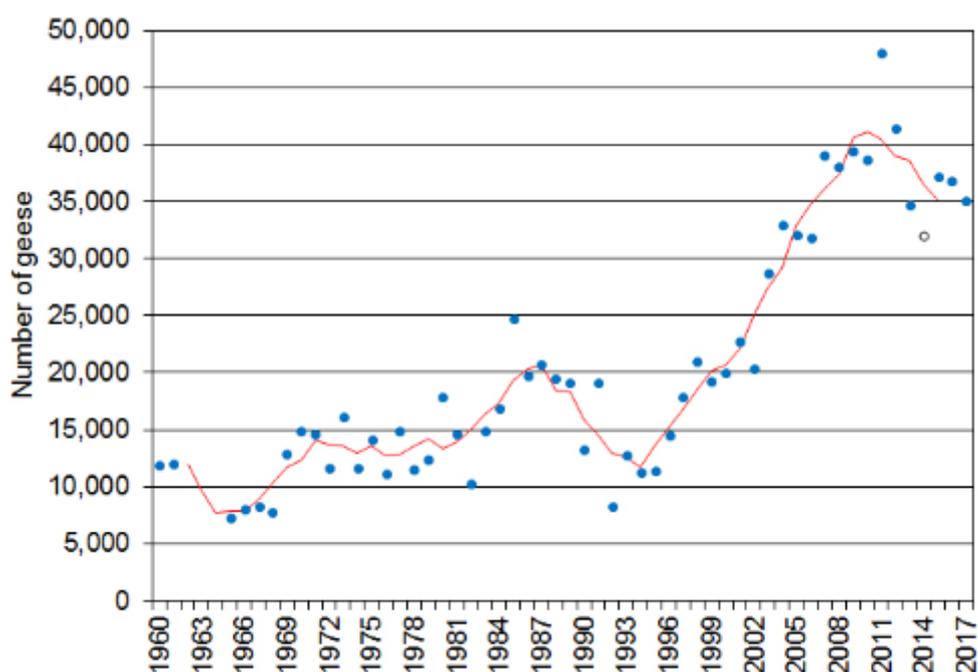


Figure 1. Annual census-derived estimates of Canadian Light-bellied Brent Goose population size, 1961–2017. Five-year running mean shown as red line (e.g. mean for 2011 is from population estimates for 2009–2013). The open circle in 2014 represents a likely undercount due to a lack of coverage in Iceland.

2. Breeding success

Age assessments collected in 2017/18 suggest that the Canadian Light-bellied Brent Geese had a poor breeding season in 2017.

A sample of 17,184 geese were aged, representing 49% of the 2017 population estimate, of which only 140 (0.8%) were identified as young birds (Figure 2). This is considerably lower than the previous ten-year mean (10.2 % for 2007/08–2016/17) and amongst the lowest recorded since records began. The mean brood size was, however, only slightly lower than the previous ten-year average (2.50 0.25 for 2007/08–2016/17) with 2.05 young per successful pair recorded for the 60 broods assessed (Figure 2).

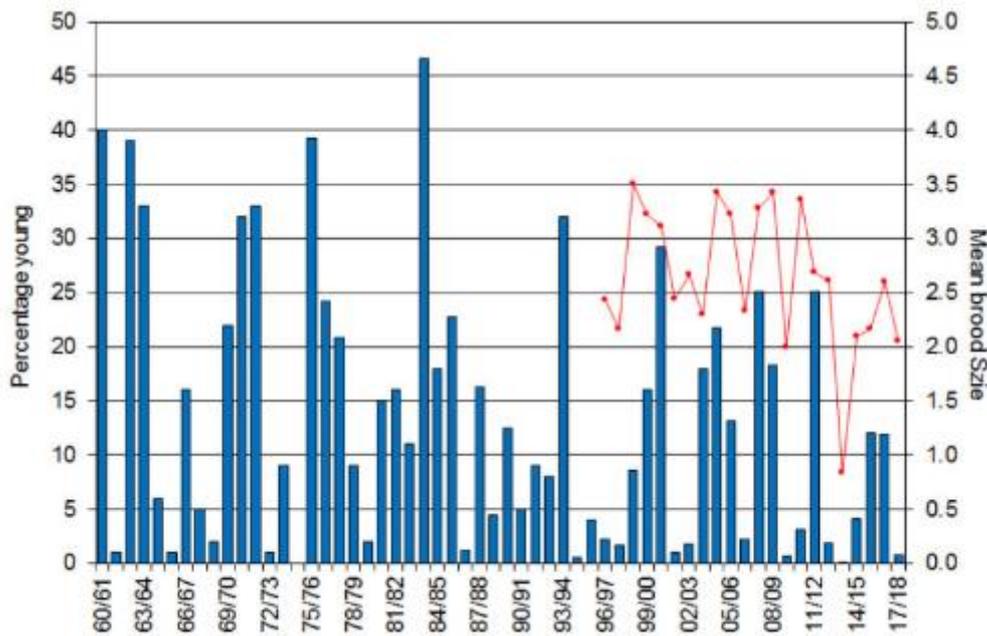


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of Canadian Light-bellied Brent Geese, 1960/61–2017/18.

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