

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2018/19

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

1. Abundance

The abundance of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in the UK during 2018/19 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

2. Breeding success

Age assessments of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese are undertaken annually at Lindisfarne (Northumberland), the key site for these geese in Britain. In September 2018, a total of 1,393 birds were aged of which only 11 were juveniles (0.8%). A second assessment was undertaken later in the winter, which allowed for any birds arriving later in the season (which could include families) to be assessed: five smaller flocks were assessed in January/February 2019, and of the 746 birds aged in total, 5.9% were young birds. Results from this second age assessment were used as the estimate of breeding success for the birds wintering in Britain (Figure 1).

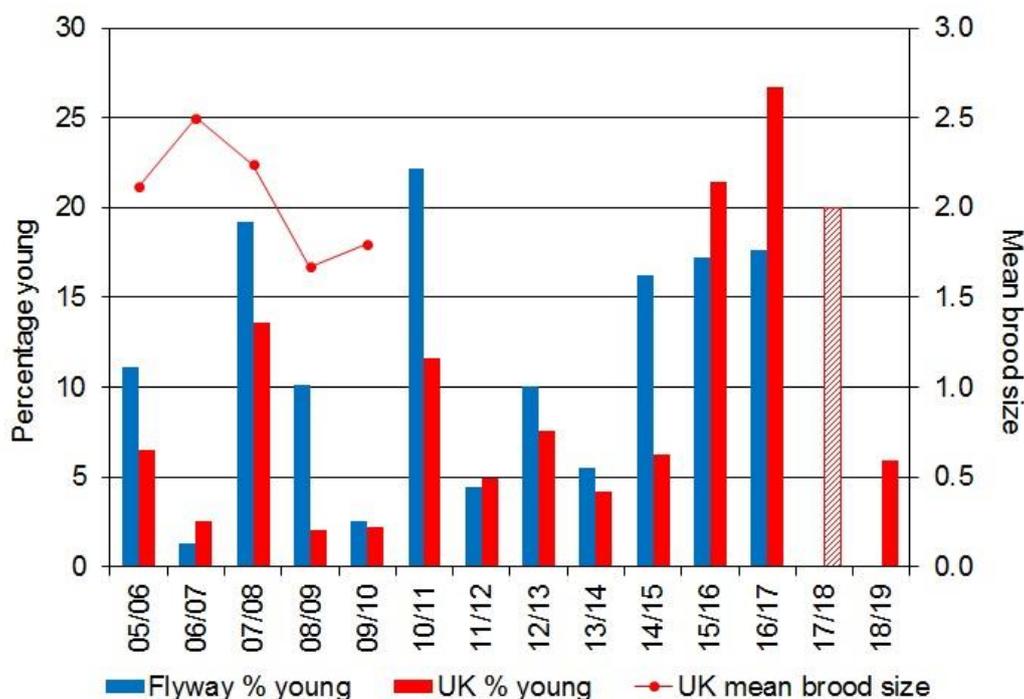


Figure 1. Percentage of young and mean brood size of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in Britain, and the percentage young for the flyway population, 2005/06–2018/19. Flyway data are still being collated for 2017/18 and 2018/19. Note, only a small sample size was assessed in the UK in 2017/18 and the data are not thought to be representative.

3. Discussion

Results from age assessments of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese wintering in Britain indicate that breeding success was lower in 2018 than the previous year; however, the sample size in 2017 was thought to be too small to produce any meaningful result. Therefore, when compared with 2015/16 and 2016/17 when productivity was reported as good the 2018/19 result indicates a poor breeding year (Figure 1), and indeed, it was lower than the previous ten-year mean (10.7% young \pm 2.81 SE; 2008/09–2017/18).

At the time of writing, data from elsewhere along the flyway were still being collated so an estimate of breeding success for the population as a whole could not be presented (see Figure 1 for previous results). However, an assessment of four flocks found at four locations in Denmark did reveal that of the 658 birds aged, 2.0% were young birds.

Whilst it is usual for smaller flocks to hold slightly higher proportions of families, the results from Britain and Denmark do suggest that the population had a poor breeding season in 2018, and possibly one of the poorest on record since 1980 when the annual assessments began (P. Clausen pers. comm.)

4. Acknowledgements

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Goose & Swan Monitoring