

WWT/JNCC/NatureScot Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2020/21

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese in the UK during 2020/21 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

2. Breeding success

In 2020/21, the breeding success of European White-fronted Geese wintering in Britain was assessed amongst flocks at WWT Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) only. Due to the assorted restrictions in place as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, geese were not checked at any other locations.

Overall, 161 geese were aged, of which, 37 (23.0%) were young birds. Compared with previous years' data, collected at various sites (see previous results), the 2020/21 result is higher than the previous winter (19.1% young) and slightly higher than the previous ten-year mean (2010/11–2019/20, 22.7% \pm 2.31 SE) (Figure 1).

When comparing data for WWT Slimbridge only, the 2020/21 result is notably higher than that for 2019/20 (14.2% young) and slightly higher than the previous ten-year mean (2010/11–2019/20; 21.4% \pm 1.60 SE) (Figure 2). Brood size assessments were also undertaken at WWT Slimbridge, with an overall mean brood size of 1.54 young per successful pair recorded for the 24 families assessed (Figure 2). Unlike the percentage young, this result is lower than that recorded in 2019/20 (2.5 young per successful pair) and also the previous ten-year mean (2010/11–2019/20; 2.33 \pm 0.06 SE).

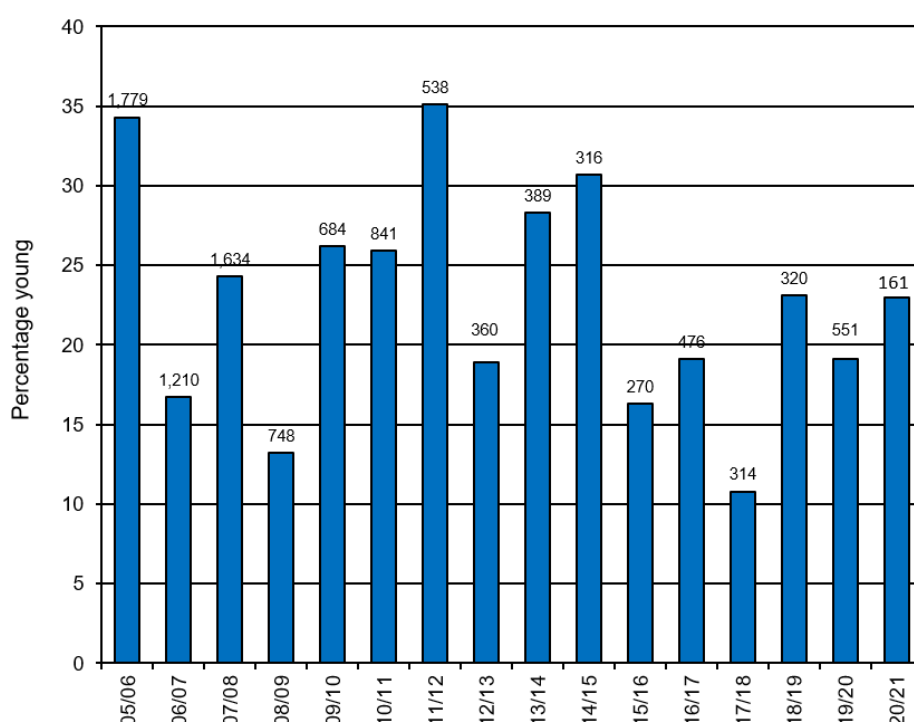


Figure 1. The percentage of young for European White-fronted Geese in Britain, 2005/06–2020/21. The sample size of the number of birds aged is given above the column.

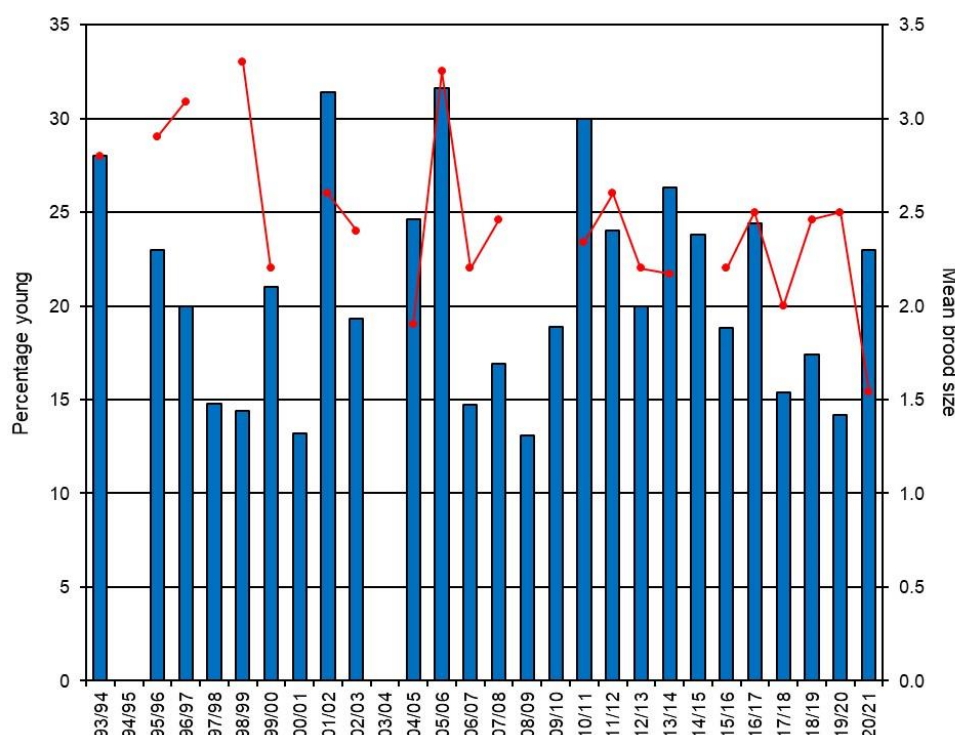


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue column) and mean brood size (red line) of European White-fronted Geese recorded at WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, where data have been collected regularly, 1993/94–2020/21. No data were collected during the winters of 1994/95 or 2003/04.

3. Discussion

Results from the 2020/21 surveys in Britain suggest that European White-fronted Geese wintering at WWT Slimbridge experienced a successful breeding season in 2020, although families contained fewer young, on average, than recorded in previous years.

Similarly, data from across the flyway indicate that the population as a whole experienced a good breeding season. Based on a total sample of more than 300,000 individuals aged in Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium and the UK, 20.7% of the birds recorded amongst flocks were young (first-winter), this being the highest percentage recorded since 2005. As is usual, the percentage of young was highest in countries on the southwest of the wintering range: Belgium (30.0% young) and Britain (23.0%).

In 2020, conditions on the breeding grounds in Arctic Russia were seemingly good for breeding geese. Reports from monitoring stations (Soloviev & Tomkovich 2020) suggest that the weather was good, with many areas experiencing above average temperatures for the time of year, and rodents were reported in abundance at some monitoring stations: in years with higher rodent numbers, predators, such as Arctic foxes, are able to exploit this resource and prey less on eggs and young goslings.

4. Acknowledgements

As always, our thanks go to the reserve staff at WWT Slimbridge for their help in collecting age assessment records and also to our colleagues at SOVON, The Netherlands, for providing the international data.

5. References

Soloviev, M. & P.S. Tomkovich. 2020. *Arctic Birds: an international breeding conditions survey*. Online database: <http://www.arcticbirds.net/>. Accessed 08/06/2021.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring