

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2017/18

British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The abundance of British Greylag Geese in Britain during 2017/18 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

Numbers at key sites in Scotland

Annual monitoring of the whole British Greylag Goose population is not undertaken, but annual counts have been carried out in four key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides), Tiree/Coll (Inner Hebrides) and Harris/Lewis (Outer Hebrides) in some years.

In 2017, no counts were undertaken in Orkney, nor in Harris/Lewis. On Tiree, the late summer (August 2017) count totalled 2,039 geese (Figure 1), a 13.5% decrease compared to the previous year. On the Uists, 5,268 Greylag Geese were counted in the early September census (Figure 1), a decrease of 20.4% on the previous year, but this was after shooting had started in early August. During a second count in late February 2018, 4,892 geese were counted.

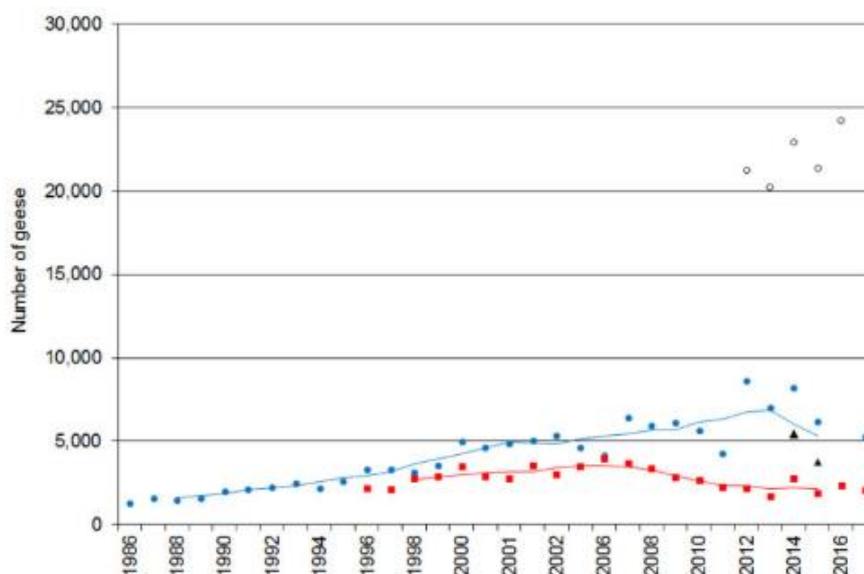


Figure 1. Late summer counts of British Greylag Geese on the Uists (blue circles), Tiree (red squares), Orkney (black open symbols) and Harris/Lewis (black triangles) 1986 to 2017. Five-year running means shown as lines.

2. Breeding success

Estimates of annual breeding success of British Greylag Geese is not undertaken at a representative range of sites, but have been carried out in four key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides), Tiree/Coll (Inner Hebrides) and Harris/Lewis (Outer Hebrides) in some years.

In 2017, no age counts were undertaken in Orkney, nor in the Outer Hebrides. Breeding success on Tiree was estimated at 37.6% young in late summer flocks ($n=1,810$), with a mean brood size of 2.45 young per successful pair ($n=278$) (Figure 2).

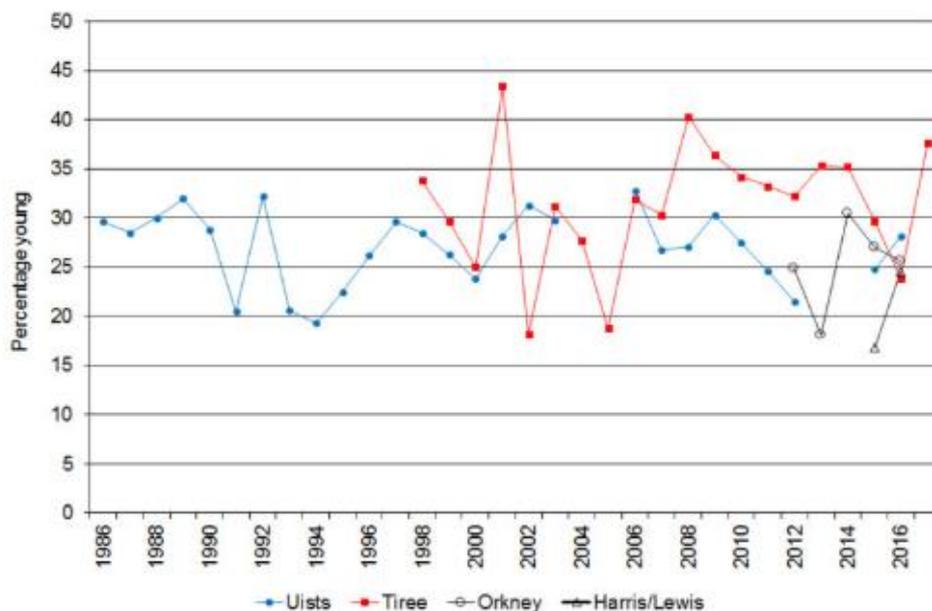


Figure 2. The percentage of young British Greylag Geese recorded on the Uists (blue circles) 1986–2016 (no data were collected in 2004, 2005, 2013 or 2014), on Tiree (red squares) 1998–2017, on Orkney (black open symbols) 2012–2016 and on Harris/Lewis (black triangles) 2015–2016.

3. Discussion

The long-term increase in the abundance of British Greylag Geese in Scotland led to calls to control numbers in key areas where the geese interacted with agricultural economic interests. Three areas in Scotland were chosen for pilot adaptive management schemes (Orkney, the Uists and Tiree/Coll) and these areas have been subject to recent licensed shooting during the close season as well as an increase in shooting during the open season. In 2015, the management scheme was extended to Harris/Lewis.

The number of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in September 2017 (5,268) was 20.4% lower than the previous year. Shooting there appears to have led to a stabilisation in numbers with a slight decrease in the most recent two years. The goal of the pilot management scheme on the Uists is to bring the summer population down to 3,600 to 4,400 birds (SNH *in litt.*). Numbers counted on Tiree in late August 2017 (2,039) were 13.5% lower than the previous year. The current peak counts of Greylag Geese on Tiree, at any time of the year, are just over a half of what they were in 2006. Under the management scheme, the target population range for Greylag Geese is of 1,350 to 1,650 birds on Tiree and 300 to 550 birds on Coll (SNH *in litt.*). No counts were undertaken on Harris/Lewis nor on Orkney in summer 2017, so a comparison with previous years is not possible.

4. Acknowledgements

Goose and age counts from Tiree were kindly provided by John Bowler, and counts on the Uists were provided by SNH.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring