

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2011/12

British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

WeBS

The abundance of British Greylag Geese during 2011/12 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS); the results are expected to become available in 2013.

The latest results, for 2010/11, have been published in Holt *et al.* 2012.

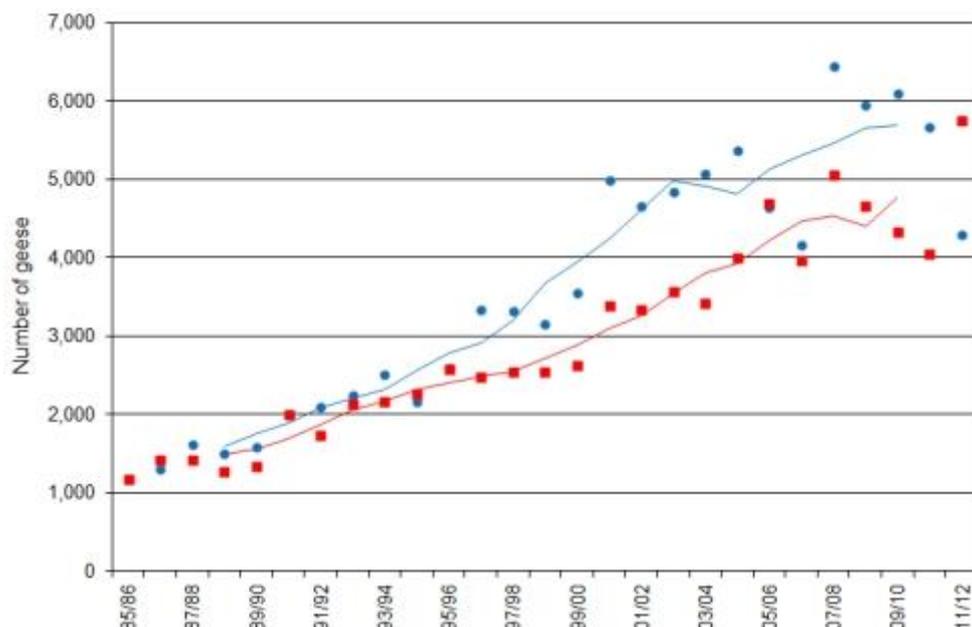
In 2010/11, a British maximum of 39,448 was recorded in October representing a decrease of 1.5% compared to the previous year (Holt *et al.* 2012).

Monitoring at key sites

As well as the WeBS counts, annual monitoring is carried out at two key sites: Uists, Outer Hebrides and Tiree, Inner Hebrides.

Annual monitoring of all British Greylag Geese is not undertaken, but annual counts and breeding success estimates are conducted at two key areas within northwest Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely the Uists (Outer Hebrides) and on Tiree (Inner Hebrides).

Between the 1980s and the mid 2000s, the number of birds at these two locations steadily increased, although the number on the Uists now shows signs of levelling and, on Tiree, numbers are steadily decreasing. A total of 4,292 Greylag Geese was counted on the Uists in late August 2011, a decrease of 24% on the August count in the previous year. However, the weather was poor on the count weekend and the count was considered an underestimate. This is borne out by the count in late February 2012, which found 5,742 geese.



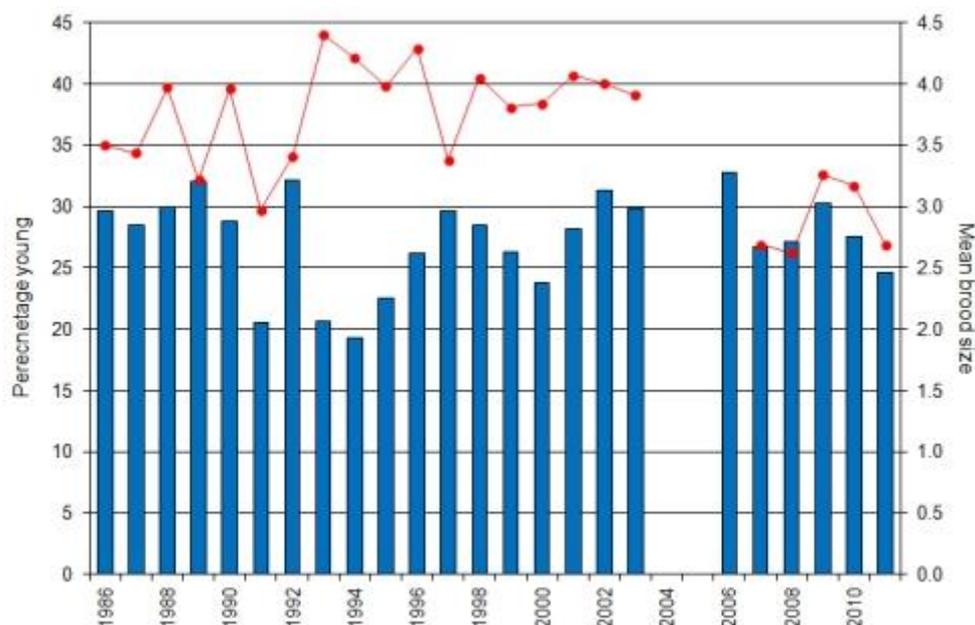
Peak counts of British Greylag Geese recorded in August (blue circles) and February (red squares) on the Uists, Outer Hebrides, 1985/86-2011/12. The five-year running means (e.g. mean for August 2009 is from counts for August 2007-2011) are shown as lines.

On Tiree, an island-wide census in late August/early September 2011 produced a count of 2,236 birds, a decrease of 15.3% on the count in August 2010. Numbers on Tiree have declined after reaching a high point in 2006 (4,005 birds), presumably reflecting the increase in the number of birds shot annually under licence.

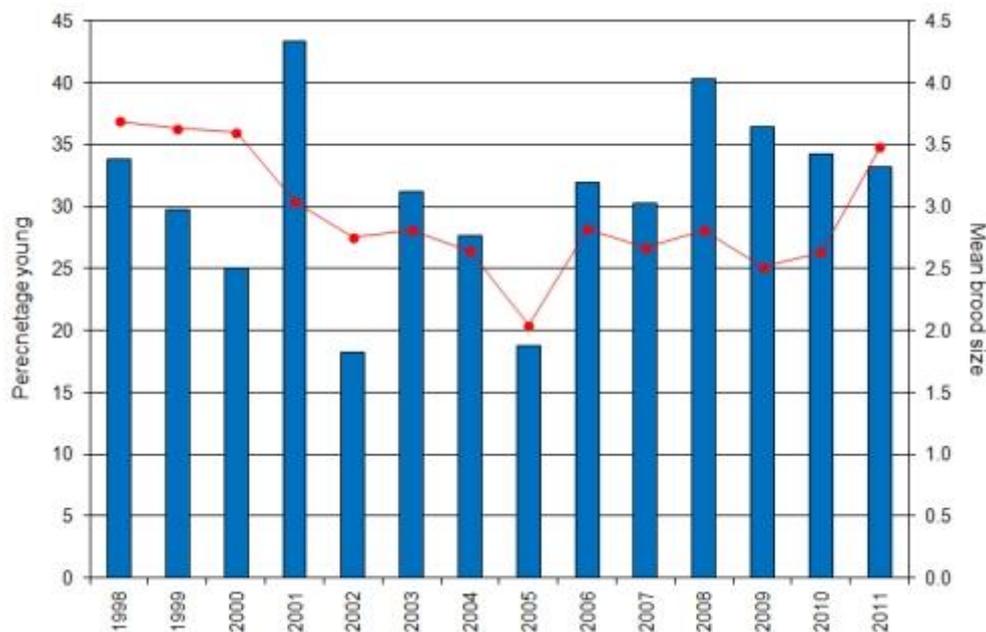
2. Breeding success

Age assessments of the whole British Greylag Goose population are not routinely undertaken. Annual age counts are, however, carried out on the Uists, Outer Hebrides and on Tiree, Inner Hebrides.

Productivity data were collected from the Uists, with a total of 803 birds aged in August 2011. The percentage of young birds was 24.6% and the mean brood size was 2.84 goslings per successful pair. On Tiree, 1,943 Greylag Geese were aged in late August and early September and brood sizes were collected for 50 families in July. The percentage of young birds in this post-breeding count was 33.2% and the mean brood size was 3.1 goslings per successful pair.



The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of British Greylag Geese on the Uists, 1986-2011. No data were collected in 2004 and 2005.



The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of British Greylag Geese on Tiree, 1998-2011. Data from Bowler *et al.* (2005) and updated (J. Bowler pers. comm.)

3. Discussion

The number of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in August 2011 was 24% lower than the same month in the previous year. This is considered an underestimate due to poor weather conditions at the time of the census. The breeding success was similar to the previous year. The February 2012 count was 5,742 birds, higher than the February 2011 count by 42%, and emphasising that the August 2011 count was an underestimate.

Numbers counted on Tiree in late August 2011 were 15% lower than the previous year and an overall decrease in the Tiree population in recent years is thought to be likely. In both areas (Tiree and the Uists) annual breeding success remained high with over 24.6% and 33.2% young in post-breeding flocks, respectively. Both areas have been subject to licensed shooting and this extra mortality appears to have halted, or at least slowed, the gradual increase witnessed over the last 10-20 years, especially so on Tiree.

On Shetland, a post-breeding survey found 5,247 British Greylag Geese in early September 2011. Of 109 birds aged, 23.9% were young, with a mean brood size of 1.76 goslings, although both sample sizes were small. A survey of post-breeding British Greylag Geese on Orkney is planned for August 2012, in order to update the current population estimate from July 2008 when *c.* 10,000 birds were counted during an island-wide census, and there is every indication, from RSPB breeding records, that numbers have continued to increase since then.

4. References

- Bowler, J, C Mitchell, & AJ Leitch. 2005. Greylag Geese on Tiree and Coll, Scotland: Status, Habitat Use and Movements. *Waterbirds* 28(1): 61-70.
- Holt CA, GE Austin, NA Calbrade, HJ Mellan, RD Hearn, DA Stroud, SR Wotton & AJ Musgrove. 2012. *Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11: The Wetland Bird Survey*. BTO/RSPB/JNCC, Thetford.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring