

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme
survey results 2013/14
British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The abundance of British Greylag Geese in Britain during 2013/14 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented in survey reports which are available on the WeBS website.

Numbers at key sites in Scotland

Annual monitoring of all British Greylag Geese is not undertaken, but annual counts and breeding success estimates are carried out in three key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides) and on Tiree/Coll (Inner Hebrides).

On Tiree, the late summer (August) count totalled 1,690 birds, the lowest count since 1997 (Figure 1). As recently as 2006, 4,005 Greylag Geese were counted on Tiree. The November count totalled 2,200 birds suggesting that the August figure was an undercount; John Bowler, who counts the geese on Tiree, reports that the geese are becoming wary in late summer due to the increase in shooting. Alternatively, there may be a late autumn movement of birds to the island, although, if this is the case, nothing is known about the origins of these birds.

On the Uists, 7,031 Greylag Geese were counted in the early September census (Figure 1), a decline of 18.7% on the previous year, and this was after shooting had started in early August. During a second count in late February, 5,906 geese were counted.

On Orkney, an archipelago-wide census was carried out in late August and found 20,242 Greylag Geese (Brides et al. 2013), the majority being on Mainland (9,893 birds) (Figure 2). This was a 5.3% decrease on the previous year (Mitchell et al. 2012).

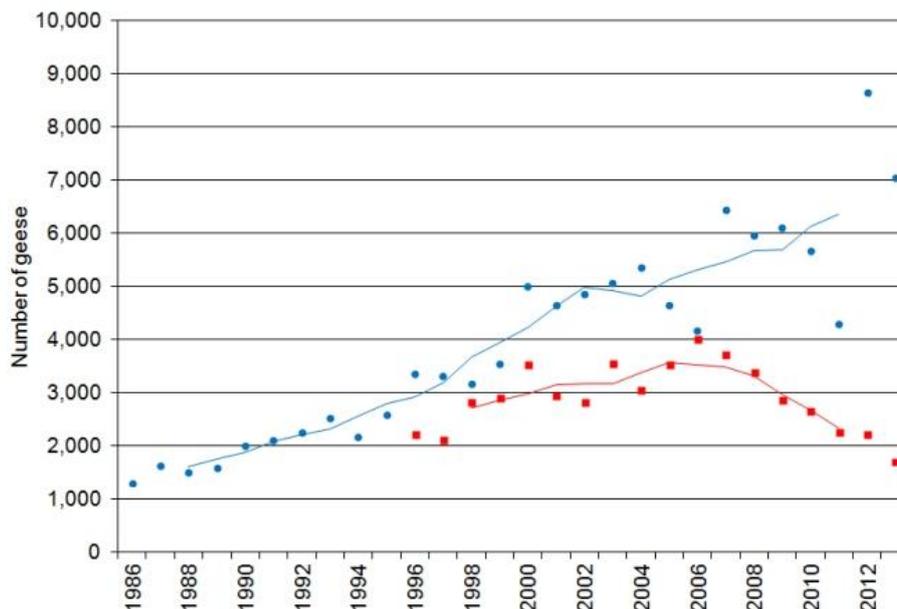


Figure 1. Late summer counts of British Greylag Geese on the Uists (blue circles) and Tiree (red squares). Five year running means shown as lines.

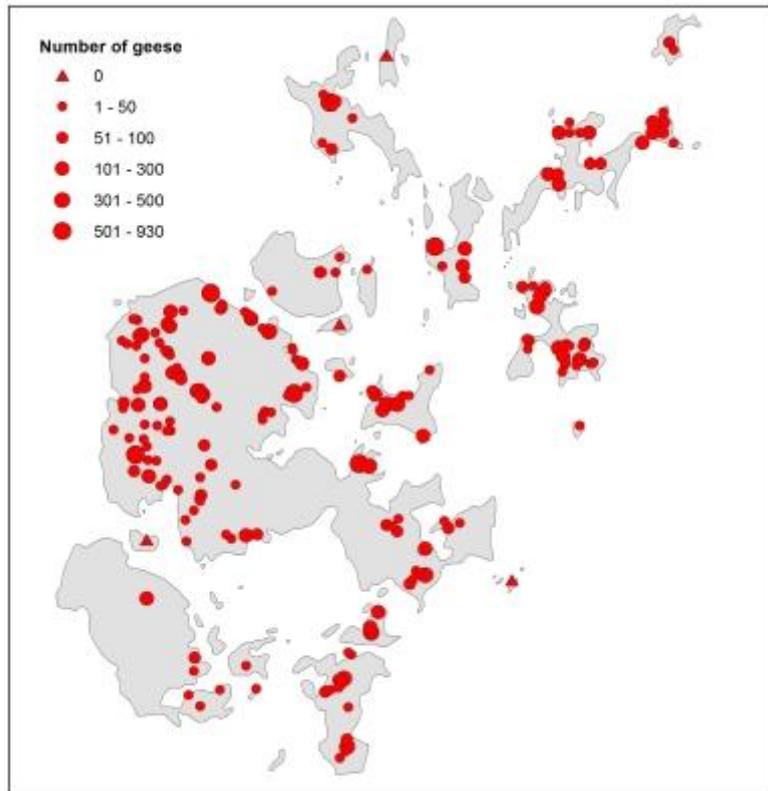


Figure 2. The distribution of Greylag Geese found during field surveys in Orkney in late August 2013 (from Brides *et al.* 2013). Dots are proportional to flock size.

2. Breeding success

Breeding success in Orkney was lower than average at 18.1% young in late summer flocks, with a mean brood size of 2.23 young per successful pair. On Tiree, breeding success was, once again, relatively high at 35.3%, with a mean brood size of 2.64 young per successful pair (Figure 3). On the Uists, no age counts were undertaken.

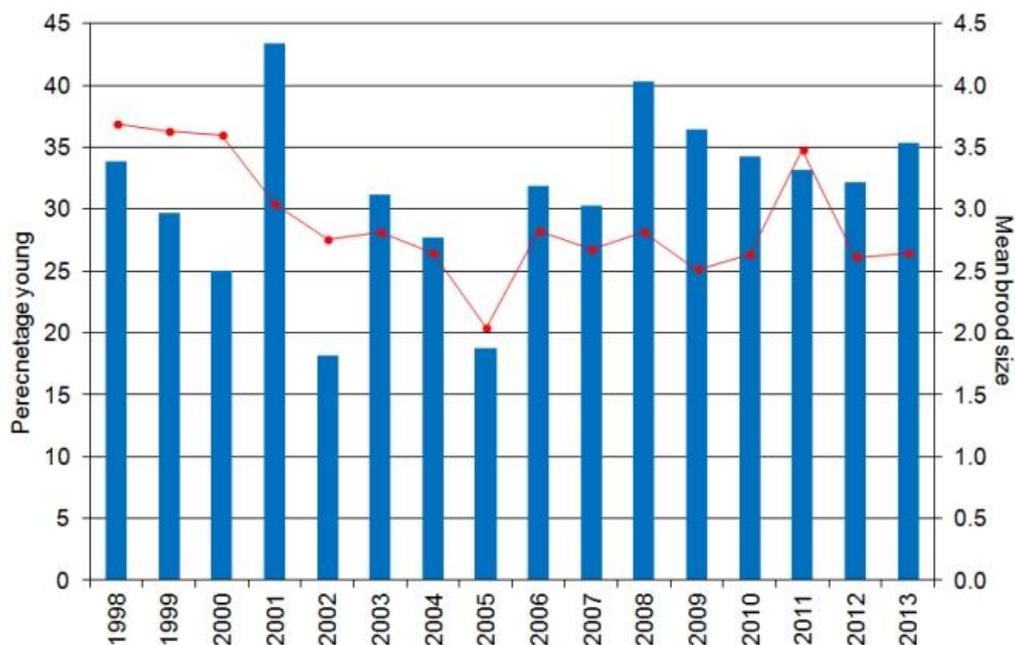


Figure 3. The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of British Greylag Geese on Tiree, 1998-2012. Data from Bowler *et al.* (2008) and J. Bowler pers. comm.

3. Discussion

British Greylag Geese are doing remarkably well, with numbers and distribution both increasing. For example, the latest WeBS trend shows a steady increase in numbers, especially so since the 1980s. The increase in abundance 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.

The late August 2013 count in Orkney was the second annual archipelago-wide assessment. Numbers had decreased by 5.3% between the two survey periods from 21,367 birds in 2012 to 20,242 in 2013. The goal of the pilot management scheme is to maintain the current levels of shooting in order to bring the summer population of British Greylag Geese down to 9,000 to 11,000 birds (SNH in litt.).

The number of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in September 2013 (7,031) was 18.7% lower than the previous year and reflects the increase in the number shot there during the year. 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 2012 were lower than the previous year when 2,210 were counted. However, the numbers counted at the end of the summer in the last two years have been lower than those counted later in the autumn, suggesting that some of the geese are more nervous after coming out of moult and are missed during the August count, but are picked up again later in the autumn. Alternatively, there may be a modest influx of birds into Tiree after the summer, although the origins of these birds are unclear. The current peak counts of Greylag Geese, at any time of the year on Tiree are just over a half of what they were in 2006. Under the management scheme, the target population range for resident Greylag Geese is of 1,350 to 1,650 birds on Tiree and 300 to 550 birds on Coll (SNH in litt.).

4. Acknowledgements

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

5. References

Bowler, J, C Mitchell, & AJ Leitch. 2005. Greylag Geese on Tiree and Coll, Scotland: Status, Habitat Use and Movements. *Waterbirds* 28: 61-70.

Brides, K. AJ Leitch & E Meek. 2013. The abundance and distribution of British Greylag Geese on Orkney, August 2013. *Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report*, Slimbridge.

Mitchell, C, AJ Leitch, K Brides & E Meek. 2012. The abundance and distribution of British Greylag Geese on Orkney, August 2012. *Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report*, Slimbridge.

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