

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2005/06

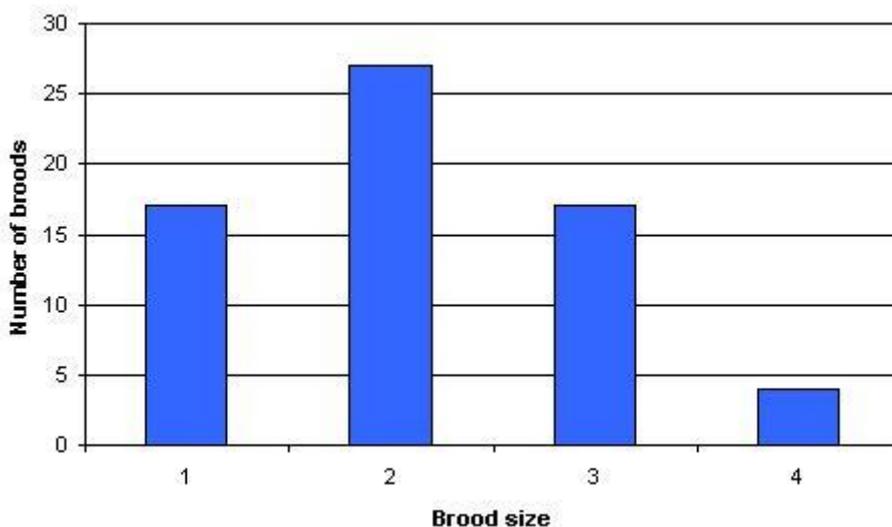
East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

1. Abundance

The abundance of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese during 2005/06 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Following a period of growth through the 1970s and 1980s, numbers recorded at Lindisfarne (the only site of international importance in the UK) have fluctuated substantially. The last five years have seen peak counts vary between 2,505 and 4,845. After a low count in 2004/05, numbers in 2005/06 returned to a similar level as those recorded in 2003/04 (2,505, 3,688 and 3,716 respectively).

2. Breeding success

Flocks of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese were counted and aged at Lindisfarne on three occasions over the course of winter 2005/06. A total of 2,129 individuals were aged, of which 6.5% were young. The number of goslings was determined for 65 families and the mean brood size was 2.12 young per successful pair, ranging from 1-4 goslings per family.



Frequency distribution of brood sizes of East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Geese in 2005/06.

3. Discussion.

The East Atlantic Light-bellied Brent Goose population is one of the smallest goose populations in the world. Since Lindisfarne is the single-most important wintering site in Britain, it is important that regular abundance and productivity data are collected. Routine collection of abundance data occurs through WeBS, although these counts have in the past under-estimated numbers, due to the fact that the timing of WeBS counts may miss peak numbers, and counts are made at high tide when numbers are difficult to assess due to dense flocks of roosting birds on the water (Denny *et al.* 2004).

Productivity assessments within Britain have been carried out for only three of the last five years. Of the data that are available, it is evident that the percentage of young in wintering flocks has remained low for a number of years, only exceeding 10% on two occasions since 1996. Productivity assessments in Denmark have also shown highly variable percentages of young between years (Denny *et al.* 2004). This low and fluctuating productivity is likely to be the main regulator of population size. It is therefore important that age assessment data are collected annually to fully assess the status of this small population.

4. References

Denny, MJH, P Clausen, SM Percival, GQA Anderson, K Koffberg & JA Robinson. 2004. *Light-bellied Brent Goose* *Branta bernicla hrota* (East Atlantic population) in Svalbard, Greenland, Franz Josef Land, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Britain 1960/61 – 2000/01. Waterbird Review Series, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust/Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring