

# WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2018/19

## European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

### 1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese in the UK during 2018/19 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

### 2. Breeding success

In 2018/19, the breeding success of European White-fronted Geese in the UK was assessed for flocks wintering at WWT Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) and North Warren (Suffolk). Overall, of the 320 birds aged 23.1% were young birds, this being slightly above the previous ten-year mean ( $22.5\% \pm 2.52$  SE) and the highest recorded since 2014/15 (Figure 1).

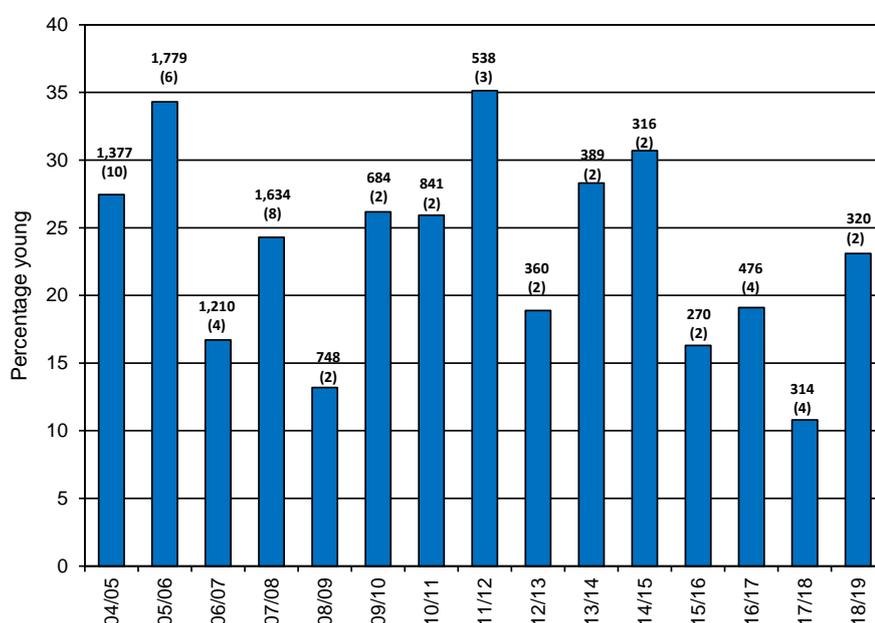


Figure 1. The percentage of young for European White-fronted Geese in the UK, 2004/05–2018/19. The sample size is given above the column, with the number of sites at which flocks were assessed given in parentheses.

In February at WWT Slimbridge (the only site where age assessment data have been collected regularly), 149 birds were aged with 26 young (17.4%) present in the flock, 2% higher than in 2017/18 (15.4%, Figure 2). Brood size counts were also carried out at the site, with 32 young counted among 13 broods, giving a mean brood size of 2.46 young per successful pair, slightly higher than the previous year (2.00).

Elsewhere during January, birds were aged at North Warren, where 171 birds were aged of which 48 were young (28.1%).

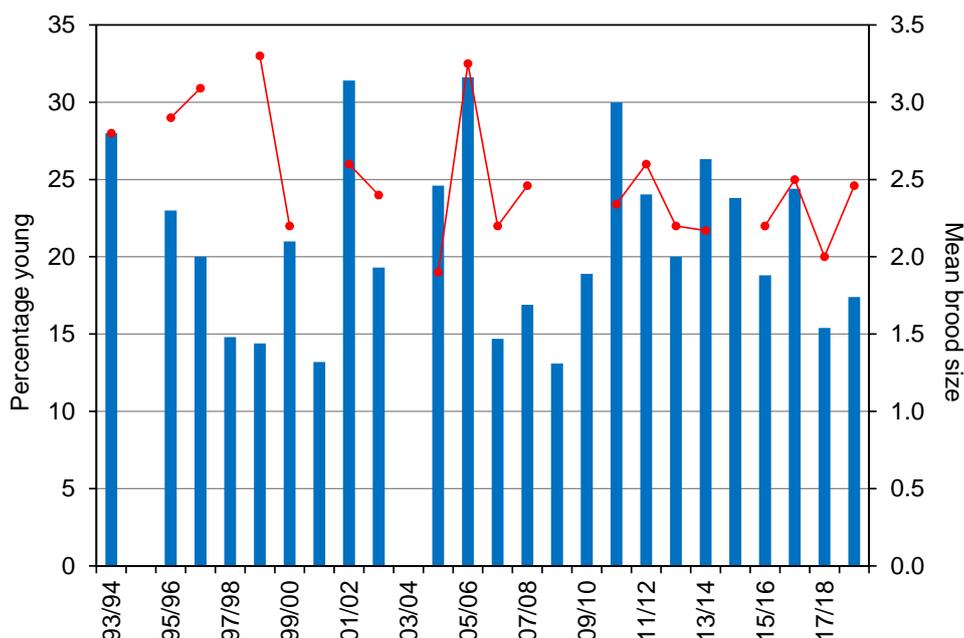


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue column) and mean brood size (red line) of European White-fronted Geese recorded at WWT Slimbridge (where data have been collected regularly), 1993/94–2018/19. No data were collected during 1994/95 or 2003/04.

### 3. Discussion

Results from age assessments of European White-fronted Geese carried out at wintering locations in the UK in 2018/19 indicated that the 2018 breeding season was considerably more productive than the previous winter (with 12.3% more young recorded in flocks) and the most productive year since 2014. The mean brood size of 2.46 young per successful pair was slightly higher than in 2017/18 (2.00).

During summer 2018, reports from monitoring stations in the Arctic indicated that the season was moderately late, with late snowfall in June and windy conditions affecting the nesting of most species of birds, and yet the percentage of young European White-fronted Geese recorded in the UK remained around average.

Across the flyway, a total of 273,652 individuals was counted as part of age assessment counts carried out in Germany, The Netherlands and the UK from October 2018 to February 2019, revealing 12.6% young in the population. At the time of writing, data are still to be received from other areas of the flyway; however, the final assessment is expected to be close to this figure. Compared to the previous ten years, breeding success for the population during 2018 was about average.

The percentage of young in The Netherlands (15.4%) was slightly higher than in Germany (12.1%); but this is mainly due to the 19.6% young recorded in a sample of 19,535 geese in Friesland, northern Netherlands. Overall, variation between the other regions in both countries was actually very low (ranging from 10.6% to 13.2% young). In a large sample in Germany, the mean brood size was 1.51 young per pair (3,684 families assessed) and in The Netherlands 1.60 young per pair was recorded (456 families); based on preliminary data.

European White-fronted Geese arrived rather late at their wintering sites on the continent in autumn 2018, and so was the arrival of successful families. According to long-term monthly counts in The Netherlands, total numbers around mid-October were the lowest since 2009. Initially, very few young birds were recorded in the flocks, pointing at a repetition of the low breeding year of 2017 (when a late arrival also occurred). October age assessments showed only 8.8% first year birds, but after a mass arrival during late October and early November, the number of young increased to 11.7% in November and 12.8% in December (and then stayed around that level for the rest of the winter).

#### 4. Acknowledgements

As always, our thanks go to the network of dedicated GSMP volunteers for their help with collecting age assessments and to our colleagues at SOVON, Denmark, for providing the international data.

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## Goose & Swan Monitoring