

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme
 survey results 2015/16
 European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese in the UK during 2015/16 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

2. Breeding success

The breeding success of European White-fronted Geese in the UK was assessed at WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire and at RSPB Church Farm, Suffolk, during 2014/15. In total, 270 birds were aged, of which 44 (16.3%) were young.

At WWT Slimbridge, 117 birds were aged with 22 juveniles (18.8%) present (Figure 1), and a sample of 153 birds aged at Church Farm, contained 22 juveniles (14.3%). Brood size counts were carried out by the reserve wardens at Slimbridge, with 22 juveniles counted among 10 broods, giving a mean brood size of 2.2 goslings per successful pair.

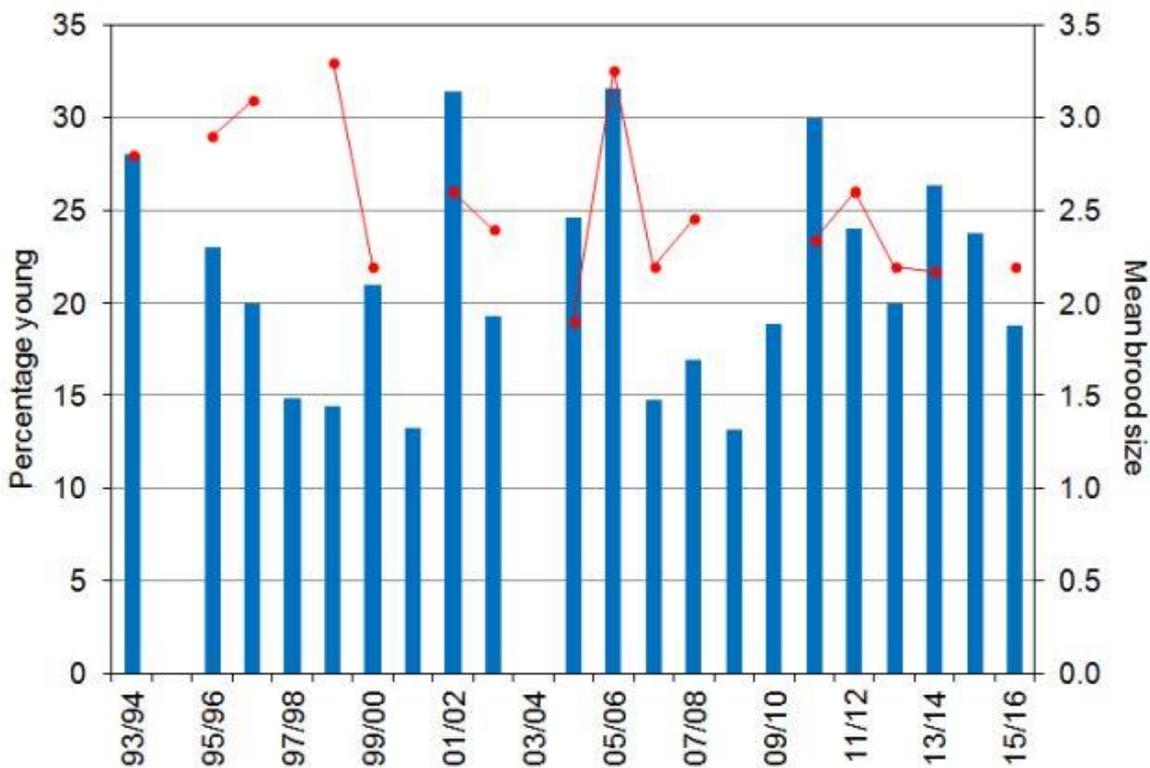


Figure 1. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red line) of European White-fronted Geese recorded at WWT Slimbridge (where data have been collected regularly), 1993/94-2015/16. No data were collected during 1994/95 or 2003/04.

3. Discussion

The results from age assessments made at wintering sites in the UK indicate that the breeding success of European White-fronted Geese in 2015 was lower than the previous five-year average ($24.8\% \pm 1.63$ SE), and 14.4% lower than the previous year.

At the time of writing, not all the data from elsewhere along the North Sea/Baltic flyway have been collated but preliminary results suggest 2015 was another poor breeding season for this population of White-fronted Goose. Together, results from the UK, the Netherlands and the western part of Germany indicate a breeding success of 11.4% young.

As noted in previous years, the age ratios in the UK were slightly higher than those recorded in the core wintering regions of the Netherlands and Germany, where a total of 196,330 geese were aged of which 11.3% were first-winter birds.

These initial results for the 2015 breeding season confirm the continued decline in the European Whitefront breeding success that has been recorded since the early 1990s (Figure 2). Recent studies in The Netherlands have shown that the lower reproductive output is probably the result of density-dependence on the breeding grounds. As a result, the flyway population has stabilized since 2000. The tendency for milder winters has initiated a long-term decline in numbers wintering in the UK and an increase in wintering numbers along the northern fringe of the wintering range in Denmark and Sweden.

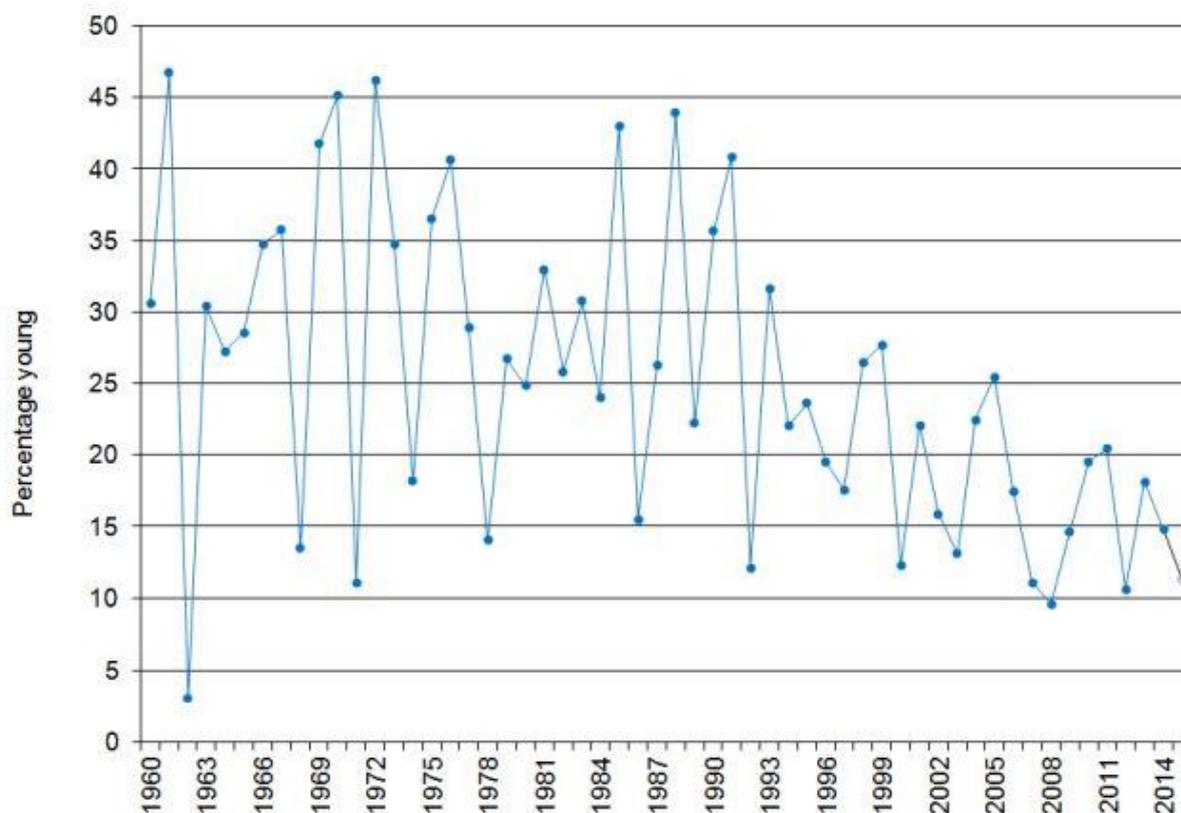


Figure 2. Long term trend in breeding success of European White-fronted Geese, expressed as the percentage of juveniles recorded in the wintering areas (mainly data from The Netherlands and Germany). Note, the open circle for 2015 indicates preliminary results calculated at the time of writing. Data: Sovon Vogelonderzoek Nederland.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring