

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2017/18

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese in the UK during 2016/17 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

2. Breeding success

In 2017/18, the breeding success of European White-fronted Geese in the UK was assessed for flocks wintering at WWT Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), North Warren (Suffolk) and in Lincolnshire at Gibraltar Point and Elm House Farm.

Overall, of the 314 birds aged, 10.8% were young birds, this being well below the previous ten-year mean ($23.8\% \pm 2.16SE$) and the lowest recorded since 2004/05 (Figure 1).

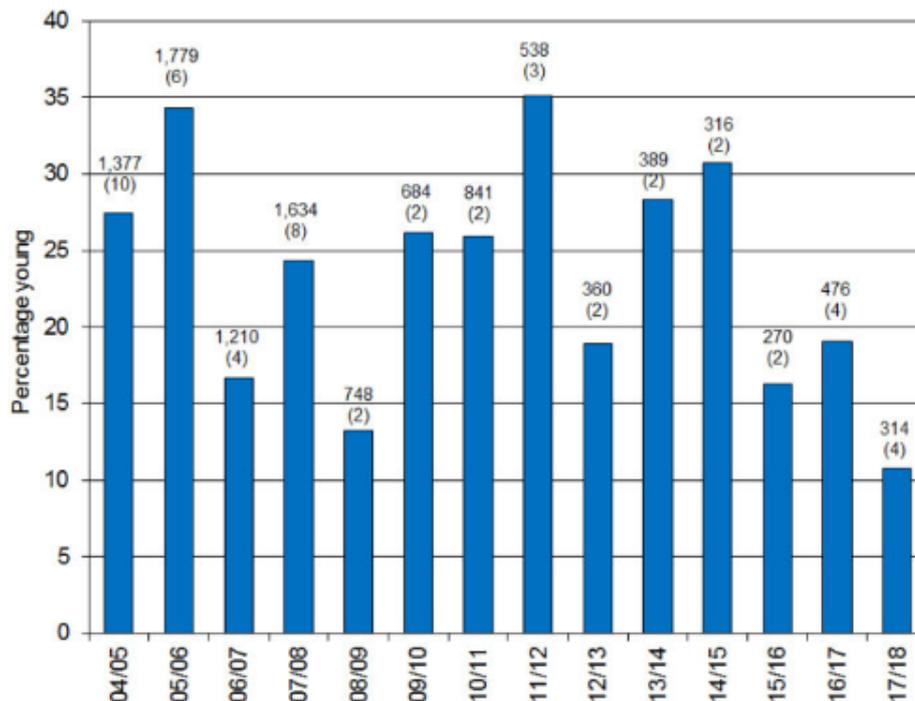


Figure 1. The percentage of young for European White-fronted Geese in the UK, 2004/05–2017/18. The sample size is given above the column, with the number of sites at which flocks were assessed given in parentheses.

In February at WWT Slimbridge (the only site where age assessment data have been collected regularly), 117 birds were aged with 18 young (15.4%) present in the flock, 9.0% lower than in 2016/17 (Figure 2). Brood size counts were also carried out at the site, with 18 young counted among nine broods, giving a mean brood size of 2.0 young per successful pair, slightly lower than the previous year.

Elsewhere during January, birds were aged at North Warren, where 129 birds aged of which 14 were young (11.6% young); at Elm House Farm, 53 were birds were aged but no young were present in the flock; and one young bird was recorded in a flock of 15 (6.7%) at Gibraltar Point.

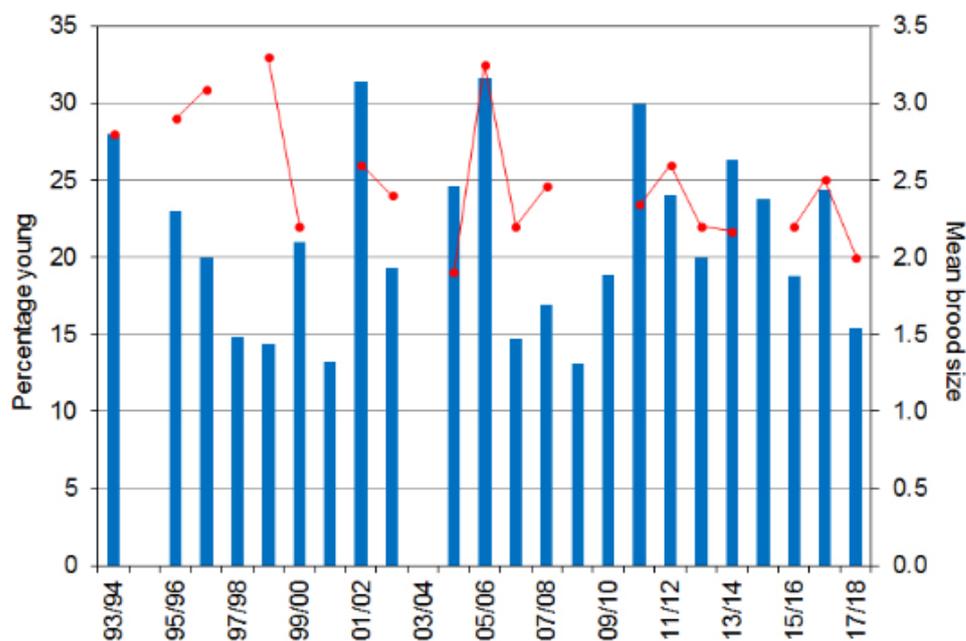


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red line) of European White-fronted Geese recorded at WWT Slimbridge (where data have been collected regularly), 1993/94–2017/18. No data were collected during 1994/95 or 2003/04.

3. Discussion

Results from age assessments of European White-fronted Geese carried out at wintering locations in the UK highlight that the 2017/18 breeding season was a poor year for this species, similar to what was seen for other Arctic Russian breeding geese and swans, such as the Dark-bellied Brent Goose and Bewick's Swan. Weather conditions at the breeding grounds during the spring and summer of 2017 were reported to have been particularly cold, which is likely to have contributed to the poor breeding season.

Although breeding success amongst the Whitefront flocks wintering in the UK has fluctuated in recent years, the general trend has been one of a decline. This mirrors what has been recorded for the Baltic/North Sea population of European Whitefronts as a whole, of which birds wintering in the UK are a part. This population has shown a considerable decline in reproductive output since the early 1990s (see Figure 3), and age assessments made elsewhere along the flyway, together with those from the UK, suggest little improvement in 2017. Only 7.3% of the 171,000 birds aged in The Netherlands, Belgium and the UK, were young birds, one of the lowest recorded since 1960. Although at the time of writing, some data were still being received, no further large samples are expected so this provisional result is not expected to change significantly when the dataset is completed.

Across the flyway, the percentage of young was similar between Germany (7.1%) and The Netherlands (8.4%), but slightly higher in Flanders/Belgium (13.0%) and the UK (10.8%). This is a typical pattern that has been observed in previous years.

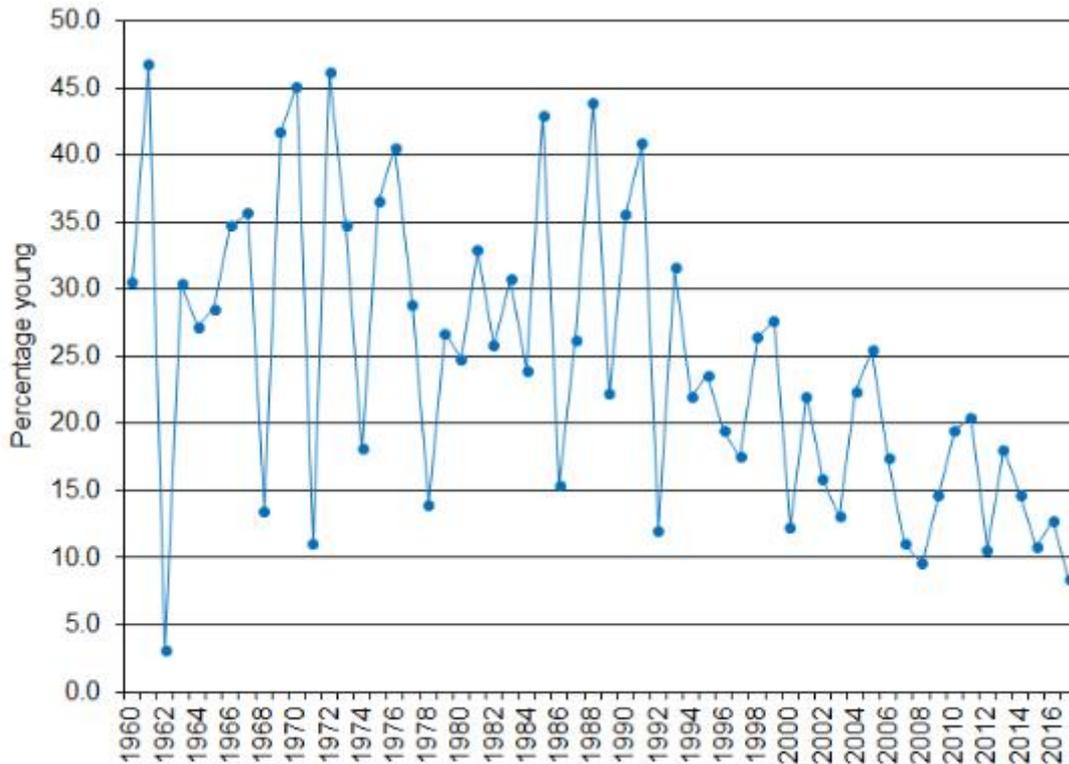


Figure 3. The percentage young of European White-fronted Goose population in the Netherlands, 1960–2017 (the open circles represent incomplete data). Data provided by Sovon Vogelonderzoek Nederland. Only data from the Netherlands, where a large number of Whitefronts concentrate and data have been collated for the longest period, are used to assess the long-term trend; however, the results are thought to be representative of the trend for the population as a whole.

4. Acknowledgements

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This report should be cited as:

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Goose & Swan Monitoring