

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2011/12

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese during 2011/12 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS); the results are expected to become available in 2013.

The latest results, for 2010/11, have been published in Holt *et al.* 2012

During 2010/11, a British maximum of 3,087 was recorded in January, representing a 112% increase on the previous season (Holt *et al.* 2012). This increase was a result of a large influx of geese into eastern England, which likely occurred due to much of northwest Europe experiencing frozen conditions at that time.

2. Breeding success

During the winter of 2011/12, European White-fronted Geese were aged at three localities, WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, Church Farm Marshes in Suffolk and Blakeney Fresh Marshes in Norfolk. In total, 538 geese were aged. Overall, the percentage of young present in winter flock was 35.1%. This represents a 9.2% increase compared to the previous winter and remained above the mean for UK wintering European White-fronted Geese.

The percentage of young differed between the three sites. At Church Farm Marshes, 203 geese were aged of which 50.7% were young birds. At Blakeney Fresh Marshes 52 birds were aged of which 34.6% were young. While at WWT Slimbridge 283 birds were aged of which 24% were young. This was the fourth highest breeding success recorded at Slimbridge; only in 2001/02 (31.4%), 2004/05 (24.6%) and 2005/06 (31.6%) was there a higher proportion of young. The previous 10 year mean for WWT Slimbridge is 21.3% \pm 2.3 SE.

The proportion of young and mean brood size of European White-fronted Geese in Britain, 2004/05-2011/12

	No. sites	Total aged	% young	No. broods	Mean brood size
2004/05	10	1,377	27.45	60	2.42
2005/06	6	1,779	34.3	93	3.01
2006/07	4	1,210	16.7	49	1.9
2007/08	8	1,634	24.3	104	1.9
2008/09	2	748	13.2	-	-
2009/10	2	684	26.2	-	-
2010/11	2	841	25.9	44	2.34
2011/12	3	538	35.1	-	-

3. Discussion

One of the main influences on the breeding success of tundra-nesting geese is the cyclical pattern of lemming abundance. Breeding success generally decreases in years of low lemming abundance as a result of predators switching from lemmings to birds. Reports from monitoring stations in the Arctic indicated that in 2011 numbers of lemmings & predators were generally low (www.arcticbirds.ru).

In a sample of 116,643 birds aged at wintering sites in Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium, 20.7% were first winter birds. The percentage of first-winter birds differed within the wintering range, being lowest in Germany (19.2%) and The Netherlands (19.5%) and highest in Belgium (31.7%). Age-ratios recorded in the UK (35% young) fit this pattern showing that more successful birds move towards the south western edge of the wintering range.

4. References

Holt CA, GE Austin, NA Calbrade, HJ Mellan, RD Hearn, DA Stroud, SR Wotton & AJ Musgrove. 2012. *Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11: The Wetland Bird Survey*. BTO/RSPB/JNCC, Thetford

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Goose & Swan Monitoring