

WWT/JNCC/NatureScot Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2019/20

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese in the UK during 2019/20 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

2. Breeding success

In 2019/20, the breeding success of European White-fronted Geese wintering in Britain was assessed amongst flocks at WWT Slimbridge (Gloucestershire), Holkham Fresh Marsh (Norfolk) and RSPB North Warren (Suffolk). Overall, 551 geese were aged of which 19.1% were young birds, this being slightly lower than during the previous winter (23.1% young) and also the previous ten-year mean (2009/10–2018/19, 23.4% \pm 2.30 SE) (Figure 1) (Table 1).

Brood size assessments were conducted at WWT Slimbridge and Holkham Fresh Marsh, with an overall mean brood size of 2.05 young per successful pair recorded for the 21 families assessed (Table 1).

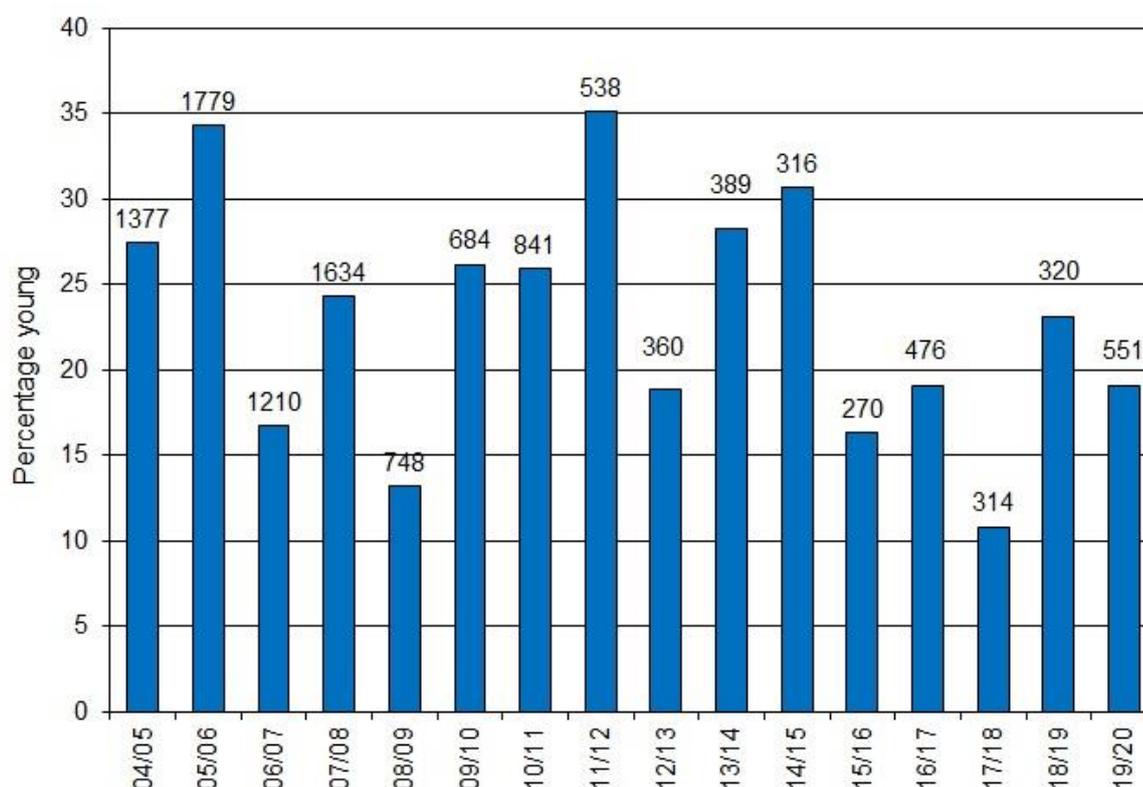


Figure 1. The percentage of young for European White-fronted Geese in Britain, 2005/06–2019/20. The sample size is given above the column.

Table 1. The percentage of young and mean brood size of European White-fronted Geese recorded at wintering sites in Britain, 2019/20.

Site	Number of geese aged (no. of young)	% young	Mean brood size (number of families)
WWT Slimbridge	141 (20)	14.2	2.50 (8)
Holkham Fresh Marsh	130 (26)	20.0	1.77 (13)
RSPB North Warren	280 (59)	21.1	—
Overall	551 (105)	19.1	2.05 (21)

Since the early 1990s, regular assessments of both the percentage young and mean brood size of wintering European White-fronted Goose flocks have only been made at WWT Slimbridge (Figure 2). In 2019/20, results indicated that the percentage of young amongst flocks at the site was lower than the previous winter (14.2% *cf* 17.4% in 2018/19), whilst the mean brood size for the eight families assessed was 2.50 young per successful pair, similar to that recorded in 2018/29 (2.46).

In comparison, the percentage of young recorded at the wintering sites in Suffolk and Norfolk was higher than that recorded at WWT Slimbridge, with 21.1% and 20.0% young, respectively, recorded among flocks (Table 1). Brood size counts were also made at Holkham Fresh Marsh (Norfolk), where 13 families were assessed yielding a mean brood size of 1.77 young per successful pair.

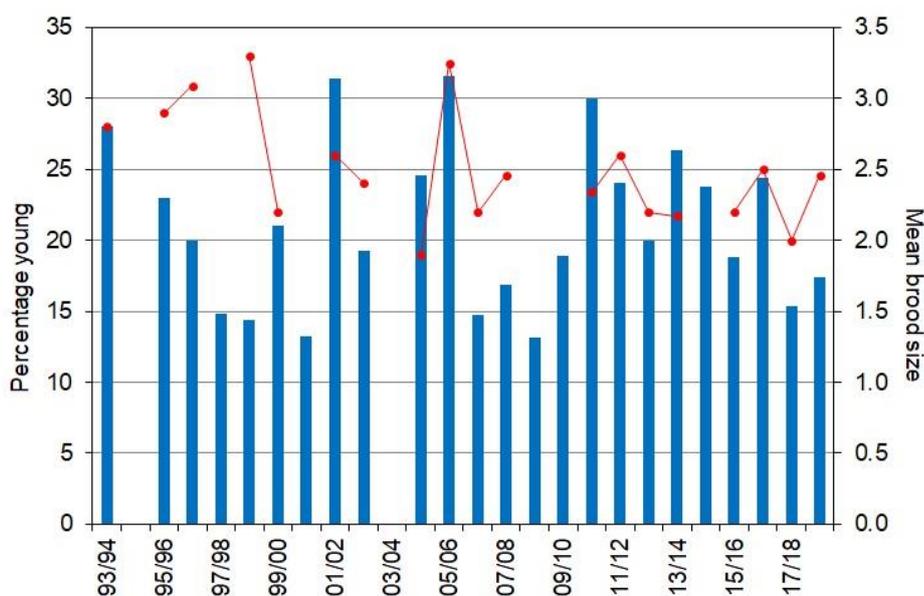


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue column) and mean brood size (red line) of European White-fronted Geese recorded at WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, where data have been collected regularly, 1993/94–2019/20. No data were collected during the winters of 1994/95 or 2003/04.

3. Discussion

Results from age assessments of European White-fronted Geese made at wintering sites in Britain indicated that breeding success in 2019 was slightly lower than the previous season and also the previous ten-year mean. However, as sample sizes assessed each year in Britain are only small, annual variation across between years is likely to be high.

Nonetheless, preliminary data from across the flyway similarly suggests a very slight drop in breeding success compared with 2018. Age ratio counts undertaken across the main wintering range of the Whitefront population – in Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium and the UK – produced an overall percentage young of 12.4%, compared with 12.6% for 2018. Although this is close to the previous five-year average (11.7%), when viewed across the longer-term, breeding success in 2019 was still comparatively low. Years of over 20% young have become scarce, with the winter of 2005/06 being the last time this occurred. However, it is thought that the current level of productivity is likely to keep the Baltic-North Sea population of White-fronted Geese (of which the birds wintering in Britain are a part) at least at a stable level and may, possibly, exceed annual mortality.

4. Acknowledgements

As always, our thanks go to the dedicated team of counters for all their help collecting age assessment records and also to our colleagues at SOVON, The Netherlands, and Kees Koffijberg for providing the international data.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring