

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2007/08

Iceland Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The 48th consecutive Icelandic-breeding Goose Census (IGC) took place during autumn and winter 2007, providing information on the abundance and distribution of Iceland Greylag Geese. In addition to the two usual counts undertaken in October and November, a third count in December (introduced in 2005) was also conducted, primarily as a three year trial to re-assess the most suitable time for a complete census of this population.

Counts were conducted by a network of volunteer observers and professional conservation staff over the weekends of 13/14 October, 10/11 November and 8/9 December 2006. Coverage in Britain and Ireland was higher than the preceding year, with 127 sites visited in October, 140 in November, and 138 in December. Outside Britain and Ireland, counts were made at several sites in the Faroe Islands in all three months and an estimate of the maximum number in Iceland in October was also provided. In Ireland, a comprehensive survey of Greylag Geese was carried out by Birdwatch Ireland. Data were also received from Norway.

Totals of 9,684 Greylag Geese were counted in October, 112,141 in November and 104,464 in December. Following adjustments and the addition of estimated counts¹, totals were adjusted to 4,352 in October, 107,137 in November and 95,359 in December. A population estimate of 107,137 was derived from the higher November total, representing an increase of 30.1% since 2006/07, when a population size of 82,339 individuals was estimated.

The autumn distribution was typical, with a low proportion of the population present in Britain during October. Those that had arrived were primarily concentrated in North Scotland, East Central Scotland and Southeast Scotland/Northeast England, though no count was made in Orkney during this month. By November, 70.0% of the population was present in North Scotland, with most of the remainder in Iceland, Ireland and East Central Scotland. Distribution was similar in December.

¹ For definitions of adjusted and estimated counts, see full report (Mitchell 2008; IGC reports).

Regional distribution of Greylag Geese during October, November and December 2007 (nc = not counted). Regional counts do not include estimated counts for sites where no data were received.

	October	November	December
Iceland	nc	13,825	nc
Faroe Islands	633	921	822
Southwest Norway	nc	2,000	2,000
Ireland	nc	6,218	5,954
North Scotland	3,990	78,330	80,354
Northeast Scotland	658	941	825
East central Scotland	1,139	4,529	5,366
Southeast Scotland/Northeast England	2,047	2,736	2,226
Southwest Scotland/Northwest England	1,397	2,641	3,917
Total counted	9,864	112,141	101,464
Adjusted counts	5,512	6,461	6,105
Estimated counts	n/a	1,457	n/a
Adjusted total	4,352	107,137	95,359
Population estimate		107,137	

2. Breeding success

During early November, 3,340 Greylag Geese from 38 flocks were aged at various localities throughout northern Scotland. The proportion of the 2007/08 population estimate was 3.1%. The brood size of 44 families was also determined during this period.

Breeding success was slightly higher than average, with flocks containing 21.7% young (mean 1997-2006: 19.5%, ± 1.4 s.e.). The mean brood size of 2.6 goslings per successful pair was similar to that of the recent ten year mean (mean 1997-2006: 2.6, ± 0.06 s.e.).

3. Discussion

The 2007 Icelandic-breeding Goose Census revealed a 30.1% increase in the population estimate of Iceland Greylag Goose since 2006. The population estimate returned to the high numbers found in 2004 and 2005 (both over 95,000). The 2006 survey was, almost certainly, an undercount.

The count of Greylag Geese was comprehensive with sites being covered in most of the winter range. It was particularly good to get coverage in Ireland, the Faroes Isles and south west Norway. The increasing concentration of the population on Orkney continues with a record count of 67,540 in December, 2007. The November counts in Iceland, which have only recently been initiated, remain somewhat crude, with a mixture of dedicated aerial survey, together with patchy coverage elsewhere and anecdotal evidence (rather than accurate counts) informing the estimate of the number present from a number of areas. Peak counts have occurred in November in each of the three years 2005-2007. However, it would appear prudent that coverage of sites for Greylag Geese need to be maintained in both November and December due to the varying time of arrival from the breeding grounds.

Despite the annual harvest of c 30,000-40,000 birds annually in Iceland and an unknown number shot in other parts of the winter range, breeding success at over c 20% in seven out of the last eight years appears to be maintaining numbers at c 80,000 to c 100,000 individuals. However, there is an increasing number of summering Greylag Geese in Scotland. Swann (2007) estimated there to be c 25,000 Greylag Geese in Scotland and a dedicated summer survey in summer 2008 is being undertaken to better understand the abundance and distribution of these birds. This will help enormously in understanding where summering Greylags are and where they overlap with the winter distribution of Iceland birds.

4. References

Mitchell, C. 2008. *Status and distribution of Icelandic-breeding geese: results of the 2008 international census*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report, Slimbridge.

This report should be cited as:

WWT. 2008. *Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme: survey results 2007/08 Iceland Greylag Goose* Anser anser. WWT/JNCC/SNH, Slimbridge.

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This report was produced under the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP). This programme monitors numbers and breeding success of geese and swans in the UK during the non-breeding season. GSMP is organised by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside) and Scottish Natural Heritage.



Goose & Swan Monitoring