

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2017/18

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis fabalis*

1. Abundance

Monitoring of Taiga Bean Goose was undertaken at the Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk, by the Bean Goose Action Group and at the Yare Valley, Norfolk, by RSPB reserve wardens during winter 2017/18.

A peak count of 206 birds was recorded at Slamannan, ten birds fewer than the previous year (216), lower than the previous ten-year mean (251 ± 7.7 SE) (Figure 1) and well below the peak there of 300 birds in winters 2005/06 and 2007/08. At the Yare Valley, where the number of wintering Bean Geese has been declining since 1993/94, the peak count of just 18 geese on 27 November was five birds fewer than that recorded during the previous winter (23) and the lowest since 1954/55. The slow decline of this important flock continues and the previous ten-year mean has declined to 78 birds (± 14.7 SE). The total count for the two sites in 2017/18 (224 birds) was the lowest since 1982/83 and continued the long and slow decline in numbers wintering in the UK which probably reflects the decline in the overall flyway population.

The first 18 birds arrived at Slamannan on 25 September and this increased to 90 birds on 7 October. The highest winter count was of 206 birds on 20 December. Migration back to the spring stop over sites in Denmark again took place in mid-February 2018, with birds leaving between 16 and 20 February.

At the Yare Valley, the geese again arrived slightly later than usual. No geese were recorded in October and the first birds (three individuals) were seen on 29 November increasing to 17 birds on 4 December. The highest winter count of 18 birds was recorded on 5 and 16 December. The last count was of 15 on 3 January 2018. The duration of stay of the Yare Valley flock appears to be getting shorter each year. No neck collared birds ringed in Sweden were recorded at the Yare Valley during winter 2017/18.

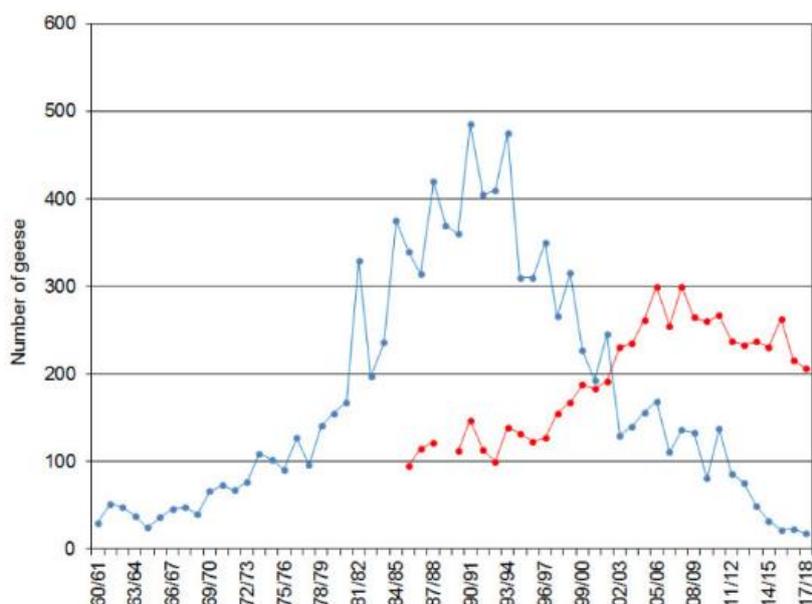


Figure 1. Winter peak counts of Taiga Bean Geese at Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk (red squares) and at Yare Valley, Norfolk (blue circles) from 1960/61–2017/18.

2. Breeding success

Age assessments at Slamannan indicated that 2017 was a reasonable breeding year for Taiga Bean Geese wintering in Scotland. Breeding success was estimated from a sample of 118 birds at Slamannan in early November of which 17 birds (14.4%) were aged as first winter, with a mean brood size of 2.13 young per successful pair. This is the best breeding success recorded in the flock after three years of very low productivity.

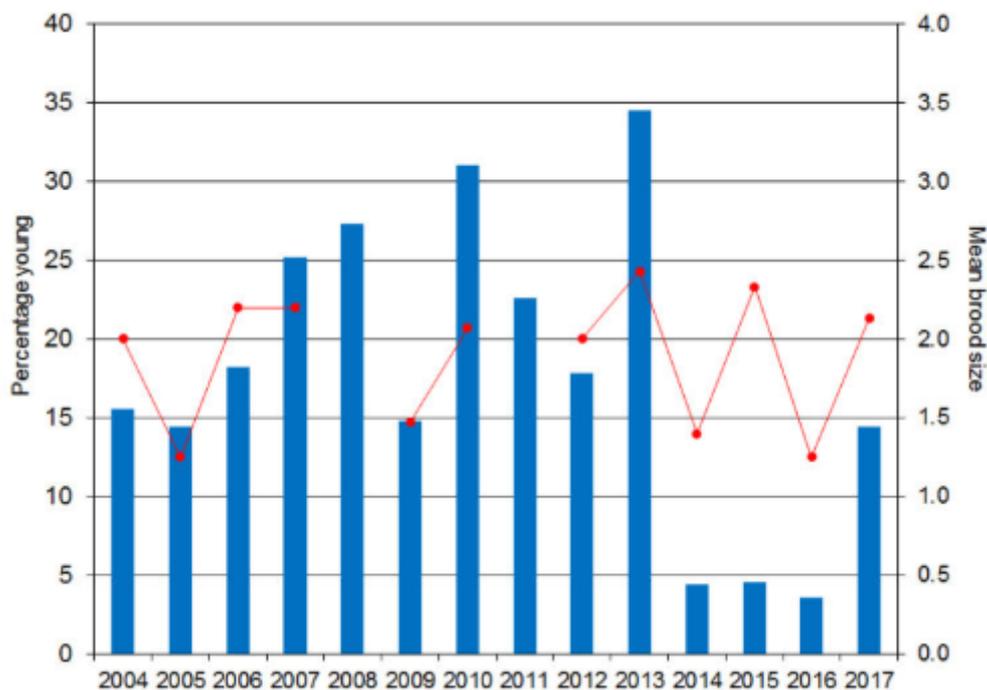


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red line) of Taiga Bean Geese recorded at Slamannan Plateau, 2004–2017.

3. Discussion

Since the peak count of 300 Bean Geese in 2005/06 and 2007/08, numbers at Slamannan have declined, with the peak count in 2017/18 (206 birds) a decrease on recent years. With poor breeding success recorded at Slamannan between 2014/15 and 2016/17 (Figure 2), it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the number of geese recorded there has decreased recently. However, breeding success in 2017, as recorded at Slamannan, was reasonable (14.4%), so it is perhaps surprising that the winter flock did not increase. Bean Geese are not legal quarry in Scotland (although one was shot illegally at Slamannan in winter 2017/18) and few are probably shot in Sweden, Norway or Denmark. There may be unknown sources of mortality affecting this small group, or there may be connectivity between the Scottish winter flock and those wintering on the continent. However, based on sightings of colour ringed birds, we know that only one of the 33 Bean Geese marked at Slamannan since 2011 has switched wintering area to the continent.

The spring departure from Scotland was early and weather conditions in Denmark were harsh, with low temperatures and frozen waterbodies. The birds moved further north to southern Norway between 26–30 March and here they met deep snow. The poor weather conditions may impact on breeding in summer 2018. The migration story can be followed here <https://sites.google.com/view/scotlands-bean-geese/migration>.

The decline at the Yare Valley has been remarkable, since over 400 birds were recorded there as recently as 1993/94. It is likely that rather than crossing the North Sea to winter in Norfolk, Bean Geese are 'short-stopping' and wintering in Denmark instead. This phenomenon might also help explain why the Slamannan flock is not increasing (but see above).

4. Acknowledgements

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Goose & Swan Monitoring