

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme survey results 2018/19

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis fabalis*

1. Abundance

Monitoring of Taiga Bean Goose during winter 2018/19 was undertaken at the Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk, by the Bean Goose Action Group and at the Yare Valley, Norfolk, by RSPB reserve wardens.

The total count for the two sites in 2018/19 (262 birds) was below the previous ten-year mean, which has declined to 308 birds (± 19.4 SE), and continued the long and slow decline in numbers wintering in the UK. This probably reflects the decline in the overall flyway population, or short stopping, or a combination of both.

A peak count of 241 birds was recorded at Slamannan, 35 birds more than the previous year (206), and similar to the previous ten-year mean (242 ± 6.8 SE) (Figure 1) but still below the peak of 300 birds recorded there in winters 2005/06 and 2007/08. The first Bean Goose was seen on 27 September with 40 birds recorded two days later and the last 22 birds seen on 18 February. The peak count was recorded on 6 February.

At the Yare Valley, where the number of wintering Bean Geese has been declining since 1993/94, the peak count of just 21 geese on 15 December was three birds more than that recorded during the previous winter (18) (Figure 1). There have been fewer than 30 birds at this site since 2014/15. The slow decline of this important flock continues and the previous ten-year mean has declined to 66 birds (± 14.1 SE). The geese again arrived slightly later than usual. No geese were recorded in October and the first birds (16 individuals) were seen on 26 November, increasing to 21 birds on 15 December and 20 birds were seen on 19 December, however only 15–16 birds were recorded there during January. The last count was of four Bean Geese on 20 January 2019. The duration of stay of the Yare Valley flock appears to be getting shorter each year. Neck-collared birds ringed in Sweden have been recorded at the Yare Valley in previous winters, but none were recorded there during winter 2018/19

Two other Taiga Bean Geese spent the majority of the winter on the east Norfolk coast in the Waxham area with Pink-footed Geese.

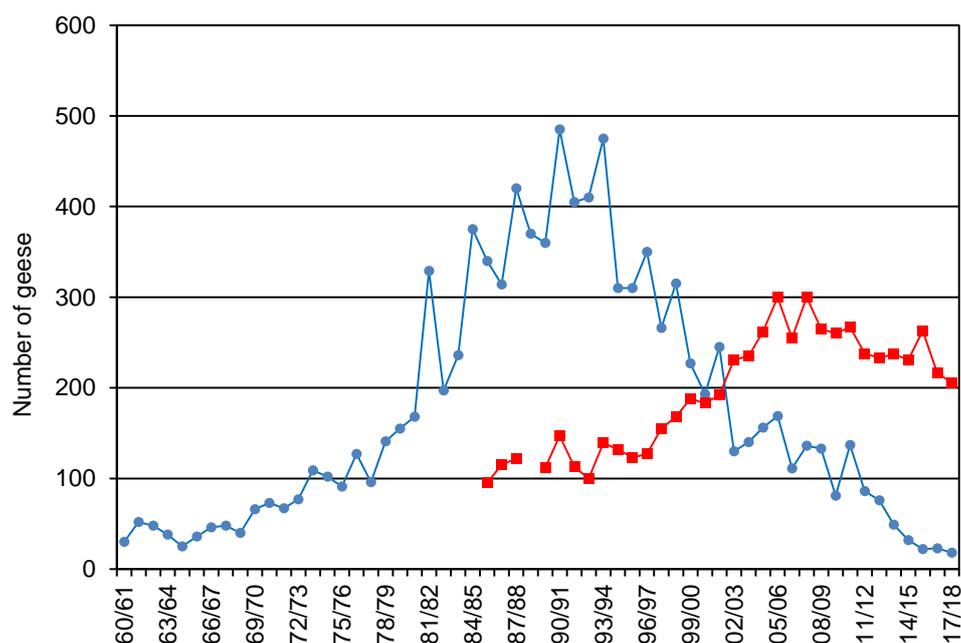


Figure 1. Winter peak counts of Taiga Bean Geese at Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk (red squares) and at Yare Valley, Norfolk (blue circles) from 1960/61–2018/19.

2. Breeding success

Breeding success was estimated from a sample of 85 birds at Slamannan in late October and four birds were aged as juveniles (5% young), with a mean brood size of 1.3 young per successful pair (Figure 2). Breeding success has been at, or below, 5% in four out of the last five years.

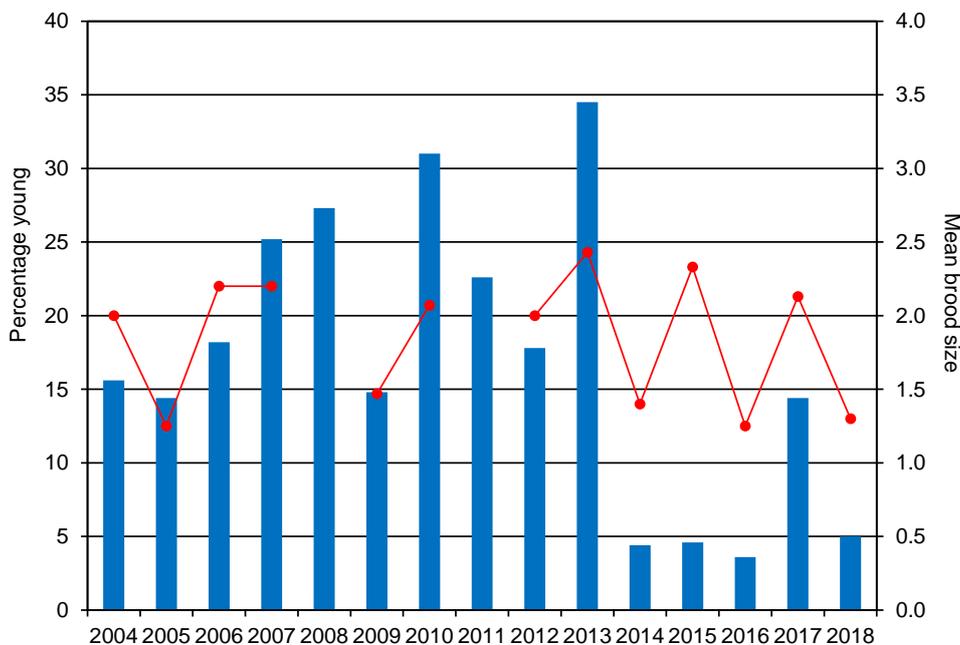


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red line) of Taiga Bean Geese recorded at Slamannan Plateau, 2004–2018.

3. Discussion

Since the peak count of 300 Bean Geese in 2005/06 and 2007/08, numbers at Slamannan have declined, although the peak count in 2018/19 (241 birds) is an increase on very recent years. However, breeding success in 2017, as recorded at Slamannan, was low (5.0%), so it is perhaps surprising that the winter flock increased. There appears to be a mismatch between annual breeding success and the number of birds overwintering at Slamannan. In winter 2017/18, 14% young was recorded, but numbers declined. In winter 2018/19, there was 5% young and numbers increased. The opposite to what might be expected. Quite what is driving the changes in numbers at the site is not clear. The surveillance may suffer from low sample sizes when determining age counts, or there may yet be hitherto undetected connections with birds wintering in Denmark one year and in Scotland the next. 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.

Numbers at the Yare Valley remain low in winter 2018/19. The decline 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.

4. Acknowledgements

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Goose & Swan Monitoring