

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2012/13

British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The abundance of British Greylag Geese in Britain during 2012/13 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented in survey reports which are available on the WeBS website.

Numbers at key sites in Scotland

Annual monitoring of all British Greylag Geese is not undertaken, but annual counts and breeding success estimates are conducted at three key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides) and on Tiree (Inner Hebrides).

On Tiree, the late summer (August) count totalled 2,210 birds, the lowest count since 1997 (Figure 1). The November count totalled 2,409 birds and there were 2,871 in January 2013, suggesting a mid-winter movement of birds to the island. Nothing is known about the origins of these birds. On the Uists, there was a large increase in the number counted with 8,650 geese in the early September census, and this was after \approx 1,000 birds had been shot in August. This is discussed below. During a second count in late February, 7,500 were counted.

In Orkney, an archipelago-wide census was carried out in late August and found 21,367 Greylag Geese (Mitchell et al. 2012), the majority being on Mainland (10,625 birds) (Figure 2).

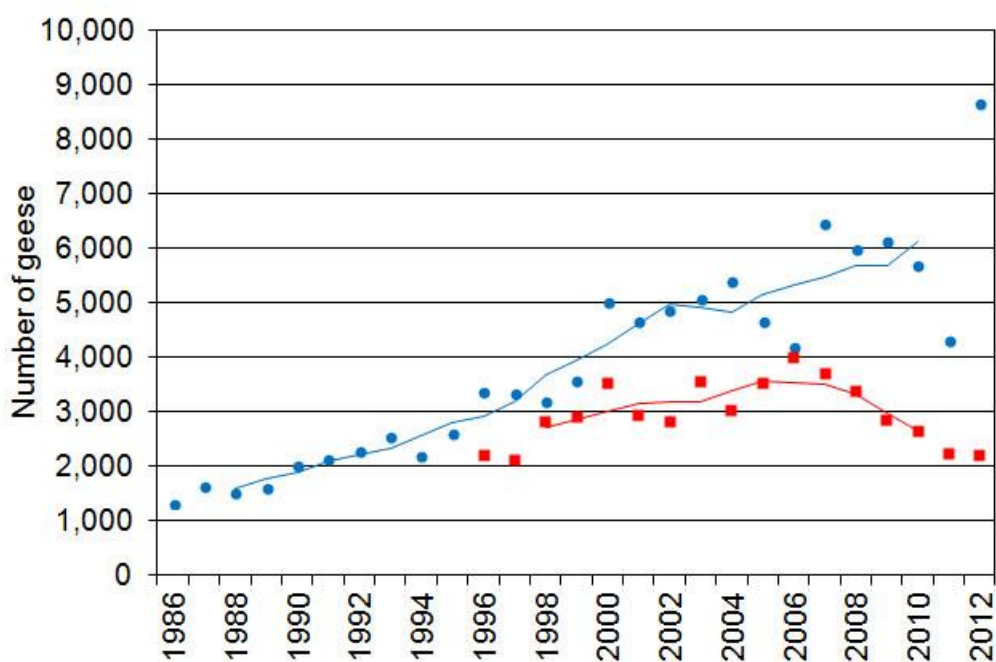


Figure 1. Late summer counts of British Greylag Geese on the Uists (blue circles) and Tiree (red squares). Five year running means shown as lines.

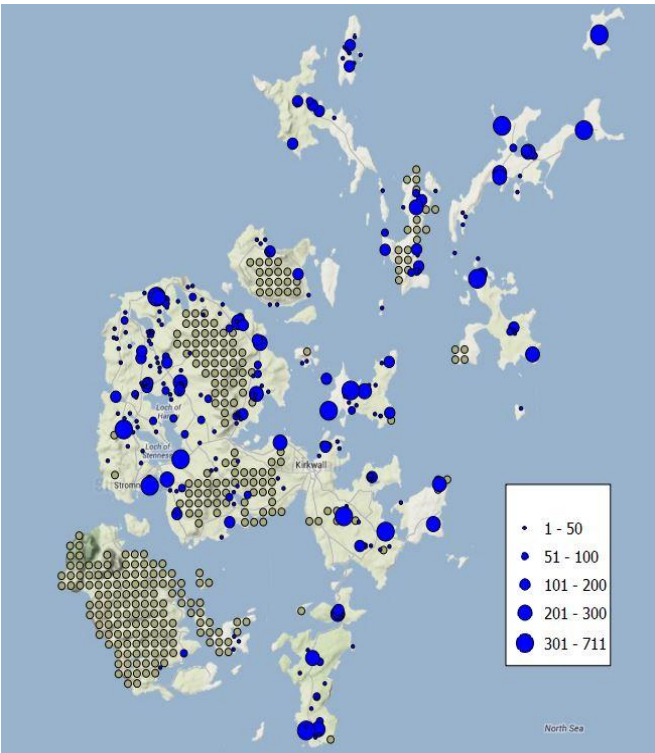


Figure 2. The distribution of Greylag Geese found during field surveys in Orkney in late August 2012 (from Mitchell *et al.* 2012). Blue dots are proportional to flock size. One km squares dominated by moorland are shaded in brown.

2. Breeding success

Breeding success in Orkney was average at 24.9% young in late summer flocks, with a mean brood size of 2.95 young per successful pair. On Tiree, breeding success was, once again, relatively high at 32.2%, with a mean brood size of 2.61 young per successful pair (Figure 3). On the Uists, a sample of the population in August found 25.1% young and 3.08 young per successful pair (Figure 4).

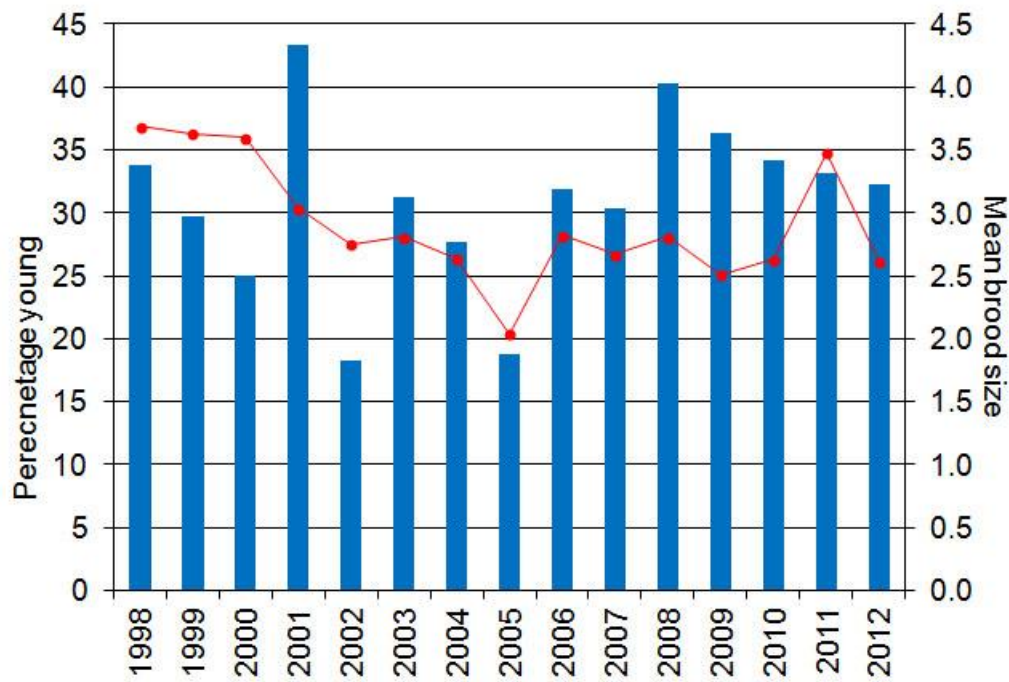


Figure 3. The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of British Greylag Geese on Tiree, 1998-2012. Data from Bowler *et al.* (2008) and J. Bowler pers. comm.

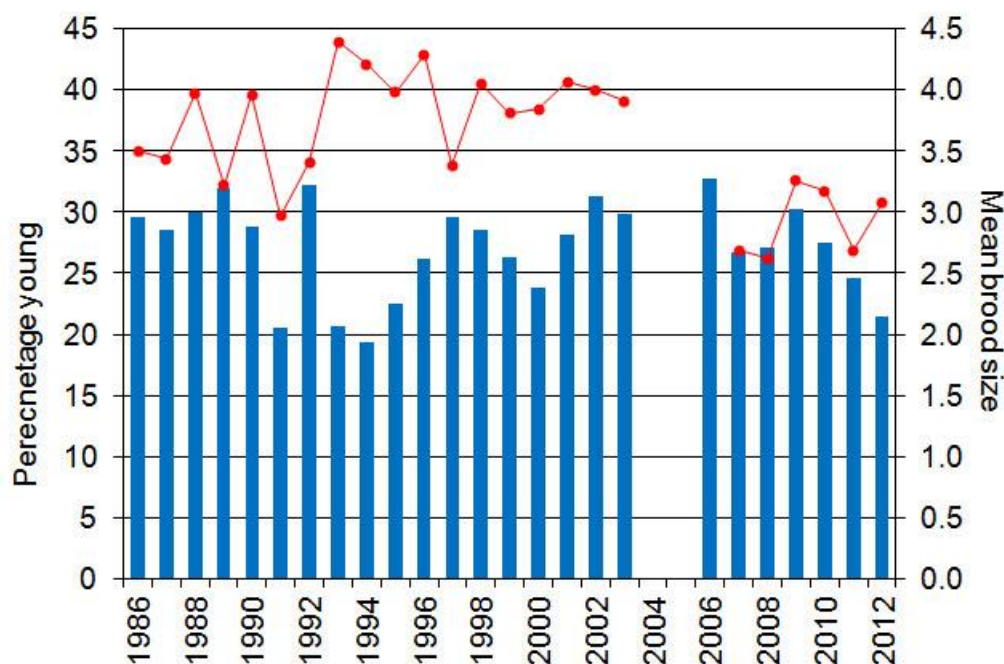


Figure 4. The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of British Greylag Geese on the Uists, 1986-2012. No data were collected in 2004 and 2005.

3. Discussion

The late August 2012 count in Orkney was the first archipelago-wide assessment since 2008. Numbers had increased between the two survey periods from *c.* 10,000 birds in 2008 to 21,367 in 2012.

The number of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in September 2012 (8,650) was double that recorded in August of the previous year. However, the August 2011 count was considered an underestimate due to poor weather conditions at the time of the census, and presumably the September 2012 count reflects the true number of geese present on the islands. In addition, approximately 1,000 Greylag Geese had been shot in August so the total post breeding population was nearly 10,000 birds. The breeding success was similar to the previous year. The February 2013 count (7,500) was higher than the February 2012 count by 30.6%. Numbers counted on Tiree in late August 2012 were very similar to the previous year. In all three areas annual breeding success remained relatively high with between 24.9% and 32.2% young in post-breeding flocks. All three areas have been subject to recent licensed shooting during the close season.

4. References

Bowler, J, C Mitchell, & AJ Leitch. 2005. Greylag Geese on Tiree and Coll, Scotland: Status, Habitat Use and Movements. *Waterbirds* 28: 61-70.

Mitchell, C., A.J. Leitch, K. Brides & E. Meek. 2012. *The abundance and distribution of British Greylag Geese on Orkney, August 2012*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report, Slimbridge.

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WWT/JNCC/SNH, Slimbridge.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring