VERIFICATION OF DARK-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE BREEDING SUCCESS. 1987.

A report by The Wildfowl Trust to The Nature Conservancy Council. By D.G.Salmon. The Wildfowl Trust. Slimbridge, Gloucester. GL2 7BT. 21st December 1981.

SUMMARY

Sample age counts of Dark-bellied Brent Geese were carried out in October and November which suggested that the proportion of young in the British flocks had risen from c.0.1% in late October to c.1.6% by the end of November. Earlier predictions that the total number of geese at peak this winter would be c.150.000 in Europe and 60-90.000 in Britain are not altered.

INTRODUCTION

As in the previous two years age counts of Dark-bellied Brent Geese in Britain were continued through the autumn using volunteer National Wildfowl Count observers and staff of the Nature Conservancy Council and Wildfowl Trust, under the NCC's contract with the Wildfowl Trust. Recorders noted the date, time, locality, habitat and the sizes of flocks, number aged, total of juveniles and brood-sizes.

METHODS AND RESULTS

The preliminary assessment of the breeding success of Dark-bellied Brent Geese in 1987 (Salmon 1987) was based on data up to October 20th by which time very few young birds had been reported either in Britain or on the Continent: an estimate of 0.1% was made for the proportion of juveniles in the autumn flocks. The sample age counts were continued to the end of November using local experts in most parts of the range. They showed that there had been a small influx of juveniles from the end of October onwards. The figures for each area are summarised in the table overleaf. Because the families arrived in the country later than the non-breeding birds the latest available records have been used for each site, except where more complete or co-ordinated coverage was obtained earlier. Although there may well be some duplication among the sample used the totals have been added to produce an overall proportion of 1.6% young which is considered a reasonable estimate of the percentage present in Britain in the latter half of November. Comparable figures are not available for the Continent.

This increase in the estimated breeding success does not significantly affect the prediction for the total population in 1987-88 made in the preliminary report namely for c.150.000 in Europe with 60-90.000 in Britain at peak.

In the relatively successful breeding season of 1985 there was evidence that non-breeding geese stayed on in Essex while at least some of the families dispersed to other areas (Ogilvie 1985). The 1981 results suggest an even smaller proportion of young at Foulness and Leigh than elsewhere by the end of November.

One brood of six and one of five were reported from Lincolnshire. Otherwise there were a few broods of four but the great majority were of one to three juveniles.

The number of young birds is too small to allow meaningful comparisons between the age ratios on different habitats but a slightly greater number of young were certainly found inland. On Hayling Island a flock of 214 containing 18 juveniles were feeding on young cabbages!

DISCUSSION

Even in this poor breeding season it is evident that families tended to arrive later than non-breeding birds as in 1985 (Ogilvie 1985). I suggest that in future rather than age counts being continuously requested to the end of November there should be two periods for sampling: up to c.20th October, as before, for preliminary assessment, and 20th-30th November for verification, with a break in between. This year's preliminary assessment underestimated the likelihood of more juveniles appearing in Britain from late October onwards largely because of their virtual absence from the Continent in mid-October. In future means Of obtaining comparable data for the periods in Question from other countries, via the IWRB would be worth pursuing.

Two censuses of Dark-bellied Brent Geese in Britain are again being attempted this winter - in January and February rather than December and January, a February census being more likely to give the seasonal peak than one in December. Counters will be asked to record the numbers of juveniles where possible and also to provide details of feeding habitats. A report will be prepared as soon as possible, including any further data on age ratios.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF JUVENILE BRENT GEESE FOUND IN LATE NOVEMBER 1987

Place	Date	Habitat (if noted)	Total present	Total aged	Young	Observer
Kevhaven	28th	I	868	440	16	EJW
Lepe	30th	I	88	88	1	Re
Langstone	21st	G/A/I	6280	6280	79	DB.CT.JT
Swale	22nd	A/S	580	580	1	PHI
Foulness	22nd	I/G	800	620	0	RK
Leigh	22nd	I	1000	530	2	RK
Blackwater	20th	I/S/A	2250	1438	211	RK
Orwell	22nd		719	335	16	MW
Deban	22nd		316	316	29	NM
Scolt Head	26th		?	370	0	CC
Wash	17th	S	?	420	15	EM.JW
Lincs	27th	S/1	1086	1086	16	EM. JW. DG
TOTAL				12503	199 (1.6%)	

I - Intertidal: S - Sa1tings: G = Grass: A = Arable

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