

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme
 survey results 2013/14
 Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis fabalis*

1. Abundance

During winter 2013/14, monitoring of Taiga Bean Goose, was undertaken at the Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk, by members of the Bean Goose Action Group and at the Yare Valley, Norfolk, by RSPB reserve wardens. A peak count of 237 birds was recorded at the Slamannan Plateau, slightly lower than the previous ten-year mean (262 ± 7.6 SE) (Figure 1). At the Yare Valley, where the number of wintering Bean Geese has been declining since 1993/94, the peak count of 49 geese was lower than in 2012/13, when 76 geese were recorded. The slow decline of this important flock continues and the previous ten year mean has declined to 114 birds (± 8.9 SE).

Arrival at the Slamannan Plateau was again early, with the first 162 birds arriving on 29 September although the peak count of 237 birds wasn't reached until 20 November. Migration back to the spring stop over sites in Denmark took place from mid- February. At the Yare Valley, the geese arrived slightly later than usual. No geese were recorded in October and the first birds (six individuals) were seen on 20 November. Numbers increased to a peak of 49 in December, falling to 36 in January and none were recorded in February. No neck collared birds ringed in Sweden were recorded at the Yare Valley during winter 2013/14.

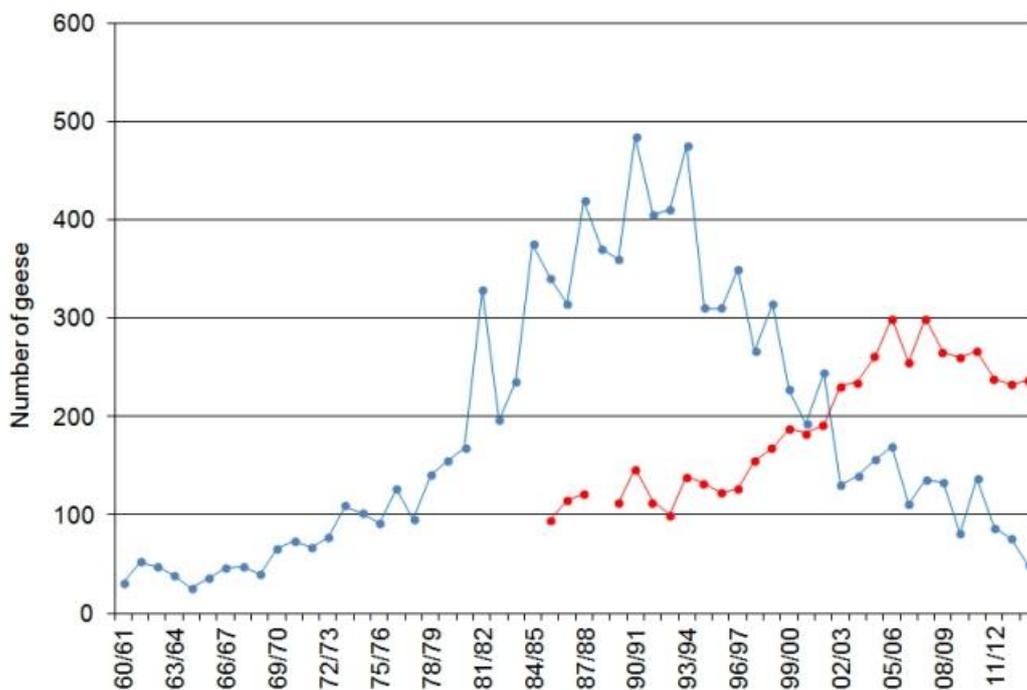


Figure 1. Winter peak counts of Taiga Bean Geese at Slamannan Plateau, Falkirk (red circles) and at Yare Valley, Norfolk (blue line) from 1960/61-2013/14.

2. Breeding success

Age assessments at the Slamannan Plateau indicated that 2013 was a good breeding year for Taiga Bean Geese wintering in Scotland. A flock of 87 birds was aged on 11 October, of which 30 (34.5%) were young birds (Figure 2). Seven families were identified on 29 October with a mean brood size of 2.43 goslings per successful pair. However, these values are derived from a small sample of the Scottish wintering flock. Breeding success data were not collected at the Yare Valley.

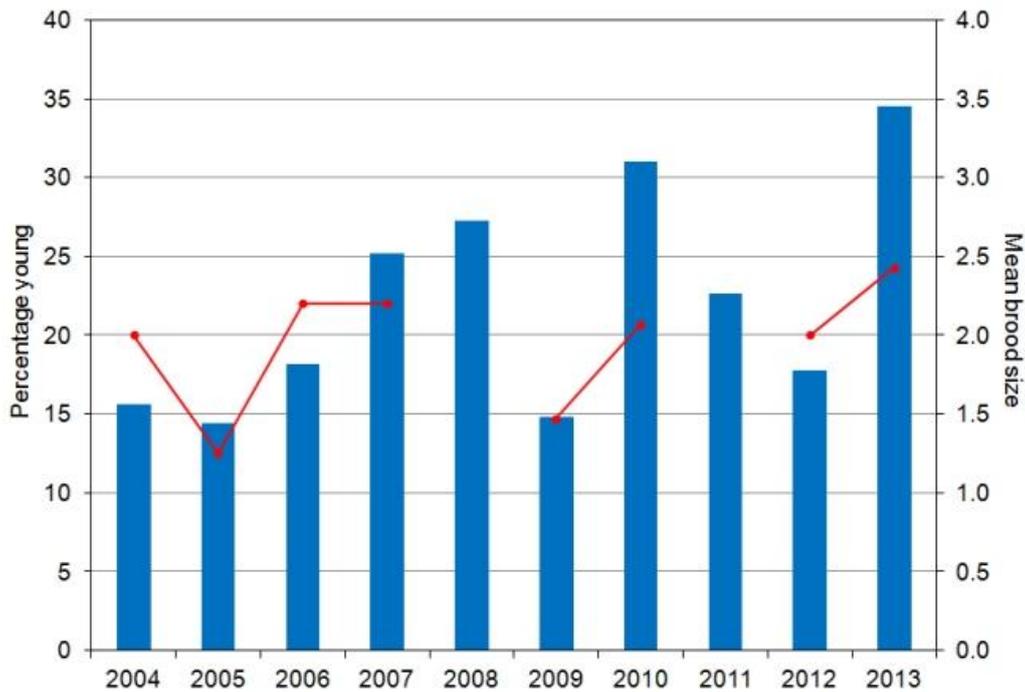


Figure 2. The percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red line) of Taiga Bean Geese recorded at Slamannan Plateau, 2004-2013.

3. Migration and site use

Fourteen Bean Geese were caught in mid October at Slamannan and five of these were fitted with telemetry equipment enabling the birds' feeding and roosting habits to be studied in detail. The remainder were fitted with standard grey plastic neck collars engraved with two black characters – these can be read with a telescope at up to 300m. The geese spent the entire winter on the Slamannan Plateau in an area of approximately 30km². In addition, the migration route and stop over sites in northwest Jutland, Denmark and at Akershus, Norway were confirmed. From here, the geese moved to Dalarna County in west Sweden where it is believed they spent the summer and probably breed.

4. Discussion

Since the peak count of 300 Bean Geese in 2005/06 and 2007/08, numbers at the Slamannan Plateau have remained stable at 200-250 birds, although the peak count in 2013/14 (237 birds) was the second lowest since 2003/04. Breeding success in 2013, recorded at Slamannan, was good. However, because this flock is <1% of the whole population, this estimate may not be representative of overall breeding success in the population. Bean Geese are not legal quarry in Scotland and few are probably shot in Sweden, Norway or Denmark. With average or good breeding success recorded at Slamannan in most years since 2004 (Figure 2), it is therefore surprising that the number of geese recorded there has fallen from a peak of 300 in 2007/08 to 200–250 birds currently. 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, so far, none of the 33 Bean Geese marked at Slamannan since 2011 have been seen on the continent.

Numbers at the Yare Valley continue to decline and were below the previous ten year mean (114 birds \pm 8.9 SE). The decline has been remarkable, since over 400 birds were recorded there as recently as 1993/94. We know through sightings of neck collared individuals that the Norfolk flock is separate from the Slamannan flock in Scotland and is linked to wintering flocks in west Denmark. It is likely, therefore 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 (see above).

5. Acknowledgements

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Goose & Swan Monitoring