

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2009/10

Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*

1. Abundance

Coordinated spring and autumn censuses of the Greenland White-fronted Goose were carried out in Great Britain and Ireland for the 28th consecutive winter. Censuses were organised by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study in Britain and by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Coverage in Britain was almost complete during the censuses, although all resorts were covered at least once during the winter. For those sites not counted during the census period, counts were substituted with those undertaken very close to the defined dates, amounting to 3.0% and 5.1% of the totals in autumn and spring, respectively. Totals of 13,269 and 11,841 Greenland White-fronted Geese were recorded in autumn 2009 and spring 2010, respectively. The autumn total comprised nine birds in England, 59 in Wales and 13,201 in Scotland, of which 7,079 were found on Islay. In spring, 14 were recorded in England, 75 in Wales and 11,752 in Scotland, with 5,744 of these birds seen on Islay.

Excellent coverage of Ireland was also achieved during the censuses; counts were substituted for sites not covered during the census periods, contributing 1.5% and 6.9% of the Irish autumn and spring totals, respectively. A total of 9,992 and 11,003 were recorded in autumn and spring, respectively, of which 7,477 and 8,381 were recorded in Wexford.

Combining the results for Britain and Ireland from the spring census gives an overall population estimate of 22,844 (no counts were available from Norway where very small numbers Greenland Whitefronts may winter).

Autumn and spring census counts in Britain and Ireland 2009/10 (includes substituted counts; see above).

Region	Autumn Census	Spring Census
Orkney	46	64
Caithness	310	289
Western Isles	48	199
Inner Hebrides	49	49
Lochaber/North Argyll	1,792	1,871
South Argyll	3,562	3,096
Islay	7,079	5,744
Dumfries & Galloway	315	440
Wales	59	75
England	9	14
Britain total	13,269	11,841
Donegal	1,097	1,228
North Central	115	106
Mayo	91	91
Mayo/Galway Uplands	70	65
Galway Lowlands	140	156
Clare/Limerick	64	64
Shannon headwaters	148	148

Region	Autumn Census	Spring Census
Middle & lower Shannon	510	491
Midlands	269	262
Southwest	11	11
Wexford	7,477	8,381
Ireland total	9,992	11,003
Population estimate	n/a	22,844

2. Breeding success

A total of 6,412 birds was aged at 27 sites in Britain during winter 2009/10 and brood size was assessed for a total of 128 families. The overall percentage of young was 12.9% and mean brood size was 3.1 young per successful pair. The percentage of young varied between wintering sites, ranging from 0-50% young. The proportion of young amongst flocks on Islay was slightly higher than the previous winter and above that for the rest of Britain (14.7% on Islay compared with 11.5% for the rest of Britain).

Age assessments were made at nine sites in Ireland, where a total of 4,804 birds were aged and brood size was collected for a total of 126 families. The overall proportion of young was 9.2% and breeding success varied between sites, ranging from 0-60% young. The majority of birds were aged at Wexford, where the percentage young was 9.1% (n = 4,340). The proportion of young reported amongst flocks in the rest of Ireland was slightly higher at 10.1%. Overall, mean brood size was 3.01 young per successful pair amongst the 126 families recorded; the majority were seen at Wexford (3.09, n = 115).

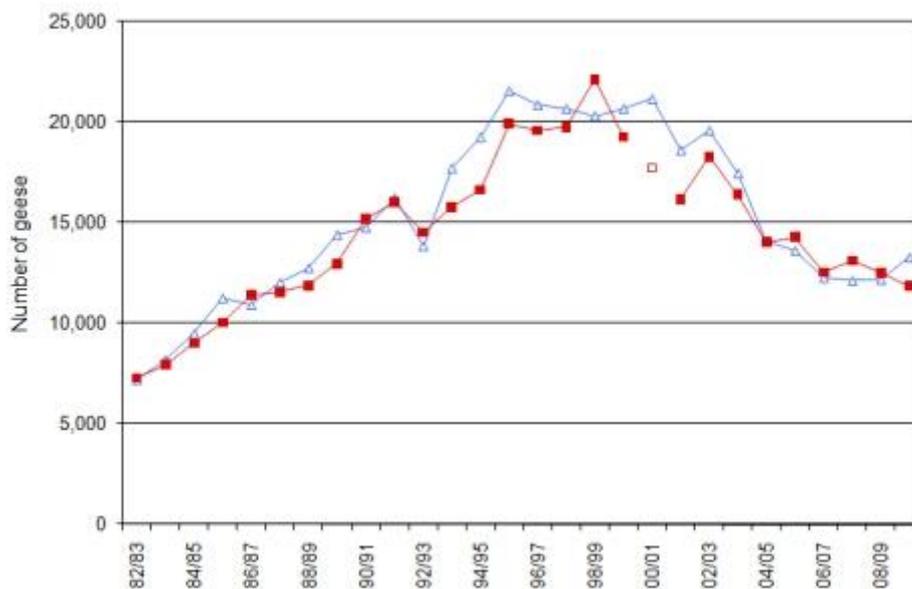
Percentage of young and mean brood size during winter 2009/10.

	% young (n)	Mean brood size (n)
Islay	14.7 (2,899)	3.55 (33)
Britain excluding Islay	11.5 (3,513)	2.87 (95)
Britain overall	12.9 (6,412)	3.05 (128)
Wexford	9.1 (4,340)	3.09 (115)
rest of Ireland	10.1 (464)	2.18 (24)
Ireland overall	9.2 (4,804)	3.01 (126)

3. Discussion

Overall numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese have remained fairly stable in the most recent three years, with the spring 2010 population estimate being only 1.4% lower than in 2009 (23,163), which in turn was only fractionally below that of 2008 (23,208).

The British autumn 2009 total was higher than the previous year (autumn 2008; 12,159), whilst the spring 2010 count was over 5% lower than that of 2009 (12,505). The difference between the autumn 2009 and spring 2010 count was mainly due to the number of birds on Islay, the top wintering resort, having fallen from 7,079 in autumn to 5,744 in spring. It is, however, thought that the spring count may be an underestimate as it seems unlikely that 1,400 fewer geese were in Britain at that time compared with the autumn.



Counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Britain, 1982/83-2009/10, showing autumn (open triangles) and spring (filled squares) census results for each season. Note the missing value for spring 2001 (unfilled square) on account of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease that year (from Fox *et al* 2010).

The spring 2010 total in Ireland was slightly higher than in 2008 (10,657). Numbers there increased by just over 1,000 birds, the majority being found in Wexford, between autumn 2009 and spring 2010.

Following the low breeding success of recent years, there has been a very slight recovery in young amongst flocks on Islay and elsewhere in Britain. Overall breeding success in 2009/10 was up on the previous season (2008/09; 10.7% young), although the proportions of young amongst flocks on Islay and elsewhere in Britain were slightly below average (15.2% for 1962-2008 on Islay; 12.7% for 1982-2008 elsewhere in Britain). In Ireland, breeding success was slightly lower than in 2008/09 (10.2%).

Although numbers have remained relatively stable since 2006 and the improved breeding success in 2009 is hopeful, the lack of any clear recovery in the population is still a cause for concern. The development of an International Action Plan for Greenland White-fronted Geese is on-going and a draft will be presented to the Birds Directive's 'Ornis' Committee in November for formal EU approval. More details can be found on the GWFG - Conservation website .

4. References

Fox, TD, I Francis & A Walsh. 2011. *Report of the 2010/2011 International Census of Greenland White-fronted Geese*. Greenland White-fronted Goose Study. Kalo

This report should be cited as:

WWT. 2010. *Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme: survey results 2009/10 Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris**

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Goose & Swan Monitoring