WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2008/09

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*

1. Abundance

The abundance of European White-fronted Geese during 2008/09 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS); the results are expected to become available in 2010.

2. Breeding success

European White-fronted Geese were aged at two localities during winter 2008/09, WWT Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, and North Warren, Sufolk. A total of 748 geese were aged, of which 13.2% were young birds. No brood size data were collected.

Data were collected during two months at both sites. At North Warren the proportion of young decreased from 20.9% (110 birds aged) in December to 13.5% (245) in January, while at WWT Slimbridge, the percentage young was only slightly lower in February (13.1%; 415) compared with January (14%; 503).

3. Discussion

The breeding success of European White-fronted Geese wintering in the UK was lower in 2008 compared with the previous year, and the lowest recorded since 2004/05, when counts were first routinely undertaken at other sites in addition to WWT Slimbridge.

At WWT Slimbridge the proportion of young was also lower than in 2007/08 and remained below the ten-year mean (1998/99-2007/08; 20.8% + 2.35 SE).

The proportion of young and mean brood size of European White-fronted Geese in Britain, 2004/05-2008/09

	No. sites	Total aged	% young	No. broods	Mean brood size
2004/05	10	1,377	27.45	60	2.42
2005/06	6	1,779	34.3	93	3.01
2006/07	4	1,210	16.7	49	1.9
2007/08	8	1,634	24.3	104	1.9
2008/09	2	748	13.2	-	-

One of the main influences on the breeding success of tundra-nesting geese is the cyclic pattern of lemming populations. Breeding success generally decreases in years of low lemming abundance as a result of predators switching from lemmings to birds (Blomqvist *et al.* 2002). Reports from monitoring stations in the Arctic indicate that numbers of lemmings dropped dramatically during summer 2008 (Soloviev & Tomkovich 2009), and Arctic Foxes were common in some areas.

4. References

Blomqvist, S, N Holmgren, S Åkesson, A Hedenström & J Pettersson. 2002. Indirect effects of lemming cycles on sandpiper dynamics: 50 years of counts from southern Sweden. *Oecologia* 133: 146-158.

Soloviev, M & P Tomkovich. (Eds.) 2009. *ARCTIC BIRDS: an international breeding conditions survey*. Online database: http://www.arcticbirds.ru/ Accessed 5 June 2009.

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