

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2005/06

Iceland Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The 46th consecutive Icelandic-breeding Goose Census (IGC) took place during autumn and winter 2005. In addition to the two usual counts undertaken in October and November, a third count was introduced as part of a three year trial to reassess the most suitable time for a complete census of Iceland Greylag Geese due to later departures from the breeding grounds.

Counts were conducted by a network of volunteer observers and professional conservation staff over the weekends of 8/9 October, 5/6 November and 3/4 December 2005. Coverage in Britain, Ireland and the Faroe Islands was similar to previous years, although no data were received from a small number of key sites in Britain. No data were received from Norway and an estimate of numbers present in Iceland in November was provided, rather than an actual count. A total of 138 sites were visited in October and 176 in November. The response to the newly introduced December count was extremely good with 161 sites surveyed in this month.

Totals of 13,882 Iceland Greylag Geese were counted in October, 94,359 in November and 83,295 in December. Both October and November counts were lower than those of the preceding year, however, counts were not received for some important regions in North Scotland in these months. Once adjustments for the presence of birds from the Re-established or Northwest Scotland population were made, as well as the inclusion of estimated counts for key sites not counted, these totals were adjusted to 17,697 in October, 95,938 in November and 77,519 in December. A population estimate of 95,938 was thus derived from the November count, representing a decrease of 10.5% since the previous estimate of 107,207 in 2004/05.

Regional distribution of Iceland Greylag Geese during October, November and December 2005. Regional counts are adjusted for the presence of Northwest Scotland or Re-established Greylag Geese, but do not include estimated counts for sites where no data were received.

	October	November	December
Iceland	nc	5,500	nc
Faroe Islands	865	979	568
Ireland	nc	4,814	6
North Scotland	3,097	56,960	60,722
Northeast Scotland	807	8,589	2,867
East central Scotland	948	7,439	7,415
Southeast Scotland/Northeast England	609	3,035	2,430
Southwest Scotland/Northwest England	1,780	1,267	3,511
West England	0	0	0
East England	0	0	0
Total counted	8,106	88,583	77,519
Estimated counts	9,591	7,355	n/a
Adjusted total	17,697	95,938	77,519
Population estimate		95,938	

Very few Iceland Greylag Geese had arrived by the October count; of those that were present, the largest numbers were recorded in North and Southwest Scotland. By November, almost 64% of the population estimate was present in North Scotland, with the Orkney Islands holding the greatest concentration of birds. The distribution in December was broadly similar to that in November, with over 69% of the geese present in Orkney, and the proportion in East central Scotland comparable to that in November. A decrease in numbers,

however, was evident in Northeast Scotland, while larger concentrations were present in Southwest Scotland at this time.

2. Breeding success

A total of 4,242 Iceland Greylag Geese was aged and brood size information collected for 84 families at various localities throughout Scotland between October and early November. The percentage of young in these flocks was 22.7%, higher than the mean of the preceding ten years (1995-2004 mean: 18.3 ± 1.5 s.e.) and the second highest over that time period (2004 yielded 28.2% young).

Variation across regions was apparent with the lowest proportion of young recorded in East central Scotland and the highest in Northeast Scotland. Brood sizes also showed some regional variation with a range between 2.2-2.8. The mean brood size of 2.3 was below that of the most recent five year mean (2.7).

The proportion of young and mean brood size of Iceland Greylag Goose flocks in autumn 2005.

	Total aged	% young	No. of broods	Mean brood size
North Scotland	3,302	22.6	61	2.2
Northeast Scotland	820	24.4	18	2.6
East central Scotland	120	15.8	5	2.8
Total	4,242	22.7	84	2.3

3. Discussion

The 2005 Icelandic-breeding Goose Census revealed a 10.5% decline in the Iceland Greylag Goose population since 2004, in contrast to the 32.1% increase seen between the preceding two years. However, the population estimate of 95,938, although lower than the preceding year, is still the second highest since 1993.

Previous census results and anecdotal evidence from Iceland suggest that Greylag Geese are remaining for longer in Iceland in the autumn, with later departure to the wintering grounds. This may mean that a substantial proportion of the population may be missed during the November count (when the population is traditionally best counted). The introduction of a December count, as part of a three year trial to reassess the most suitable time period for estimating population size effectively, was very well received by the counter network with almost as many sites counted in December as in November. Full analyses of the December counts will be carried out after the completion of the trial period in 2008.

The breeding success of Iceland Greylag Geese was lower than the preceding year, although the percentage of young was still the second highest over the most recent ten years. Preliminary hunting bag estimates from Iceland also suggested a successful breeding season for Greylag Geese, with 36% young found in the bag (although sample size was small at 400 birds, A. Sigfusson pers. comm.).

This report should be cited as:

WWT. 2006. *Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme: survey results 2005/06 Iceland Greylag Goose* Anser anser. WWT/JNCC/SNH, Slimbridge.

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This report was produced under the Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme (GSMP). This programme monitors numbers and breeding success of geese and swans in the UK during the non-breeding season. GSMP is organised by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside) and Scottish Natural Heritage.



Goose & Swan Monitoring