

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

survey results 2008/09

Iceland Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The 49th consecutive Icelandic-breeding Goose Census (IGC) took place during autumn and winter 2008, providing information on the abundance and distribution of Iceland Greylag Geese. In addition to usual count undertaken in November, a count in December (introduced in 2005) was also conducted. Counts were conducted by a network of volunteer observers and professional conservation staff over the weekends of 8/9 November and 6/7 December 2008.

Coverage in Britain similar to the preceding year, with 137 sites counted in November, and 133 in December. Outside Britain, counts were made at several sites in the Faroe Islands in both months and in Ireland, fewer counts were undertaken than in 2007. Data were also received from southwest Norway. Totals of 110,441 Greylag Geese were counted in November and 98,904 in December.

Following adjustments and the addition of estimated counts, (for definitions see full report, Mitchell 2009.) totals were adjusted to 98,291 in November and 90,007 in December. The population estimate of 98,291 was derived from the higher November total, and represented a decrease of 6.9% compared to 2007/08, when a (revised) population size of 105,630 individuals was estimated. The autumn distribution was typical, with a very low proportion of the population present in Britain during October. Those that had arrived were primarily concentrated in North Scotland, East Central Scotland and Southeast Scotland/Northeast England, though no count was made in Orkney during this month. By November, 70.0% of the population was present in North Scotland, with most of the remainder in Iceland, Ireland and East Central Scotland. Distribution was similar in December.

Regional distribution of Greylag Geese during November and December 2008 (nc = not counted). Regional counts do not include estimated counts for sites where no data were received.

	November	December
Iceland	18,000	1,500
Faroe Islands	570	nc
Southwest Norway	2,502	2,600
Ireland	2,230	277
North Scotland	77,273	78,726
Northeast Scotland	1,615	885
East Central Scotland	3,568	8,462
Southeast Scotland/Northeast England	2,577	4,242
Southwest Scotland/Northwest England	2,106	2,212
Total counted	110,441	98,904
Adjusted counts	-12,150	-12,050
Estimated counts	-	3,153
Adjusted total	98,291	90,007
Population estimate	98,291	

2. Breeding success

During early November, 1,890 Greylag Geese from 31 flocks were aged at various localities throughout northern Scotland. The proportion of the 2008/09 population estimate was 1.9%. The brood size of 42 families was also determined during this period.

Breeding success was higher than average, with flocks containing 25.0% young (mean 1998-2007: 20.4% \pm 1.21 SE). The mean brood size of 2.3 goslings per successful pair was lower than that of the recent ten year mean (mean 1998-2007: 2.6 \pm 0.09 SE).

3. Discussion

The 2008 Icelandic-breeding Goose Census revealed a 6.9% decrease in the population estimate of Iceland Greylag Goose compared to 2007. The population estimate returned to the high numbers found in 2004 and 2005 (both over 95,000 birds). The 2006 survey was, almost certainly, an undercount.

The count of Greylag Geese was comprehensive with sites being covered in most of the winter range. It was particularly good to get coverage in the Faroes Isles, Iceland and south west Norway. The increasing concentration of the population on Orkney continues with a record count of 68,349 in December 2008. Peak counts have occurred in November in each of the three years 2006-2008. However, it would appear prudent that coverage of sites for Greylag Geese need to be maintained in both November and December due to the varying time of arrival from the breeding grounds.

Despite the annual harvest of *c* 30,000 40,000 birds annually in Iceland and an unknown number shot in other parts of the winter range, breeding success at over *c* 20% in eight out of the last nine years appears to be maintaining numbers at *c* 80,000 to *c* 100,000 individuals. However, there is an increasing number of summering Greylag Geese in Scotland. Mitchell *et al* (2008) estimated there to be *c* 40,000 Greylag Geese in Scotland and a dedicated summer survey in 2008 and 2009 is being undertaken to better understand the abundance and distribution of these birds. This will help enormously in understanding where summering Greylags are and where they overlap with the winter distribution of Iceland birds.

4. References

Mitchell, C. 2009. *Status and distribution of Icelandic-breeding geese: results of the 2008 international census*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report, Slimbridge.

Mitchell, C, M Trinder, J Newth & L Griffin. 2008. *The population size of breeding Greylag Geese Anser anser in Scotland in 2008/09*. Interim report. Report to Scottish Natural Heritage. 30pp.

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Goose & Swan Monitoring