

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme

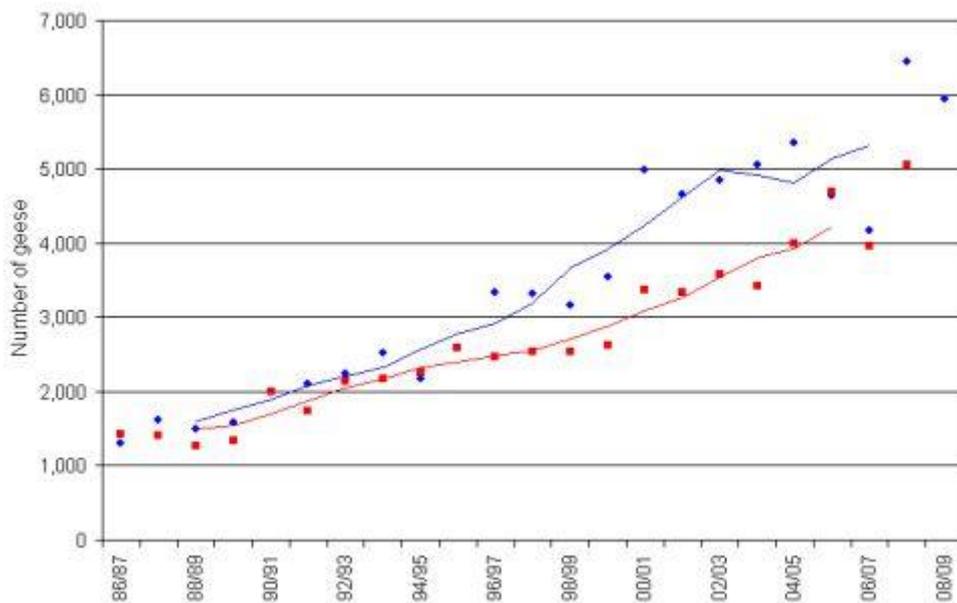
survey results 2008/09

Northwest Scotland Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

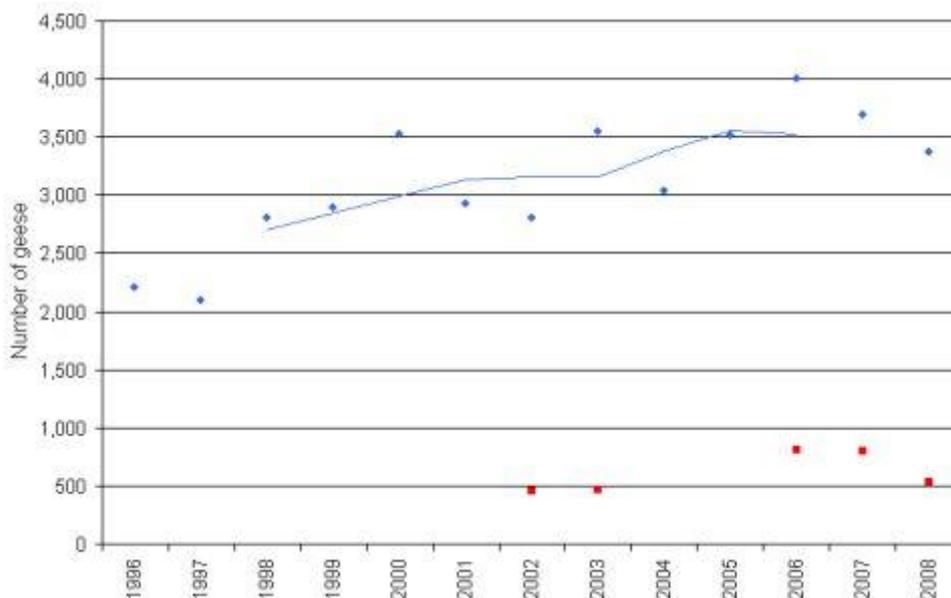
A total of 5,948 Greylag Geese was counted on the Uists in late August 2008. This was a decrease of 7.6% on the August count for the previous year. During February 2009, a count of 4661 was made, representing a decrease of 7.8% on the count in February 2008.

North Uist held the largest percentage of birds in both August 2008 (46.8%) and February 2009 (51.0%). However, unusually, Benbecula held 43.9% of the count in August 2008 and South Uist only 9.2%. Conversely, in February 2009, Benbecula held 9.2% of the count and South Uist held 42.3%.



Peak counts of Northwest Scotland Greylag Geese recorded in August (blue circles) and February (red squares) on the Uists, Outer Hebrides, 1986/87 to 2008/09. The five-year running means (eg mean for August 2006 is from counts for August 2004-2008) are shown as lines.

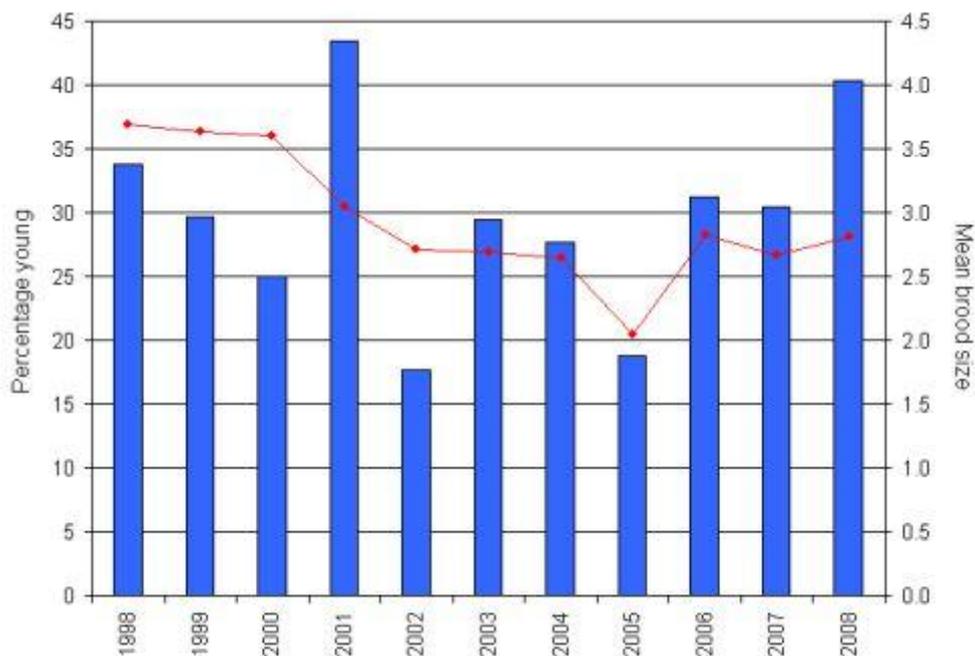
The other key area monitored on an annual basis is the island of Tìree, in the Inner Hebrides. An island-wide census in late August 2008 produced a count of 3,370 birds. This represents a decrease of 8.8% on the count in August 2007, and numbers have declined in the most recent two years after reaching a high point in 2006 (4,005 birds).



Peak counts of Northwest Scotland Greylag Geese recorded in late August/early September on Tiree, Inner Hebrides (blue circles), 1996 to 2008. The five-year running mean (eg mean for August 2005 is from counts for August 2003-2007) is shown as a line. Coordinated counts for Coll, Inner Hebrides are also shown (red squares).

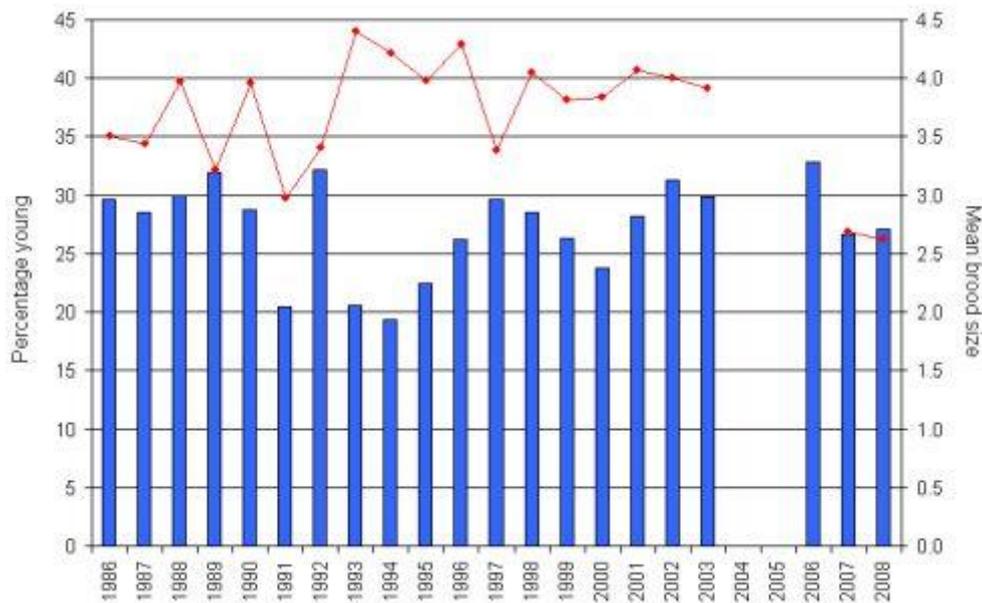
2. Breeding success

A total of 2,491 Northwest Scotland Greylag Geese was aged on Tiree on 25/26 August 2008, and brood sizes were collected for 358 families. The percentage of young birds in the post-breeding August count was 40.3% - above the average for the previous five years (mean 2003-2007: 29.8% \pm 3.47 SE). The mean brood size was similar to that recorded in the previous five years at 2.81 goslings per successful pair (mean brood size 2003-2007: 2.59 \pm 0.14 SE).



The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of Northwest Scotland Greylag Geese on Coll and Tiree, 1998 to 2007. Data from Bowler *et al.* (2005).

Productivity data were also collected from the Uists in 2008. A total of 782 birds in 27 flocks was aged between 23 and 25 August 2008, with an overall proportion of young of 27.1%. The mean brood size was 2.62 goslings per successful pair, from a sample of 29 broods.



The mean percentage of young (blue columns) and mean brood size (red circles) of Northwest Scotland Greylag Geese on the Uists, 1986 to 2008.

3. Discussion

The numbers of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in August 2008 and February 2009 were lower than the previous year, both decreasing by 7.6%. Numbers on Tiree decreased by 8.7% compared to the previous year. In both areas (Tiree and the Uists) annual productivity remains high. Both areas have been subject to licensed shooting and this extra mortality appears to have halted the gradual increase witnessed over the last 10-20 years.

Since the last national census in 1997, the Northwest Scotland Greylag Goose population is thought to have increased in number and range. In some parts of Scotland, the Re-established and Northwest Scotland populations overlap and are therefore indistinguishable. It is likely that it will become increasingly difficult to separate these populations in future, with consequences for the monitoring schemes.

A complete census of Greylag Goose in Scotland was started in summer 2008 and will be completed in summer 2009. Due to the difficulties in delimiting the two populations in Scotland, the area surveyed was extended from that covered in 1997 to include the whole of Scotland, in order to improve the understanding of distribution and to determine whether the Northwest Scotland and Re-established populations can still be delimited. There is also a need for more information on the movements of these Greylag Geese, especially between breeding areas, and on mortality patterns. This could be achieved through increasing the number of individually marked birds.

This report should be cited as:

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Goose & Swan Monitoring