

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring

Programme survey results 2014/15

British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The abundance of British Greylag Geese in Britain during 2014/15 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented in survey reports which are available on the WeBS website.

Numbers at key sites in Scotland

Annual monitoring of all British Greylag Geese is not undertaken, but annual counts and estimates of breeding success are carried out in three key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides) and on Tiree/Coll (Inner Hebrides).

On Tiree, the late summer (August) count totalled 2,808 birds (Figure 1), a 66% increase on the figure obtained in the previous year. The August 2013 count was considered an under-estimate (Mitchel *et al.* 2014) since 2,200 birds were counted there in November 2013. As recently as 2006, 4,005 Greylag Geese were counted on Tiree. On the Uists, 8,233 Greylag Geese were counted in the early September census (Figure 1), an increase of 18.1% on the previous year, and this was after shooting had started in early August. During a second count in late February, 5,576 geese were counted. On Orkney, an archipelago-wide census carried out in late August found 22,911 Greylag Geese (Mitchel *et al.* 2014), the majority being on Mainland (11,621 birds) (Figure 2). This was a 7.2% increase on the previous year (Brides *et al.* 2013).

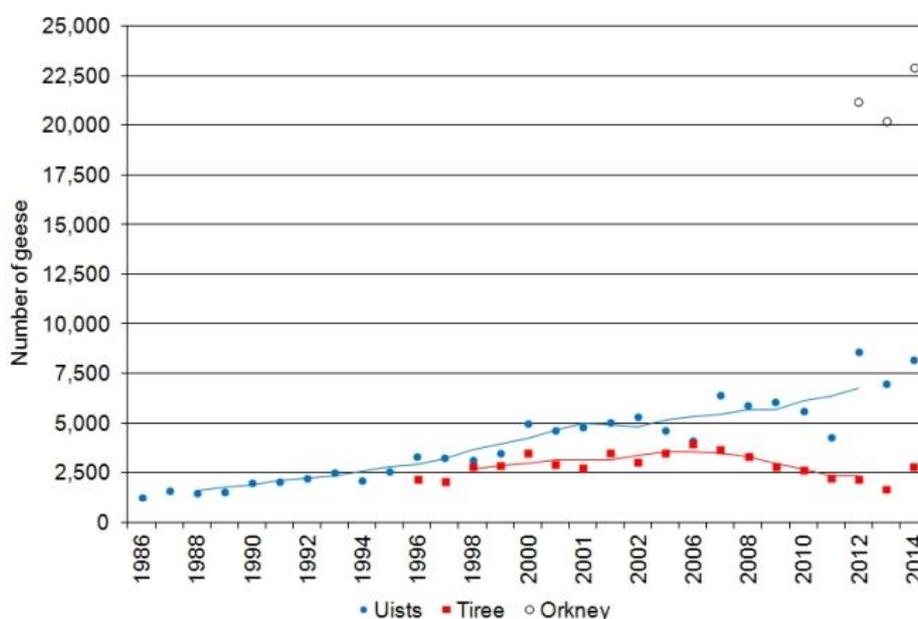


Figure 1. Late summer counts of British Greylag Geese on the Uists (blue circles), Tiree (red squares) and Orkney (open black circles) 1986 to 2014. Five year running means shown as lines.

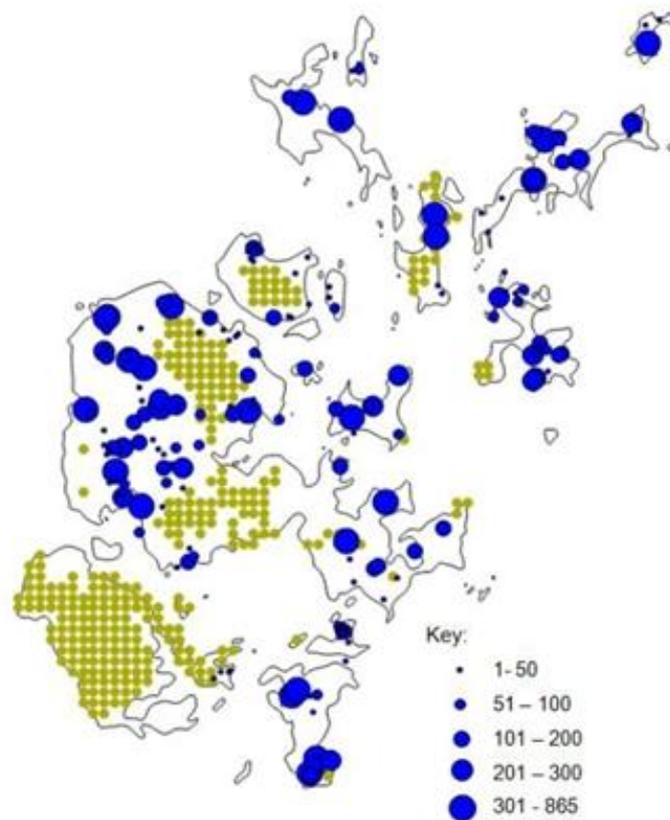


Figure 2. The distribution of Greylag Geese found during field surveys in Orkney in late August 2014 (from Mitchell et al. 2014). Blue dots are proportional to flock size. Green dots indicate 1km squares dominated by moorland habitat.

2. Breeding success

Breeding success in Orkney was estimated at 30.5% young in late summer flocks, with a mean brood size of 3.07 young per successful pair. On Tiree, breeding success was also relatively high at 35.2%, with a mean brood size of 2.27 young per successful pair (Figure 3). On the Uists, no age counts were undertaken.

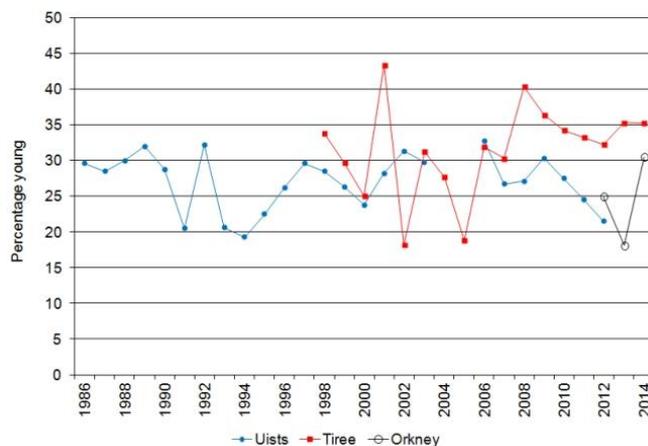


Figure 3. The percentage of young British Greylag Geese recorded on the Uists (blue circles) 1986-2012 (no data were collected in 2004 and 2005), on Tiree (red squares) 1998-2014 and Orkney (black open symbols) 2012-2014. Data from Bowler et al. (2008), J. Bowler pers. comm., SNH and Mitchell et al. (2014).

3. Discussion

British Greylag Geese continue to do remarkably well, with numbers and distribution both increasing. For example, the latest WeBS trend, for the whole of the UK, shows a steady increase in numbers, especially since the 1980s. The increase in abundance in Scotland led to calls to control numbers in key areas where the geese interacted with agricultural economic interests. Three areas in Scotland were chosen for pilot adaptive management schemes (Orkney, the Uists and Tiree/Coll) and these areas have been subject to recent licensed shooting during the close season as well as an increase in shooting during the open season.

The late August 2014 count in Orkney was the third annual archipelago-wide assessment. Numbers had increased by 7.2% compared to the previous year, despite nearly 8,500 geese being shot there in the previous 12 months. However, given that between c.20,000 and c.23,000 Greylag Geese have been counted in Orkney during late August in 2012 to 2014, it seems the rapid increase in number up to 2012 (of up c.19% per annum, see Mitchell *et al.* 2012) has stopped and that, due to increased shooting, the population trend has stabilised.

The goal of the Orkney pilot management scheme is to maintain the current levels of shooting in order to bring the summer population of British Greylag Geese down to 9,000 to 11,000 birds (SNH *in litt.*). The number of Greylag Geese counted on the Uists in September 2014 (8,233) was 18.1% higher than the previous year. As on Orkney, the recent increase in shooting appears to have led to a stabilisation in numbers. The goal of the pilot management scheme on the Uists is to bring the summer population down to 3,600 to 4,400 birds (SNH *in litt.*). Numbers counted on Tiree in late August 2014 were higher than the previous year (although the 2013 August count was considered an underestimate). The current peak counts of Greylag Geese, at any time of the year on Tiree are just over a half of what they were in 2006. Under the management scheme, the target population range for Greylag Geese is of 1,350 to 1,650 birds on Tiree and 300 to 550 birds on Coll (SNH *in litt.*).

4. Acknowledgements

Goose and age counts from Tiree were kindly provided by John Bowler. Goose counts on the Uists were provided by SNH.

5. References

Bowler, J., C. Mitchell, & A.J. Leitch. 2005. Greylag Geese on Tiree and Coll, Scotland: Status, Habitat Use and Movements. *Waterbirds* 28: 61–70.

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Mitchell, C., A.J. Leitch, K. Brides & E. Meek. 2012. *The abundance and distribution of British Greylag Geese on Orkney, August 2012*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust Report, Slimbridge.

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