

WWT/JNCC/SNH Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme
survey results 2016/17
British Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

1. Abundance

The abundance of British Greylag Geese in Britain during 2016/17 was monitored through the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Results are presented on WeBS Report Online.

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 four key areas in Scotland where Greylag Geese are actively managed, namely Orkney, the Uists (Outer Hebrides), Tiree/Coll (Inner Hebrides) and Harris/Lewis (Outer Hebrides).

On Orkney, an archipelago-wide census carried out in late August found 24,250 Greylag Geese (Mitchell *et al.* 2016), the majority being on Mainland (10,766 birds) (Figures 1 & 2). This was a 13.6% increase on the previous year (Mitchell *et al.* 2015). On Tiree, the late summer (August) count totalled 2,357 geese (Figure 1), a 23.9% increase compared to 2015. As recently as 2006, 4,005 Greylag Geese were counted on Tiree. No count data were available for the Uists or Harris/Lewis.

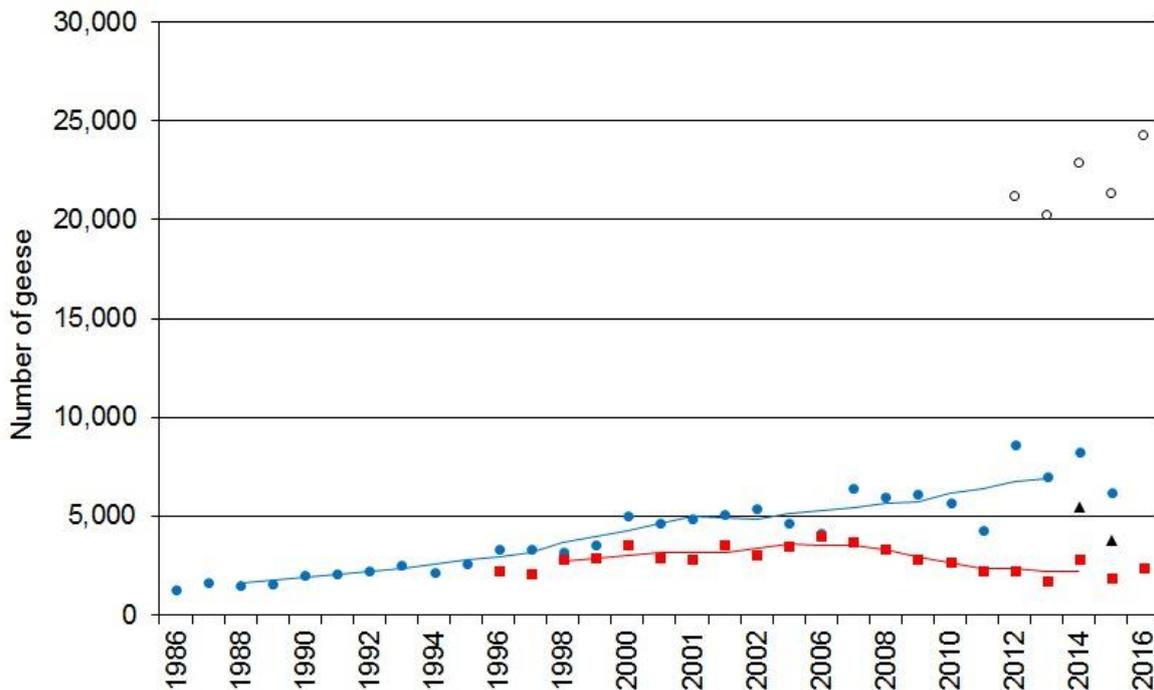


Figure 1. Late summer counts of British Greylag Geese on the Uists (blue circles), Tiree (red squares), Orkney (black open symbols) and Harris/Lewis (Black triangles) 1986 to 2016. Five-year running means shown as lines. No data were available for the Uists or Harris/Lewis for 2016.

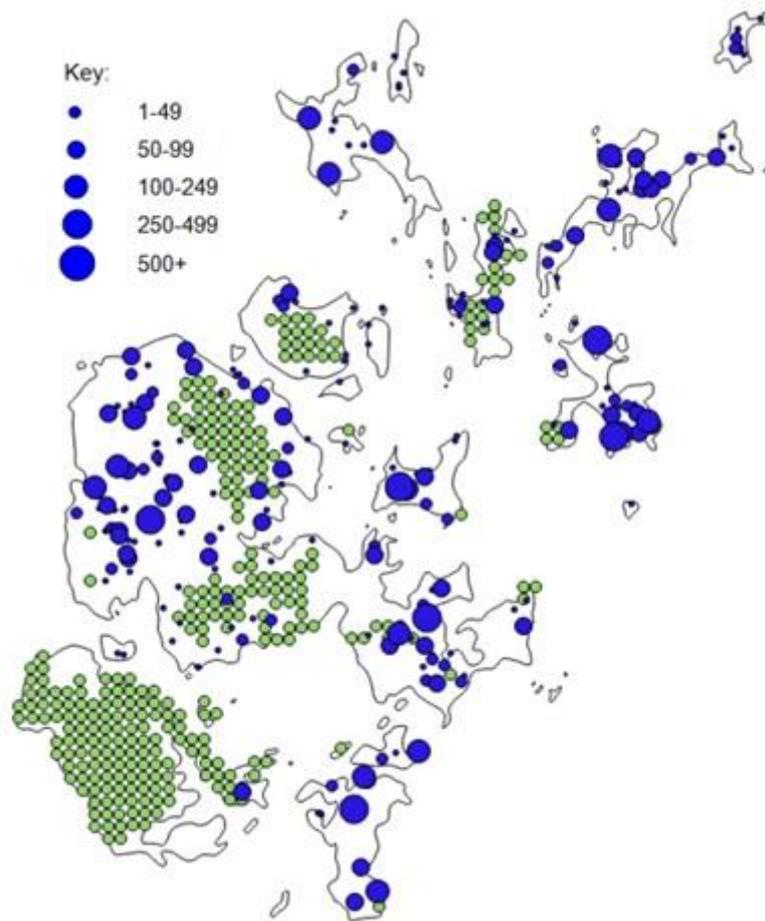


Figure 2. *The distribution of Greylag Geese found during field surveys in Orkney in late August 2016 (from Mitchell et al. 2016). Blue dots are proportional to flock size. Green dots indicate 1km squares dominated by moorland habitat.*

2. Breeding success

Breeding success in Orkney was estimated at 25.6% young in late summer flocks, with a mean brood size of 2.89 young per successful pair. On Tiree, breeding success was also relatively high at 23.9%, with a mean brood size of 2.60 young per successful pair. On the Uists, breeding success was estimated at 28.1% young with a mean brood size of 2.89 young and on Harris/Lewis the values were 24.5% young with a mean brood size of 3.23 young per successful pair (Figure 3).

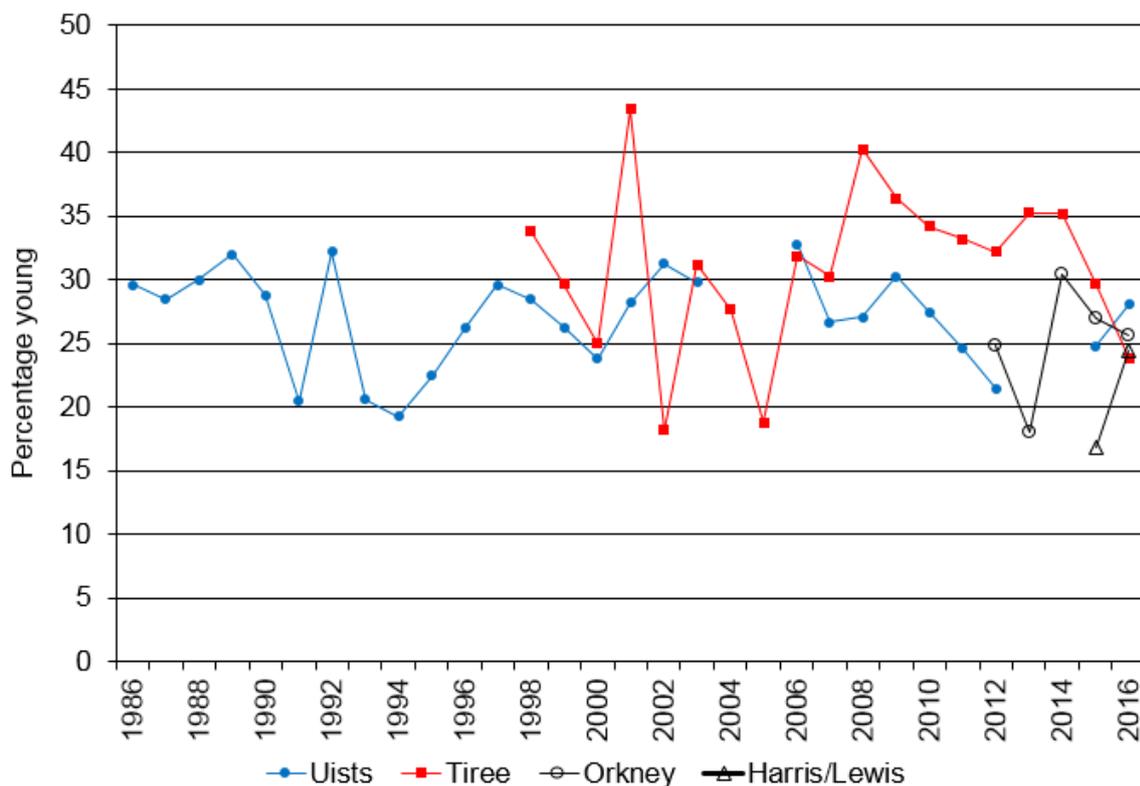


Figure 3. The percentage of young British Greylag Geese recorded on the Uists (blue circles) 1986–2016 (no data were collected in 2004, 2005, 2013 and 2014), on Tiree (red squares) 1998–2016, on Orkney (black open circles) 2012–2016 and on Harris/Lewis (black open triangles) 2015–2016. Data from Bowler et al. (2008), J. Bowler pers. comm., SNH, Mitchell et al. (2016) and Mitchell (2016).

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 (see British Greylag account at <https://app.bto.org/webs-reporting/>). 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. In 2015, the management scheme was extended to Harris/Lewis.

The goal of the Orkney pilot management scheme is to reduce damage to agricultural economic interests by maintaining 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 late August 2016 count in Orkney was the fifth annual archipelago-wide assessment. Numbers had increased by 13.6% compared to the previous year. Nearly 10,000 geese were shot there in the previous 12 months although during the winter months some of the geese shot will have been migrants from Iceland. However, given that between *c.* 20,000 and *c.* 24,250 Greylag Geese have been counted in Orkney during late August in 2012 to 2016, it seems the rapid increase in number up to 2012 (of *c.* 19% per annum, see Mitchell *et al.* 2012) has stopped and that, due to increased shooting, the population trend has stabilised.

On the Uists, 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 (2,357) in late August 2016 were 24% higher than the previous year, although the apparent increase may have been exaggerated due to an undercount due to the wet summer in August 2015. 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.*). Numbers on Harris/Lewis have been relatively stable at between 3,700 to 5,800 birds since 2010.

4. Acknowledgements

Goose and age counts from Tiree were kindly provided by John Bowler.

5. References

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This report should be cited as:

WWT. 2017. *Goose & Swan Monitoring Programme: survey results 2016/17 British 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 (WWT) and funded in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and DAERA Northern Ireland) and Scottish Natural Heritage.



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