

REPORT OF THE 2024/2025 INTERNATIONAL CENSUS OF GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GEESE

by

GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE STUDY



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SUMMARY

The global population of Greenland White-fronted Geese in spring 2025 comprised 13,303 individuals, 5,086 in Ireland and 8,217 in Britain, the lowest count on record, a decline of 11.6% from the 15,043 counted the previous spring. Numbers at Wexford, SE Ireland, fell by a third from 4,283 last spring to 2,858 in spring 2025 (after departures of geese mid-winter) and on Islay by 13.2%, from 4,926 to 4,274 in spring 2025. Counts elsewhere in Ireland rose from the low of 1,325 last spring to 2,228 in 2025, while numbers counted elsewhere in Britain declined from 4,509 to 3,943. The percentage of young among wintering Wexford and Islay geese were each among the lowest on record again (4.7% and 3.9%) and generally low elsewhere, due to poor spring conditions on the west Greenland breeding areas. The conservation status of these geese is now increasingly perilous.

Here we present the results of the Greenland White-fronted Goose surveys conducted on their wintering grounds in winter 2024/2025. This combines counts from all British resorts, coordinated by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study, with those in Ireland, coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The international coordinated count in spring 2025 found a combined global total of 13,303 Greenland White-fronted Geese. This was the lowest count since organised surveys began in 1982/1983, down 11.6% on the previous lowest, 15,043 counted in spring 2024.

The annual spring 2025 census in **Ireland** found a total of 5,086 Greenland White-fronted Geese (compared to 5,608 in spring 2024), with 2,858 birds at Wexford and 2,228 elsewhere in Ireland. Missing spring counts for nine flocks (all down-country flocks, away from Wexford) were substituted with counts from the nearest months, less than in recent years, representing 9.2% of the total for Ireland. The annual spring count of all known Greenland White-fronted Goose wintering flocks in **Britain** found a total of 8,217 in spring 2025, compared to 9,435 in spring 2024. The 2025 total included one bird counted in England, 25 in Wales, 4,274 on Islay and 3,917 in the rest of Scotland. Spring coverage in Britain was exceptionally good, requiring substituted counts at only four resorts, representing 4.7% of the British total.

Among **Irish** wintering geese, the percentage young birds in aged samples after the 2024 breeding season was again very low at 5.3% (based on 3,402 aged) compared to 2.9% last season. There were 4.7% young among 2,732 aged at Wexford (a slight improvement on last season's very low 2.4% but reflecting a long decline there since the late 1980s). Elsewhere in Ireland, reproductive success was also low at 7.9% (based on a sample of 670 compared to 18.2% last season based on 99 birds aged at two flocks). Mean brood size among the Irish flocks was low (2.22, $n = 67$) but slightly up on 1.96 last season. Mean brood size at Wexford was 2.15, based on 48 broods (compared to 1.69 last season). Elsewhere in Ireland, mean brood size was 2.42 ($n = 19$, compared to 2.57 last season). The overall proportion of young in aged samples from **British** wintering geese was 5.3% ($n = 4,825$ aged, compared to 3.1% last season), also far below the recent average. This included 3.9% young birds on Islay ($n = 1,844$, compared to 2.3% last year) and 6.1% ($n = 2,981$) elsewhere in Britain. Overall mean brood size in Britain was 2.11 ($n = 105$ broods, compared to 1.79 last season), mean brood size on Islay was better at 2.0 ($n = 33$ broods, compared to last year's 1.45) and 2.17 elsewhere ($n = 72$, close to 2.19 after summer 2023).

Very low reproductive success in 2024 throughout the population largely explained severe declines in annual numbers since last winter. Although numbers in Ireland away from Wexford increased in spring 2025 compared to the previous season, this failed to balance a larger loss at Wexford. The apparent abandonment of many traditional wintering sites gives additional cause for concern, jeopardising as it does the maintenance of range which is a key objective for the population. Given that adverse weather conditions on the breeding grounds in spring are seemingly affecting the reproductive output of this population (factors about which we can do little), the persistent low breeding success that has precipitated the current poor conservation status of Greenland White-fronted Geese necessitates continued vigilance, monitoring and increasing concern.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024/2025 survey represents the 43rd annual census of Greenland White-fronted Geese coordinated in Great Britain by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study and in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Table 1 shows the most recent six seasons of total census data available to the present, based on the full survey of all known regular winter haunts for this population, broken down by totals for Wexford and the rest of Ireland, and from Islay and the rest of Britain. The spring census in winter 2024/2025 was undertaken in March, with the autumn census in December, as has been standard for many years. However, due to advancing departure dates, the spring census in future will be brought forward to February, starting with the winter 2025/2026 season.

Table 1. Spring population census totals for Greenland White-fronted Geese, 2020-2025.

	Spring 2020	Spring 2021	Spring 2022	Spring 2023	Spring 2024	Spring 2025
Wexford	8,312	6,262	5,361	5,531	4,283	2,858
Rest of Ireland	2,106	2,148	2,928	2,261	1,325	2,228
TOTAL IRELAND	10,418	8,410	8,289	7,792	5,608	5,086
Islay	5,910	6,878	5,297	5,168	4,926	4,274
Rest of Britain	5,223	4,898	4,441	5,067	4,509	3,943
TOTAL BRITAIN	11,133	11,776	9,738	10,235	9,435	8,217
Population total	21,551	20,186	18,027	18,027	15,043	13,303

COUNTS IN BRITAIN 2024/2025

Thanks to all our amazing and dedicated observers in Britain, who again devoted considerable time and energy to count Greenland White-fronted Geese at all their regular wintering resorts. Monthly maximum counts from all known regularly occupied British Greenland White-fronted Goose wintering haunts are shown in Table 2, where we also present the totals from the nominated internationally coordinated census periods in December and March. Each year, we encourage count coverage during these two periods to ensure coordination with parallel counts in Ireland. Counts from other sites, not known to support regular numbers of Greenland White-fronted Geese are shown in Table 3. The total from these counts are added to the master totals at the foot of Table 2. The count network achieved an extraordinary level of cover; we only lacked spring counts from four resorts in the allotted count dates, although all had February counts that could be substituted, constituting just 386 birds, 4.7% of the British total.

As explained in earlier reports, we feel the March count provides a more representative assessment of total numbers in the population each winter. Our experience continues to be that the geese tend to aggregate more, making them easier to count during this spring period at most resorts compared to other times of year. It also has the advantage that it represents the population size after the course of the preceding winter. However, whereas Greenland White-fronted Geese used to depart from the winter quarters in late April in the 1960s and 1970s, they are now leaving for Iceland earlier, typically now in late March, necessitating the advancement of the international “spring” count in future to February.

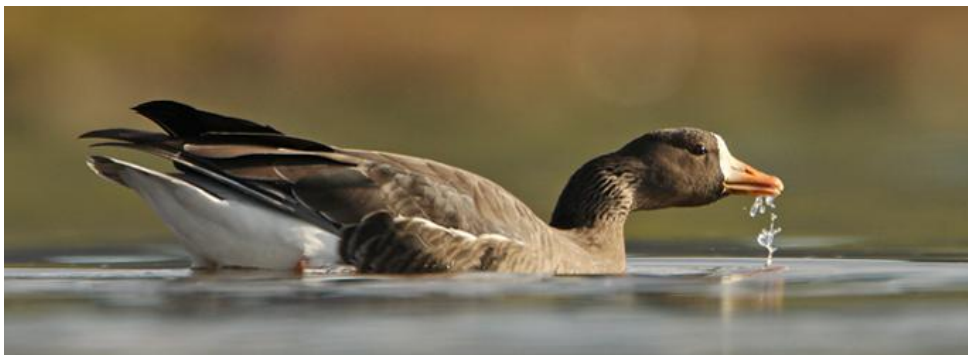
Reproductive success in summer 2024 was again poor (see later), resulting in a 13% decline in Greenland White-fronted Geese counted during the 2025 spring count at British resorts compared to the previous year. This continues the deeply worrying trend of rapid population decline. Despite this, numbers on Orkney were largely unchanged (55 compared to 51 in 2023/2024, but down from 84 in the previous year). Numbers held up in Caithness, though slightly down in both flocks. Interestingly, 15 birds were found on the patterned mire systems on the Flow Country, the first reports of geese using peatlands there in many years. The Mey flock peaked at 138 birds in November but generally numbered 110-115 in March. The Westfield group was more fragmented, peaking at 146 in February, but varying between

49 and 98 at other times of year. Many flocks now show signs of dispersing in smaller groups across multiple feeding areas, making reliable counting increasingly difficult. We need to remain vigilant and try and understand where small flocks may disperse, especially during the internationally coordinated spring count, when every last goose matters!

For the first time ever, the flock on Lewis was not located throughout the entire winter, despite considerable searching. We may have to accept that this site has now been abandoned. No birds were reported from Askernish this year, which might indicate the end of regular wintering there, yet the Lough Bee group continued to number 100 birds, now the last apparently persisting flock on the Uists and Benbecula. Likewise, the gloomy news from Skye was that despite 24 geese moving through Broadford on migration in autumn, diligent searches for the flock on the west side of the island failed to find any wintering birds signalling the end of regular wintering Greenland White-fronted Geese on that island as well. The flock that commutes between Kentra and Claish Mosses briefly peaked at 87 birds in November, then settled to a regular 72 individuals for the rest of the winter, slightly down on last winter's numbers. No birds were seen at Appin in winter 2024/2025 which also seems to mark the desertion of that area. The counts of 25 in the Benderloch group and 60-68 on the nearby island of Lismore were only slightly down on last winter's counts. Cheeringly, numbers were slightly up on Tiree (868 compared to 746) and Coll (136 versus 128), little changed on Colonsay and approximately the same on Danna/Keills/Ulva. Only three birds were registered on Mull which also suggests another long-established island wintering group of geese will disappear before long. The three birds counted on the mainland at Moine Mhor continue to hang on by returning faithfully to that site despite the very small numbers present over many years. The total of geese on Kintyre in spring reached 1,774, down on last year's 2,160 at the same time in spring. Counts on the Isle of Bute found no birds in winter 2024/2025 despite a count of 115 last winter. However, an Ornitela tagged bird marked at West Freugh in December 2019 by Larry Griffin spent most of the winter on the island of Inchmarnock (just west of Bute), as well as visiting the main island, suggesting that that flock is still present, but spending most of its time on Inchmarnock where they have been seen but are not easy to see from Bute. Numbers at Loch Lomond were a little up (170 versus 161 at peak the previous winter). Numbers on Islay peaked at 4,852 in December, but the spring count there (4,274) was down by 13.2% on that in spring 2024 (4,926). Monthly counts at Loch Ken never nudged above 100 and were down on the 120 counted at peak the previous winter, whereas numbers at Stranraer held up (115 in spring 2025 compared to 137 in 2024). Welsh numbers dropped again on the Dyfi (10 birds versus 14 the previous winter) and slightly on Anglesey (15 compared to 16).

The autumn count of 8,770 was well above the following spring total for the first time in many years (Figure 1) and may relate to the increased movement of geese as spring migration commences, one reason why discussions have led to the advancement of the spring survey dates (see later).

Tim Deans, County Recorder for Northumberland confirmed this year that the last long staying bird at the former haunt, Grindon Lough in that county between 1 January and 27 April 2022, was the final sighting at a site now regularly monitored by many observers. It would therefore appear that that flock, which never numbered more than a few individuals, has disappeared. Tim wryly commented that the sub-species is now a county rarity and any sighting now causes a "mini-twitch".



A Greenland White-fronted Goose at Hvanneyri, west Iceland October 2010 (Sigurjón Einarsson)

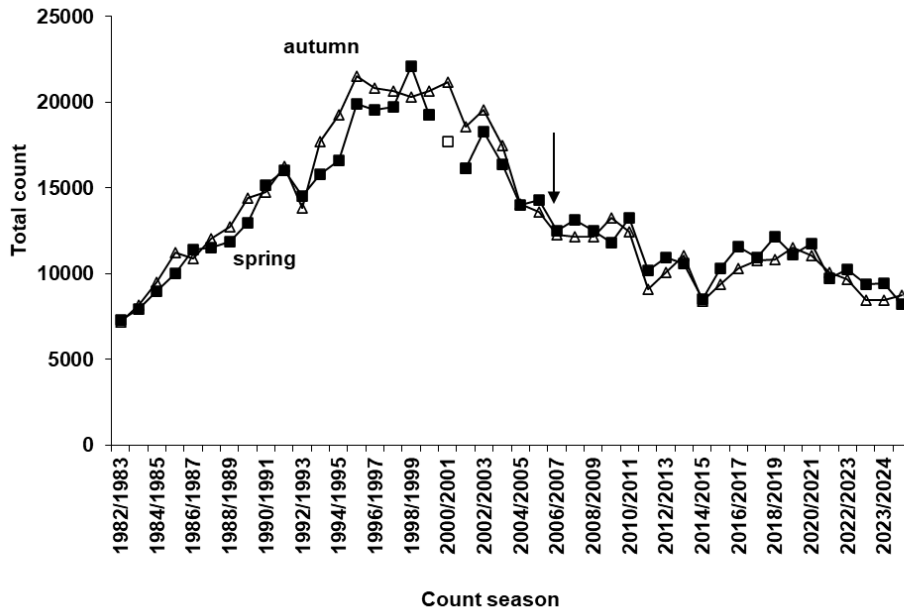


Figure 1. Counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Britain, 1982/1983-2024/2025, showing autumn (open triangles) and spring (filled squares) census results for each season. The value for spring 2001 (unfilled square) was missing on account of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease that year and was therefore estimated from previous counts. Vertical arrow indicates the start of the hunting ban in Iceland in autumn 2006.



Greenland White-fronted Goose at Danna, Argyll March 2017 (Ian Francis)

Table 2. Summary counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Britain 2024/2025

Shaded values are estimates for sites missing counts within the nominated periods for the international censuses

SITE NAME	SEP	OCT	NOV	AUTUMN CENSUS	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	SPRING CENSUS	APR
ORKNEY										
Yonbell, Birsay										
Loons, Birsay			71	71	67	67	55	40	55	
Hundland, Birsay										
CAITHNESS										
Westfield			98	98	49	49	146	86	86	14
Loch of Mey		70	138	138	48	71		115	110	
Lythmore								2		
Flows				15	15	15				
WESTERN ISLES										
Barvas/Shawbost, Lewis		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Coot Loch, Benbecula		8				2				
Kilpheder/Askernish, South Uist										
Loch Bee/Kilaulay, South Uist				100		100		56	100	
INNER HEBRIDES										
Kilmuir, Skye				0					0	
Broadford/Pabay, Skye		24								
LOCHABER/NORTH ARGYLL										
Muck/Eigg										
Loch Shiel/Claish Moss		68	87	72	72	72	72	72	72	72
Lorn:Benderloch				25		25	19		25	
Lorn: Appin				0		0	0	0	0	
Lismore			60	68		68	60		63	34
Tiree				605	605	649			868	
Coll			116	40	90	102	164		136	
Assapol/Fidden, Mull		3	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	
SOUTH ARGYLL										
Colonsay/Oronsay		74	125	100	100	24	99	17	99	55
Jura: Loch a'Chnuic Bhric				0				0		
Jura: Lowlandman's Bay				0				0		
Danna/Kiells/Ulva		70	124	138		153	90	54	142	
Moine Mhor			3	3		0	3	3	3	
Rhunahaorine		87	233	395	355		346	304	322	
Machrihanish			630	1686	280		1636	1369	1302	
Clachan			124	0		138	132	94	132	
Gigha				47					18	
Glenbarr				12					0	
Isle of Bute				0					0	
Endrick Mouth, Loch Lomond		25	144	64		165	120	170	170	
ISLAY										
			4183	4852	4852	4066		4268	4274	
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY										
Loch Ken		68	97	89	98	95	95	96	96	
Stranraer		70	124	126	126	140	91	115	115	
WALES										
Dyfi Estuary		10	10	10					10	
Cors Ddyga, Cefni valley, Anglesey			15	15	15	15		15	15	
ENGLAND										
Grindon Lough, Northumberland				0					0	
OTHER IRREGULAR SITES										
England combined		0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scotland combined		113	9	1	2	13	5	3	3	1
Wales combined		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS										
				8770					8217	
Rest of GB less Islay				3918					3943	
Rest of Scotland less Islay				3893					3917	
England				0					1	
Wales				25					25	

Table 4. Counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese at irregular sites in Britain 2024/2025

	SEP	OCT	NOV	AUTUMN CENSUS	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	SPRING CENSUS	APR
OTHER IRREGULAR SITES										
Scotland										
Hollandstoun, North Ronaldsay, Orknet		5								
Udale Bay, Ross & Cromarty		1								
Loch Spynie, Moray			1							
Loch of Skene, Aberdeenshire		1	1	1	1					
Ratchill Pond, Kintour, Aberdeenshire							1			
Ratray, Loch of Strathbeg, Aberdeenshire						1	2	3	3	1
Milton of Culsh, Aberdeenshire					1					
Loch Nan Eala, Arisaig, Inverness-shire		60								
Senna, Ardnamurchan, Argyll		4								
Kilmory, Rum, Argyll		34								
Seil, Argyll		7	7							
Yorkston Pool, Midlothian		1								
Mossblown, Ayrshire							2			
Fail Loch, Tarbolton, Ayrshire						10				
Ladystone Loch, Galston, Ayrshire						1				
Seamill, Ayrshire						1				
England										
Boldon Flats Nature Reserve Tyne & Wear						1				
Little Woollen Moss, Greater Manchester			10*							
Woolston Eyes, Cheshire (same birds)			10*							
Culcheth, Warrington, Cheshire (same birds)			10*							
Stanhoe, North Norfolk						1				
Sharrington, North Norfolk						1				
Slimbridge, Gloucestershire			3				1	1	1	1
Wales										
Aberffraw, Anglesey					1					
TOTALS										
Scotland		113	9	1	2	13	5	3	3	1
England		0	13	0	0	3	1	1	1	1
Wales		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

*same birds reported at different sites



Greenland White-fronted Goose at Meikle Finery, Loch Lomond March 2020 (Ian Francis)

COUNTS FROM IRELAND

Sincere thanks to our fantastic network of counters in Ireland who achieved excellent monthly coverage at most of the Irish wintering flocks (Table 4). Spring counts were only missing for nine down-country flocks, less than in recent years, accounting for 9.2% of the total for Ireland.

Nine geese were seen early in the winter on Rathlin Island. It was unclear whether these birds remained throughout the winter. Numbers at Loughs Foyle and Swilly in the far north increased markedly in January and February compared to earlier in the winter. This within-winter movement has been connected to Wexford in the past by the sudden appearance of collared birds confirming arrivals from there. This shift of individuals from Wexford to elsewhere would certainly help explain the drop in numbers registered on the Slobbs from December 2024 onwards. Sustained numbers on the Foyle/Swilly into March produced a relatively good count of 956 in spring 2025 compared to the count of 306 in the previous spring. Numbers at Dunfanaghy were also encouragingly higher throughout 2024/2025 (>120 birds) than in 2023/2024 (maximum 81). Similarly, numbers at Pettigo increased to 81 in spring 2025 from 37 the previous year. Counts at Lough McNean remained stable at just over 100 birds, Sheskinmore at around 20 birds and Stabannon (the sole flock on the east coast) at 12. In the central west resorts, numbers were generally up slightly, for example at Lough Conn (55), the combined small flocks on the Bog of Erris (just over 30), Rostaff and Killower (41), Lough Corrib (15), Rahasane Turlough (58), the North County Clare flock (55) and Lough Gara (114). Eleven were also re-found in winter 2024/2025 in Connemara, where the use of remote bogland feeding areas always make this group challenging to find. On the Shannon, numbers on the Brosna were 188 compared to 71 last winter and the Suck/Glenamaddy complex supported some 175 geese in 2024/2025 compared to 149 last winter. Even the Midland Lakes complex did not witness large reductions, where 183 were counted in spring 2025 compared to 198 in the previous spring. News was less encouraging from the Tullagher flock, which dropped from three previously to just two this winter. It seems unlikely the subspecies will continue to use this site in the future. Finally, the picture at Wexford was pretty bleak, with a peak at all local resorts generating a count of only 4,520 in December and just 2,858 in spring 2025 (Figure 2), down from 5,569 and 4,283 in the previous winter, respectively.

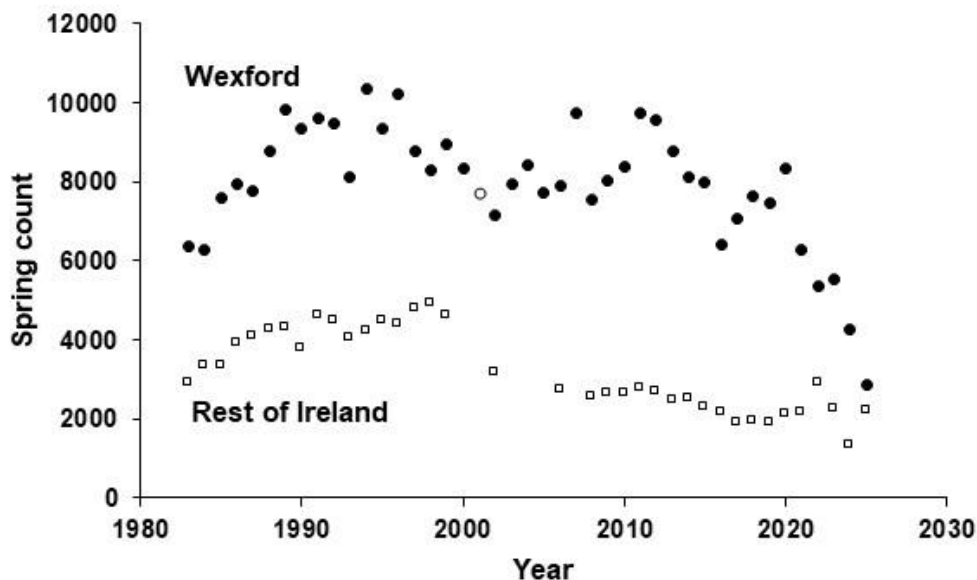


Figure 2. Counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Ireland, 1982/1983-2024/2025, showing Wexford spring counts (filled circles) separate from the rest of Ireland spring totals (open squares) for each season. The counts for spring 2001 were missing due to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease that year and was therefore estimated at Wexford from previous and subsequent counts (open circle). Note that full coverage of the down country flocks was missing for some years in the 2000s when complete coverage was not possible. After a prolonged period of fluctuating trends, note the alarming declines at Wexford since 2020.

Table 4. Summary counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese in Ireland 2024/2025

Shaded values are estimates for sites missing counts within the nominated periods for the international censuses

	OCT	NOV	AUTUMN CENSUS	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	SPRING CENSUS	APR
Rathlin Island		9	9	0				0	
DONEGAL									
Loughs Foyle & Swilly	128	487	620	620	794	1095	956	956	
Dunfanaghy	26	123	123	17	87	72	124	124	
Sheskinmore Lough	11	21	21	21	19	22	21	21	11
Pettigo		14	85	85	50	36	81	81	
NORTH CENTRAL									
Lough Macnean			101	101	20	16		101	
Stabannon		12	12	12	6			15	
MAYO									
Lough Conn			45	45	55		0	55	
Bog of Erris									
a. Mullet		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
b. Carrowmore			12				0	12	
c. Owenduff			21				21	21	
MAYO/GALWAY									
Connemara			11	11				11	
Rostaff & Killower		40	44	44	41	41	41	41	
Lower Lough Corrib			10		10	9	15	15	
Rahasane turlough	28	41	57	57	49	58		58	
Errif & Derrycraff									
CLARE/LIMERICK									
Tullagher		3	2	2	2	2		2	
North County Clare		30	43		43	55		55	
SHANNON HEADWATERS									
Lough Gara			157	157	88	52	114	114	
MIDDLE & LOWER SHANNON									
River Suck		0	0						
Glenamaddy			70		70			70	
Four Roads	0	1	101	0	101	105	0	105	
Little Brosna			207					188	
MIDLANDS									
Midland lakes		200	169	167	169	190	183	183	
SOUTH EAST									
Wexford North Slob	1910	3662	4511	4511	3686	3797	2853	2853	5
Wexford South Slob		0	9	9	19	117	0	0	
Tacumshin		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Cahore		0	0	0	0	0	5	5	
OVERALL COUNT TOTALS									
			6440					5086	
Ireland without Wexford									
			1920					2228	
Wexford									
			4520					2858	

THE INTERNATIONAL TOTALS

The Irish totals included 2,858 counted at Wexford added to the 2,228 geese counted elsewhere in the rest of Ireland. In Britain, 4,274 were counted on Islay with 3,943 at sites elsewhere in Scotland, Wales and England. This gives a global total of 13,303 Greenland White-fronted Geese in spring 2025, a decline of 11.6% from the 15,043 counted in spring 2024 (Figure 3). The spring count at Wexford was unusually low due to apparent departures in mid-winter, whereas counts elsewhere in Ireland showed a modest increase over the already low 2024 spring count. Nevertheless, the overall declines continue to be largely attributable to yet another poor breeding season in summer 2024 (due to poor conditions on the breeding grounds; see below and Fox *et al.* 2025), with a staggering 34% decline since the count in 2021. Given this recent downturn, the population seems to be in new territory with regard to population size and annual rate of decline.

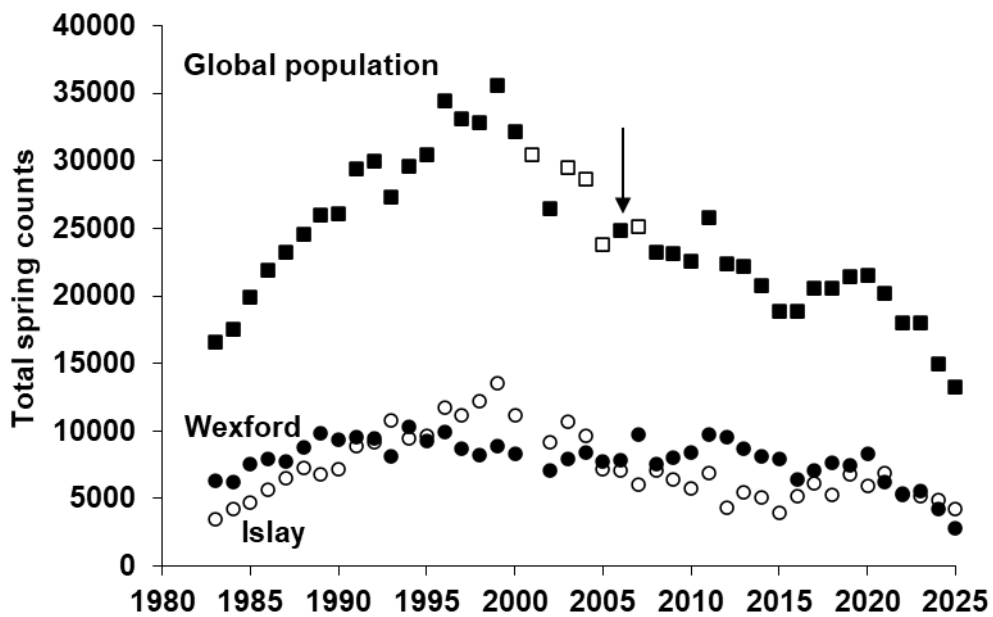


Figure 3. Spring counts of Greenland White-fronted Geese from Wexford Slobs and Islay and the global population count, 1983-2025. Values for the total population size are missing in some years when complete coverage could not be achieved (open squares, for which estimated counts based on previous counts have been substituted). Values for spring 2001 were missing on account of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease that year and were therefore also estimated from previous counts. The arrow marks the point at which autumn hunting in Iceland was stopped in 2006.

Fox, A.D., Stroud, D.A., Francis, I.S., Walsh, A.J., Kelly, S., Norriss, D.W., Wilson, H.J., Schindler, A.R. & Weegman, M.D. (2025) Can the Greenland White-fronted Goose be saved? *British Birds* 118:431-445.

AGE RATIOS IN BRITAIN

We were delighted with the high level of sampled age ratios and brood size data that observers managed to collect in Britain during 2024/2025 which generated large samples from very many flocks (Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of age ratio determinations and brood sizes for Greenland White-fronted Geese wintering in Ireland 2024/2025.

Flock name	Percentage young	Number aged	Number of first-winter birds	Mean brood size	Number of broods	Numbers of young in broods
Loons	2.82	71	2	1.00	2	2
Loch of Mey, Caithness	1.35	74	1	1.00	1	1
Hill of Forss, Caithness	14.84	128	19	3.17	6	19
Loch Shiel	2.86	35	1	1.00	1	1
Tiree	4.48	335	15	2.14	7	15
Coll	6.14	114	7			
Assapol/Fidden Mull	0.00	6	0			
Lismore	9.09	55	5	5.00	1	5
Tralee, Benderloch	0.00	25	0			
Colonsay	5.17	58	3			
Danna/Ulva	5.07	138	7	1.75	4	7
Moine Mhor	33.33	3	1	1.00	1	1
Clachan	18.84	138	26	2.36	11	26
Rhunahaorine, Kintyre	6.85	248	17	1.70	10	17
Machrihanish, Kintyre	4.96	1210	60	2.17	24	52
Islay	3.85	1844	71	2.00	33	66
Loch Ken	2.17	92	2	2.00	1	2
Stranraer	6.35	126	8	2.67	3	8
Endrick Mouth	7.00	100	7			
Anglesey	0.00	15	0			
Dyfi Estuary	20.00	10	2			
Britain, excl. Islay	6.14	2981	183	2.17	72	156
OVERALL	5.26	4825	254	2.11	105	222

The summer of 2024 was another poor season for reproductive success among Greenland White-fronted Geese based on age ratios sampled in wintering flocks. Overall, 5.3% of 4,825 birds assigned to age classes were young birds, including 3.9% young of 1,844 sampled on Islay and 6.1% young of 2,981 sampled elsewhere in Britain (Table 4). Despite this, considerable variation existed between flocks. Notably, 18.8% of 138 birds aged at Clachan, Kintyre were first-year birds (based on photographic evidence), and 14.9% among 128 aged in the Westfield flock in Caithness were first winter geese. These higher (>15%) levels of reproductive output are needed to restore the population to a positive population growth rate. However, since most flocks remain below 10% (acknowledging the small samples such as at Moine Mhor and on the Dyfi), there is little prospect of a return to more favourable conservation status for the population at British wintering resorts. The extremely low productivity of the last three summers contrasts with the situation in previous years (Figure 4).

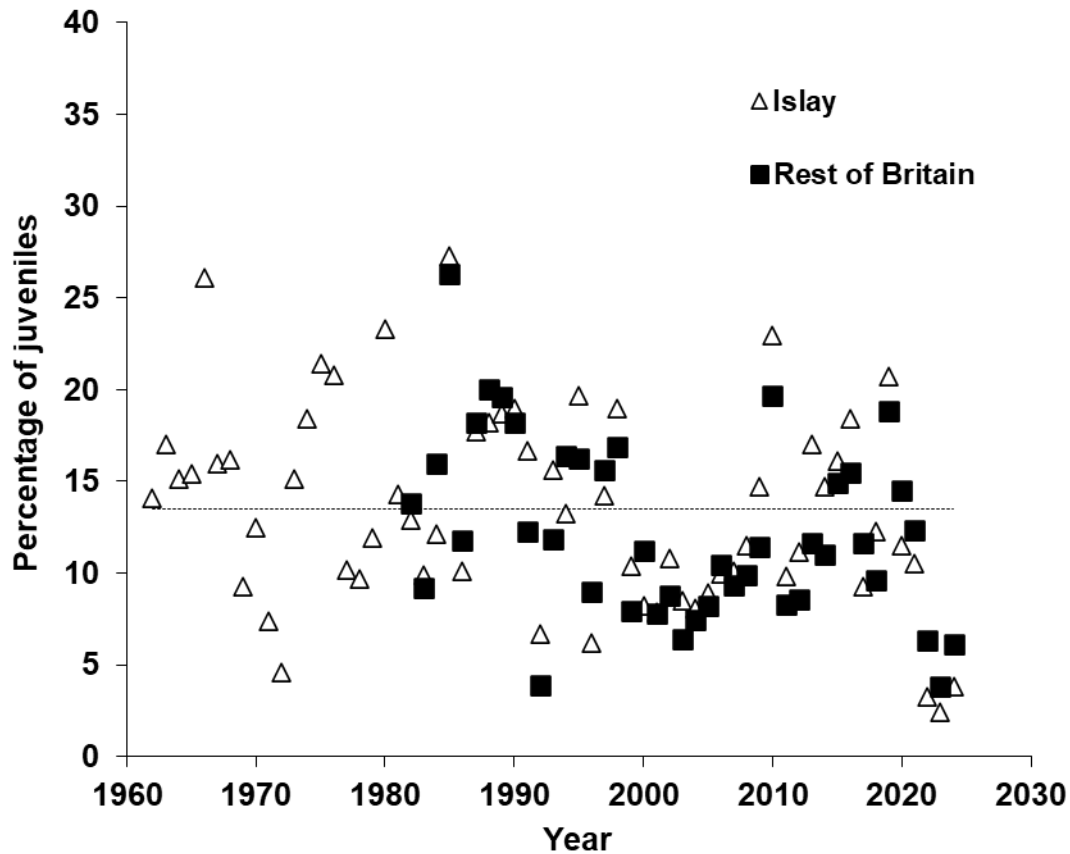


Figure 4. Age ratios sampled among Greenland White-fronted Geese at Islay 1962-2024 (open triangles) and compiled from other sites in Scotland and Wales, 1982-2024 (solid squares). The horizontal dotted line indicates the average percentage young among samples from Islay for 1962-2024.

AGE RATIOS FROM IRELAND

Breeding success following the 2024 summer among flocks returning to Ireland was again among the lowest recorded but following the long-term trend of decline since the early 1990s (Figure 5). At Wexford, 4.7% of 2,732 birds sampled were first-years, which added to 7.9% of 670 sampled elsewhere in Ireland, resulted in 5.3% young overall (Table 6). Last year, sampling from Dunfanaghy and Sheskinmore found 18.2% young among 99 geese assigned to age classes. Table 6 shows that, this year, age ratios in northern flocks (this year from Dunfanaghy, Sheskinmore and Pettigo) remained higher than among flocks further south. Mean brood size after the 2024 breeding season was 2.15 at Wexford (compared to 1.69 last season) based on 48 broods and 2.42 from elsewhere Ireland (n = 19, Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of age ratio determinations and brood sizes for Greenland White-fronted Geese wintering in Ireland 2024/2025.

Flock name	Percentage young	Number aged	Number of first-winter birds	Mean brood size	Number of broods	Numbers of young in broods
Dunfanaghy	17.74	124	22	2	11	22
Sheskinmore	23.81	21	5	2.5	2	5
Pettigo	23.53	17	4			
Lough McNea	2.97	101	3			
Loch Conn	0.00	55	0			
Rahasane Turlough	1.89	53	1	1	1	1
Little Brosna	3.45	145	5	2.5	2	5
Midland Lakes	8.44	154	13	4.33	3	13
Wexford	4.65	2732	127	2.15	48	103
Ireland. excl. Wexford	7.91	670	53	2.42	19	46
OVERALL	5.29	3402	180	2.22	67	149

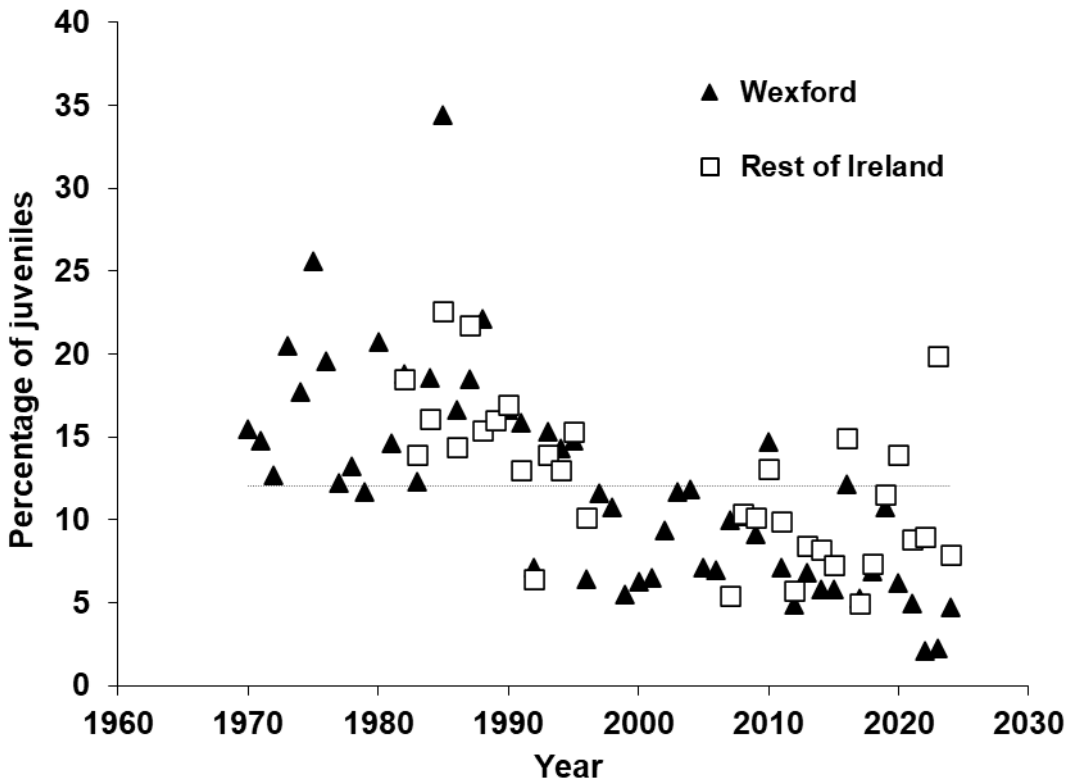


Figure 5. Age ratios sampled among Greenland White-fronted Geese at Wexford 1970-2024 and compiled from other sites elsewhere in Ireland for years in which there exist sufficient data. The horizontal dotted line indicates the average percentage young among samples from Wexford for 1970-2024.

AUTUMN ARRIVAL PATTERNS IN AUTUMN 2024

A single adult with Pink-footed Geese was reported at Tennyson's Sands and Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve in Lincolnshire on 17 September. Other lone migrating birds were reported from Quendale, Shetland on 25 September and Cupwith Reservoir, West Yorkshire on 26 September. The first reported Greenland White-fronted Goose back on the regular wintering grounds was a single bird at Ynyslas on the Dyfi Estuary, Ceredigion on 23 September, which like all the other September records may relate to geese "missing" Iceland en route to the wintering areas, where they potentially arrived without stopping.

First birds back on Wexford Slobs were two individuals (orange collared X3N with an unmarked bird) on 4 October, with numbers rising to 53 geese on 10 October. Numbers rose to 435 on 11 October, including a few more collars and 2 geese with tracking devices, reaching 1,910 on 30 October. Three were seen at Five Mile Point, County Wicklow on 12 October and 15 flew over Rathlin Island on 30 October.

The first Greenland White-fronted Geese back on Islay were eight at Loch Gruinart on 4 October and two geese were back at Loch Lomond on 6 October. Although calling birds were heard mid-morning on 30 September from Claish Moss, and on 3 and 5 October, first visual confirmation of the Loch Shiel flock were 25 that lifted from Kentra Moss and flew to Claish Moss at 18:51 on 6 October, confirmed by similar numbers counted next day. Numbers rose to 35 on 14 October, 39 on 23 October, 55 by 27 October and 68 on 30 October, continuing to rise, with c.76 on 3 November, 87 on 5 November, 75 on 6 November and 8 November but 85 on 11 November and 75 again on 19 November, suggesting additional transient birds were passing through, since numbers remained constant at 72 for the rest of the winter there.

On Tiree on 8 October, 12 were at Loch a'Phuill and 173 flew S over the west of the island on 8 October, rising to 22 at Loch a'Phuill on 10 October, including one first winter bird. That day, 45 at Loch Riaghain included 2 goslings and 14 were at Druimbuidhe, Cornaigmore. Still on Tiree, nine were at Loch an Eilein (11 October), 34 at Heylipol (12 October), 83 at An Fhaodhail (14 October) included 2 families of 3 goslings, where numbers rose to 115 by 29 October. First birds back on Coll were recorded on 12 October and on Tiree again, 25 flew west at Balinoe (11:00hrs on 14 October), 51 were on the Reef (19 October). Five headed high south over Balephuill (on 25 October, 09:30hrs) with 5 more south at Balemartine (on the same day 11:00hrs).

Numbers also started to increase on Islay on 8 October with 75 at Loch Gruinart the same day, 125 the next day, rising to 900 on 10 October, when 200 were counted on Loch Skerrols, Islay, 118 at Drumlemble on Kintyre and 48 (including tagged bird YT) at Mains of Duchrae, Loch Ken.

The first 27 Greenland White-fronted Geese were seen on stubbles at Broadlean, Caithness on 12 October, rising to 34 on 14 October and numbers had reach 70 at Loch Heilen by 19 October. A flock of seven that rested briefly at Bail'lochdrach, Carinish, North Uist on 14 October appeared to be a pair with five young. Two flocks of 13 and 21 were observed flying over Kilmory on Rum on 15 October, when 17 flew south at Smerclate, South Uist and four were at the south end of Loch Bornish, South Uist. Eight birds were also on Coot Loch, Benbecula on 17 October. A distant count of 74 on Colonsay on 19 October were the first observations there. Eight birds, heading south were reported at Sanna, Ardnamurchan on 21 October, the same day that 45 were present at Blackpark, Loch Ken. The first ten flew in over the saltmarsh to settle on their usual feeding fields on the Dyfi Estuary on 23 October; the same day 60 were observed flying over Loch Nan Eala, Arisaig, south of Mallaig. Ten were reported from Durness, on the north Highland coast on 24 October. Five turned up at Hollandstoun, North Ronaldsay, Orkney on 25 October and 20 Greenland White-fronted Geese were present at West Loch Ollay, South Uist on 26 October. A group of seven passed south over Seil, on the mainland SE of Mull, on 27 October and on the same day, 24 flew through Broadford Bay heading southwest to Loch Cill Chroisd on Skye also seen heading SW over Old Corry, above Broadford.

Four were reported from Fleck, Shetland on 30 October 2025 and some 70 White-fronted Geese heading south over Carinish on North Uist on 1 November were clearly migrants passing south. About

98 Greenland White-fronted Geese flew over Broubster apparently coming from their Achalone/Westfield feeding location, probably heading for their inland roosts at 16:50hr on 3 November - the first reports from that Caithness flock. Loch of Mey numbers in Caithness reached 138 at Philips Mains by 10 November. A single bird turned up among Pink-footed Geese at Udale Bay, Ross and Cromarty on 26 October. Seven passed over Seil, Argyll on 7 November. A flock of 10 turned up at Woolston Eyes on 2 November, moving to Little Woolden Moss, Greater Manchester on 3 November, where they remained a few days, dwindling to five there on 15 and 16 November and three on 18 November. During their stay these birds were also seen at the nearby Silver Lane Lakes complex at Warrington.

Outside of the normal range 3 birds turned up in Stuivekenskerke in the Province of West Flanders, Belgium on 1 February 2025.

SPRING 2025 DEPARTURE PATTERNS

A few geese were reported departing Wexford Slobs on 15 and 16 March, and a count of the North Slob on 18 March found 2,858, following which more geese were reported migrating from the direction of the Slobs up the Glenmacnass Valley in Wicklow at 20:00hr that evening. More left early morning on 21 March and the count on the North Slob on 24 March still located 2,520 geese. However, most geese apparently departed on the night of 27 March, with numbers falling to just over 400 on 29 March and just five on 1 April. The last departures probably occurred on the morning of 30 March, when approximately 180 were also seen flying north over Dublin Bay. A flock of 150 were apparently staging on the Bann Estuary on the north coast of Ireland on 29 March and the last signs of major movement were 20 Greenland White-fronted Geese on passage at Lough Bunny, County Clare on 3 April.

In Scotland, five flew north at Neise Point, Skye on 30 March and Islay witnessed a major departure of Greenland White-fronted Geese in the early hours of 1 April. There were still 55 birds on Colonsay on 1 April and last birds seen in Caithness were 10 at Westfield (3 April) and 14 at Broubster Leans (4 April). After 72 were counted at the Loch Shiel flock on 1 April, next day only 20 were feeding on Kenra Moss at 08:35hr local time and at least 14 (possibly still all 20) at 19:00hr that evening, with none seen subsequently. Almost all birds departed from Tiree on 1/2 April, with singles remaining at Balephuill (6 April) and 18 remaining at Baugh (6-9 April) and 8 still there on 17 April. A flock of 270 White-fronted Geese passed north over Carinish and 80 flew north past Aird an Runair, both North Uist on 5 April, after a single bird had been present there on the ground with Pinkfeet and Barnacle Geese the day before. Six left the Dyfi at around 09:30hr on the morning of 6 April, and the remaining four went to roost that evening, last seen 20:30hr but not seen subsequently. A flock of flew north-west off Balranald, Western Isles on 9 April. Two geese stayed on Lismore until 11 April and the last record for the Western Isles was a single bird observed with 14 Pink-footed Geese and Barnacle Geese at Balranald, North Uist on 14 April. Three were reported at Haroldswick Unst, Shetland on 14 April, while one was well photographed at Woodhorn Flash and then Castle Island (Northumbria) on 19 April. A very late bird persisted on Eday, Orkney until 26 May.

Sarah Nordlinder passed on a photograph of 2 adult Greenland White-fronted Geese foraging in a field at Elevgård, in the north of Nordland County (68°15'N, 17°23'E) on 16 April 2025. Although this is quite far north for the species in Norway, strong winds in the preceding days south of Iceland may have contributed to their vagrancy there.

CONSERVATION UPDATES

Action for Greenland White-fronted Geese on the international stage

by DAVID STROUD

As noted in last year's report, work continues to formally raise the profile of the plight of Greenland White-fronted Geese at international and governmental levels. In February, the Technical Committee of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) adopted a 'Conservation Brief' on the population,

drafted by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study (GWGS). This provides an update for governmental AEWA Parties and others on progress to deliver the objectives of the 2012 International Single Species Action Plan (<https://tinyurl.com/mrxpdjdf>). The Conservation Brief was drafted by government and other researchers from Iceland, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England and provides a current, consensus view on necessary conservation actions that need to be implemented. It has been tabled at AEWA's ninth Meeting of Parties being held in November 2025 (<https://tinyurl.com/mr7dcwfm>) and will be discussed there.

The Brief recommends the following actions across the Range States:

- Enhance productivity in Greenland through limiting human disturbance to accessible spring arrival areas as well as enhancing knowledge of issues (*Greenland*).
- Rewet peatlands throughout the home ranges of extant flocks to create novel feeding opportunities, disturbance-free refuges and night-time roost sites (*UK, Ireland, Iceland*).
- Reduce adult and juvenile mortality to the maximum extent possible to conserve reproductively successful females, primarily through eliminating illegal shooting wherever it occurs and especially in Iceland where it remains significant (*all Range States*).
- Research to improve understanding of how the staging and wintering needs of subpopulations can be met and enhanced in the current agricultural landscape. This includes implementing recommendations from Scottish Natural Heritage's Small Sites Project (Francis *et al.* 2011) and undertaking a similar assessment in Ireland to reverse declines of the smallest flocks through proactive land management (*UK, Ireland and Iceland*).
- Maintain and enhance the high level of numerical and demographic monitoring of the population and the constituent winter subpopulations (*all Range States*).
- Ensure necessary site-safeguard networks are in place to protect the population. This includes implementing the recommendations of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) Review of the UK Special Protection Areas which found the suite of SPAs for Greenland White-fronted Geese is insufficient numerically, for range, and ecologically (inadequate habitat provision) (*all Range States*).
- Convene an emergency review meeting of the Plan because three different alert thresholds of the ISSAP have been breached (*all Range States*).

A first step to this last action was taken in May with discussions between the AEWA Secretariat, Ireland, UK and Iceland and which has started dialogue between the Range States. However, none of the four Range States were prepared to take on the international coordination of actions identified. The May meeting agreed that a first step should be for customised lists of actions to be developed for each Range State – essentially a national subset of the actions in the Brief. This is currently being undertaken by GWGS in the absence of a coordinator.

Francis, I.S., Mitchell, C., Griffin, L. & Fox, A.D. 2011. Greenland White-fronted Geese. Land use and conservation at small wintering sites in Scotland. Greenland White-fronted Goose Study report to Scottish Natural Heritage. 145 pp

Caithness: the plight of the Greenland White-fronted Goose

by JULIAN SMITH

Below, Julian Smith, one of our White-front counters in Caithness, raises strong concerns about rapid developments in that part of Scotland. These could bring about major changes to the area used by the geese and potentially threaten their conservation status. Along with parts of Argyll, Caithness is the main area where rapid wind farm developments are occurring in the traditional White-front range and as Julian reports, the situation is becoming severe here. The full document from which this section is taken has been posted on the Greenland White-front website under the Caithness section at <https://greenlandwhitefront.org/plight-of-the-caithness-white-fronted-geese/>

For anyone not familiar with Caithness, it might be useful to understand that its geographical location in the far north of Scotland, and its distance from population centres has been a major reason for its

strategic and commercial appeal since the 1950s involving the nuclear, forestry and renewables sectors - not all with positive outcomes for the environment. In the 1970s, Caithness Bird Club (CBC - a branch of the Scottish Ornithologists' Club) began a campaign to draw attention to the looming crisis in the 'Flow Country' - the most extensive and intact blanket bog system in the world, which was under threat from large-scale conifer plantation schemes. Despite the unimaginable damage perpetrated by the forestry industry for more than a generation, the club's stance was eventually vindicated. Millions of pounds are now being spent on a peatland bog regeneration programme. It should never have happened, of course.

Some of the areas planted would undoubtedly have included foraging sites used by Greenland White-fronted Geese. We'll never know. But Greenland White-fronts are challenged across their whole range, by a number of threats affecting them to varying degrees. One of the major problems on their wintering grounds is windfarm developments, and specifically the cumulative effects of the proposed ten-fold increase in generation capacity across Caithness (see Figure 6). These rapid and 'uncontrolled' developments threaten to displace birds from known feeding and roosting sites and over the lifespan of the windfarms, will have a "likely significant effect on the population..." a quote from the CBC's document "The Plight of the Caithness White-fronted Goose" which discusses the issues above and highlights the growing concerns about the headlong rush for power and its associated risks to birds. It ends with an appeal to Scottish government to listen to local knowledge as well as experts in the field, pause and reconsider the programme before it's too late.

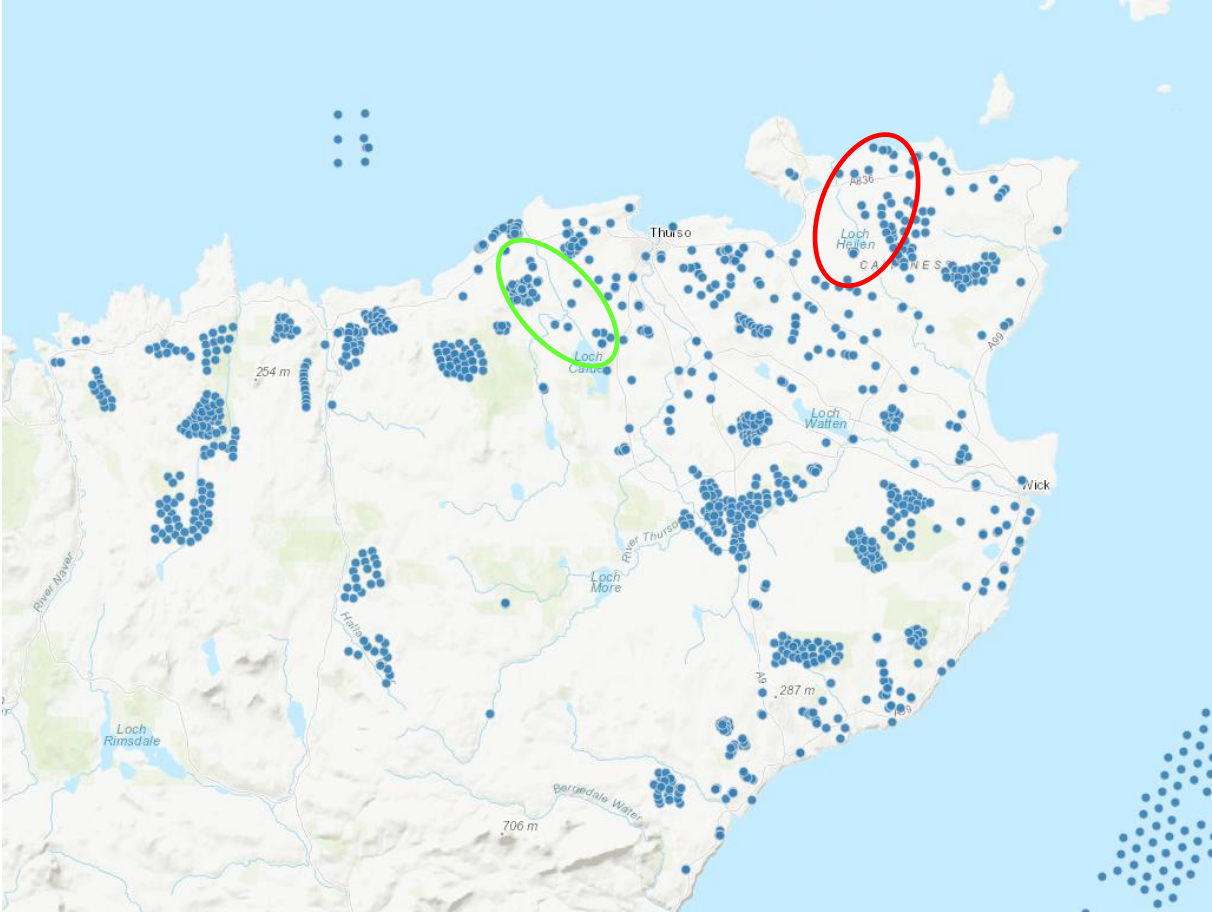


Figure 6. Wind turbine planning applications in the Caithness part of the Highland Regional Council area, last updated to 31 December 2024, including constructed and approved projects. The red and green ovals define the approximate feeding home ranges of the Mey and Westfield flocks respectively. The map is accessible on-line from <https://map-highland.opendata.arcgis.com/search?q=Wind%20turbines>.

RECENT REPORTS AND SCIENTIFIC OUTPUTS

Movements within and between winters, linked to habitat

In the course of the past year, Alec Schindler successfully defended his PhD on Greenland White-fronted Geese with Mitch Weegman at University of Saskatchewan in Canada. His work has brought us a much deeper understanding of the changes in population size and distribution, as well as the factors affecting these changes now and in the past. Two of his chapters have already appeared as articles in scientific journals as described in the last annual report (Schindler *et al.* 2024a, 2024b). Since then, a third has come out which examines how habitat conditions can explain individual movements within- and between winters at wintering resorts based on GPS tracking data and applying modelling techniques to their transitions (Schindler *et al.* 2025). The results confirmed what we have known for a long time, namely that Greenland White-fronted Geese are highly site loyal to their wintering subpopulations, returning to the same relatively restricted geographical areas year after year. That said, as we have seen from collared individuals, some geese do make intra- and inter-winter movements, and now Alec has shown that they do so in a way that reflected the habitats that were available to them, which characterised each wintering home range.

What was evident was that the decisions made differed according to whether the shifts between sites were within or between winters. For instance, geese were more likely to move sites within a winter to areas with less arable croplands and bogland. This makes good sense, because both these habitats are likely to experience local food depletion relatively early in the course of a winter. On croplands, geese quickly denude stubble fields of spilled and waste grain and inevitably need to disperse elsewhere to more profitable foraging habitat. Likewise, on restricted boglands, it is known that the geese can remove large quantities of Common Cotton Grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* that is limited to the soft *Sphagnum* lawns of patterned mires which are often limited in extent locally, again pressing the geese to move elsewhere. In contrast, between winter shifts in wintering areas were more likely to be to areas with more extensive boglands (i.e. larger scale) and lush greener grasslands. These findings have practical applications, insofar as they identify some of the potential mechanisms operating that contribute to the explanations for why some Greenland White-fronted Goose flocks seem to be declining more rapidly than others during a period of overall decline in population abundance. In particular, it gives some basis for implementing habitat management strategies that optimise available foraging conditions throughout the winter. Hence, rewetting cut-over, degraded and drained peatland can generate new mire habitat that offers extensive and rich feeding opportunities as Cotton Grass rapidly recolonises such restored wetlands. Provision of cereal stubbles in early winter may not represent a nature-based solution for supporting the geese but could contribute to maintaining the current wintering range during this period of challenging declines in abundance and range contraction. Likewise, providing high-quality agricultural grassland may not be contributing the most natural land-use change to benefit the geese but in the short term, it may constitute the best investment to improve conservation outcomes for this population that seems in such a cycle of decline and wintering range reduction.

Alec has another major population modelling manuscript currently submitted for review and we will keep you posted on progress with that. Meantime, we express our enormous thanks to Alec for his major and insightful contributions to our understanding of Greenland White-fronted Goose population dynamics and wish him every success in his new post-doc role and future.

Rates of flock decline linked to breeding locations in Greenland

In addition to the above, some of the explanation for the differences in the rates of decline between different geographical wintering units is related to the classic leapfrog migration of the Greenland White-fronted Goose. Alec already showed a very distinct north-south gradient in the rate of decline amongst flocks (Schindler *et al.* 2025) which represents an extension of the general higher extinction tendency among flocks in the south and west of Ireland since the 1970s. This again makes some sense, because if geese wintering in the extreme south of the range breed in the northernmost part of the summer range and vice versa, the plant growth season is very much shorter in Upernavik (at 72°N), where southern Irish birds summer, than north of Kangerlussuaq (at 67°N) where we know many Scottish wintering birds spend their summer (Kampp *et al.* 1988). Although Greenland has generally been experiencing warmer

temperatures, we know conditions have been deteriorating on the west coast in early spring (see previous reports), As a result, the cooler spring weather has effectively been shortening the length of the effective plant growth season, by truncating the spring thaw. If we crudely suppose that it takes a female goose 10 days to complete rapid follicular development ready to lay the first egg of a clutch of six eggs (laid daily), that equates to 16 days before the start of incubation. She must then incubate the clutch for a maximum of 28 days, after which goslings take approximately 40 days to grow and fledge. Following that, goslings must take approximately 58 days at normal daily rates of fat accumulation to build up enough energy stores to fuel the flight to Iceland. This adds up to 142 days in Greenland with plant growth to permit geese to feed.

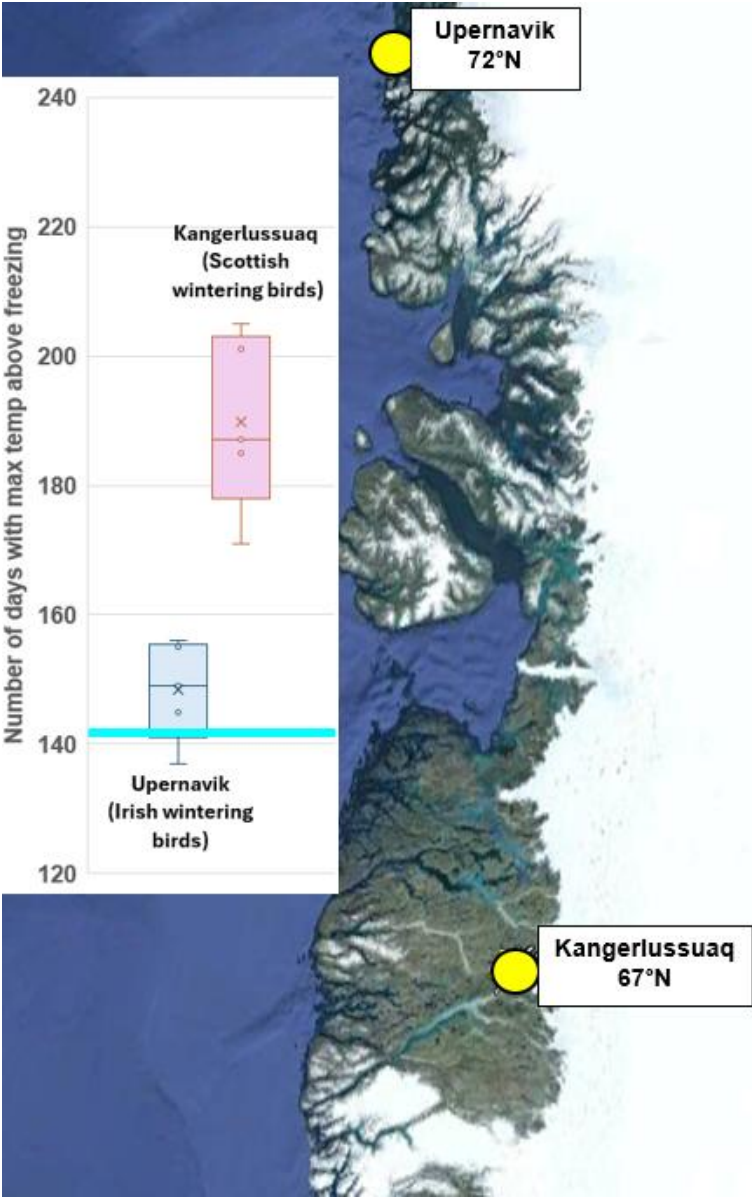


Figure 7. GoogleEarth image showing the relative positions of Kangerlussuaq (67°N) and Upernavik (74°N). The graph shows box and whisker plots for the number of days with a maximum temperature recorded above zero degrees Celsius at Danish Meteorological Institute weather stations at the two places during 2020-2024 inclusive. The light blue line indicates 142 days, the length of time needed for a female to complete rapid follicular development, lay six eggs, incubate to hatching, raise to fledging and allow the goslings to accumulate sufficient fat stores to fuel the migration to Iceland (based on fat accumulation rate calculations).

Based on the temperature records from the Danish Meteorological Institute weather stations at Upernavik and Kangerlussuaq, the mean number of days with a maximum temperature above freezing during 2020-2024 inclusive were (148.4 and 189.8 days respectively, see Figure 7). Although the times required for the various development stages are conservative and rough estimations, while geese breeding in the south of the range evidently have some time to spare, those breeding further north have considerably less, potentially contributing to the explanation why the most northerly breeding birds have lower levels of reproductive success in recent year than those attempting further south.

Families and group relations

On a completely different subject, thanks to Rob Wilson and his team at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, some fancy genetic analysis of blood samples of Greenland White-fronted Geese taken way back in November 1994 at Wexford have proved invaluable for determining family relations within observed family groups. Of course, we have known for many decades that Greenland White-fronted Geese exhibit prolonged parent–offspring (up to 13 years in the case of one mother and her male gosling offspring) and sibling–sibling associations, suggesting fitness advantages to such behaviour (Weegman *et al.* 2016). We used reduced representation genome sequence data to determine the degree to which marked flock members observed associating in apparent parent–offspring and sibling–sibling relationships that were identified on a regular basis thanks to the incredible observations of Alyn Walsh in the field at Wexford after the release of the birds following capture. Using small blood samples from 50 captured, marked and released geese, we genetically identified members of 11 different family groups. Back in winter 1994/1995, Alyn Walsh diligently observed the marked geese in the field at Wexford and was able to identify the family relationships shown by the collared parents and offspring after their marking and release. His careful observations confirmed all the male parent–offspring relationships as genetically predicted, but only 10 out of 12 (83%) possible female parent–offspring relationships (i.e. two offspring were not genetically related to the adult female in their family groups observed in the field); these two ‘adopted’ offspring were responsible for four (15%) of the cases where observed ‘siblings’ were not genetically related to other family-member first-winter birds with which they associated. One multigenerational family consisted of three genetically confirmed grandmother–mother–sibling offspring relationships, not previously reported in arctic-nesting geese, as well as one of the two ‘adopted’ first-winter geese. As far as we are aware this is the first set of observations of such multigeneration offspring care for geese ever, the fact that one family comprised a grandma, mother and offspring (including an adopted gosling unrelated to any other family members) was a major surprise. We are also a little shocked at the relative high levels of adoption of unrelated gosling that we found and as you can read in the article, we have attempted to understand this behaviour and when in the annual cycle such adoption was likely to occur.

During 2025, we also published an article entitled “Can the Greenland White-fronted Goose be saved?” in the journal *British Birds* (Fox *et al.* 2025). The article describes the declines from the 1950s to the 1970s that led to protection from hunting on the wintering grounds in the 1980s and how by the mid-1990s, the subspecies was seen as something of a conservation success story. Since then, as we all know only too well, the fortunes of the geese have changed and numbers have plummeted to the current level of 13,000. We outline the reasons why the most plausible current hypothesis is that climate change driven cooling of spring and early summer temperatures have had adverse effects on reproductive success. Climate change mitigation or adaptation measures are unlikely to reduce these impacts in the short term, so we conclude that we need to minimise all available sources of human-induced mortality, (such as illegal and accidental shooting in Iceland, collisions with wind turbines, etc.) if we are able to do our best to safeguard the population. We also need to reduce disturbance and ensure optimal feeding opportunities on the wintering and staging grounds to ensure geese depart wintering and staging areas in best possible condition for migration and breeding. *British Birds* have graciously given their permission for us to send a pdf copy to all of our count network and supporters, which will be sent out with this report as an expression of our enormous thanks for your support over very many years. Without your loyal support, none of these analyses would be possible, nor would we be able to marshal support for the effective conservation of the subspecies.

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Weegman, M.D., Bearhop, S., Hilton, G., Walsh, A.J., Weegman, K.M., Hodgson, D.J. & Fox, A.D. (2016) Should I stay or should I go? Fitness costs and benefits of prolonged parent-offspring and sibling associations in an Arctic-nesting goose population *Oecologia* 181: 809-817. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00442-016-3595-4>

Wilson, R.E, Sonsthagen, S.A., Walsh, A.J. & Fox, A.D. (2025) Adoption of non-related goslings and intergenerational family cohesion among Greenland White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris*. *Ibis* 167: 1080-1088. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.13427>

Note: both the 2025 articles are available "Open Access" by clicking on the link or typing it into a search engine. If you have any trouble accessing these, or wish for copies of other published articles, let me know at tfo@ecos.au.dk and I can send you pdfs by return.



Greenland White-fronted Geese on the North Slob Wexford, February 2009 (Alyn Walsh)

SPECIAL REQUEST

Recording the exact locations of geese – why it is important

The situation in Caithness outlined above raises the need to try and improve our knowledge of exactly where the geese feed and roost within and near count sites. Our site-based records are poor, in terms of information held by our census programme. We know that all our counters are very well aware of where the geese go (and at a very few sites this information is recorded), but a formal record of goose locations is lacking from many of our sites at present, many counters give headcounts for a site but not precise locations. Sometimes, field numbers used by other organisations (such as NatureScot or RSPB) are referred to, but these require knowledge of the field numbering systems used (which may change) and accessing the original number keys is not easy. All this means our attempts to use the Greenland White-front count data for conservation are weakened.

To help remedy this, our request is this. When counting this winter, ideally, when a flock of geese is found, please use a national grid reference to record where the birds are, if at all possible (or latitude and longitude instead). This is immensely useful, as it allows us to insert them into a GIS mapping system and plot locations in relation to habitat or any potential development. We realise that many sites are complex, and birds move between fields, or can spread over a wide area. But even getting a general six-figure reference with a comment saying ‘birds often use this’ or ‘the geese found here today – not a usual site’ would be extremely helpful.

While we absolutely wish to continue to get the key baseline information (counts at a site on a given date), anything extra in terms of locations would be so helpful. We would be pleased if counters continue to fill out our forms and record this basic information. There is, however, at least one viable and straightforward way to enter location data digitally. The BTO ‘BirdTrack’ app <https://www.bto.org/get-involved/volunteer/projects/birdtrack> (which covers the UK and Ireland) has the facility for easily pinpointing a record to a given place simply by pressing and holding your finger on the location on a Google-type satellite image on your phone. Once done, you can then enter any other kind of information from a simple count to an age ratio or any comments. This information eventually is passed to us for inclusion in our census reports. *Note: it is preferable that NPWS staff can and should continue to use the NPWS Waterbird Mapping app for the submission of their records, which addressed the issues highlighted here.*

So: if at all possible, and without wishing to complicate matters too much, if you can note the headline counts per month on your forms, along with any age ratios, as normal, then move on to add location information separately using BirdTrack, that would be ideal. Or if not, please use the census forms and add grid references noting where you saw the birds. At present, we request purely one central grid reference per site on the title page of the form. Ideally, we would like more specific locations for counts, within the overall site. We will amend the forms in future to facilitate this. Either approach would be great.

Thanks very much!

Tony and Ian

Yvonne Benting

It is with great sadness that we have to say that, following a prolonged fight with cancer, we lost a stalwart supporter when Yvonne Benting passed away in July 2025. Yvonne was British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Regional Representative, organising and coordinating many surveys in Benbecula and Uist, while also participating in and organising surveys throughout Lewis and Harris. She was also the Outer Hebrides county bird recorder during which time she and her husband ran the Outer Hebrides bird portal which was invaluable for collating many of the Greenland White-fronted Goose observations throughout the Western Isles. She was a vigilant observer of the Loch Bee flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese that has done so well in holding its numbers despite the overall declines in abundance. This flock is notoriously difficult to find, so we are in Yvonne’s debt for her counts over the years. She will be sorely missed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is so difficult to adequately thank everybody who has contributed to the information presented here. Every year, we struggle to adequately acknowledge your enormous contributions from very dedicated people who so kindly give so much of your time to keep an eye on your local flocks of Greenland White-fronted Geese. Thank you all once again for your sacrifice and great efforts and we humbly apologise if we have inadvertently forgotten to mention anybody.

In Britain, we heartily thank those people who kindly provided counts and other information during 2024/2025 which include: Mary Lou Aitchinson, Elie Ames, Jack Barton, Dave and Pat Batty, Oscar Bonetti, John Bowler, Roger Broad, Harrie Burney, Gavin Chambers, George Christie, Sue Clare, Andrew Dacre, Pete Dale, Tim Dean, Steve Duffield, Rhodri Evetts, Carol Fielding, Ian Fulton, Larry Griffin, Ian Hawkins, Brian Henderson, David Holden, Ian Hopkins, James How, Rob Hughes, David Jardine, Tracey Johnston, Ben Jones, Rhys Jones, Linden Kingston, Tom Kistruck, Catriona Laird, Ivan Lang, Morven Laurie, Mary Legg, Alan Leitch, Alison Leonard, Fiona MacGillivray, Callum McGregor, Sinclair Manson, Kay-Leigh Marais, Eddie MacKay, Paul Massey, Clive McKay, Rae McKenzie, Bob McMillan, Sandy McNeil, Mark Mitchell, Karen Munro, Bill Neill, Alex Nichol, Alison and Donald Omand, Malcolm Ogilvie, Patrick Pearce, Nicky Penford, Crystal Powell, Alan Reid, Nicola Ritchie, RSPB staff on Anglesey and the Dyfi, Andy Robinson, Chris Rollie, Hannah Sharratt, Mark Shields, Pete Skinner, Julian Smith, Andrew Stevenson, Robyn Stewart, Gareth Thomas, Rosie Thompson, Reg Thorpe, Niall and Rachel Tierney, Morgan Vaughan, Luke Wake, Catriona White and Emily Wilkins.

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Thanks also to Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson and Olafur K Nielsen for their help collating Icelandic observations and to Paul Shimmings for data from Norway.

Thanks as in previous years for permission to incorporate data from BirdTrack and WeBS, kindly provided by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), with our sincere thanks to Justin Walker and Neil Calbrade for organising the supply of data. BirdTrack is organised by the BTO for the BTO, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), BirdWatch Ireland, Scottish Ornithological Club and Welsh Ornithological Society. Data were provided by WeBS, a Partnership jointly funded by the British Trust for Ornithology, RSPB and Joint Nature Conservation Committee, with fieldwork conducted by volunteers. Although WeBS data are presented within this report, in some cases the figures may not have been fully checked and validated. Therefore, for any detailed analyses of WeBS data, enquiries should be directed to the WeBS team at the British Trust for Ornithology, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU (webs@bto.org). Data was also incorporated from the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) which is delivered by BirdWatch Ireland under contract to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. We also

thank *eBird* for the provision of data for Ireland [eBird Basic Dataset. Version: EBD_reISep-2025. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Sep 2025].

Thanks to the continuing programme of research and surveillance carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the count network in Ireland for another fantastic effort to gather all the data for this report. We are especially grateful for the continuing help and support of John Wilson who initiated the entire process of studying White-fronted Geese in Ireland and continues to be the source of great support, but also to Dave Tierney for his support. Thanks to NatureScot for site coverage throughout Argyll, especially to Tracey Johnston and Morven Laurie who so kindly helped with count data on Islay, to the counter teams on Kintyre and Islay and to all the contributors for their kind help in preparing sections of the report. Special thanks as ever to Dr Malcolm Ogilvie for his extensive age ratios and for wise counsel at all times. The census is only possible thanks to the financial support of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee under their UK Goose and Swan Monitoring Programme and we thank Kirsi Peck for her support and help during the past few months. Thanks to Ailidh Barnes, Neil Calbrade, David Noble, Elizabeth Tatham, Justin Walker and "Tom" at BirdTrack for kind support at BTO under their Swan and Goose Monitoring Programme. Finally hearty thanks to Larry Griffin for proof checking the entire report!

Just as a reminder, please be aware that we have made a major decision to bring forward the critical international spring count of Greenland White-fronted Geese because the geese are continuing to leave earlier and earlier in the year. We are of course concerned that this may have some implications relating to backward compatibility, but given their earlier departure, we must acknowledge that we need to do this to avoid counting geese potentially after they have departed their normal winter quarters. For this reason, we have agreed with the relevant statutory agencies and the BTO that the spring count now be undertaken in late February for the foreseeable future to see how this functions. The autumn international census timing remains the same, because there is no strong sign of major change in timing of that migration episode.

The international census periods to count Greenland White-fronted Geese in the coming winter will therefore be as follows: **Autumn international census dates: 13-17 December 2025 and Spring international census dates: 21-25 February 2026.** However, as usual, we greatly welcome all counts from any dates, but we especially welcome other monthly counts especially from the following periods: 15-19 November 2025; 10-14 January 2026; 14-18 March 2026.

As always, please try and record the number of young birds within flocks, check for neck collars and leg rings, and, as articulated in the short article above, please try and record more precisely where birds are when you see them.

Good luck, thanks again and have a great winter monitoring the geese!



Classic flood land Greenland White-fronted Goose habitat at New Ashton Callows, Little Brosna, Co. Offaly, autumn 2007 (Alyn Walsh)