



Orkney GREYLAGS 2009



Fab Four on River Yare,, Norfolk

Photo – Justin Lansdell

Summer Round-up 2009

The catch on Loch of Hundland on 8 July 2009 resulted in the capture and processing of 191 Greylag Geese, which was about 30% of the birds present at this site.

The same field as in 2008 was targeted in 2009. A group of over 300 birds were grazing in the catching field where corral nets had already been set up. An evening catch was attempted to avoid the interest of nearby Great Skuas which regularly predate the breeding/moulting flock.

During the summer, Loch of Hundland was monitored from time to time to establish the numbers of breeding and non-breeding Greylags using the loch. The peak count of birds on the loch was 640 on 30 June when 82 broods, totalling 307 goslings were also noted, giving an average brood size of 3.74 goslings per successful pair. This compares with the 2008 figure of 500 birds, which included 58 broods totalling 215 goslings, giving 3.70 as an average brood size.

25 individually marked birds from the 2008 ringing were recorded on Loch of Hundland during the breeding season in 2009. Many of these had goslings in tow.

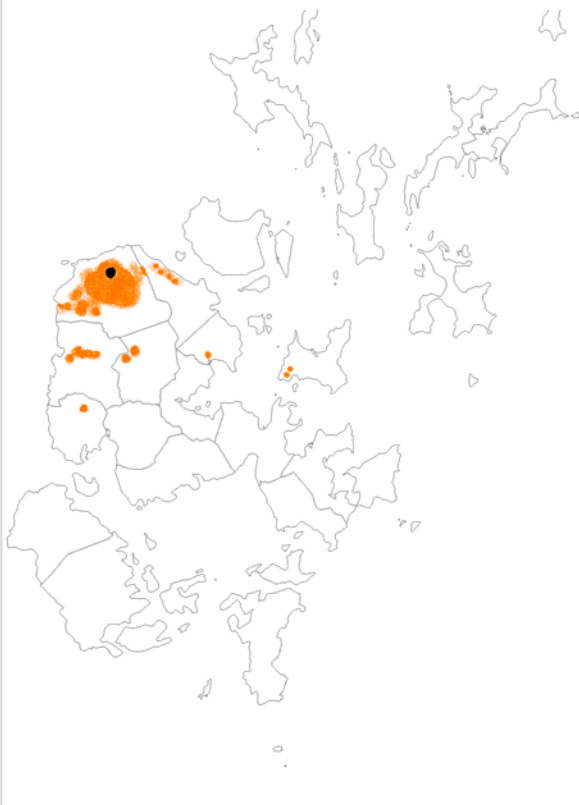
Annual ringing totals of **Greylag Geese** caught and **ringed** on Orkney 2008-2009. In brackets are the numbers of additional re-trapped birds caught.

Year	Total
2008	139
2009	186 (5)
Grand Total	325 (5)



Loch of Hundland round-up July 2009 Photo – Iain Smith

Re-sightings Map of Collared Greylags in Orkney 2008/2009



Since July 2008 all the sightings of collared birds have been entered into a database.

The results of the ringing effort is surprising in one respect, that collared birds have been sighted in East Anglia, but as expected in another: about 90% of all reported sightings are within 5km of Loch of Hundland (the black dot on opposite map). The areas highlighted in orange show all locations where birds have been sighted.

Shapinsay remains our furthest movement within Orkney at 20km.

Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk is 780km away from Orkney – WHY?



HAX – One of the almost fledged goslings marked in July 2009 with an individual neck collar. This bird was reported in September at The Loons, RSPB Reserve 5km away from the original ringing site at Hundland – a more typical re-sighting.

Photo – A.J Leitch

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following members of the 2009 catching team for the sterling efforts in the field and for helping organise the round-up: Colin Corse, Brian Ribbands, Dawson Shearer, Libi Jardine, Caroline Thompson, Iain Smith and Aaron Leitch. We are also grateful to the landowner David Morven, of Birsay who permitted access for catching geese on his land and kept the livestock out for an extra week.

Andy Knight (RSPB) for allowing the reserve vehicle to be available and some flexibility in my work programme to co-ordinate the operation, Carl Mitchell for his encouragement and support to get the project off the ground in the first place and finally to Scottish Natural Heritage for providing the funding for this ongoing project.



Our East Anglian friends for observing the collared geese while wintering in the deepest SOOTH! ; Chris & Sheila Alcock, Steve Smith, Justin Landsell, Keith Dye, Matt Wilkinson, Andrew Easton, Rob Wilton, Tim Strudwick, Phil Heath, Tony Stride and Peter Allard

All observers/shooters on Orkney who took the time to report birds to me. Thanks very much.



Members of Orkney Ringing Group processing a bird
Photo – Iain Smith

East Anglia bond strengthens...

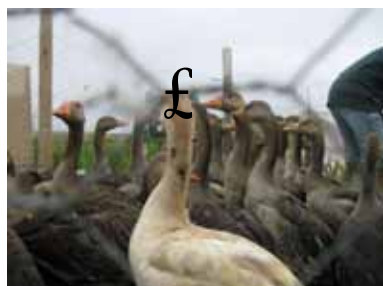
In 2008 two of our collared goslings made the 790km trip to East Anglia. **DIS & DIU** surely just made a mistake and they perhaps got caught up with some pink-feet heading south? Well you will be glad to hear they made it “home” to Orkney with both being present in Durkadale, Birsay on 6 April (interestingly, with darviced goslings from 2008 which also had not been seen over the winter, did they go south too and were not seen?).

They then split up with **DIS** remaining in Durkadale and **DIU** heading to Mill Dam, Shapinsay (20km) on 26 April. Neither bird was seen during the summer/autumn period until, yes, you’ve guessed it, they showed up together on Buckenham Marshes, Norfolk on 3 January 2010 and what is more they had a couple of 2009 marked birds (goslings once more) for company **HAK & HAJ** (neither of which had been sighted since ringing in July 2009). The birds were still present on 6 March 2010. They have been spending most of the time on the River Yare between Buckenham and Claxton Marshes, Norfolk since January.

Quite a little story developing here - why East Anglia? Given we know **DIS & DIU** did not breed in 2009 as they were only a year old (Greylags do not breed until 2/3yrs old) these birds are not related. All four birds have been spending time with some “feral” Greylag and indeed Canada Geese, although often reported as only loosely associating with other geese out with the main group of ten birds (all Orcadian?).

A BTO recovery slip the other day added more weight to the already bizarre story. **HFS** (also a gosling marked in 2009) was shot on 12 December 2009 and reported by a Mr Howlett from Wickhampton, Acle, Norfolk – not too far from our wintering “FAB FOUR”. Was this bird originally with the others and had they just arrived? – we will never know.

What next? I am expecting to see these wanderers back in Durkadale come April time and perhaps **DIS & DIU** will breed locally and raise some goslings to continue the story, although, pressure locally is increasing to reduce the Greylag population substantially.



“Blondie” in the corral Photo – Iain Smith

HBF or the Greylag formerly known as “Blondie” First seen as a tiny yellow gosling in a family of five at Loch of Hundland in May 09. Surely, such a bird could not survive the daily Bonxie patrol of the loch. I was proved wrong by the fact we caught it during the round-up in July almost fledged!

However, “Blondie” is not like all the other geese and once more is the subject of unwanted attention this time in the form of local shooters specifically targeting this unusual leucistic collared goose. At the moment “Blondie” is alive and kicking albeit only 2km from the ringing site...



A collared pair with a gosling on The Loons RSPB Reserve – Sept 09
Photo –D.M Armstrong

December 2009 Grey Goose count for the whole of Orkney revealed a staggering **80,538** of which an estimated 10-12,000 (11%) currently summer on the islands. (RSPB/WWT)

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