



NEWS RELEASE

Status of pink-footed goose population revised

In May 2015, the size of the population of the pink-footed goose was estimated at 59,000, which represented a significant decline of the population, achieving the agreed target of about 60,000 set as an objective under the AEWA International Species Management Plan (ISMP). Although the harvest bag was at the recommended level of c. 15,000 to achieve the population target this was reached much sooner than predicted. The population estimate of 59,000 was used to set the harvest regulations for the 2015 hunting season in Denmark and Norway, and the fact that the population had already reached the target means that the harvest had to be more restrictive. As a consequence, the January extension of the hunting season in Denmark which was implemented for the 2014-15 hunting season was rolled back.

In the start of November 2015, a new census of the population was organized in the range states, including Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium as well as Sweden and Germany. The population size has now been estimated at c. 75,000 individuals. According to censuses of the productivity in the population, carried out in the range states in October 2015, the breeding conditions in Svalbard were moderate, resulting in 13.8% juveniles in the autumn population. With this new information at hand, it is evident that the May 2015 estimate was too low and may have been at c. 70,000 geese (subtracting productivity and estimated adult mortality during May-October from the November 2015 estimate).

It is not clear where the missing c. 11,000 pink-footed geese were 'hiding', but in recent years, it has been observed that flocks of pink-footed geese have spread to new sites outside the known range, and it is a constant challenge to follow up on these unexpected developments.

The future monitoring of the population was discussed at a recent meeting of the International Working Group of the ISMP, which met in Ghent, Belgium on 10-11 December 2015. It was decided to improve the monitoring protocol by intensifying the efforts for more systematic searches of geese within and outside the known staging areas, both in May and November. Furthermore, it was recommended that an alternative population estimate shall be derived, based on marked geese in the population. This technical analysis will be performed immediately, ready for the next population assessment in May-June 2016.

The annual adaptive harvest management decisions are dependent on reliable population estimates and it is unfortunate that the 2015 population was underestimated, with implications for the harvest regulations. However, the harvest decision was based on the best available knowledge at that time, as part of the agreed protocol for the process. The adaptive management process provides a mechanism to address such problems, and adapt. The harvest opportunities for the 2016 hunting season in Norway and Denmark will be decided in June 2016 on basis of spring weather conditions in Svalbard, updated population data and population models. The fact that population size was underestimated in 2015 is likely to lead to increased harvest opportunities in the next hunting season. Hunting still remains prohibited in the Netherlands and Belgium, so these range states continue to function as a 'safe harbour'.

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