



The Sizewell C Project

9.59 White-fronted Geese survey report

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Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed
Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009



Sizewell Nocturnal Audio Recording of Greater White-fronted Geese



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1.0 Introduction

From December 2020 to March 2021 a passive sound recorder was set up on the corner of Sizewell Belts and Reckham Pits Wood to record throughout the night. A total of 97 nights of recordings were made. These sound files were checked for calls of Greater White-fronted Geese moving across the Sizewell Belts. All species were noted and the detailed analysis was only made for the Greater White-fronted Geese.

2.0 Summary

At least forty five species of birds were recorded, including Greater White-fronted Geese. Greater White-fronted Geese flew over the site on 25 of the 97 nights. The data was not considered representative of a typical year. There was an influx of Greater White-fronted Geese to Suffolk, Essex and Kent during the 2020/21 winter. It has been noted that during the 2020/21 winter, up to four times the normal numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese were reported in Suffolk when compared to the previous winters of 2017, 2018 and 2019. The peak movements were late December 2020 / early January 2021 and early March 2021. The latter was likely to be birds leaving England and returning to their breeding grounds.

3.0 Method

An automated sound recorder was placed on the corner of Sizewell Belts and Reckham Pits Wood. A Song Meter Mini Acoustic Recorder was used and recorded each day from 1630 hrs until 07:00 hrs the next day from 17 December 2020 to 25 March 2021. Each sound files sonogram was scanned for all bird vocalisations and markers placed against the majority. Adobe Audition version 13.1 and above was used. Due to the volume of dabbling ducks feeding on the Sizewell Belts every night, not all of the calls of ducks were marked. For example, during the 15 nights in December 2020 over 12,000 calls were logged. For the whole period over 1,400 hours were checked.

Each group of geese calls was logged once and then individual calls were counted to give an indication of the size of the group flying over. If no calls were received for over a minute the next set of calls were considered to be a different group of geese. Sound recordings cannot provide the information to understand if a group circled the site and therefore a single group could have been recorded on more than one occasion. However, if a group was to circle the site, it would be expected they would continuously call and so should be audible throughout.

4.0 Constraints

During the surveys some nights were affected by rain and or wind which impaired the ability to hear or see the calls on sonograms. During these conditions birds tend not to migrate as it is more energy consuming. On the very wet nights it becomes difficult to locate bird calls.

Out of 97 nights it either rained and or was windy on 49 of these. On 29 nights the conditions lasted for more than 50% of the night. Only on two of the 97 nights did it rain throughout.

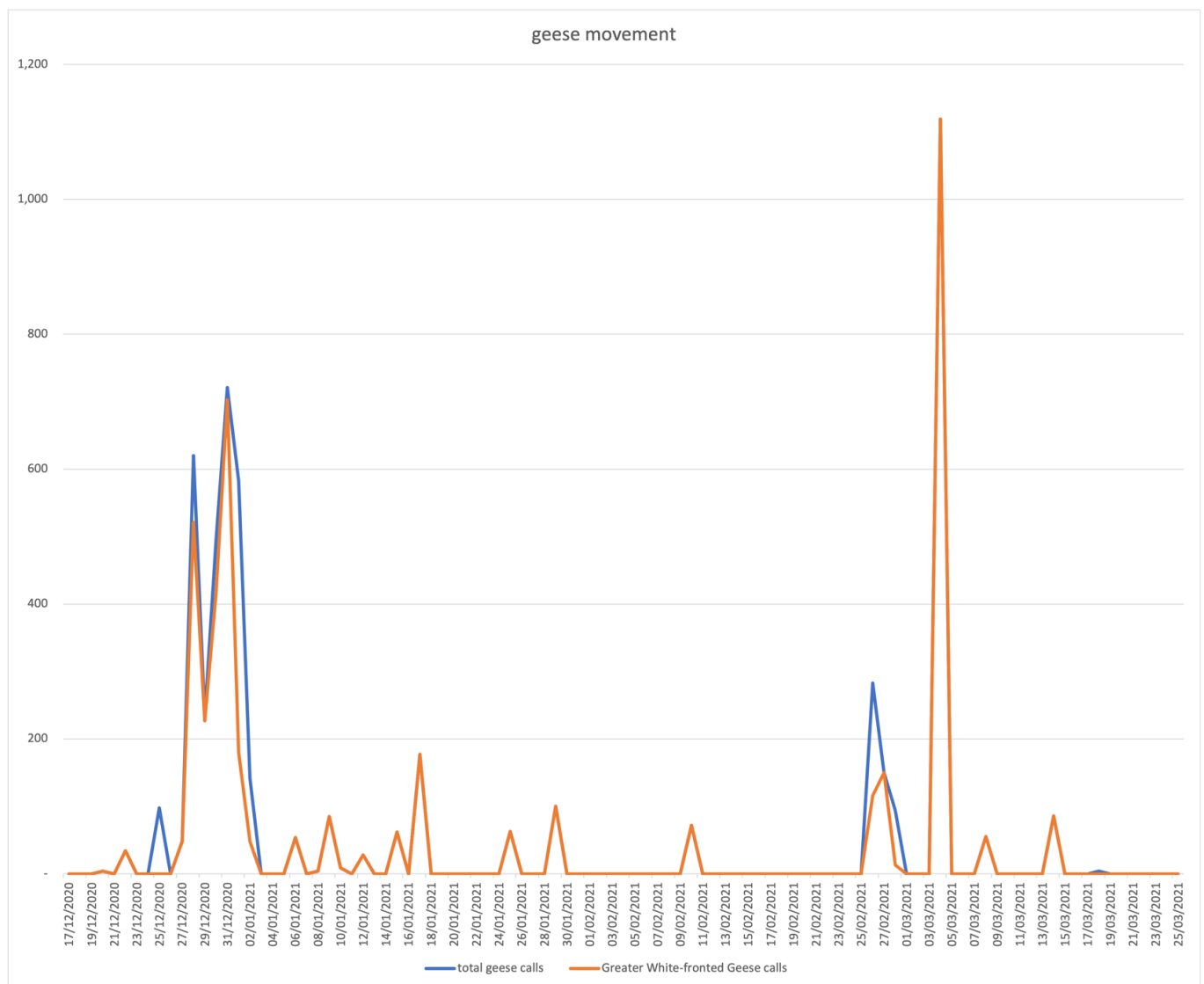


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On one of the windy nights 4th/5th March, there was a large passage of Greater White-fronted Geese recorded with 1,119 calls logged. Therefore, it was possible to detect some groups during these conditions.

5.0 Results - Greater White-fronted Geese movement

During the survey Greater White-fronted Geese were recorded on 27 nights. There was a peak in late December 2020 / early January 2021 with 2,144 calls over seven nights and then another large movement on 4th March 2021 with 1,119 calls. See the below line chart which illustrates the two peaks.





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Also included here are three groups of Barnacle Geese. Given the unclear position of this species with feral birds mixing with wild birds, they have been included. Canada, Greylag and Egyptian Geese were excluded. Goose calls which could not be identified were also recorded on eight nights. There are some captive domestic geese in the area which could be heard on some of the nights. These calls were mostly distant and were excluded because this group of domestic birds could not be eliminated. The calls were mostly from the late December 2020 to early January 2021 period.

During the 2020/21 winter an influx of Greater White-fronted Geese occurred in Suffolk, Essex and Kent. The normal numbers at North Warren RSPB, due south from Sizewell, peak in the late winter January/February of up to 200 birds. Counts of up to 800 birds were reported on the bird information services. The following counts were made by [REDACTED].

Date	Location	Number of Greater White-fronted Geese
7th December 2020	North Warren RSPB	164
8th December 2020	Leiston	186
15th December 2020	Leiston	280
1st January 2021	North Warren RSPB	193
4th February 2021	North Warren RSPB	600
4th February 2021	Aldeburgh Marshes	107
10th February 2021	North Warren RSPB	1

Whilst these counts were not a systematic coverage of the whole area they do illustrate the build up in numbers and the departure during the cold snap in February 2021.

It is my opinion that the majority, if not all, of the Greater White-fronted Geese record moving over the site were part of the influx and not part of the normal North Warren RSPB population. There was not a regular movement every night as would be expected with birds going to roost. Wildfowl will generally use the same roost site and there are few bodies of water that are suitable for this species in the area.

6.0 Other important species

Eurasian Bitterns were recorded on four nights, see the table below. This was mostly around late February and was thought to be migrating birds leaving the area to return to their breeding grounds in mainland Europe. These calls have been associated with migrant birds moving at night. See <https://www.xeno-canto.org/446989>

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Night	Individuals / groups	Number of calls
24th February 2021	1	1
26th February 2021	2	26
27th February 2021	2	5
21st March 2021	1	1

Report completed by:

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
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Dated 30 April 2021



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Appendix 1 Species recorded during the nocturnal recordings

Species
Common Pheasant
Canada Geese
Barnacle Geese
Greylag Goose
Greater White-fronted Geese
Mute Swan
Common Shelduck
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
Eurasian Wigeon
Mallard
Eurasian Teal
Common Scoter
Common Wood Pigeon
Water Rail
Common Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
Little Grebe
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Pied Avocet
Northern Lapwing
European Golden Plover
Common Ringed Plover

Species
Eurasian Curlew
Dunlin
Eurasian Woodcock
Common Snipe
Common Redshank
Common Greenshank
Black-headed Gull
European Herring Gull
Eurasian Bittern
Grey Heron
Western Barn Owl
Tawny Owl
Eurasian Magpie
Western Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Common Blackbird
Fieldfare
Redwing
Song Thrush
White Wagtail yarrellii
Meadow Pipit



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References

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Birdguides Ltd 2003-2006. Birds of the Western Palearctic 2.0

British Trust for Ornithology www.bto.org.uk

www.xeno-canto.org

Common Scoter nocturnal migration

https://www.rarebirdalert.co.uk/v2/Content/NocMig_Birding_by_Night.aspx?s_id=473906476