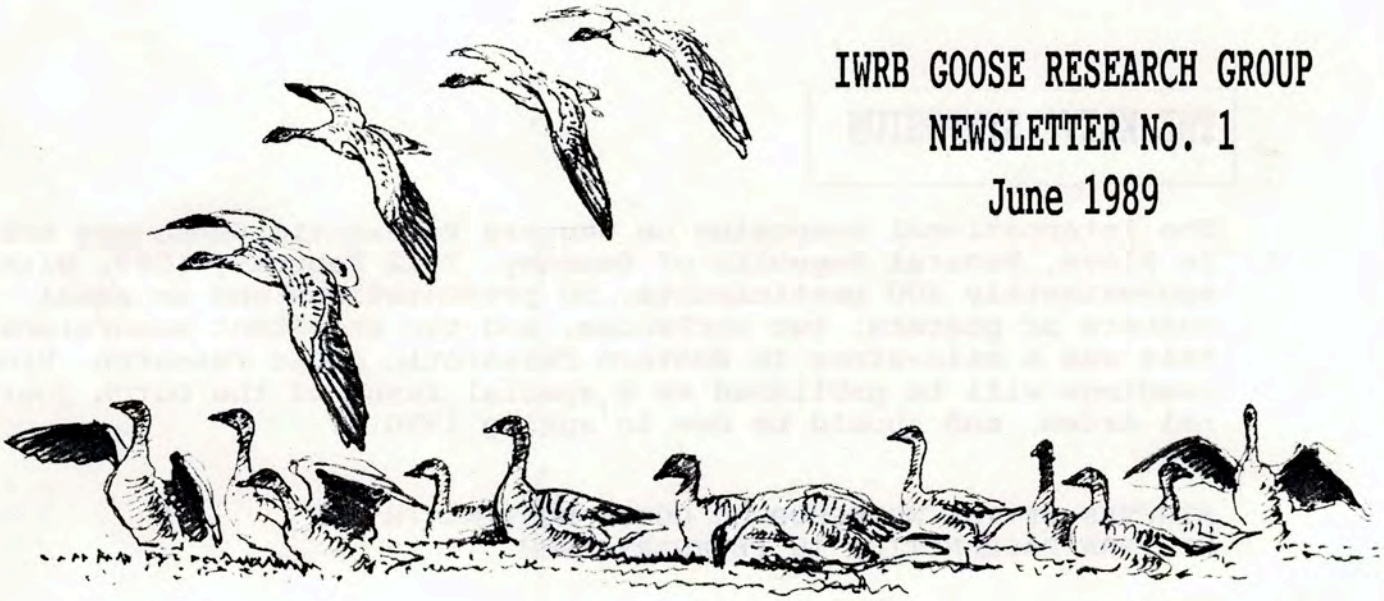

IWRB GOOSE RESEARCH GROUP
NEWSLETTER No. 1
June 1989

Editorial

Welcome to the Goose Research Group's first newsletter. It has long been our intention to produce such a circular and we hope this one is but the first in a long series with hot news from the frontiers of goose research.

This year has already seen some exciting activities:

- the International Symposium on Western Palearctic Geese in Kleve, F.R.G. (February 1989) was a land mark in goose research. It was certainly the largest gathering of goose fanatics which, to our knowledge, has taken place in this century.

- a generous grant from the Dutch Jachtfonds and from the Danish Ministries of Agriculture and the Environment has enabled the setting up of a goose count database for the Western Palearctic based at the Game Biology Station, Kalö, Denmark.
  Computerisation of the goose counts will mean that data can be processed faster and more efficiently and will help to ensure that all of <u>you</u> receive the feedback you deserve for all your efforts. We have been through our records (and those held at IWRB) to compile a table of counts received/not received from each country. This table is included within the full report on the goose count database below. Please help us by sending in the missing data as soon as possible so that we make best use of the time/grant....
  Standardisation of the day(s) on which counts are conducted is extremely important. The programme for counts agreed by the Workshop on Goose Counts at the Kleve Symposium is detailed below.

We are pleased to be able to incorporate in this Newsletter reports by two of our Species Coordinators. We hope that the Newsletter will be used as an informal forum for disseminating information about ongoing projects, project proposals, conferences etc. and invite contributions from all participants.

In this first issue we take the opportunity to publish a list of names and addresses of IWRB Goose Research Group National and Species Coordinators and of other people known to be involved in goose research. If you know of any other people who would be interested in receiving and/or contributing to the Newsletter, please let us know.

THE KLEVE SYMPOSIUM

The International Symposium on Western Palearctic Geese was held in Kleve, Federal Republic of Germany, 7-12 February 1989. With approximately 200 participants, 50 presentations and an equal numbers of posters, two workshops, and two excellent excursions, this was a mile-stone in Western Palearctic goose research. Proceedings will be published as a special issue of the Dutch journal Ardea, and should be due in spring 1990.

MINUTES OF THE WORKSHOP ON GOOSE HUNTING IN THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC, 10 FEBRUARY 1989

Chairman: B. Ebbinge
Secretary: J. Trouvilliez

After discussion, participants did not think it necessary to control goose populations at the present time. Hunting geese is a separate matter. Hunters are interested in a harvest which can contribute to the control of numbers.

Questions arose about the wise management of goose populations and more generally about the wise use of wetlands as defined by the Ramsar Convention. What is a healthy goose population? No general answer was available.

There are competing demands between the different groups of people with an interest in goose populations, such as conservationists, hunters, ornithologists and farmers. Solutions are to be sought to accommodate all such legitimate interests.

The management of goose populations was discussed. It is not possible to find an approach applicable to all species of geese, habitat requirements and population dynamics differ considerably between species. Most participants agreed with the idea of international agreement. Some regional situations may be difficult to manage in a more general way and local solutions may have to be sought.

Species or populations should only be hunted if they can sustain a regulated harvest. Information on population size is, therefore, required. The importance of safeguarding natural and semi-natural goose habitats was emphasised in order to maintain healthy populations, and to help reduce damage to crops. One way of managing "goose damage", is to try to accommodate geese in farming systems, i.e. to consider geese as part of the farmer's crop with appropriate compensation payments. The possibility of integrating goose management with the EEC's 'set-aside' programme was highlighted.

Proper hunting management requires accurate knowledge of hunting statistics from all range states, including information on the number of hunters, the length of the season, methods of hunting etc.. The side effects of hunting need to be better understood, including the extent of ingested lead pellet poisoning, and the wounding of birds by shotgun pellets. It was noted that research into such issues is currently underway in some countries.

MINUTES OF THE WORKSHOP ON GOOSE COUNTS IN THE WESTERN PALEARCTIC, 9 FEBRUARY 1989

Chairman: Jesper Madsen
Secretary: Jean-Yves Pirot

This workshop was organised to discuss the improvement of goose counts in the region in the context of the establishment of a Western Palearctic goose count database in Denmark. The main aim of the database is to provide better population estimates and yearly indexes of abundance, and to document the distribution and movements of geese in autumn and winter.

Goose counts

It is extremely important to increase the coverage and consistency of counts which are performed; for this purpose, the workshop agreed that:

- The mid-January goose count should be generalised to cover synchronously the whole of Europe. Counts should be restricted to a few number of days on each side of the traditional counting weekend to avoid the duplication of counts. The survey is coordinated with the International Waterfowl Census.

- The species coordinators of IWRB are invited to devise special counting programmes for particular goose species or populations. Count dates are agreed internationally and circulated by the general coordinator. These special programmes could also propose intensive counting periods for a given species, assemblage of countries and periods of time.

- In any case, all counts available should be transmitted to the IWRB Goose Coordinator for integration into the database.

Ringing

Many populations of geese are ringed and there are few exceptions. It was suggested that IWRB should assist some countries with expertise in goose catching and ringing.

The workshop also recommended that a cooperative programme of ringing should be developed for one or several goose species and submitted to the Soviet authorities in September 1989. The species coordinators of the IWRB Goose Research Group were asked to discuss and arrange this international project as soon as possible.

A European directory of goose ringing programmes has been compiled by J. Madsen; this directory will be up-dated on a regular basis, and all new ringing schemes should be reported to the author of this document.

AGREED PROGRAMME OF INTERNATIONAL GOOSE POPULATION COUNTS TO BE USED FROM AUTUMN 1989 ONWARDS. NEW COUNTS ARE SHADED ( ).

		Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
A. fabalis (fabalis)			+[1]			+				
A. fabalis				+		+				
A. brachyrhynchus	Iceland			+		+			(+)	
	Svalbard					+			+	
A. a. albifrons	NW/Central Europe			+		+				
	Central Europe			+		+				
	Blacksea/Turkey					+				
A. a. flavirostris				+					+	
A. erythropus				+		+				
A. anser	NW Europe/Baltic	+				+				
	Central Europe	+				+				
	Black Sea					+				
	Iceland			+		+			(+)	
B. leucopsis	Greenland[2]			+		+				
	Svalbard			+		+				
	Russia					+		+		
B. b. bernicla						+				+
B. b. hrota	Canada/Ireland		+			+				
	Svalbard			+		+				
B. ruficollis						+				
B. canadensis	Scandinavia					+				
	British Isles[3]			+		+				

Notes: 1. Sweden, Denmark, (G.D.R., Poland).
2. Only partial coverage; full coverage at 5-year intervals.
3. Also summer counts.

COUNT DATES FOR 1989/90

In 1989/90, counts should be conducted on the following dates (or, if necessary, on the preceding or following days):

17 September,
15 October,
12 November,
14 January,
* March,
* April,
13 May.

* The date of the March and April counts will be decided at a later date between species and national coordinators.

J. Madsen

THE GOOSE COUNT DATABASE

Presentation

In June 1989, a computerised database for the Western Palearctic goose counts is being created at the Game Biology Station, Kalø, Denmark, for the IWRB. The overall aim is (i) to enhance greatly the production of population estimates and trends, and (ii) to map the geographical distribution of geese and relate annual variations in distribution to weather conditions and environmental factors.

The establishment of the database from June 1989 to March 1990 has been granted by the Dutch Jachtfonds (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries), the Danish Wildlife Administration (Min. of Agriculture), and the Danish Agency for the Protection of Nature (Min. of Environment). IWRB is currently working to raise funds to run the database for a further year.

Gill Cracknell, a British biologist living in Denmark, has been appointed as the daily coordinator of the database, working together with the Goose Research Group general coordinator.

Set up and presentation of data

When it was decided to set up a goose count database the intention was to make it compatible with the IWRB International Waterfowl Counts (IWC). Having discussed this with the IWRB, and more informally with some of the national coordinators, we have decided to standardise the presentation of data with regard to the use of site listing and count forms. We hope that the national coordinators will approve of this, and will be helpful in providing data in the establishment-phase of the database. It will make the setting up much easier, if we make it right from the outset.

The database will be run on an IBM-compatible PC (connected to a network with external data storage) in dBase III format. This means that national coordinators storing their counts on computers can transfer data by floppy discs.

We shall return to you shortly with recommendations as to count information required, but for those of you using the IWC forms, there is no problem in data transfer.

Site information

One of the major, very important issues to be solved is the standardisation of how to report the location of goose flocks. As for the IWC, we aim to have counts reported on a site basis. We know that in some countries it is difficult sharply to define a site (e.g. geese feeding in fields far away from the roost) and there are problems with geese moving between adjacent sites. In the IWC, each site is now defined by its geographical coordinates (the center of the site), and given a site-code, which defines the site within a 10-minute square. This gives us the

opportunity to amalgamate nearby sites or adjacent 10-minute squares which may make up a functional unit. For countries with large goose concentrations, we may even have to make an additional data file for regional, interpreted totals. This aspect will be discussed in detail with the relevant national coordinators.

We are soon going to send out forms for site descriptions to the national coordinators. The forms will be quite similar to those already used in the IWC.

IWRB Manual

The IWRB is preparing a manual for computerising national waterfowl counts. The manual includes suggestions for standardised structure and format which should speed up data flow between the national and international databases. The manual should be available later this year and will be applicable to the goose counts as well.

JANUARY GOOSE COUNT DATA RECEIVED FROM COUNTRIES IN 1986-1989.
N - NATIONAL TOTAL; P - PARTIAL COUNT; S - SITE COUNT.
* *Branta bernicla* only.

	Jan 1986	Jan 1987	Jan 1988	Jan 1989
ALGERIA				
AUSTRIA	S	S	S	
BELGIUM	S			
BULGARIA	S	S		
CZECHOSLOVAKIA		P	P	P
DENMARK	S	S	S	S
F.R.G.	S	S*		
FRANCE	N	P	P*	
G.D.R.			S	
GREECE	S			
HUNGARY	S	S	S	
IRELAND	P	P	P	
ITALY	P	S		
LUXEMBOURG	S	S	S	
MOROCCO	S	S	S	
NETHERLANDS	N	N		
POLAND	P		N	
PORTUGAL	S	S	S	
RUMANIA			P	
SPAIN	S	S	S	
SWEDEN	N	N	S	
SWITZERLAND	N			
TUNISIA	S	S		
TURKEY	S	S	S	S
U.K.	N	N	N	
USSR				
YUGOSLAVIA		S		

National coordinators: Please send in the missing counts as soon as possible, preferably reported on a site basis.

REPORTS FROM SPECIES COORDINATORS

A PROGRAMME OF FUTURE WORK OF THE GREYLAG GOOSE SUBGROUP

Elaborated during the International Symposium on Western Palearctic Geese held in Kleve, F.R.G. (February 1989) by K. Hudec, with the assistance of H. Rutschke, G. Dick.

I International level

1 **September count:** Counts in all important staging areas in NW and central Europe (Norway, Netherlands, F.R.G., Denmark, G.D.R., Sweden, Poland, Austria, Estonian SSR, Czechoslovakia)

2 **Winter counts:** January term. Most important in main wintering places (G.B., Netherlands, France, Spain, Tunisia, Algeria); southern Balkan Peninsula and western Asia minor (Greece, Turkey) - expeditions?!

3 **List of important localities:** Breeding places (20 breeding pairs or more); roosting places during migrations; moulting places and wintering places (over 500 individuals?) on all flyways (in the whole area?). Characteristics, protection, management. First draft 1990.

4 **List of introduced populations:** Locality, number, year of introduction, trends, origin of introduced birds (until 1990).

5 **Neck-banding and controls of banded birds:** Promotion of activities is very important in Eastern Europe (Estonian and Ukranian SSR, Rumania) and in wintering places in Greece and Turkey - neck-banding here? Continuation in west and central Europe, north Africa. Compilation 1990.

6 **List of ringing and neck-banding localities and control places:** Compilation 1990.

7 **Activities in Eastern Europe:** To look for active organisers.

8 **Evaluation of bag statistics.**

II National level

To promote research work especially in following aspects:

1 **Registration of places and numbers of geese in various seasons:** Breeding grounds, non-breeding birds, moulting grounds, summer roosts, autumn migration roosts, wintering grounds, spring migration roosts.

2 **Nesting success.**

3 **Neck-banding:** Very preferably breeding populations, families.

4 **Controls of neck-banded geese in breeding and roosting places.**

5 **Collection of bag statistics.**

6 **Collection of visual observations:** Especially between individual roosting places.

7 **National bibliography and other sources of information.**

8 **Reports for IWRB coordinators (Goose Research Group, Species Subgroups) and for IWRB databases:** Selected information for work on the international level.

III Individual level

To stimulate and support all branches of Greylag Goose research work. Preferably:

1 **Ecological studies:** Breeding, including population studies, food studies, pollution aspects.

2 **Ethological studies:** Comparison with Konrad Lorenz's studies on semi-wild population, practical aspects (disturbance, repellents etc.)

3 **Hunting studies:** Bag limits within different flyways.

STATUS OF BARNACLE GEESE *Branta leucopsis* IN 1987-1988

B. S. Ebbinge

The world population of Barnacle Geese in 1987-88 numbered almost 120,000 individuals. The following is a short update of earlier status reviews (Boyd 1961, Ebbinge 1982) of each of the three populations of Barnacle Geese.

The Greenland population, which breeds in East Greenland, winters along the north and west coast of Ireland and the islands of northwest Scotland, primarily on Islay (60% of the total). The most recent full count (April 1988) gave a provisional total of 32,000 birds (M. Owen & A. Fox, pers. comm.). This shows that the population has recovered from the decline (to 25,250 birds in April 1983 (Ogilvie 1983)) caused principally by shooting pressure on the island of Islay. Numbers have also increased along the Irish coast, particularly on two mainland sites which have been actively managed for geese. There has been a slight decrease in goose numbers on Scottish islands other than Islay due to the fact that these islands are no longer grazed by sheep which has resulted in an overgrown and rank vegetation that is less attractive to geese.

Breeding success on Islay (M.A. Ogilvie, pers. comm.) has varied over the period 1973-86 from 4.9 - 22.4% first-winter birds (mean 11.9%). The downward trend in breeding success in the early 1980's (Cabot & West 1983) seems to have been a temporary phenomenon. Amongst birds wintering on the Inishkea islands, northwest Ireland, the proportion of first-winter birds is much lower (ave. 5.3% over a 22-year study, 1961-83)(Cabot & West 1983). However, this population accounts for only 10% of the Greenlandic breeding population.

Intensive studies using colour-rings or engraved coloured leg-rings are being carried out on the Inishkea islands, on Islay and during spring staging in Iceland (Percival et al. 1987)(ringing in Inishkea islands, Islay and East Greenland).

The Svalbard population winters exclusively on the Solway Firth, southwest Scotland, and is the smallest of all three Barnacle Goose populations at 11,400 birds (November 1987)(M. Owen, pers. comm.) but also the most intensively studied. This population has grown steadily since 1970, spreading north along the west-coast of Spitsbergen. There has, however, been a marked decrease in the proportion of mature geese breeding successfully: 40-50% bred successfully when the potential breeding population was 2-3000 but only 10-20% when the latter was 6-7000 (Owen 1984). Over the last 12 seasons, breeding success ranged from 2.5 - 26.2% first-winter birds (mean 13.4%).

The Wildfowl Trust, U.K. have run an individual marking programme since 1973 such that up to 25% of birds are individually identifiable (ringing on Svalbard and Solway Firth). Detailed studies are also being conducted on the breeding grounds (Prop et al. 1984), on Bear Island autumn staging grounds and in Helgeland spring staging grounds.

The Russian population breeds in northern USSR (Novaya Zemlya, south island, Vaygach and, more recently, the Yugor peninsula (Kaljakin 1986)). Numbers have increased from 20,000 in 1960 to 85,000 (37% first-winter birds) in 1985-86 following a highly successful breeding season. Provisional results from 1986-87 counts show 75,000 birds (<5% first-winter birds)(C.M. Lok, pers. comm.) after a very poor breeding season.

A separate breeding population has established at one of the Baltic spring staging areas on Gotland, Sweden, some 2000 km south of the species' usual breeding range. The breeding population has increased from 1 (1971) to 900 (1988)(Larsson et al. 1988 and pers. comm.). This population most probably derived from the Russian population. Recently, a few pairs have bred in Estonia too.

Breeding success as assessed in the Netherlands (1972-87) ranged from 3 - 37% first-winter birds (mean 16.9%).

578 birds from the Russian arctic-breeding population have been individually marked in the Netherlands and F.R.G. (between 1979-84). The Gotland breeding population is being intensively studied and 1440 birds have been marked with engraved legrings.

Early spring counts of the Russian population of Branta leucopsis in 1988 and 1989

In 1988 and 1989, counts have been organised in cooperation with P. Prokosch and J. Madsen to cover the entire Russian population of Barnacle Geese (including the recent Baltic breeding population) in the early spring when peak numbers occur in the German Bight. These counts show a further increase in the size of this population. In the winter of 1987/88 the proportion of first-winter birds was 6%, in the winter 1988/89 the proportion was 31%.

	2 April 1988	22 March 1989
Denmark	2,200	1,900
Schleswig-Holstein	34,300	40,300
Elb estuary	23,500	26,000
Dollart & Leybucht	9,000	11,500
Netherlands(*)	33,700	46,900
Total	102,700	126,600

* Geese in the Dutch part of the Dollart have not been included in the total for the Netherlands, but have been included under Dollart & Leybucht.

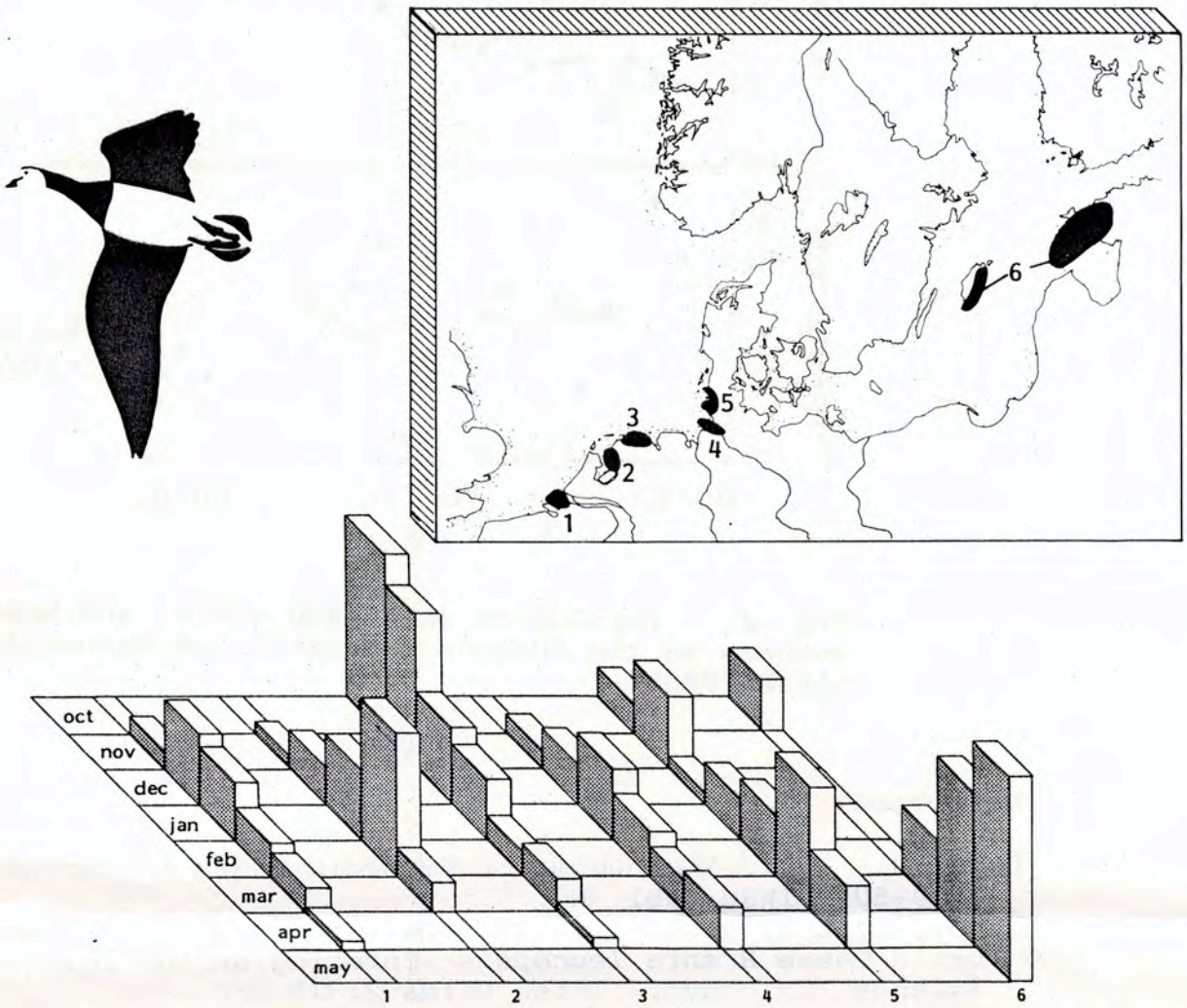

Fig. 1. Temporal and spatial distribution of the Russian population of Barnacle Geese from October to May (expressed as a mean and based on simultaneous counts in 1975-85). 1: southwestern Netherlands; 2: Frisian lake district (Neth.); 3: northern Netherlands bordering the Wadden Sea; 4: Elb estuary; 5: west coast of Schleswig-Holstein; 6: Baltic (Gotland & Estonian SSR) (from Ebbinge & Van Biezen 1987).

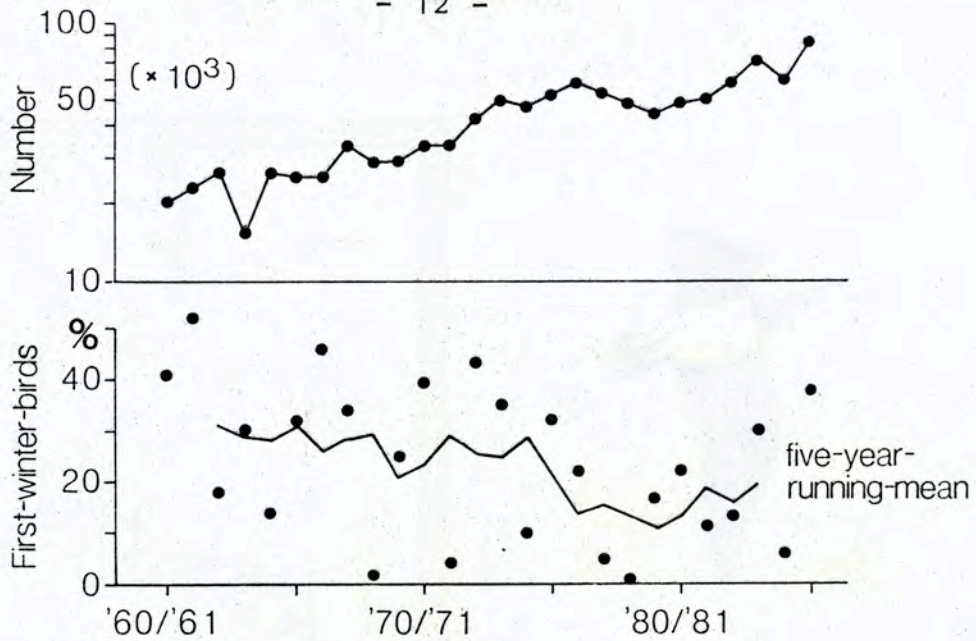

Fig. 2. Population size (log scale) and breeding success in the Russian population of Barnacle Geese (1960-1985).

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

IWRB NEWS

IWRB has started producing a bi-annual bulletin reporting on major events in the Organisation, ongoing projects, major achievements in conservation of waterfowl and their habitats, etc. The first issue (January 1989) is available - free copies may be obtained from the IWRB Headquarters, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BX, U.K. From 1990 onwards you can subscribe to IWRB News (price not yet fixed).

8TH INTERNATIONAL WATERFOWL FEEDING ECOLOGY SYMPOSIUM RIBE, DENMARK, 18-21 SEPTEMBER 1989

This symposium is the eighth in the series organised by the IWRB Feeding Ecology Research Group, and aims to bring together specialists working on the feeding ecology of wildfowl and waders. The main theme of the Ribe symposium will be the relationship between waders and wildfowl and their habitats. There will be a workshop devoted to discussion of an international project on the nutritional ecology of the Greylag Goose in Europe. Information about the symposium is available from: K. Laursen/J. Madsen, Game Biology Station, Kalø, 8410 Rønde, Denmark. There are only few places left, so please be quick with your application.

NEXT ISSUE OF THE NEWS LETTER DUE LATE-AUTUMN 1989

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