



Monitoring a Breeding Colony of Lesser Snow Geese on the Ikpikpuk River Delta

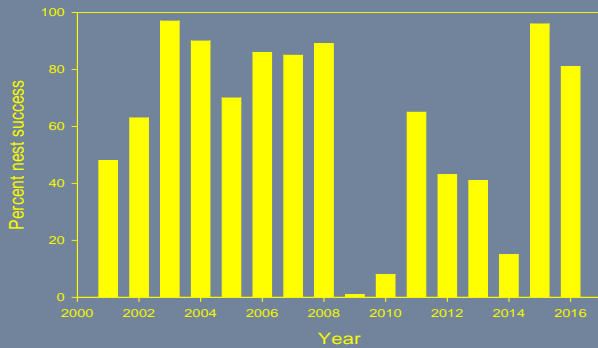
Brian Person, NSB Department of Wildlife Management



Why: Lesser snow geese have the capacity to grow in numbers very rapidly and this has led to damage to tundra ecosystems in other parts of the Arctic. Their numbers are increasing on the North Slope and we are monitoring their growth and their effect on the habitat.

How: We conduct a photocensus while geese are on their nests, counting the number of nests in the colony. We estimate the percent of nests that successfully hatch; we determine their brood-rearing distribution and breeding behavior 2-3 weeks after hatch; and finally, we band geese while they are molting and flightless 3-4 weeks after hatch to determine their fall, winter, and spring distribution. This information allows us to estimate survival rates and monitor the population growth.

Ikpikpuk Lesser Snow Goose Colony Nest Fate

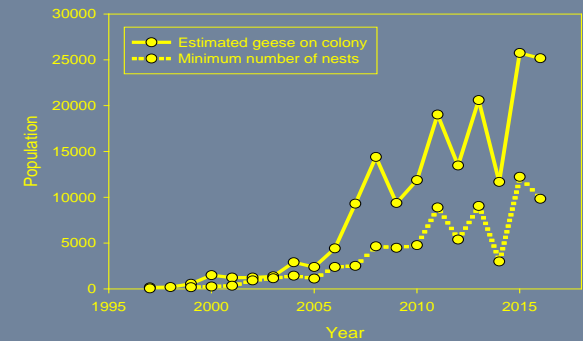


Percent of nests estimated to have successfully hatched on the Ikpikpuk Delta Colony

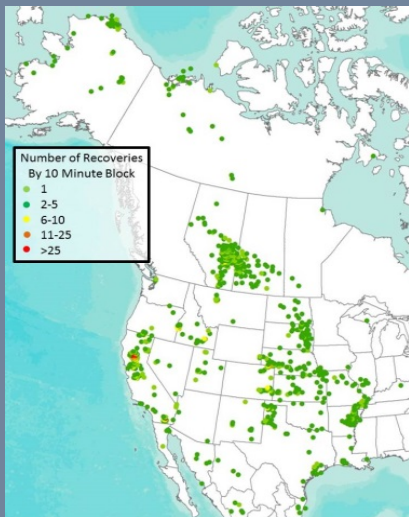


Herding flightless geese into "pot" to hold for banding

Ikpikpuk Lesser Snow Goose Colony Demography



Minimum estimates of nests and estimates of the number of lesser snow geese on the Ikpikpuk Delta Colony



Distribution of lesser snow geese banded on the Ikpikpuk. Locations are where shot or found dead.

DISCUSSION

- The number of lesser snow goose nests on the Ikpikpuk Delta increased from about 50 to around 10,000 nests between the mid-1990's and 2015.
- Nesting success has averaged about 65% over the past 15 years and in several years was well above 85%, which has led to the dramatic increase in this population.
- By 2015 there were over 40,000 adults and goslings that were brood-rearing between Barrow and Fish Creek.
- Lesser snow geese banded on the Ikpikpuk Delta have a broad wintering distribution between California, as far east as Kentucky, and well to the south in Mexico.
- The best thing we can do to control this population growth is to harvest as many as you can for your family and community. Snow geese are delicious!
- Please report any metal bands that you may recover when you harvest them. This information will help maintain local management of this resource.

Acknowledgements: Funding for this project was provided by the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management, the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, the Bureau of Land Management. Many people have assisted with this project but it would not have been possible without the assistance of Bob Ritchie, Alex Prichard, Bob Burgess, numerous other scientists at ABR, Inc., and Robert Suydam. Photo credit: Olive Kanayurak. For more information, contact Brian Person at 852-0350 or at Brian.Person@north-slope.org.