

# Mindre Meddelelse

## The history of Barnacle Geese in the Faroe Islands

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The Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* has historically been a scarce visitor in the Faroe Islands in spring and autumn (Jensen & Sørensen 2015). The only two ring recoveries of Barnacle Geese were of birds ringed in Svalbard and recovered on autumn migration in the Faroes (Hammer *et al.* 2014). Barnacle Geese, however, have been kept in captivity in the Faroes since 1960, and a recently established breeding population on the islands at least in part may stem from these birds.

In 1960, a private bird keeper received a number of Barnacle Goose eggs from Copenhagen Zoo, and goslings from these eggs were reared in captivity in Tórshavn

(Andrias Reinert pers. comm.). Towards the end of the 1980s, many unclipped Barnacle Geese could be seen flying around the Faroes.

In 1989, a Barnacle Goose was seen incubating five eggs including one runt egg near Gróthúsvatn (Fig. 1) on Sandoy (61°50'N, 06°50'W) (Jensen 1990). However no further note or observation would suggest that any chicks fledged from this breeding attempt. In 1990, five Barnacle Geese were observed at Gróthúsvatn. One was colour-ringed (an escapee from Tórshavn), while the rest appeared unringed. The first successful breeding occurrence was a pair at Gróthúsvatn in 1991, which fledged



Fig. 1. Gróthúsvatn on Sandoy is the primary moulting area for Barnacle Geese in the Faroe Islands. Photo: Marita Gulkleff. Gróthúsvatn på Sandoy er det primære fældningsområde for Bramgæs på Færøerne.

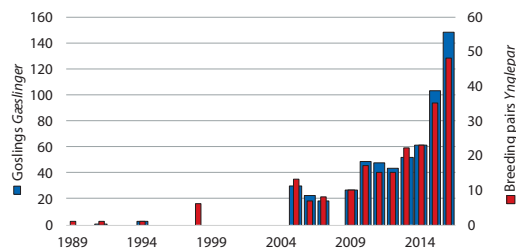


Fig. 2. Breeding pairs and goslings of Barnacle Geese in the Faroe Islands. *Ynglepar og gæslingar af bramgæs på Færøerne.*

one gosling (Sørensen & Jensen 1991, Jensen 1992) (Fig. 2). In 1994, there was one breeding pair which fledged three goslings. In 1998, there were six breeding pairs, but it is unknown how many goslings they fledged. Since 2005, counts have been undertaken every year (with the exception of 2008) (Fig. 2). The counts have been made using binoculars at a range of 50-200 meters.

The rapid reproductive rate of the Barnacle Goose is evident. In 2011, one pair was observed with as many as eight goslings, and since 2005 each pair has reared on average 2.8 goslings (all age classes included). We have also seen the total population grow markedly over the past five years (approximately 17% growth per year) (Fig. 2). Detailed counts conducted in 2015 and 2016 (Tab. 1) showed the total population to be 302 individuals (103 goslings) and 356 individuals (148 goslings) in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

In 2016, Barnacle Geese were confirmed as breeding in three locations on Sandoy, Gróthúsvatn, Söltuvík and Hálsavøtn. Although there are still free-living Barnacle Geese in Tórshavn, they have not been found to successfully breed anywhere except on Sandoy. This is most likely due to the favourable habitat of lakes and cultivated land on Sandoy.

There have also been notable changes in the migratory behaviour of the Barnacle Goose in the Faroes. In the period between 1990 and 2007, most or all Faroese Barnacle Geese overwintered in the Faroes, but since 2008 they all migrate in the autumn. Barnacle Geese now arrive at the breeding areas between 11 and 22 April, and they leave between 14 and 20 August. Their goslings hatch between 30 May and 20 June.

Our observations, which suggest that at least one escaped bird constituted a part of the early breeding population, lends some support to Kampe-Persson's (2010) note that "Without releases and escapes from captivity, there had, in all probability, been no breeding colonies of the Barnacle Goose in temperate areas today." However, it should be noted that very similar

Tab. 1. Detailed population counts of Barnacle Geese in the Faroe Islands.

*Detaljerede populationsoptælling af bramgæs på Færøerne.*

	Breeding pairs <i>Ynglepar</i>	Goslings <i>Gæslingar</i>	Non breeders <i>Ikke- ynglende</i>	Total
2015	35	103	129	302
2016	48	148	112	356

population growth has been observed in other areas at about the same time that growth occurred in the Faroese population. An example is SE Iceland which has seen a rapid growth since 1990 (approximately 25% growth per annum) (Stéfansson *et al.* 2015 and Arnór Þórir Sigfússon pers. comm.). When the population growth on Svalbard (Strøm 2017) is also considered, it is possible that the Faroese population growth is also a reflection of a wider regional population growth. This would in our view warrant further study into the migration and population connectivity of the Faroese Barnacle Goose population.

While all goose species have been protected in the Faroes since 1954, a recent change in legislation allows farmers to seek a special permit to shoot Greylag Geese *Anser anser* (Vang & Jensen 2016). Despite protection, there have been indications that Greylag Geese and Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* have been persecuted by shooting, egg collecting, and also catching and wing clipping. By contrast, we believe that persecution of Barnacle Geese has been fairly limited so far. However, the rapid growth of the breeding population might change public attitudes in the Faroes, and this could potentially result in illegal hunting or to a similar dispensation as was passed for Greylag Geese on agricultural lands. This current publication highlights some of the shortcomings of Faroese goose population monitoring. Our hope is that our findings can provide a scientific foundation for Faroese involvement in future regional monitoring and management of migratory geese.

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## Resumé

### Bramgåsens historie på Færøerne

Bramgåsen er en fåtallig trækfugl om foråret og efteråret på Færøerne. I 1989 blev et par set med fem æg ved Gróthúsvatn på Sandoy, men de fik ingen unger. I 1990 blev fire Bramgæs af ukendt oprindelse og en sikker undsluppet fangeskabsfugl fra Tórshavn observeret ved Gróthúsvatn (Fig. 1). Et par fik en unge her i 1991, og siden 2005 er ynglebestanden vokset drastisk (Fig. 2). I 2016 talte den samlede bestand således 356 Bramgæs, hvoraf 148 var gæslinger. De første år var de standfugle, men siden 2008 er de trukket væk om vinteren. Trods lovmæssig beskyttelse kan det forventes, at den drastiske bestandsfremgang kan påvirke den lokale befolknings holdning til Bramgæs på Færøerne i retning af krav om regulering af bestanden.

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## Anmeldelser

### The Arctic Guide

Sharon Chester. *Wildlife of the Far North*. 542 sider, talrige udbredelseskort og farvetavler mv., hft. Princeton University Press, 2016. ISBN 9780691139753. Pris £19,95.

I dag er verden godt dækket af felthåndbøger med fugle, pattedyr og planter osv., men her har vi noget så usædvanligt som en komplet felthåndbog, der dækker hele den cirkumpolare arktiske region med pattedyr (herunder hvaler og sæler), fugle, fisk, insekter (især sommerfugle) og planter (både terrestriske og marine). Dækningen omfatter hele området fra den højarktiske polarørken og tundraområderne og helt ned i nåleskovszonen (tajgaen). En mere komplet felthåndbog over Arktis i bredeste forstand kan næppe fås – og er mig bekendt heller aldrig set for.

Bogen begynder med en ca. 15 sider introduktion til de arktiske økosystemer, deres historiske definition, deres udbredelse, klassificering i forskellige vegetationszoner og geologiske områdetyper, deres morfologi og glaciationskarakteristika, Det Arktiske Ocean og dets bundtopografi, havstrømme osv., havisen og dens egenskaber og variation, osv. Derefter følger beskrivelserne af de forskellige dyr og planter, meget rigt illustreret med farvebilleder og cirkumpolare udbredelseskort, art for art.

Generelt giver bogen et meget positivt indtryk, selv om denne overvældende mangfoldighed naturligvis medfører, at man kan finde en lang række fejl og mangler. Holder vi os til fuglene og ser på udbredelseskortene, så bemærker man fx, at Kortnæbbet Gås' udbredelse i Grønland er fuldstændig forældet. Det samme gælder for Grønlandsfalken. Ifølge kortene findes Thorshanen hverken på Svalbard eller i Østgrønland,

