




First steps in the re-development of a UK duck wing survey using hunter bags

 Duck wings are a valuable source of information on the composition of harvests and population demography

 A pilot study in winter 2017/18 resulted in 14 wildfowling clubs in the UK submitting 106 wings of five species

 This and other feedback indicates there is enough interest in re-developing a comprehensive UK scheme

INTRODUCTION

BASC and WWT established the Duck Production Survey in the UK in 1965. For the following three some decades, around 200 committed wildfowlingers submitted ~3,000 wings per year, reaching 6,600 wings in 1995/96. The survey also resulted in the seminal publication 'Duck Wings' (Hugh Boyd *et al.* 1975).

Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding and administrative support, the survey ended in the late 1990s. The value and justification for it has never dissipated however, and with the worsening trends now seen in a number of European duck populations there is a strong need to better understand the demography of European duck populations and sustainably manage those that are hunted. Hunters have a crucial role to play in this work and one key contribution they can make is through the collection of duck wings for assessments of the age and sex composition of the bag.



METHOD

The survey followed a standard method as used by existing duck wing schemes. Wildfowlingers were asked to collect one wing of each bird they harvest. The survey was advertised on the BASC website, through the BASC membership magazine, email newsletters, club meetings and on social media. BASC's network of regional officers acted as advocates and encouraged clubs and individuals to take part. Wings were to be collected by a central contact in each club and then brought along to the annual BASC Wildfowling Conference. However, the conference was unfortunately cancelled due to adverse weather and wings had to be posted instead. Wings were collected at BASC headquarters and frozen, then identified, aged and sexed by experienced staff at WWT using the ONCFS duck wing guide. Photographs were also taken to facilitate a comparison of the accuracy of 'in the hand' versus digital photo ageing and sexing.

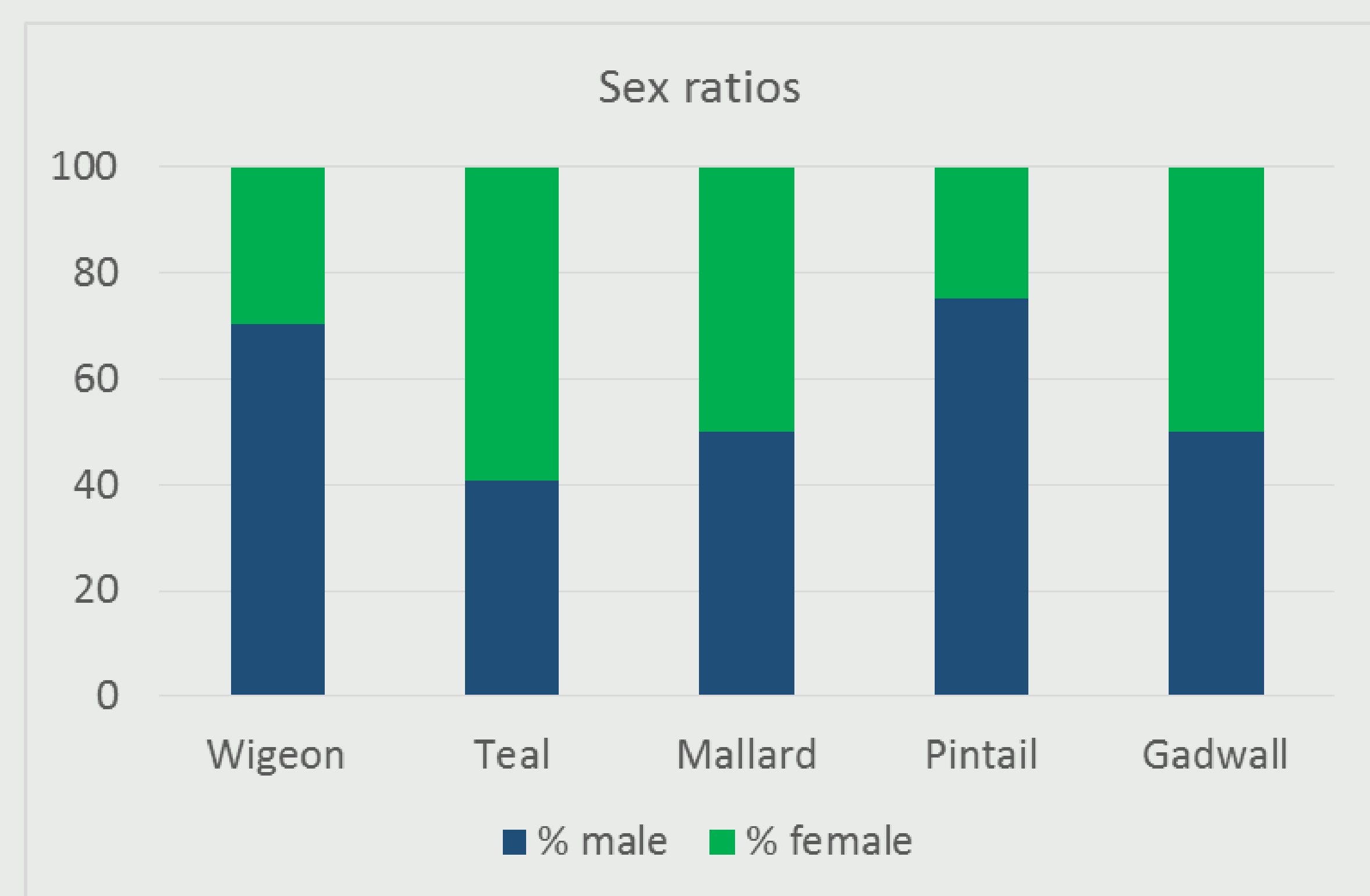
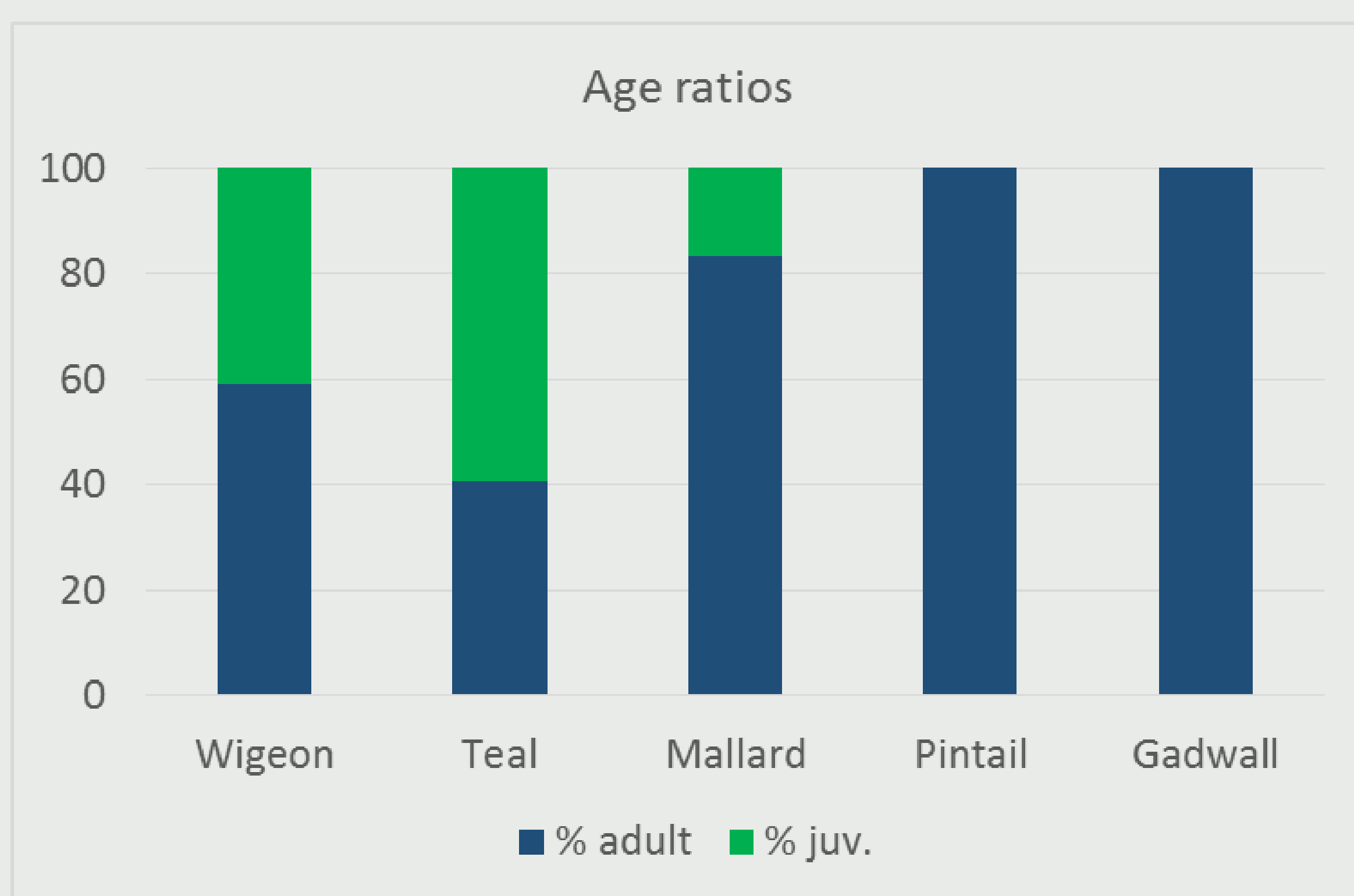
DISCUSSION & RESULTS

A total of 106 wings of five duck species was submitted by 14 wildfowling clubs (Table 1). We also received a number of wings of Pink-footed Goose and Greylag Goose. Unfortunately this was fewer than expected due to the cancellation of the conference, and we know from feedback we have received that some wildfowlingers disposed of their wings when the event was cancelled.

Nevertheless, whilst this sample is insufficient for any meaningful analysis at this stage, dissemination of the results of this pilot study will help to support the future growth of the scheme.

Table 1. The number of wings submitted for each age and sex class.

Species	♂		♀	
	Ad.	Juv.	Ad.	Juv.
Wigeon	27	16	9	9
Teal	4	7	7	9
Mallard	6	0	4	2
Pintail	3	0	1	0
Gadwall	1	0	1	0



NEXT STEPS...

Increase participation

The level of participation in the pilot study was encouraging despite the problems caused by the cancellation of the conference. Steps will be taken this summer to increase participation in 2018/19, including dissemination of the 2017/18 results and greater promotion of the scheme through the network of clubs, social media and online. We also hope to hold a wing bee at the 2019 Wildfowling Conference.

Go digital

Asking hunters to store wings for a winter, and getting them to post them, is a potential barrier to participation. We would therefore like to use social media to allow hunters to submit digital photos of wings. Before we do this we intend to undertake a study of the accuracy of age and sex determination using digital photos.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all wildfowlingers that contributed to this study, particularly Pat Gubb, James Green, Dan Reynolds, Ian Danby, Trevor Connah, Alex MacDonald, Mark Astley-Jones, Ian Whitehall, John Tripp and Pete Nichols.

