

POPULATION STUDY OF GREATER SNOW GEESE AND ITS NESTING HABITAT ON BYLOT ISLAND, NUNAVUT IN 2013: A PROGRESS REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, we continued our long-term study of the population dynamics of Greater Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens atlantica*) and of the interactions between geese, plants and their predators on Bylot Island. Like many other goose populations worldwide, Greater Snow Geese have increased considerably during the late XXth century. The exploding population has imposed considerable stress on its breeding habitat, while extensive use of agriculture lands provides an unlimited source of food during winter and migratory stopovers for them. Remedial management during autumn, winter and spring has been undertaken since 1999 in Canada and 2009 in the United States to curb the growth of this population. A synthesis report produced in 2007 evaluated the initial success of these special conservation measures. However, both the Avian Monitoring Review Steering Committee Final Report and the Greater Snow Goose Action Plan released in 2012 by the Canadian Wildlife Service called for a continued monitoring of the dynamic of this population and of its habitats. In response to those needs, the long-term objectives of this project are to (1) study changes in the demographic parameters of the Greater Snow Goose population, and especially the effects of the spring conservation harvest, (2) determine the role of food availability and predation in limiting annual production of geese, and (3) monitor the impact of grazing on the Arctic vegetation.

OBJECTIVES

Specific goals for 2013 were as follows:

- 1) Monitor productivity (egg laying date, clutch size and nesting success) of Greater Snow Geese on Bylot Island.
- 2) Mark goslings in the nest to provide a sample of known-age individuals to be used to assess the growth of goslings by their recapture in late summer.
- 3) Band goslings and adults, and neck-collar adult females at the end of the summer to continue the long-term study of demographic parameters such as survival and breeding propensity.
- 4) Study factors affecting the molt (chronology, plumage quality) of adults during the summer such as timing of breeding, food availability, body condition and the hormonal status.
- 5) Monitor the abundance of lemmings and study their demography and factors affecting their cyclic fluctuations of abundance.
- 6) Monitor the breeding activity of other bird species and in particular avian predators (Snowy Owls, jaegers, Glaucous Gulls and Rough-legged Hawks).
- 7) Monitor the breeding activity of foxes at dens.
- 8) Capture and mark adult Arctic Foxes and their pups with ear-tags to study their movements and demography.
- 9) Sample plants in exclosures to assess annual production and the impact of goose grazing on plant abundance in wet meadows.

10) Maintain our automated environmental and weather monitoring system.

FIELD ACTIVITIES

Field camps. — In 2013, we operated two camps on Bylot Island: the main field station, located at 6 km from the coast in the largest glacial valley on the island (“Qarlikturvik Valley”, 73° 08' N, 80° 00' W), was occupied from 11 May to 20 August. However, arrival of the goose study team, which normally occurs around 1 June, was delayed by a week due to bad weather. A secondary camp, located in a narrow valley 30 km south of the main field station and 5 km from the coast (“Camp-2 area”, 72° 53' N, 79° 54' W) was occupied from 23 May to 20 July (Fig. 1). Finally, 16 fly camps were also established for 2-12 days at various times throughout the island, west of Pointe Dufour.

Field parties. — The total number of people in both camps ranged from 4 to 18 depending on the period. Members of our field party included project leaders Joël Bêty and Dominique Berteaux and several graduate students whose thesis projects addressed many of the objectives mentioned above: Cynthia Resendiz (PhD, objectives 1, 2 and 3), Dominique Fauteux (PhD, objective 5), Vincent Marmillot (MSc, objectives 1 and 4), Audrey Robillard (PhD, objective 6), Andréanne Beardsell (MSc, objective 6) and Clément Chevalier (PhD, objectives 7 and 8). Several other students assisted them in the field, including: Gabrielle Mercier, Gabriel Montpetit-Allard, Caroline Potvin, Nicolas Bradette, Florence Lapierre-Poulin and Jonathan Frénette. Other people in the field included Marie-Christine Cadieux, a research professional in charge of goose banding and plant sampling (objectives 3 and 9); Denis Sarrazin, research professional responsible of the maintenance of the weather stations (objective 10); Christine Lepage, a biologist, and Christian Marcotte, a wildlife technician, from the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS, Quebec region) and Nicolas Casajus, a research professional from Université du Québec à Rimouski. Finally, we hired 2 persons from Pond Inlet to work with us: Joasie Ootovak (marking goslings in nests: 3-13 July) and Ezra Arreak (goose banding: 5-13 August).

Several other people also used our camps during the summer. They were Jean-François Lamarre (PhD student), Catherine Doucet (MSc student), Pascal Royer-Boutin (MSc student), Eric Reed (biologist from the CWS, Gatineau region), Fanny Senez-Gagnon, Don-Jean Léandri-Breton and Hans Meltofte (researcher from Aarhus University, Denmark) who studied shorebirds, lapland longspurs and insects under the supervision of Joël Bêty; the field party of Daniel Fortier (Université de Montréal) and Esther Lévesque (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières), which included Étienne Godin (PhD student), Stéphanie Coulombe (MSc student), Denis Lacelle (researcher from the University of Ottawa), Audrey Veillette and Gabrielle Létourneau, who studied the permafrost and the geomorphology of the island; the field party of Isabelle Laurion (Institut National de la Recherche Scientifique), which included Gabrielle Lupien and Hilary White (PhD, Wilfrid Laurier University), who studied the carbon cycle in ponds; and Florent Dominé (Takuvik, Université Laval/CNRS) who studied the snow physical and chemical properties. Stephen Dicks (acting manager of *Sirmilik National Park*) and Brian Koonoo from Parks Canada inspected both camps during the summer. Finally a film crew of 4 led by James Broadley from *The Polar Sea* project visited our main field station for one day to film some of our research activities.

Environmental and weather data. — Environmental and weather data continued to be recorded at our four automated stations. Our network includes 3 full stations, two at low and one at high elevation (20 m and 370 m ASL, respectively) where air and ground temperature, air humidity, precipitations, snow depth on the ground, solar radiation, wind speed and direction are recorded on an hourly basis throughout the year (Fig. 1). A fourth station measures soil surface temperature in areas grazed and ungrazed by geese (i.e. exclosures). All automated stations were visited during the summer to download data and were found to be operating normally. Daily precipitation was also recorded manually during the summer. Finally, snowmelt was monitored by measuring snow depth at 50 stations along two 250-m transects and by visually estimating snow cover in the Qarlikturvik Valley, both at 2-day intervals.

Monitoring of goose arrival and nesting. — We monitored goose arrival in the Qarlikturvik Valley by counting goose pairs every two to three days from our arrival on the island until the end of snowmelt on sample plots. Nest searches were carried out within walking distance (~6 km) of both the main field station and the Camp-2 between 8 and 18 June. Nests were found by systematic searches conducted over various areas in the field. At Camp-2, where the bulk of the goose colony is located, nest searches were conducted in two ways: 1) over an intensively-studied core area (ca 50 ha) located in the centre of the colony every year, and 2) within a variable number of 1 and 2-ha plots randomly located throughout the colony. Nest density was calculated over a fixed 20-ha area within the intensively-studied core area. We also attempted to find the nests of as many neck-collared females as possible through intensive searches on foot throughout the nesting colony. All nests were revisited at least twice to determine laying date, clutch size, hatching date and nesting success. During the hatching period, we visited a sample of nests almost daily to record hatch dates and to web-tag goslings.

Goose banding. — From 5 to 13 August, we banded geese with the assistance of local Inuit people and a helicopter. Goose flocks of a few hundred birds were rounded up and driven by people on foot into a holding pen made of plastic netting. All captured geese were sexed and banded with a metal band, and all recaptures (web-tagged or leg-banded birds) were recorded. A sample of young and adults was measured (mass and length of culmen, head, tarsus and 9th primary) and some adult females were fitted with coded yellow plastic neck-collars. Finally, we collected some blood samples from adult females during banding to determine if hormone levels could provide an index of the impact of environmental factors on the stress level of molting adults.

Small mammals. — We sampled the annual abundance of lemmings at two sites in the Qarlikturvik Valley (one in wet meadow habitat and one in mesic habitat) and one site at the Camp-2 (mixed habitat) in July using snap-traps. At each site, we used 240 traps set at 80 stations spaced 15-m apart along two to four parallel transect lines 100 m apart and left open for 3 or 4 days. We used Museum Special traps baited with peanut butter and rolled oats. Since 2004, we also sample lemming abundance using live-traps. We trapped on 2 permanent grids (330 × 330 m) in the Qarlikturvik Valley (one in wet meadow habitat and one in mesic habitat) with 144 traps per grid and on a 3rd grid (200 × 340 m; 96 traps) in mesic habitat where a predator exclosure experiment was set up in 2012 (the grid is surrounded by a chicken wire fence and covered by criss-crossing fishing line on top). We used Longworth traps baited with apples and set at each grid intersection every 30-m. We trapped for 3 consecutive days during 3 periods

(mid-June, mid-July and mid-August) on each grid. All trapped animals are identified, sexed, weighed and marked with electronic PIT tags (or checked for the presence of such tags). Finally, we sampled the abundance of lemming winter nests along 60 500-m transects randomly distributed in 3 different habitats of the Qarlikturvik Valley: wetlands, mesic tundra and streams in mesic tundra.

Breeding activity of foxes at dens and marking. — All known fox dens located within a 520 km² area were visited one to five times during the summer and inspected for signs of use and/or presence of reproductive adults with pups. We attempted to live-trap adults with padded leghold traps at locations where foxes were seen hunting or travelling. At reproductive dens, we noted the species (Arctic Fox, *Vulpes lagopus*, or Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*) and minimum litter size, and, whenever possible, we live-trapped pups with Tomahawk collapsible cage traps. Cage traps were kept under continuous surveillance and leghold traps were visited at least every 6 hours. Captured foxes were measured, weighed and tagged on both ears using a unique set of coloured and numbered plastic tags. In addition, some adult Arctic Foxes were fitted with ARGOS satellites collars. Samples of winter and summer fur, blood, and scats were also collected for genetic and diet analyses.

Monitoring of other bird species. — We monitored the nesting activity of Snowy Owls (*Bubo scandiacus*), Long-tailed and Parasitic Jaegers (*Stercorarius longicaudus* and *S. parasiticus*), Glaucous Gulls (*Larus hyperboreus*), Rough-legged Hawks (*Buteo lagopus*) and Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*). Nests were found through systematic searches of suitable habitats or opportunistically and revisited to determine their fate (successful or not) until fledging.

Monitoring of plant growth and goose grazing. — The annual plant production and the impact of goose grazing was evaluated in wet meadows dominated by graminoid plants at 2 sites (Fig. 1): the Qarlikturvik Valley (brood-rearing areas), and the Camp-2 area (nesting colony). At each site, 12 exclosures (1 × 1 m) were installed in late June, and plant biomass was sampled in ungrazed and grazed areas (i.e. inside and outside exclosures) at the end of the plant-growing season on 14 and 15 August. Plants were sorted into sedges (*Eriophorum scheuchzeri* and *Carex aquatilis*) and grasses (*Dupontia fisheri*). Use of the area by geese was monitored by counting faeces on 1 × 10 m transects located near each exclosure every 2 weeks in the Qarlikturvik Valley and once at the end of the season at the Camp-2 area.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Weather conditions. — Temperature in spring was generally mild. Air temperature averaged 0.10°C between 20 May and 20 June (0.09°C above normal), the period of goose arrival and egg-laying, and 2.13°C (0.66°C above normal) during 1-15 June, which is the critical period of egg formation and egg-laying. The snow pack at the end of winter was relatively thick (snow depth was 21 cm on 8 June) but the mild weather in June resulted in a normal snowmelt in the lowlands (Fig. 2). However, temperature in July was cold compared to recent years and cloud cover was extensive whereas August was generally mild and sunny. Overall, precipitations

during the summer were low (cumulative rainfall: 50.5 mm, long-term average: 90 mm) as this was one of the driest summer recorded since 1995.

Goose arrival and nesting activity. — The number of geese counted on the hills surrounding the Qarlikturvik Valley (main field station), usually the first area used by geese upon arrival, was moderate at our first count on 7 June (180 pairs) but increased rapidly over the next few days to peak at 574 pairs on 12 June, a high number (Fig. 3). Nonetheless, the peak count of birds was 5 days later than in 2012, which suggests that goose arrival on Bylot Island was delayed this year. The subsequent decline in goose numbers was due to the movements of geese to the nesting colony, away from the Qarlikturvik Valley.

Median egg-laying date in the colony was 13 June, which is one day later than the long-term average on Bylot Island (Table 1). Nest density in the center of the colony was high compared to last year (8.85 vs. 5.24 nests/ha in 2012) and above the long-term average. Similar to 2012, no nests were found in the Qarlikturvik Valley (predominantly a brood-rearing area). Overall, average clutch size was 3.58, slightly lower than the long-term average (Table 1).

Nesting success of geese. — Nesting success (proportion of nests hatching at least one egg) was moderate this year in the colony (67%, a value similar to the long-term average, Table 1). This was largely due to a relatively low activity of Arctic Foxes and avian predators around goose nests, which destroyed fewer nests than last year. During the summer, 120 neck-collared birds were sighted in the colony. Peak hatch was on 10 July, which is also one day later than the long-term average (Table 1). We tagged 2570 goslings in nests at hatch, all in the Camp-2 area. Overall, nesting conditions of geese in 2013 were therefore near average.

Density of broods. — The density of goose faeces at the end of the summer in wet meadows of the Qarlikturvik Valley was very high (13.9 ± 3.1 [SE] faeces/m²; long-term average: 6.0; Fig. 4). Accumulation of faeces began in mid-July, when newly-hatched broods started to move in the valley from the colony further south and increased steadily thereafter until mid-August. Faeces density at the end of the summer was moderate in the wet meadows of the nesting colony at Camp-2 (3.5 ± 0.4 faeces/m²; long-term average: 3.7).

Goose banding. — The banding operation was very successful this year due to good weather prevailing throughout the banding period. We conducted 6 drives in our core banding area, i.e. in the lowlands and hills bordering the main field station to the south and north (< 8 km), and 3 additional drives further away, between the Camp 2 and the Qarlikturvik Valley. We banded a total of 4865 geese, including 557 adult females marked with neck-collars and 112 young that had been marked with web-tags at hatch. In addition, we recaptured 292 adults that were banded in previous years. The young:adult ratio among geese captured at banding was much higher than last year (1.10:1) and above the long-term average (Table 1). Mean brood size toward the end of brood-rearing (2.51 young, n = 49; counts conducted from 30 July to 4 August) was similar to last year and to the long-term average. By combining information on brood size and young:adult ratio at banding, we estimated that 88% of the adults captured were accompanied by young, a high value (Table 1). Overall, these results are indicative of a good production of young on Bylot Island by the end of the summer. Finally, we collected 196 blood samples from adult females to examine hormone levels during molt.

Small mammals. — During our survey using snap traps, we cumulated 1916 trap-nights at our 2 trapping sites of the Qarlikturvik Valley from 23 to 30 July, and 960 trap-nights at the Camp-2 from 16 to 19 July. In the Qarlikturvik sites, we caught 1 Collared Lemming (*Dicrostonyx groenlandicus*) and no Brown Lemming (*Lemmus trimucronatus*), which yielded a combined index of abundance of 0.05 lemming/100 trap-nights, a very low value similar to last year (Fig. 5). The estimated abundance was even lower in the Camp-2 area, as no lemmings were caught, for an index of 0 lemming/100 trap-nights. The live-trapping survey conducted throughout the summer in the Qarlikturvik Valley area revealed the same picture. Overall, we captured only 1 Collared Lemming, for an index of 0.03 lemming/100 trap-nights, a very low number compared to last year (0.56 lemming/100 trap-nights). A formal estimation of density using capture-recapture analytical methods indeed showed that both lemming species were in the low phase of abundance of their cycle in 2013 (Fig. 6). Finally, the number of lemming winter nests found along our 60 transects was also very low as only 19 were found in 2013 compared to 49 in 2012.

Breeding activity of foxes at dens and marking. — We found 4 new fox dens on the island in 2013, bringing the total to 109 known denning sites still intact. Among these dens, we found signs of activity (fresh digging and/or footprints) at 2 of them, a very low number. The breeding activity of foxes was low as we found only 2 different litters (2% of known denning sites) of Arctic Fox, a further decrease following last year's low (8 litters found in 2012), and no litter of Red Fox. The low breeding activity of the Arctic Fox is typical of what we normally observed in years of low lemming abundance (average: 5%). Minimum litter size of Arctic Fox varied between 4 and 8 pups (6 pups on average). A total of 39 Arctic Foxes (32 adults and 7 juveniles) and no Red Foxes were captured during trapping sessions. Thirty-two Arctic Foxes (25 adults and 7 juveniles) captured were new individuals and 7 adults had been marked in previous years. All new individuals were marked with ear-tags. Among the adults captured, 14 Arctic Foxes were also fitted with satellite collars to study their home ranges and movements at large spatial scale over the entire annual cycle.

Monitoring of other bird species. — We found 23 active nests of Glaucous Gulls (vs. 22 in 2012), 2 nests of Parasitic Jaegers (vs. 2 in 2012) but no nest of Long-tailed Jaegers (vs. 6 in 2012), Rough-legged Hawks (vs. 10 in 2012) and Snowy Owls (as in 2012). The decrease in the nesting activities of several avian predators is typical of what we encountered in a low lemming year. We found 119 nests of Lapland Longspurs compared to 137 in 2012. Average clutch size was 2.6 eggs for gulls (vs. 2.2 in 2012), 2.0 eggs for jaegers (vs. 1.8 in 2012) and 5.0 eggs for longspurs (vs. 4.8 in 2012). Nesting success (proportion of nests successful in fledging at least one young) was low for longspurs (12% vs. 6% in 2012). Only 5 gull nests could be monitored and 2 of them successfully hatched young, though it is unknown if they survived to fledging. Success was unknown for jaegers.

Plant growth and grazing impact. — Plant production in wet meadows of the brood-rearing area was above the long-term average but lower than in the past two years (Fig. 7). Above-ground biomass of graminoid plants in the Qarlikturvik Valley reached 63.5 ± 9.4 [SE] g/m² in ungrazed areas in mid-August compared to 78.4 ± 10.5 in 2012 (long-term average since 1990: 50.1 g/m²). Biomass of both *Eriophorum* and *Dupontia* was reduced compared the previous year (Fig. 7). At the nesting colony (Camp-2 area), graminoid biomass was surprisingly high for 3rd year in a row (143.5 ± 16.7 , more than two times higher than the long-term average) though slightly lower than last year (182.9 ± 16.8 g/m² in 2012; Fig. 8). Biomass of *Eriophorum* had decreased considerably in 2013

($79.3 \pm 13.2 \text{ g/m}^2$) compared to the record values of the last 2 years, which was associated with an exceptional flowering activity of that plant in 2011, but was still above the long-term average (40.5 g/m^2). In contrast, biomass of *Dupontia* increased over last year to reach a record value in 2013 ($59.0 \pm 10.2 \text{ g/m}^2$), but was still lower than *Eriophorum* biomass (Fig. 8).

Grazing pressure was relatively high in the wet meadows of the Qarlikturvik Valley in 2013 as geese had removed 33% of the above-ground biomass (difference between paired grazed and ungrazed plots) by mid-August (almost twice as high as in 2012; long-term average: 31%; Fig. 7). Similar to most previous years, grazing pressure was higher on *Eriophorum* (24% of biomass removed) than on *Dupontia* (17% of biomass removed). At the Camp-2 area (nesting colony), the grazing pressure was also high this year with 43% of the graminoid biomass removed by geese, the highest value recorded since 1998 (long-term average at this site: 26%; Fig. 8). Geese removed 49% of the *Eriophorum* production at this site and 35% of *Dupontia* biomass.

CONCLUSIONS

The production of young geese on Bylot Island was good in 2013. Mild temperature at the time of laying and a normal snow-melt in June allowed geese to nest near their usual date, though with a slightly reduced clutch size. It also appears that the breeding effort of the population was high as judged by the density of nests in the core area of the colony. Predation on goose eggs was also moderate despite the fact that lemmings, the main food for predators, were extremely low this year. Even though predators like foxes had to turn to geese due to lack of lemmings, their population were probably low. Indeed, as lemmings were also very low in 2012, relatively few foxes bred last year and overwinter mortality was probably high due to this low prey availability. This can explain the moderate predation rate on goose nests despite the low lemming abundance in 2013. Nonetheless, the cold and cloudy conditions that prevailed at hatch and during the early growth period may have reduced the survival of goslings, which are vulnerable to exposure when they are young.

Based on the young:adult ratio recorded at banding on Bylot Island, we anticipated a good percentage of young in the fall flock as the predicted value was 24%, near the long-term average (23%). However, the percentage of young measured during juvenile counts conducted in southern Quebec this fall was only 8% ($n = 25,817$), a much lower value than anticipated. This indicates that breeding conditions encountered by geese elsewhere in the eastern Canadian Arctic in 2013 were much worse than those prevailing on Bylot Island. Information relayed to us by researchers working at other sites in the eastern Arctic (e.g. Cornwallis and Ellesmere Islands) indicated that spring and summer was cold and delayed over much of the High Arctic last summer. Therefore, the mild conditions and near normal snow-melt encountered on Bylot Island were apparently an exception. Snow geese nesting at other sites, and especially those nesting further north, were thus apparently confronted to poor climatic conditions during much of the breeding season, which presumably lead to widespread breeding failure at those sites. For instance, unusually large numbers of non-breeding black brants (*Branta bernicla*) were reported at Tern Island near Cornwallis Island (M. Mallory, pers. comm.).

Above-ground plant production in the wet meadows of the Qarlikturvik Valley was good in 2013, though not as much as in recent years. Because annual growth of Arctic plants is sensitive to summer temperature, the cold temperature that prevailed during much of July, the peak growth season for plants, probably explains the reduction in plant production in 2013. Nonetheless, the value recorded last summer is still indicative of a long-term increasing trend in plant production, likely due to the on-going warming occurring on Bylot Island. At the nesting colony (Camp-2), plant production was also reduced compared to the two previous summers but still surprisingly large compared to the values recorded during the preceding decade. The sudden biomass increase recorded at the site in 2011 and 2012 was associated with a massive flowering of *Eriophorum* during these years as flower abundance was an order of magnitude higher in 2011 than in preceding years. We previously suggested that the low goose grazing pressure recorded at this site in recent years combined to the warm summer temperature that prevailed may have caused this mast flowering. This year, *Eriophorum* biomass decreased considerably, presumably because this event of mast flowering is now over. However, the abundance of the other graminoid, *Dupontia* increased to a record level at Camp-2 in 2013. Although we do not have a good explanation for this increase, the consequence is that plant growth, and hence food availability for geese, has been exceptionally good in the colony over the past 3 years.

The goose grazing pressure on Bylot Island was relatively high in 2013, a consequence of the good production of young locally. Even though our data indicate that the absolute amount of biomass consumed by geese was very high in 2013, the proportion of biomass consumed was actually lower than what we regularly observed during the 1990s in years of good production of young. This is because plant production is now about two times higher than what we were measuring during that period due to climate warming. A consequence of that for plants has been a general decrease in goose grazing intensity over time (see Gauthier et al. 2013 for more details). Therefore, it appears that feeding conditions of geese on Bylot Island have been good in recent years.

PLANS FOR 2014

The long-term objectives of our work are to study the population dynamics of Greater Snow Geese, and the interactions between geese, plants, and their predators on Bylot Island. A major focus of the project is to monitor changes in demographic parameters (such as survival rate, hunting mortality, breeding propensity, reproductive success, and recruitment) and habitat (annual plant production and grazing impact) in response to the spring conservation harvest and other special management actions implemented since 1999 in Canada and since 2009 in the United States. Other aspects of the project include *i*) understanding better the links between events occurring during the spring migration and the subsequent breeding success of geese; *ii*) determining the long-term effects of geese on the arctic landscape; *iii*) assessing how climate change may be affecting the carrying capacity of the habitat for geese, *iv*) studying indirect interactions between snow geese and lemmings via shared predators; *v*) studying the ecology of the main predator of geese, Arctic Foxes; and *vi*) assessing the impact of climate change on goose reproduction and molt. In 2014, we anticipate to:

- 1) Monitor productivity (egg laying date, clutch size and nesting success) and nesting distribution of Greater Snow Geese on Bylot Island.
- 2) Mark goslings in the nest to provide a sample of known-age individuals to assess the growth and pre-fledging survival of goslings by their recapture in late summer.
- 3) Band goslings and adults, and neck-collar adult females at the end of the summer to continue the long-term study of demographic parameters such as survival and breeding propensity.
- 4) Monitor the body condition of molting adults.
- 5) Monitor the abundance of lemmings and study their demography.
- 6) Monitor the breeding activity of other bird species, in particular avian predators (Snowy Owls, jaegers, Glaucous Gulls and Rough-legged Hawks).
- 7) Monitor the breeding activity of foxes at dens and study their movements and demography.
- 8) Sample plants in exclosures to assess annual production and the impact of goose and lemming grazing on plant abundance in wet meadows.
- 9) Maintain our automated environmental and weather monitoring system.

In 2014, at least 7 graduate students will be involved in the Bylot Island snow goose project. **Vincent Marmillot** (MSc) will complete his study of factors affecting molt in snow geese. **Clément Chevalier** (PhD) will continue to study the population dynamic of Arctic Foxes with a special emphasis on annual variation on survival. **Dominique Fauteux** (PhD) will continue to study the role of predation in the cyclic dynamic of lemming populations. **Audrey Robillard** (PhD) will continue to study the inter-annual movements and habitat use by wintering Snowy Owls. **Cynthia Resendiz** (PhD) will continue her study on the effects of climate change on snow goose reproduction. **Andréanne Beardsell** (MSc) will complete her study on the nesting ecology of Rough-legged Hawks. Finally, **Yannick Seyer** (MSc) will start a study on the migratory and reproductive strategies of the Long-tailed Jaegers.

Table 1. Productivity data of Greater Snow Geese nesting on Bylot Island over the past decade.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Average ²
Number of nest monitored	676	346	393	494	466	405	372	382	375	451	--
Nest density (nb/ha)	1.12	5.55	2.14	4.07	6.36	4.94	2.95	4.89	5.24	8.85	4.41
Median date of egg-laying	11 June	12 June	14 June	16 June	10 June	12 June	13 June	13 June	12 June	13 June	12 June
Clutch size	3.65	3.60	3.68	3.91	4.10	3.38	3.68	3.74	3.80	3.58	3.71
Nesting success ¹	78%	66%	42%	82%	74%	74%	80%	90%	54%	67%	66%
Median date of hatching	7 July	8 July	10 July	11 July	6 July	9 July	10 July	8 July	9 July	10 July	9 July
Number of geese banded	3617	5304	4603	4260	3395	5417	4267	3802	2512	4865	3599
Ratio young:adult at banding	0.94:1	1.03:1	0.74:1	1.11:1	1.11:1	1.07:1	1.18:1	1.19:1	0.92:1	1.10:1	1.04:1
Brood size at banding	2.50	2.42	2.20	2.90	3.07	2.35	2.39	2.80	2.54	2.51	2.52
Proportion of adults with young at banding	75%	86%	67%	77%	72%	91%	98%	85%	73%	88%	82%

¹ Mayfield estimate² Period 1989-2013

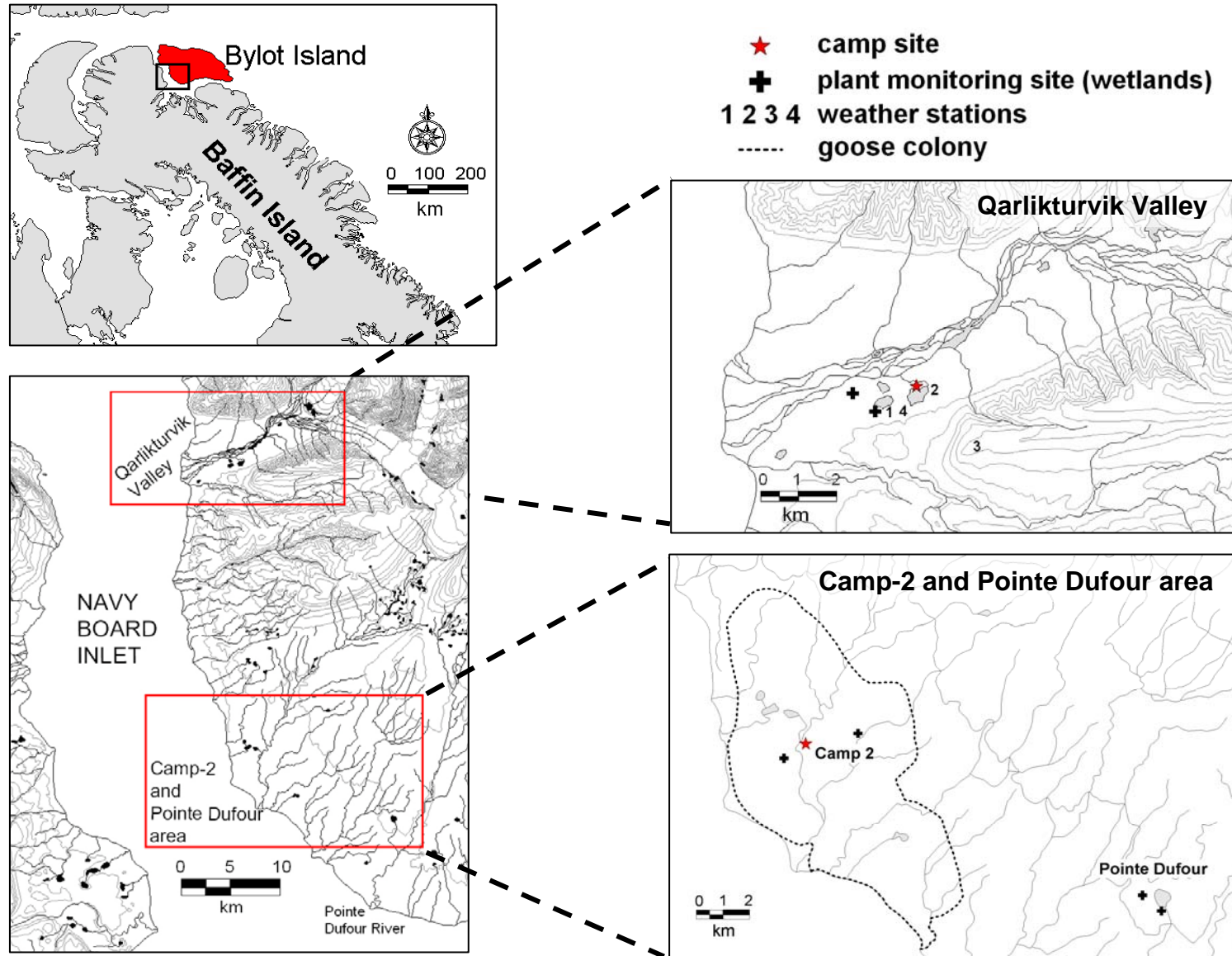


Figure 1. Location of the two main study sites (Qarlikturvik Valley and the Camp-2 area) on the South Plain of Bylot Island, Nunavut. Enlarged maps on the right present these study sites in more details, including camp locations, extent of the goose colony, vegetation sampling sites and our four weather stations. Vegetation was not sampled at Pointe Dufour in 2013.

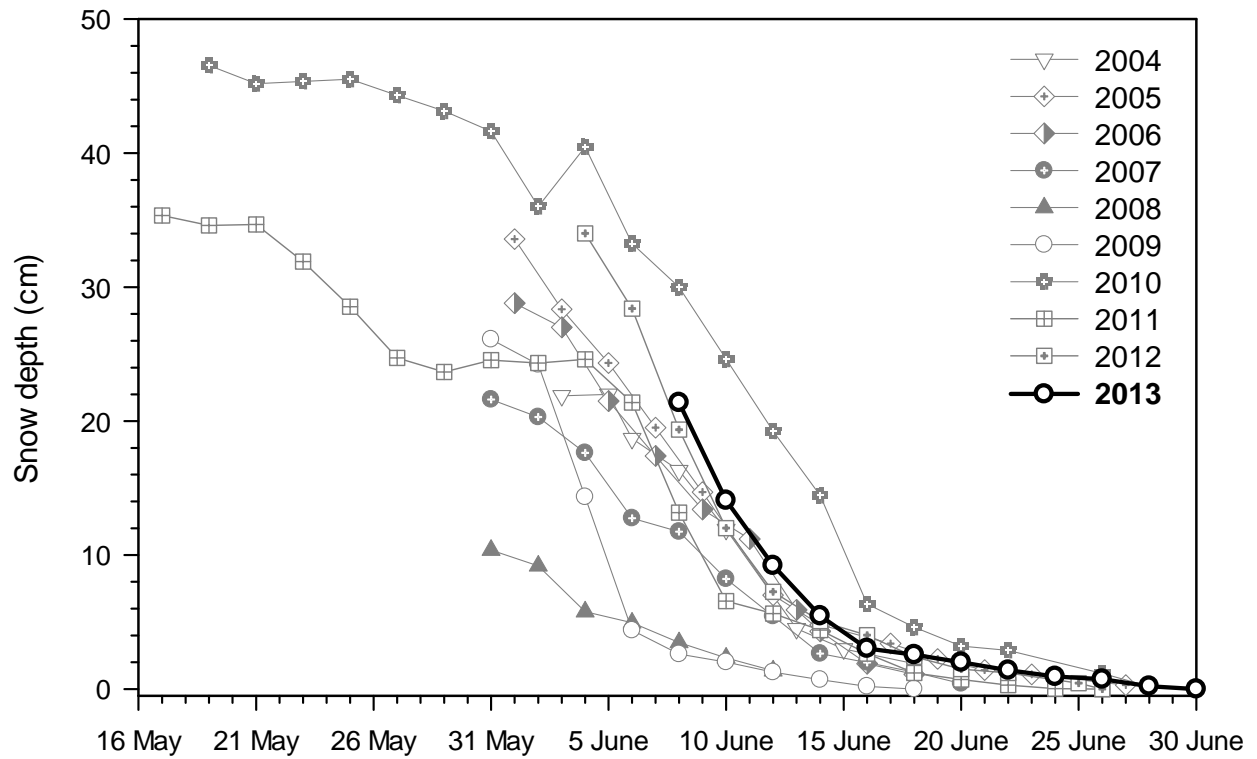


Figure 2. Average depth of snow along 2 transects showing the rate of snowmelt in the lowlands of Bylot Island over the past decade ($n = 50$ stations).

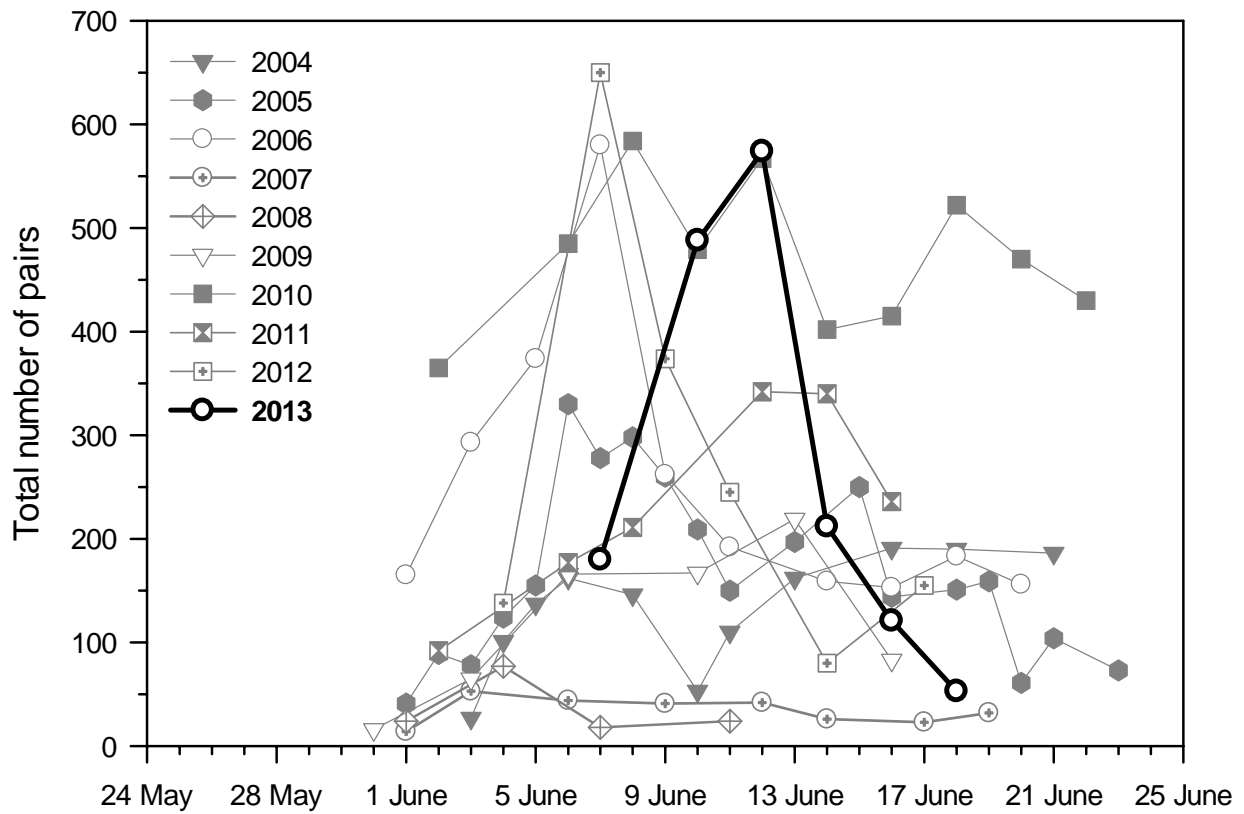


Figure 3. Total number of goose pairs counted in the Qarlikturvik Valley from arrival of our crew on Bylot Island until the end of snowmelt over the past decade.

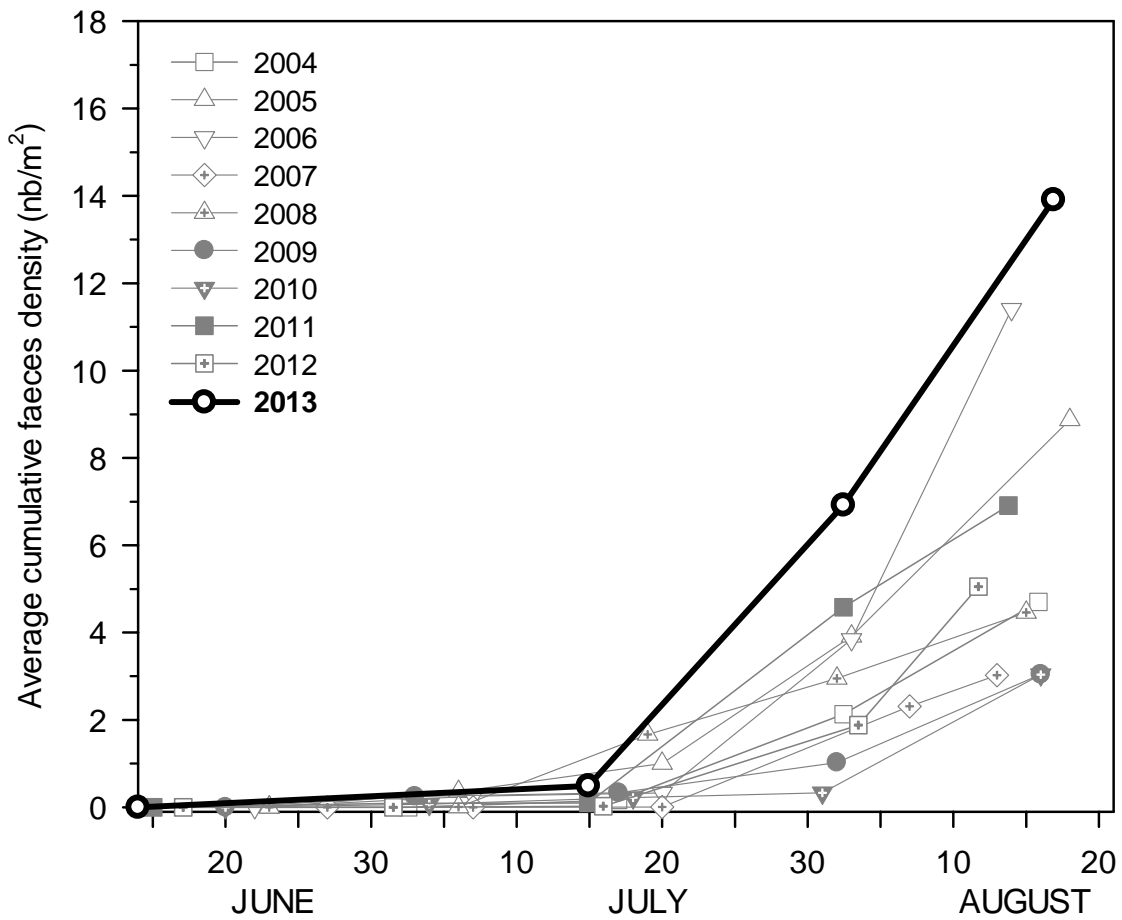


Figure 4. Average cumulative faeces density showing the use of the Qarlikturvik Valley by Greater Snow Goose families on Bylot Island throughout the summer over the past decade ($n = 12$ transects of 1×10 m; except 2013 where $n = 5$).

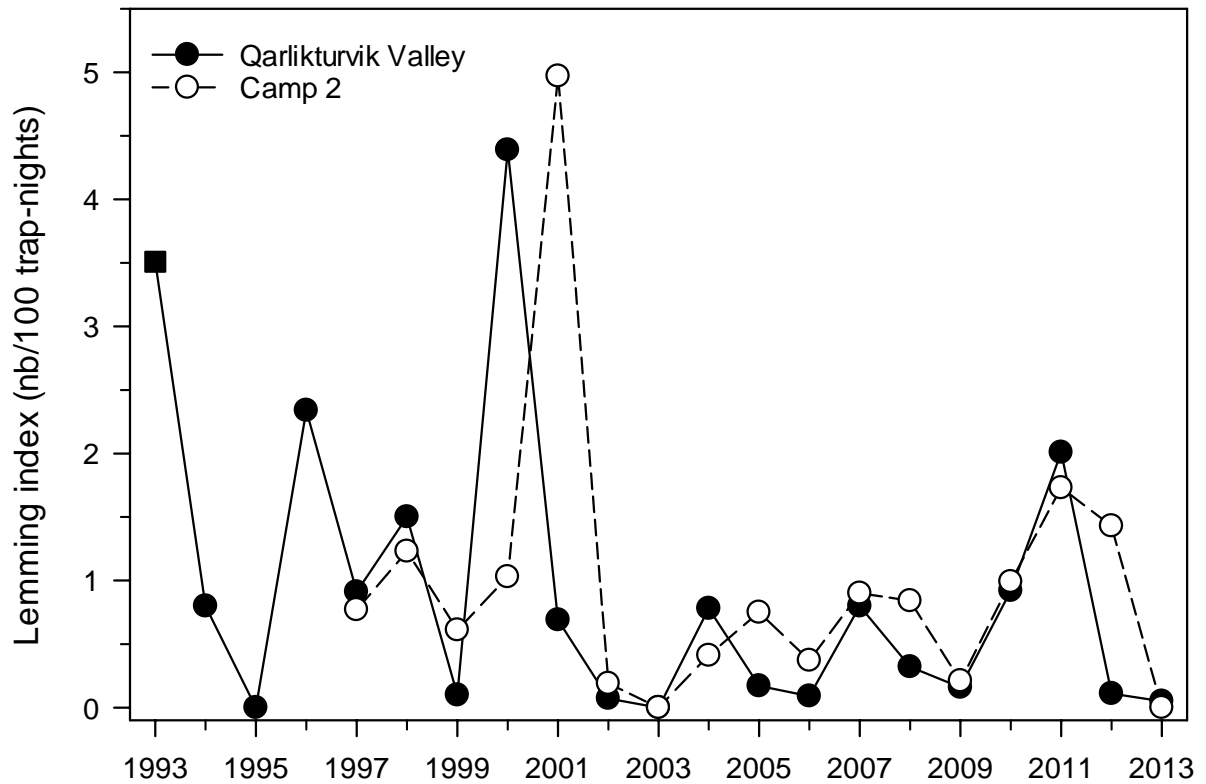


Figure 5. Annual index of lemming abundance based on snap-trapping at two study areas (Qarlikturvik Valley and Camp 2) located 30 km apart on Bylot Island.

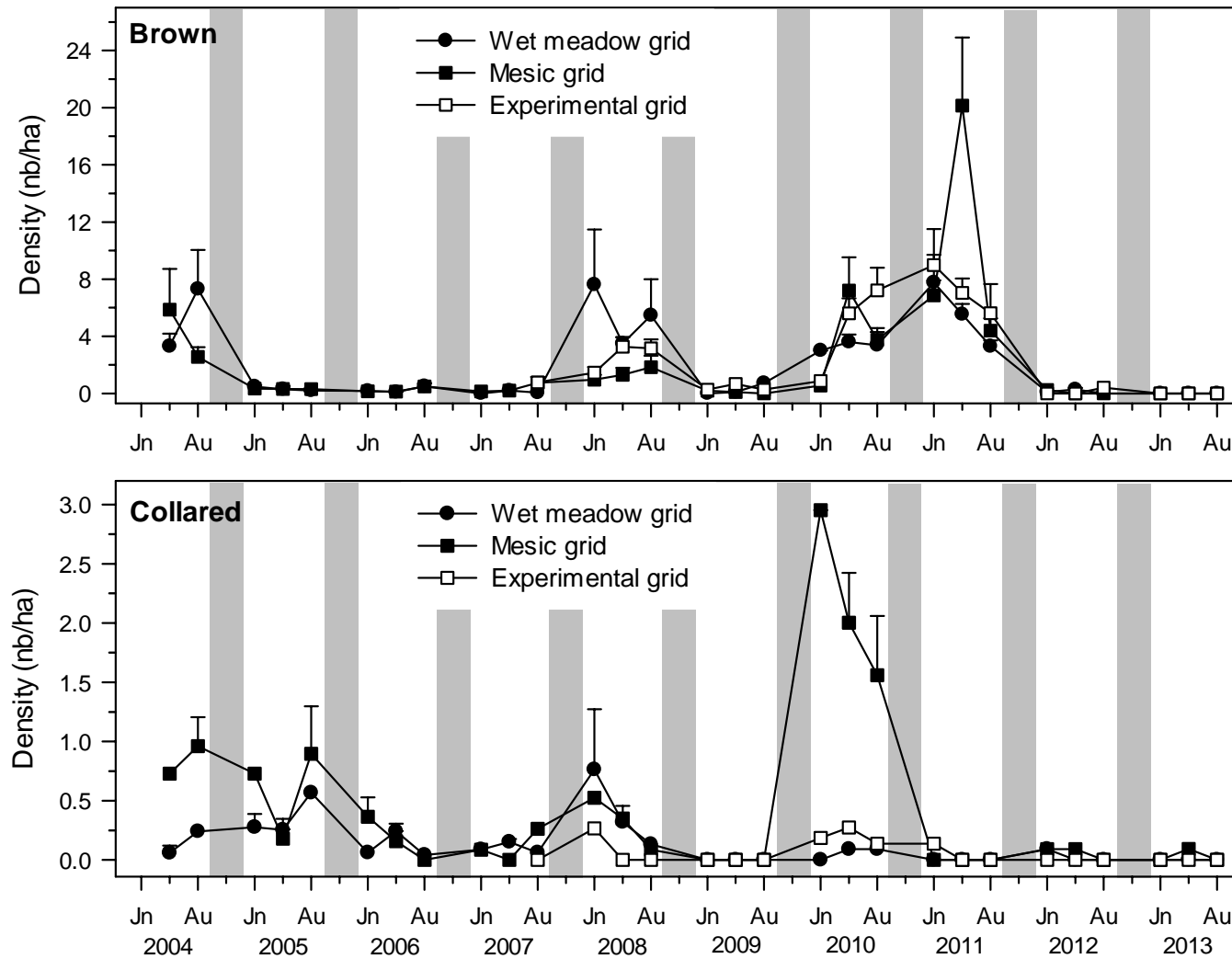


Figure 6. Annual summer density (+ SE) of Brown and Collared Lemmings on 3 trapping grids located in the Qarlikturvik Valley of Bylot Island (snow cover was increased from 2008 to 2011 and predators were excluded from 2012 to 2013 on the experimental grid). The gray area indicates winter. Jn = mid-June, Au = mid-August.

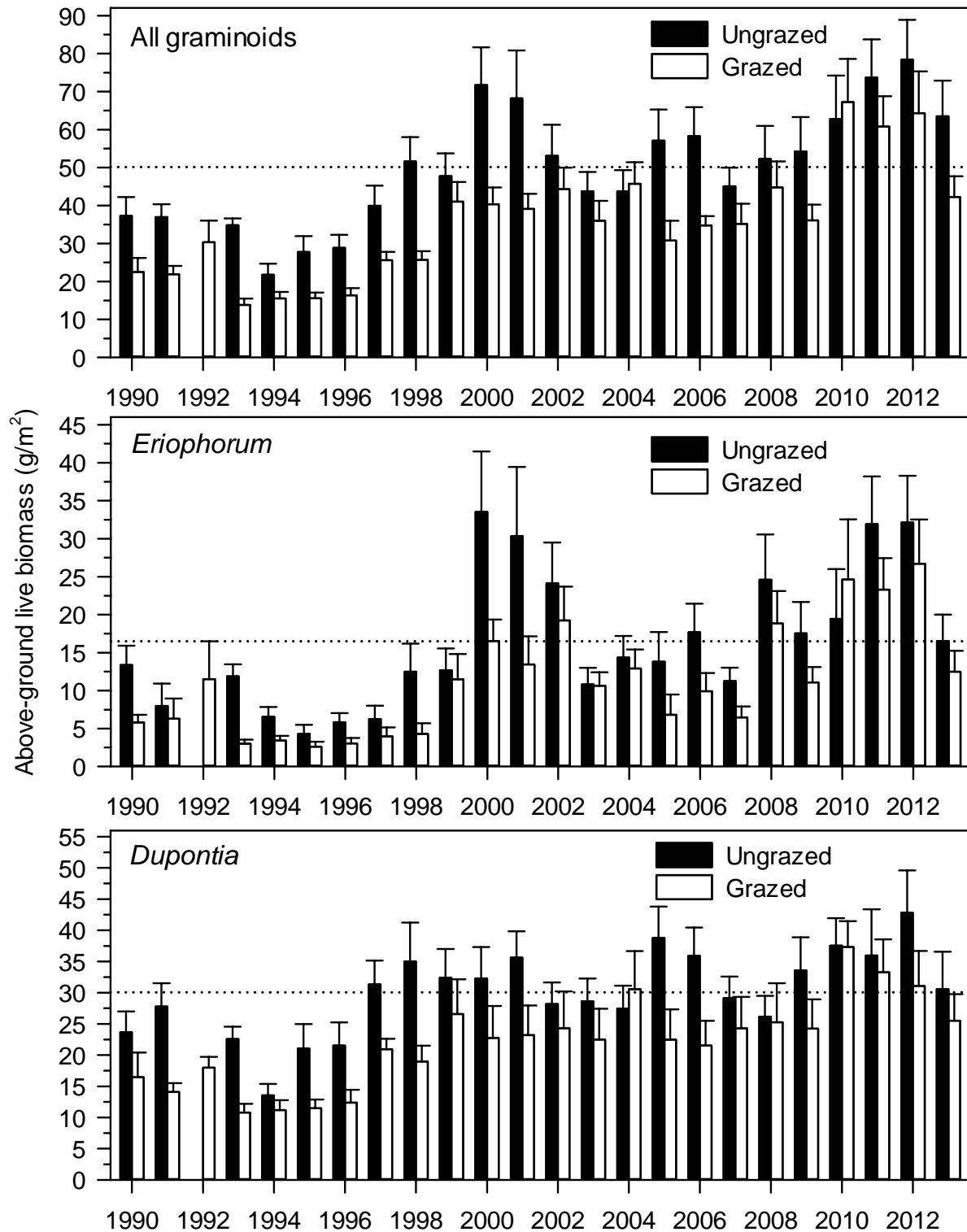


Figure 7. Live above-ground biomass (mean + SE, dry mass) of graminoids on 15 August in grazed and ungrazed wet meadows of the Qarlikturvik Valley, Bylot Island ($n = 12$, except in 2013, $n = 11$). Total graminoids include *Eriophorum scheuchzeri*, *Dupontia fisheri* and *Carex aquatilis*. There is no data from ungrazed area in 1992. The dashed line is the long-term average for ungrazed area.

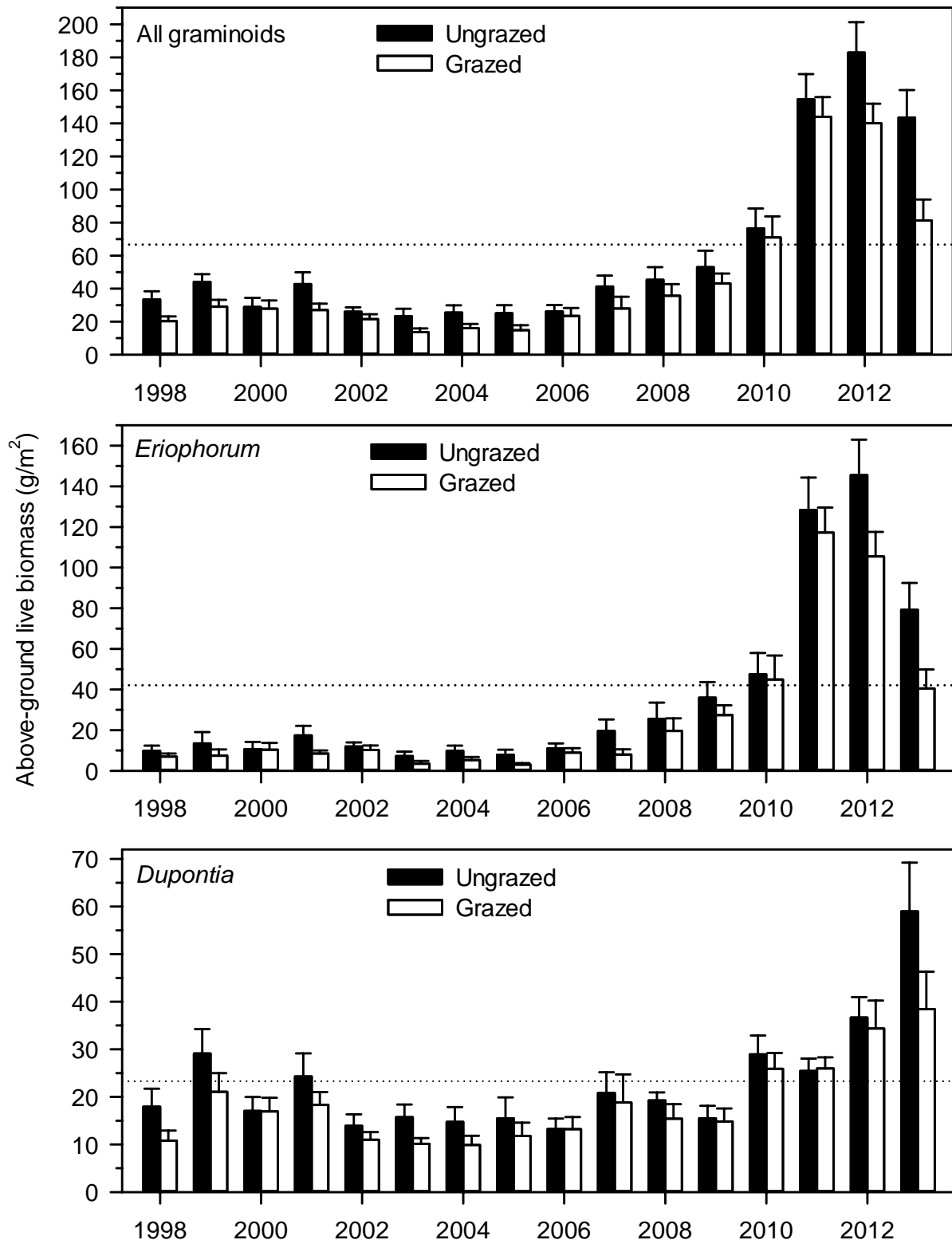


Figure 8. Live above-ground biomass (mean + SE, dry mass) of graminoids on 15 August in grazed and ungrazed wet meadows of the Camp-2 (goose colony), Bylot Island ($n = 12$, except in 2008 $n = 8$, and 2012-2013 $n = 10$). Total graminoids include *Eriophorum scheuchzeri*, *Dupontia fisheri* and *Carex aquatilis*. The dashed line is the long-term average for ungrazed area.

PUBLICATIONS FROM OUR WORK ON BYLOT ISLAND (1990-2013)

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- Souchay, G., O. Gimenez, G. Gauthier & R. Pradel. Variations in band reporting rate and implications for kill rate in greater snow geese. **Avian Conservation Ecology** (*in press*).
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