

THE NUMBERS OF GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GESE
FOUND IN BRITAIN ON 7th NOVEMBER 1965

About 45,000 Greylag Geese Anser anser and 67,000 Pink-footed Geese Anser brachyrhynchus appear to have been present in Scotland, England and Wales 7th November, 1965. There were about 58,000 Pinkfeet in the country on 17th October. The November totals are somewhat larger than in 1964. The number of Pinkfeet in England continues to fall.

The following table shows the numbers of geese roosting in each county where any were present. The county figures are rounded to the nearest ten birds, and the national total to the nearest thousand.

	GREYLAGS		PINKFEET		
	7 Nov. 1965	3 Nov. 1964	7 Nov. 1965	17 Oct. 1965	8 Nov. 1964
Orkney	30				
Caithness	180	90			
Sutherland	20	30			
Ross and Cromarty	1,830	450	1,270	0	0
Inverness	100 (incl)	660	0	0	10
Nairn, Moray	1,150	1,430	0	0	10
Aberdeen	2,540	5,080	11,640	(2,800)	5,720
Angus, Kincardine	3,530	4,270	980	50	1,030
Perth	18,440	16,130	18,560	20,540	17,580
Fife	800	2,020	6,500	10,000	7,880
Kinross	1,200	1,200	1,000	3,000	3,100
Stirling	0	10	0	0	0
Dunbarton	340	500	10	0	10
Lanark	30	30	3,080	900	990
Midlothian	1,380	2,450	4,520	2,510	5,510
East Lothian	0	0	260	320	950
Berwick	300	580	3,000	2,800	3,400
Peebles	0	710	330	2,000	5,510
Argyll	1,130	1,740	250 (incl)	0	
Bute	6,300	690			
Argyll	0	160			
Wigtown	4,120	2,850	50	0	80
Kirkcudbright	860	1,310	0	0	150
Dumfries	240	650	7,800	5,800	4,300
Northumberland	150	120			
Cumberland	40 (incl)	20	300	300	900
Westmorland	40	70			
Lancashire	-	-	2,200	2,500	4,750
Yorkshire	-	10	2,000	2,300	2,000
Lincolnshire	-	-	3,460	520	1,350
Norfolk	-	-	0	0	10
Anglesey	0	0	70	0	0
BRITISH TOTAL	45,400 45,000	45,000	67,000	58,000	65,000

Weather conditions at the time of the November count were unpleasant in part of Scotland, but otherwise not too difficult. In some places nocturnal feeding under the moon created problems, by causing geese to depart from the simple

pattern of morning and evening flighting. The biggest problem arose on the Solway, where a large proportion of the geese roosting on the Caerlaverock Reserve immediately before and again after the census weekend did not do so on the relevant nights. They must either have roosted inland on fields or mosses, as a small number were seen to do, or moved temporarily to the east, where the only observations available were not made on 6th or 7th. In the light of all the evidence, it has seemed better to assume that they remained in Dumfriesshire, although escaping detection, rather than that they moved away from the Solway.

GREYLAGS. Although the total found is so high, it is quite possible that the true peak may be even higher, because the main immigration did not take place until five or six days before the count and some birds may still have been moving in on 6th and 7th.

About 21% of the Greylags were first-autumn birds. The average brood-size was 3.3, well up to normal, so that the relatively low proportion of young birds was due either to unusually many complete breeding failures or, rather more probably, to the survival of a high proportion of yearlings and older immature geese.

As is usual, more than half the Greylags were in East Central Scotland. But, looking at the regional distribution in relation to total numbers over the six years of the November census, it is very noticeable that while the total stock has been increasing there has been virtually no change in the number found in East Central Scotland since 1961. The increases elsewhere have been erratically distributed, with no clear regional trends.

Regional Distribution of Greylags in November, 1960-65

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	% in 1965
North Scotland	6,800	3,600	3,500	5,000	7,800	5,800	13.0
East Central Scotland	16,000	23,800	23,000	24,800	24,100	24,300	54.4
South-east Scotland	1,200	700	1,900	1,400	3,800	1,700	3.8
South-west Scotland	6,100	8,200	8,800	2,300	7,400	12,700	28.3
England	200	200	500	500	200	200	0.5
Total	30,300	36,500	37,700	34,000	43,300	44,700	100.0

PINKFEET. The natural increase in recorded numbers from 17th October to 7th November may have been exaggerated by incomplete cover of the Aberdeenshire haunts in October, but it looks as if immigration to haunts both in the north and in the south (Lincolnshire) took place between the counts.

The proportion of young Pinkfeet seems to be much the same as that among the Greylags, 21%. The average brood-size is not yet known.

Regional trends over the years in the November distribution of Pinkfeet are much clearer than for the Greylags.

Regional Distribution of Pinkfeet in November, 1960-65

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	% in 1965
North Scotland	1,000	1,900	1,300	2,700	5,700	12,900	19.2
East Central Scotland	16,100	25,300	26,300	24,000	29,600	27,100	40.4
South-east Scotland	8,400	14,600	14,900	10,600	16,400	11,200	16.7
South-west Scotland	7,000	1,000	2,300	6,500	4,500	7,900	11.8
England and Wales	14,500	12,900	13,100	9,400	9,000	8,000	11.9
Total	47,000	55,700	57,900	53,200	65,200	67,100	100.0

There has been a striking increase in the north (mostly in Aberdeenshire) and a decrease in the south (principally around the Wash). The numbers in the central stronghold from 1961 have not been quite as steady as those of the Greylag, though from 1961 to 1964 their proportion of the total strength varied only between 45.0 and 45.4%. The resemblance between the abundance of the two species suggests a common cause, which is easier to invent than to prove.

The uses of good censuses. We count geese for fun, but the value of our results is considerable and increasing. They have immediate relevance to wildfowl refuge policy, as two examples will show. Three refuges have been created in England with the primary aim of giving additional protection to Pinkfoot roosts (those on the Humber, at Southport and the Wyre-Lune Sanctuary) and Gibraltar Point Local Nature Reserve performs a similar function on the east. Their creation has not stopped, though it may have slowed down, the disappearance of Pinkfoot from England. Additional action of some kind is clearly necessary (though what?).

The second example is perhaps even more important and more baffling. Why have the numbers of Greylags and Pinkfeet in Central Scotland levelled out? Will the area only hold these numbers, even in autumn when food appears abundant (especially this year)? If so, why, and what determines which geese shall stay and and which go elsewhere? Is any attempt to increase the numbers wintering at Loch Leven, now that a Reserve has been created there, doomed to failure because of some limiting social behaviour of the geese themselves?

For the answers to these and many other fascinating questions, please stay in the goose-counting game.

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Other investigations this winter: I hope to organise at least one further census this winter, probably between mid-January and mid-March. I would also be glad to hear from anyone who would like to make frequent observations on geese in the winter and spring.

Whooper and Bewick Swans

An expedition in Iceland last August ringed and marked the plumage of Whooper Swans. Anyone seeing marked Whoopers should communicate with me or with Mr. A.J. Clissold, Hill House Farm, Haydon Bridge, Hexham, Northumberland.

Mr. E.A. Ogilvie (The Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Glos.) wishes to learn of all occurrences of Bewick Swans in Britain this winter.

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Hugh Boyd

The Nature Conservancy,
12 Hope Terrace,
Edinburgh, 9.