

1960

This was the most thorough attempt yet made to find out how many Greylags Anser anser and Pinkfeet A. brachyrhynchus were in Britain at a particular time. Thanks to the ready help of over 90 observers a remarkably complete inspection of the wintering places of both species was achieved. About 30,000 Greylags and 48,000 Pinkfeet were found in all.

13th November was a day on which the National Wildfowl Count network of observers was in action and these regular watchers contributed a large proportion of the information received. For the special purpose of this census their efforts were supplemented by those of wildfowlers and others with particular local knowledge. In central Scotland, where the distribution of grey geese is most complicated, a team of six mobile observers was used to cover areas for which insufficient local watchers could be found. Two members of this team carried out surveys from an aircraft to deal with problems caused by overlapping of counts from the ground and with places not otherwise accessible.

In the table overleaf the national totals are broken down into the numbers found in each county. The counties are listed from north to south, with a few exceptions intended to keep adjacent areas together. The figures given are the sums of counts from varying numbers of localities in each county, rounded to the nearest ten birds. In one case where a number of grey geese were present but could not be specifically identified, and in another where it seems highly probable that geese were present but not found, guesses have been used (amounting to 400 Greylags in Aberdeen and 500 in Kincardine and 400 Pinkfeet in Aberdeen). Fitting together reports from some congested areas has involved personal judgments by the writer. In this preliminary account it does not seem necessary to go at length into the decisions about overlapping or the errors involved in counting or estimating large flocks. The totals for each species are more likely to be exaggerations than underestimates. As a rough guide to their reliability the limits of error may be expressed as + 10% and - 20%.

GREYLAG. The native population, now restricted to Sutherland, Ross and the Outer Hebrides, was excluded from the census, together with several feral populations which are clearly separated from winter visitors of Icelandic origin. These winter visitors also go to Ireland, where no census was made, but it appears from observations later in the month that the number in Ireland on 13th November was probably only about 150-300. No Greylags were found in Anglesey, the only county in Wales at all frequently visited by the species.

The total of 30,000 is larger than had been expected. Previous surveys indicated that the population was about 21,000 in November 1957 and 20,000 in November 1958. On neither occasion was the cover of known haunts as complete as in 1960, so that those totals included guesses of 4,000 and 2,200 for geese at uncounted places. The 1960 figure may be rather too high because of the possibility of over-estimation of the numbers in large flocks in three areas. But, after allowing for errors and omissions, it still seems probable that the stock in November 1960 was at a higher level than it had been since 1953, and perhaps nearly twice as large as in 1955.

The breeding season of Greylags in Iceland had evidently been a successful one. Sample counts in four areas in Scotland showed an average of 45.5% first-winter birds, with a mean brood-size of 3.42. Samples in 1959 (when no census was made) showed 43% young birds with average brood-size 3.27. In 1958 there were only 29% young birds, with average brood-size 2.9. The difference in the population size between 1958 and 1960 can be accounted for entirely by the apparent difference in production of goslings, the stock of older birds in both years being the same, within the limits of

PINKFOOT. No geese were found in the places in Denbigh and Flint visited each winter by Pinkfeet. No simple comparison of the 1960 estimate with earlier figures is possible, because this was the first occasion on which direct counts of all known wintering flocks had been achieved. But the figure of 48,000 is close to the average autumn population of 47,000 estimated for the years 1950-58 by capture-recapture methods based on the release of ringed birds. In 1960 about 31% of the Pinkfeet were young birds, compared with a 10 year average (1950-59) of 27.3%. In 1959, when the national average of young birds was only about 20%, and the proportion in some areas was substantially less, the total autumn population was probably not more than 40,000.

Conclusion. The detailed knowledge of the distribution of these two species which has been derived from the ringing operations of the last ten years has made it possible to expand the sample cover afforded by the regular Wildfowl Count scheme into an effectively complete census. It is hoped that it will be possible to carry out similar censuses in future years at least once and preferably twice each season.

Numbers of Greylags and Pinkfeet found in Scotland and England
12th-13th November, 1960

County	Greylags	Pinkfeet
SCOTLAND		
Ross and Cromarty	4150	190
Inverness	410	0
Moray	1220	0
Aberdeen	(1050)	(820)
Kincardine	(500)	0
Angus	3180	3100
Perth	9140	6730
Fife	2130	4500
Kinross	240	1300
Stirling and Clackmannan	310	460
Dunbarton	400	-
Renfrew	60	-
Lanark	760	1700
Midlothian	310	2000
E.Loathian	0	1700
Berwick	100	3700
Argyll - mainland	50	-
Argyll - islands	810	-
Bute	2650	-
Ayr	60	-
Dumfries	740	7000
Kirkcudbright	440	40
Wigtown	1360	0
Scottish total	30070	33240
ENGLAND		
Northumberland	30	0
Cumberland	0	50
Lancashire	140	3200
Yorkshire	30	5340
Lincoln	-	5900
Norfolk	-	0
Cambridge	-	60
Gloucester	-	110
English total	200	14660
WALES		
	0	0
TOTAL (to nearest thousand)	30000	48000

Acknowledgements. The organiser is very grateful to the following for their help: D.R. Anderson, D.G. Andrew, R. Barker, J.A.G. Barnes, W. Birrell, J. Blyth, C.G. Booth, J.B. and S. Bottomley, T. Boyd, F. Brady, W. Brotherston, H.O. Bunce, M. Clark, C.G. Cooper, R.K. Cornwallis, C.N. Cowper, W. Crawford, G. Dall, G. Dick, A. Douglas, F.J. Ellwood, Dr. S.K. Eltringham, Sir Robert Erskine-Hill, L. Fullerton, Miss E.A. Garden, M. Guilfoyle, J. Gilmour, W.A. Hall, R.H. Harrison, B. Hardy, J.M. Harrop, M. Hedley, K.J.M. Henry, Dr. C. Higginbottom, J.L. Hirst, Col. W.M. Logan Home, W.G. Hughes, T. Huxley, Miss W.M. Irving, R.L.K. Jolliffe, P. Hope Jones, M.R. Jones, A.E. Joyce, Commander A.F.C. Layard, S.L.B. Lee, J. McCreadie, D.W. McCredie, W.J. McCulloch, A. Macdonald, K.S. MacGregor, Miss A.M. Mackintosh, J. McNish, S. Martin, E.A. Maxwell, D.H. Mills, Miss A. Munro, W. Murray, I.C.T. Nisbet, M.A. Ogilvie, C. Ogston, T. Paterson, R.E.M. Pilcher, J. Potter, J.D.H. Radford, Mrs. I. Rainier, G.W. Reid, J.E. Richards, J.F. Riddoch, E.L. Roberts, Dr. M. Rusk, J.C. and V.H. Skinner, A. Smith, R.W.J. Smith, T. Speed, Miss M.M. Spires, P.J. Stead, R. Stokoe, Miss V.M. Thom, Miss O. Thompson, A.D. Townsend, R. Walker, R. Walls, G.F. Walton, A. Watson, D. Watson, W.H. Wild and Miss R. Young.

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2nd December, 1960

