

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

5th/6th November 1977

The eighteenth annual census of Greylag Anser Anser and Pink-footed Geese A. brachyrhynchus was held over the weekend 5th/6th November 1977. Compared with November 1976, the total for Greylags was up by 7,000 to 63,000, while that for Pinkfeet had fallen slightly, by 2,000 to 69,000.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each region and district of Scotland, and each county of England, are set out in the table below, together with the comparable figures for 1975 and 1976. The sub-totals are rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to nearest 1,000. Feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags are omitted where they can be identified.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976	6 Nov 1977	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976	6 Nov 1977
Orkney	-	-	60	-	-	-
Highland						
Caithness	5000	300	4240	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	6240	3020	12670	250	80	150
Inverness	500	200	2450	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	950	-	-	-	-	-
Nairn	1010	30	130	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	1750	1130	560	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	9500	8250	6100	6500	6250	7500
Gordon	1940	1610	3370	10330	3130	4110
Kincardine & Deeside	1400	1000	1700	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	3500	4060	1450	10520	5430	840
Perth & Kinross	13370	19160	17780 ¹	14730	9220	15600 ¹
Central						
Stirling	2230	1320	1370 ¹	2630	3440	7860 ¹
Fife	440	350	250	1570	3830	5750
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	3930	2890	1620	-	-	-
Cunningham	60	10	150	-	-	-
Renfrew	-	130	-	-	-	-
Dumbarton	600	300	-	-	-	-
Strathkelvin	330	10	-	-	-	-
Lanark	20	20	50	1100	2430	620
Kyle & Carrick	120	490	140	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	160	340	290 ¹	-	-	-
Midlothian	20	280	350 ¹	210	2000	5100
East Lothian	150	300	230	3500	5800	5100
Borders						
Tweeddale	-	-	-	3760	970	5520
Berwickshire	580	230	-	1200	250	1200
Roxburgh	2200	2070	3200	-	-	-

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976	6 Nov <u>1977</u>	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976	6 Nov <u>1977</u>
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	1920	1610	1610	-	-	-
Stewartry	1290	2030	850	-	-	-
Nithsdale	700	700	140	1710	650	470
Annandale & Eskdale	-	150	-	-	-	-
Northumberland	2280	2480	1600	40	-	-
Cumbria	800	1360	820	240	370	180
Lancashire	-	-	-	13890	26520	8680
Humberside	-	-	-	-	500	230
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	960	170	200
BRITISH TOTAL	63000	58000	<u>63000</u> ¹	73000	71000	<u>69000</u>

Note: Numbers denoted ¹ were revised in the 1978 report

Weather and general conditions

Saturday 5th started with widespread rain gradually clearing from the west to give a showery afternoon, though there was more rain in some areas at about the evening flight time. Sunday 6th started clear in many places but there was also some rain, while quite strong south-west winds occurred widely. Counting conditions were thus not particularly good.

In parts of Scotland there was a considerable spill of barley grain before and during harvest, providing plenty of food on the stubbles for the geese. This was especially so in the north and in east central Scotland, and in the Lothians. This is reflected in the regional distribution of the geese, as detailed below.

GREYLAGS

The increase in the population brings the total back to the level of two years ago. This upward change was slightly unexpected as a sample of 1584 birds aged showed only 11.2% young and a mean brood size of 2.2. However, not only was the sample smaller than desirable, it was also, because of the unusual distribution of the geese, perhaps biased geographically as well. In the light of this year's figures it is now possible to suggest that last year's count, carried out on a weekend with a full moon and bad weather, was an underestimate.

As the main table, and the table of regional percentages shows, the distribution this autumn was most unusual, with very large numbers of geese (half the total) in the north of Scotland, and corresponding large decreases in East Central and South West Scotland. As already mentioned this was probably caused by the plentiful supply of food in the north on the stubbles. The Greylags have only just arrived by early November and it is possible that larger than usual numbers made a landfall in the north and then stayed there, after finding ample food.

PINKFEET

The slight drop in the total is certainly within the overall counting error and the situation could be regarded as one of no change since last year. However the breeding season in 1977 was not a good one, and there were only 8.5% young birds in a sample of 2170 birds examined, with a mean brood size of 1.95. Such a poor breeding success could have been expected to lead to a larger fall in numbers. Thus this species, too, may have been undercounted last year. However this creates a further problem because last year too was a poor breeding season, and again the decrease in numbers was very small, at only 2000. Thus one gets taken back another stage into believing that perhaps the 1075 was also too low. Clearly the figures of the last three years demonstrate, if nothing else, that even after all these years, our attempts at complete censusing are not always successful. Certainly we have seen some massive changes in regional distribution in the last few autumns and it may be this that is contributing to the problem. The distribution in autumn 1977 was closer to what, some years ago, we would have regarded as normal, with substantial numbers in north and east central Scotland and the Lothians, and rather few elsewhere. However Lancashire still held quite large numbers, though nothing like the record breaking totals of last autumn.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in 1974-77

Figures are percentages of the total population

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	1974	1975	1976	1977	1974	1975	1976	1977
North Scotland	16.1	42.7	26.0	49.9 ¹	15.6	23.4	13.3	17.0
East Central Scotland	64.5	33.2	46.4	32.5 ¹	50.7	40.3	30.9	43.5
South-east Scotland	4.7	5.5	5.9	6.6 ¹	16.9	13.4	16.2	25.4
South-west Scotland	11.4	13.7	14.7	7.2 ¹	1.9	2.3	0.9	0.7
North England	3.3	4.9	7.0	3.0 ¹	13.0	19.0	37.9	12.8
East England	-	-	-	-	1.9	1.6	0.8	0.6

Note: Numbers denoted ¹ were revised in the 1978 report

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Also teams from Aberdeen University Bird Club and the Carlisle Branch of the Solway Wildfowlers' Association.

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