

## GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

4th/5th November 1972

The annual autumn census, held over the weekend of 4th/5th November 1972, gave totals of 68,000 Greylag Geese Anser anser and 73,000 Pink-footed Geese Anser brachyrhynchus. Both species show increases over the previous year.

The table below sets out the numbers of each species found roosting in each county, together with comparable figures for November 1969 and 1970. The county totals are rounded to the nearest ten, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest thousand. Feral flocks of Greylags are omitted where possible.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	8 Nov 1970	7 Nov 1971	5 Nov 1972	8 Nov 1970	7 Nov 1971	5 Nov 1972
Orkney	-	-	20	-	-	-
Caithness	200	500	200	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	1230	1710	1210	30	-	-
Inverness	50	320	460	-	-	-
Nairn, Moray	590	530	1520	-	-	-
Aberdeen	6410	9370	9790	2230	3670	5500
Angus, Kincardine	10530	8660	5300	3470	11380	10090
Perth	28750	22320	29750	34360	9640	16980
Fife	520	3040	1360	5570	7980	7680
Kinross	1700	2520	2300	4610	4030	4650
Stirling	10	-	-	100	420	-
Dunbarton	800	800	800	10	-	-
Lanark	370	570	400	1320	1230	3820
Midlothian	3130	1210	940	3670	7600	6960
East Lothian	-	-	220	800	1600	1600
Berwick	300	440	310	4000	4800	4400
Peebles	310	360	1600	3320	2820	5350
Roxburgh	650	930	1070	-	-	10
Argyll	890	1700	1440	-	-	-
Bute	1150	1640	1120	-	-	-
Ayr	100	370	170	-	-	-
Wigtown	3030	3730	2020	60	-	-
Kirkcudbright	1640	1900	2340	340	80	-
Dumfries	900	630	440	2760	1900	540
Cumberland	940	710	1800	1030	470	-
Northumberland	480	760	1380	10	-	-
Westmorland	20	80	50	200	370	-
Lancashire	-	-	-	3410	5940	4100
Yorkshire	-	-	-	480	1000	1100
Lincolnshire	-	-	-	130	50	-
BRITISH TOTAL	65000	64000	68000	72000	65000	73000

Note. In the report on the 1971 census the Greylag figures for that year for Midlothian and East Lothian were inadvertently transposed. The correct totals are given above.

## Weather and general conditions

After a run of years during which the census weekend has been bedevilled by weather varying from indifferent to downright horrible, it is pleasant to be able to record that this year there were generally excellent conditions. Over the greater part of Scotland clear, frosty and fairly calm weather prevailed, the only exception being the north-west where there were strong winds and some rain. Northern England, too, had some rain, plus poor visibility. In eastern Scotland there was just enough cloud to produce magnificent sunsets on both the Saturday and Sunday, wonderful spectacles made even better for those counters taking evening tallies of the passing skeins of geese across the lurid sky.

The all-important state of the grain harvest in eastern Scotland was somewhat mixed, being early and clean in many areas but with some spill from pre-harvest gales. The numbers of both species of geese in Perth and Angus reflects this, being intermediate between the figures for the very clean harvest year of 1971 and the very late one of 1970.

## GREYLAGS

The population has again increased, for the ninth time in the thirteen years that the censuses now cover. The distribution of this species varies less with respect to the harvest conditions than that of the Pinkfoot but on the whole there are greater similarities with 1970 than with 1971. Higher than usual numbers were found in Nairn and Moray, south-east Scotland, and northern England.

Breeding success was poor, with 15.1% young birds in a sample of 1,400, and a mean brood size of 1.8. This is hardly sufficient to account for a 4,000 increase in total numbers and it must therefore be considered whether the 1971 British census total was lower than the true figure. Counting conditions and the birds' distribution last year were both difficult, as recorded in the census report, and these could have accounted for an underestimate. An additional factor may have been the very mild winter in 1971-72, which would tend to reduce mortality from both shooting and natural causes.

Enclosed with this report is a reprint of a paper just published in *Wildfowl* 23. It analyses the Greylag Goose censuses for the period 1960 to 1971, showing how the population has more than doubled in this time. Associated with this increase has been a concentration by the birds into the east and north-east of Scotland. The paper derives largely from the annual censuses and we would like to stress our gratitude for your help over the years. The paper also looks at the results of Greylag ringing, and compares mortality rates derived from this material with those calculated from the census data.

## PINKFEET

In 1971 the numbers of Pinkfeet in Britain showed a decline of about 7,000 from the previous year which, as admitted in the census report, was difficult to explain in view of the near average

breeding success. It was suggested that some birds might have gone undetected because of the poor counting conditions and abnormal distribution. This year the Pinkfeet have apparently increased by 8,000 which is equally hard to explain as 1972 was a relatively poor breeding season (11.4% young from a sample of 1,500; mean brood size 1.6). However, if one assumes that the 1971 total was indeed an underestimate, the picture then becomes one of little change over the three year period 1970 to 1972. As with the Greylags, the mild winter of 1971-72 may have resulted in lower than average mortality, thus helping to offset the poor breeding.

The summer of 1972 saw the continuation of the research programme on the Icelandic breeding grounds of Thjorsarver. The British Ornithologists Union held a meeting in Reykjavik in June. Three members of the Wildfowl Trust's research staff attended, and were given the opportunity of spending a week in Thjorsarver seeing at first hand the work being done, and having useful contacts with the Icelandic research workers. A most welcome addition to the funds for research was the sum of £2,700 raised by the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland. This fittingly reflects the responsible attitude adopted by this organisation towards a threat to its legitimate quarry.

The general situation regarding the proposal to flood Thjorsarver remains unchanged from last year. The engineers still regard it as a most worthwhile scheme, while the conservationists are working hard to demonstrate the areas' uniqueness and value. No final decision is likely for some years.

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