

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GOOSE IN BRITAIN, 8th/9th November 1969

A census held on the weekend 8th/9th November 1969 showed that about 62,000 Greylags anser anser anser and about 74,000 Pink-footed Goose anser brachyrhynchus were present in Scotland and England. The number of Greylags is not significantly higher than in November 1968 while the Pinkfeet have shown a definite increase.

The totals of both species found roosting in each county are given in the table below, together with the results for November 1968 for comparison. The county totals are rounded to the nearest ten birds and the national total to the nearest thousand. Feral flocks of Greylags are omitted where possible.

	GREYLAGS		PINKFEET	
	9th Nov. 1969	10th Nov. 1968	9th Nov. 1969	10th Nov. 1968
Orkney	5	-	-	-
Caithness	90	390	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-
Ross and Cromarty	1510	2000	-	250
Inverness	620	370	-	-
Rain, Moray	580	780	-	-
Aberdeen	14730	4810	12810	12200
Angus, Kincardine	9530	8780	10150	2650
Perth	18410	30260	6980	24850
Fife	1150	870	11000	3520
Kinross	1010	1190	3450	1030
Stirling	-	10	10	310
Dumbarton	870	450	10	-
Leith	450	-	2320	680
Midlothian	3790	1760	5270	4800
East Lothian	10	10	2150	2200
Berwick	1680	520	2500	10
Peebles	30	20	4530	1900
Roxburgh	440	310	-	-
Argyll	1200	1560	-	-
Bute	680	2010	-	-
Ayr	10	150	-	-
Wigtown	2420	820	-	-
Kirkcudbright	1150	720	-	-
Dumfries	530	130	2570	440
Cumberland	900	700	3080	840
Northumberland	480	110	60	-
Westmorland	-	-	-	150
Lancashire	-	-	5610	7910
Yorkshire	10	-	900	600
Lincolnshire	-	-	430	850
BRITISH TOTAL	62000	61000	74000	65000

Weather conditions

In the nine years of Grey Goose censuses we have experienced just about every type of weather imaginable, but there seems general agreement from countesses that this year the conditions

included the worst ever, and these were pretty general over the whole country. A fortunate few counties had moderately good weather, especially on the Sunday, though it was still bitterly cold, but elsewhere and on the Saturday it was nothing short of atrocious. Severe gales lashed much of the country and were liberally mixed with rain, sleet and snow showers plus a fair proportion of hail. There was even some fog in one area. The observers' comments on the subject made quite entertaining reading for the organiser but were not the sort of thing one can print.

Naturally enough counting conditions were poor and this should be taken into consideration when assessing the results. Also acting against a satisfactory census was the abnormal distribution of the geese in some areas. The fine summer of 1969 led to an excellent harvest in several parts of the country, notably east central Scotland, and the barley stubbles contained little spilt grain. This caused the geese to disperse widely in search of food and they were often found only after extensive searching in seldom used localities. There was also a tendency for them to be in smaller flocks than normal.

Having made my excuses I can now say that the results actually obtained were quite satisfactory. Both species showed increases in numbers, which were to be expected from the quite good breeding results.

GREYLAG

After two poor breeding seasons 1969 was a welcome change, even though it was still only moderately successful. Counts in a number of localities showed 21.2% young birds in the flocks with a rather low mean brood size of 1.9. The percentage of young is similar to that in 1965 and 1966 though the brood size is lower. We could have expected a rather larger increase in numbers after such a breeding success, but in addition to the adverse factors already mentioned, there was strong evidence that some birds were still migrating during the census weekend. We can never hope to avoid completely such a late movement.

The table shows how unusual was the distribution in some areas with such reduced numbers in Perthshire and Bute, and great increases in Aberdeenshire and Galloway.

PINKFOOT

The breeding result is similar to that of the Greylag. A moderately good season has produced 24.4% young birds in the flocks with a mean brood size of 2.2. This is a considerable improvement on 1967 and 1968 and a little better than the average for the five years 1962-66.

Enclosed with this report is a reprint of a paper on the status of the Pinkfoot in Britain in the last twenty years. It is based on the November censuses together with earlier incomplete counts. The paper further tries to predict what may happen in the future and gives two possible ways in which the population may be going to change. On course, following the general upward trend of the last twenty years, to a possible 50,000 by 1975. An alternative is a decline based on the drop in totals in November 1967 and 1968. The paper concludes "If the population in November 1969 equals or exceeds 75,000 the long term growth rate will have been restored."

Should the 1969 total fall appreciably below 35,000, the predictor of growth must be abandoned and a new estimate of the rate of decline calculated".

The count of 74,000 found sale November 1911 close to the upper prediction line in Figure 6 of the paper, and to that extent the first forecast appears to be quite reasonable.

at the end of the 19th century is one of the very serious threats hanging over the fjordriver areas in central Iceland, the principal breeding locality for the Pinkfoot. Plans to flood the whole area for a hydro-electric project are being vigorously opposed by the international conservation bodies, as well as by conservationists in Iceland and Britain.

Expeditions to Iceland in the summers of 1966 and 1969 have covered much of the coastal parts of the country and have confirmed Thjorsuvar as a holding by far the most important of the total of breeding sites. They failed to find any other areas where more than 1000 birds breed, thus reinforcing our pessimistic view that if Finches were to be lured from Thjorsuvar there would be unable to find it suitable breeding sites. It is hoped that further work, including aerial surveys of Thjorsuvar, will be carried out in the summer of 1970.

The future therefore is not bright as long as the temporary decline of the last two years has been almost reversed, the long term prospects do not favor continued increase.

..C.A. Swledge et al.

I would like to thank the following people who braved the elements and contributed to the census. The circulation of the census results was delayed so that the reprint of the paper on Pinkfoot status could be sent out at the same time. L. Adams, L.L.G. Alexander, A. Alison, R. Baillie, J. Balfour, J.M.G. Barnes, W.H. Barr, A. Beattie, A. Boyd, P. Brady, A. Brotherston, E.C. Bunce, A.M. Cadman, C.H.G. Campbell, Dr. J.A. Campbell, A. Chapman, Capt. I.R. Coats, A. Cowieson, G. Couper, G.H. Crichton, P. Cringle, G. Dall, F. Delaney, J. Donholm, A. Dewar, J. Dewar, G. Dick, R.C. Dickson, J.E. Douglas-Menzies, Miss L. Duncan, M. Dunlop, J. Edleston, F.J. Ellwood, Sir Robert Erskine-Will, D. Ferguson, J. Ferguson, T. Fiddler, A. Fraser, Wing Cdr. A. Forsyth, D. Glass, A.J. Gordon, T. Graham, A. Gray, G.S. Gray, H. Gray, T. Gray, C. Gregory, Miss F.D. Griffin, R.W. Haig, J.M. Hall, Mr. & Mrs. G. Halliday, J.M.G. Harcourt, A.H. Harrison, G.K. Hedderley, A. Henry, J.L. Hurst, K.G. Hughes, F. James, L.B. Johnston, J. Johnstone, N. Jones, R.N. Morone, Mrs. S. King, S. Lindsay, Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Mason, A. May, J. McCulloch, A. McDonald, D. McDonnell, Mrs. McDuff-Duncan, Dr. McGeachy, R. McInnes, Mrs. McKinnell, G. McLaughlin, A. McLaughlin, A.M. MacLeod, J. Melish, J. McWilliam, A. Mann, A.M. Marshall, J. Maxwell, J. McWhuish, Captain Harris, A. Murray, G.H. Munro, A. Newton, T. O'Brien, D. Oates, L. Oates, J. O'Connell, D. Oliver, R. Orris, E. Peterson, A.M. Pinney, A. Pringle, J.D.M. Redford, Mrs. D.H. Reimer, J.M. Rowcliffe, A.M. Reid, G.M. Reid, Dr. R. Richter, G.M. Roberts, J. Robertson, Dr. A. Ross, J. Russell, J. Ryder, D. Shaw, A. Shaw, G.M. Shelling, A. Shephard, H. Shorrocks, L. Smith,

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28th January, 1970

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