

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

10th/11th November 1979

The twentieth in the series of annual autumn censuses of Greylag *Anser anser* and Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* was held over the weekend of 10th/11th November 1979. Following an indifferent breeding season, both species have increased very slightly. Greylags are up 5000 to 81,000, and Pinkfeet are up 2000 to 80,000. Neither increase can be regarded as significant in the context of normal counting error.

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 figures for November 1977 and 1978. The individual totals are rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1000. Where identifiable, feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags are omitted.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	6 Nov 1977	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	6 Nov 1977	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979
Orkney	60	-	40	-	-	-
Highland						
Caithness	4240	7440	3250	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	12670	14180	13230	150	240	-
Inverness	2450	1140	2080	-	20	-
Nairn	130	120	480	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	-	650	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	560	1540	1370	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	6100	7000	5000	7500	6200	1400
Gordon	3370	1150	2620	4110	7900	5850
Kincardine & Deeside	1700	3500	4000	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	1450	7680	7950	840	6530	8000
Perth & Kinross	22480	19940	24230	22600	20370	11710
Central						
Stirling	370	280	1140	860	820	3000
Fife	250	250	20	5750	5000	5500
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	1620	670	1420	-	-	-
Cunningham	150	500	-	-	-	-
Renfrew	-	-	270	-	-	-
Dumbarton	-	3000	2000	-	-	-
Strathkelvin	-	20	20	-	-	-
Lanark	50	-	-	620	2520	1600
Kyle & Carrick	140	270	310	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	-	20	-	-	-	-
Midlothian	640	650	580	5100	9600	8500
East Lothian	230	90	80	5100	5200	3200
Borders						
Tweeddale	-	30	-	5520	7000	10420
Berwickshire	-	1200	1280	1200	400	3220
Roxburgh	3200	2000	3400	-	-	20

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	6 Nov 1977	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979	6 Nov 1977	5 Nov 1978	11 Nov 1979
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	1600	1040	830	-	-	-
Stewartry	950	410	600	-	-	-
Mithsdale	140	60	70	470	700	130
Annandale & Eskdale	-	-	-	-	-	-
Northumberland	1610	1430	3100	-	-	-
Cumbria	820	-	920	180	10	30
Lancashire	-	-	-	2680	5280	16610
Humberside	-	-	-	230	400	400
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	200	10	800
BRITISH TOTAL	67000	76000	81000	69000	78100	80000

Weather and general conditions

Very mixed weather was experienced on both count days, with Saturday generally better than Sunday. There were heavy showers of rain and sleet around on Saturday, particularly in the north, though some more southerly areas experienced reasonable conditions all day. Sunday showed a reversed pattern, with rather nice weather in the north and east of Scotland, though clouding up towards evening, while the southern half of Scotland and northern England had progressively deteriorating conditions with rain, sleet and snow setting in from the morning onwards.

There was probably as much spilt grain, and indeed unharvested barley fields, as in or recent year at this time. Although the harvest appeared to start well, the frequent gales and rain which characterised September and October left an abundance of food for the geese in many areas, as the overall distribution of the geese shows.

GREYLAGS

There has been an increase in numbers for the third successive year, though this year's is the smallest of the three and within the limits of counting error for the census as a whole. For the first time the total is very slightly above that of the Pinkfoot, making the Greylag Britain's most numerous goose. Certainly the breeding success in 1979 was close to the long-term average, with 17.6% young birds in a sample of 1660, and a mean brood size of 2.7 from 163 broods. Such figures would not be expected to give rise to more than a slight change in the overall total.

The regional distribution table shows a drop in the importance of North Scotland compared with the past two years, and a corresponding increase in East Central Scotland. There was an abundance of spilt grain in both areas but fewer geese chose to stay in the north. This may reflect both the slightly later date of this year's census, and the relatively cold, rough weather of early November.

PINKFEET

The very slight increase this year must be regarded as well within the limits of error in counting. This is borne out by the breeding success figures which, if anything, would have suggested a slight decline. From a sample of 4250, the percentage young was 14.7%, rather below the long-term average, while the brood size from 161 broods was 2.1. The heavy shooting reported from some areas in last winter's cold weather clearly did not have an important effect on the population as a whole.

Another record count in south-east Scotland has maintained that region's increasing importance, shown in recent autumns. Elsewhere there was a substantial drop in North Scotland and a lesser one in East Central Scotland, both presumably reflecting movement south during October and early November because of bad weather. Certainly there seemed to be plenty of food left in these regions. Apart from South-east Scotland, their loss was Lancashire's gain, where numbers rose sharply after two less good years. There was no corresponding increase, however, in South-west Scotland,

where there were virtually no geese this autumn. The near total abandonment of the Solway, the region's principal haunt, as an autumn area for Pinkfeet, can be linked with the increasing importance of the areas immediately to the north and south, where there has not only been plenty of food in recent years, but where the shooting pressure is also much less.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1976-1979

Figures are percentages of the total populations

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	1976	1977	1978	1979	1976	1977	1978	1979
North Scotland	26.0	46.8	47.1	40.5	13.3	17.0	18.2	9.0
East Central Scotland	46.4	36.7	26.8	41.1	30.9	43.5	41.9	35.1
South-east Scotland	5.9	6.2	6.4	6.6	16.2	25.4	31.6	33.5
South-west Scotland	14.7	6.7	7.8	6.8	0.9	0.7	1.0	0.2
North England	7.0	3.6	1.9	5.0	37.9	12.8	6.8	20.7
East England	-	-	-	-	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.5

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to all the following for helping me with the count, and to any others whose names I am unaware of.

A. Allison, Carol Andrew, J.E. Ashworth, P.L. Atkinson, Dr R.S. Bailey, R. Baillie, J. Ballantyne, R. Barker, J.A.G. Barnes, W.M. Barr, C. Baxter, T. Binny, P. Bowyer, J. Boyce, H. Boyd, T. Boyd, F. Brady, W. Brotherston, A. Brown, Mrs L. Brown, R.A. Cadman, E.D. Cameron, C.R.G. Campbell, Capt I.P. Coats, W.A. Colclough, Mr and Mrs A.F. Collett, R. Corbet, C.N.L. Cowper, D.A. Creasey, D. Crompton, R.H. Dennis, A. Dewar, G. Dickson, R.C. Dickson, T. Duckels, J. Dunbar, P. Dunbar, Rev and Mrs R.W. Duncan-Jones, M.H. Dunn, Mrs M. Dunn, J. Edelsten, F.J. Ellwood, D. Ferguson, W. Fiddler, D. Fletcher, A. Forrest, R. Forrester, R.W. Forrester, W.D. Forshaw, J.A. Forster, C.A. Gervaise, N. Gibson, R. Coater, A.J. Gordon, P.J. Graham, Mrs J.A.R. Grant, H.C. Grav, M.J. Greenwood, M.J.P. Gregory, Mrs S.R. Hacker, Mr and Mrs J. Hall, Dr E.R. Hargreaves, J.P.D. Hargreaves, W.G. Harper, M.I. Harvey, C.G. Headlam, Mr and Mrs A. Henry, W.G. Hughes, Dr D. Jenkins, I.R. Johnston, M. Jones, Dr J. Kear, P. Kinnear, D.A. Kirk, J. Kirk, Mr and Mrs J. Kirk, Miss S. Laing, S. Laybourne, Dr J. Lazarus, D. Lea, Major M.I. Leslie Melville, Mr and Mrs J.A. Lister, D. Lord, W.J. McCulloch, D. Macdonald, Mrs M.K. Macduff-Duncan, Mr Mackie, Mrs I. Macdonald, K.J. MacLeod, J. McNish, J. Mann, C. Marshall, R.P. Mason, A. Mathieson, I. Mayne, J. Maxwell, S. Mitchell, Mr and Mrs C.G. Nendick, D.A. O'Connor, M. Nugent, N. Picozzi, R.E.M. Pilcher, B. Pounder, D. Pringle, Mrs D.H. Rainier, G. Rankin, Dr R. Richter, W. Russell, G.L. Sardeman, R. Shaw, Mr and Mrs S. Shimeld, H. Shorrocks, Betty Smith, Dr P.H. Smith, R.T. Smith, R.W.J. Smith, A.C. Stewart, Mrs P. Stiell, I.D.L. Thomson, D. Thorogood, C. Tomlinson, J. Turner, L.A. Urquhart, F.J. Usher, L. Vick, R. Walker, J.H. Wallace, R. Walls, A.D. Watson, J. Watt, M.P. Whittle, J. Wilkins, Miss J. Wilson, A. Wooldridge, A. Wright, G. Wright, W. Wright, J.F. Young, L. Young, B. Zonfrillo

And members of the Carlisle Branch of the Solway Wildfowlers' Association.

18th February 1980

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