

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

3rd/4th November 1973

The fourteenth annual autumn census of Greylag Anser anser and Pink-footed Geese Anser brachyrhynchus was held over the weekend of 3rd/4th November 1973. Following a good breeding season, both species show increases over the previous year to totals of 76,000 and 82,000 respectively.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each county are set out in the table below together with the comparable totals for November 1971 and 1972. 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		
	7 Nov 1971	5 Nov 1972	4 Nov 1973	7 Nov 1971	5 Nov 1972	4 Nov 1973
Orkney	-	20	-	-	-	-
Caithness	500	200	320	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	50	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	1710	1210	2300	-	-	-
Inverness	320	460	10	-	-	-
Nairn, Moray	530	1520	870	-	-	-
Aberdeen	9370	9790	10740	3670	5500	8900
Angus, Kincardine	8660	5300	9360	11380	10090	5600
Perth	22320	29750	35990	9640	16980	33580
Fife	3040	1360	470	7980	7680	4300
Kinross	2520	2300	2350	4030	4650	5200
Stirling	-	-	10	420	-	-
Dunbarton	800	800	600	-	-	-
Lanark	570	400	100	1230	3820	1750
Midlothian	1210	940	530	7600	6960	1400
East Lothian	-	220	10	1600	1600	3010
Berwick	440	310	620	4800	4400	750
Peebles	360	1600	450	2820	5350	6440
Roxburgh	930	1070	1800	-	10	-
Argyll	1700	1440	870	-	-	-
Bute	1640	1120	2720	-	-	-
Ayr	370	170	250	-	-	-
Wigtown	2720	2020	1380	-	-	-
Kirkcudbright	1900	2340	1180	80	-	40
Dumfries	630	440	500	1900	540	280
Cumberland	710	1800	1500	470	-	-
Northumberland	760	1380	1150	-	-	-
Westmorland	80	50	70	370	-	-
Lancashire	-	-	-	5940	4100	9800
Yorkshire	-	-	-	1000	1100	1000
Lincolnshire	-	-	-	50	-	300
BRITISH TOTAL	64000	68000	76000	65000	73000	82000

Note. The Greylag total for Perthshire includes a figure of 12,000 for an important group of roosts covered by a team of observers at dawn flight on the 4th. The area was badly affected by fog and the actual count of 9,100 was generally thought to be very low. The upward revision is based on past knowledge of the

area and on fairly extensive daytime searching in the days following the count.

Weather and general conditions

The first choice of date for the count was 10th/11th November but the occurrence of a full moon over this weekend led to the selection of the weekend before, the earliest date ever. The main disadvantage of an early census is that the Greylags may not all have arrived from Iceland. However, the risk of this seemed preferable to the unsettling effects that can be caused by a full moon, and it does seem that we got away with it. A later date in November for the census, after the full moon period, was not considered wise as there is an increasing likelihood of bad weather and, more especially, the Pinkfeet generally start to redistribute themselves in the latter half of the month.

The weather over the census weekend was very mixed with comparatively calm sunny conditions in some places and strong winds with squally showers in others. The worst hazard for accurate goose counting, however, was the fog which clung for much of the weekend to areas of east and central Scotland, and to parts of England. Only one locality holding really large numbers of geese was so seriously fogbound as to materially affect the count and this has been dealt with in a footnote to the table.

GREYLAGS

An increase of 8,000 over the previous count can be directly attributed to the better than average breeding season of 1973. Samples totalling nearly 2,000 birds were aged showing a proportion of young of 30.2% with a mean brood size of 2.56. This is the best breeding performance for eleven years.

The distribution of birds within the country was little different from previous years though with a slightly larger proportion in the east and north-east of Scotland. This fits with the spill of grain that took place in these areas before the harvest.

The table below shows the regional distribution of Greylags in Britain over the last six years.

Regional distribution of Greylags in November, 1968-1973
Figures are percentages of the total population.

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
North Scotland	13.9	28.3	13.1	19.5	19.4	18.7
East central Scotland	69.6	49.9	65.3	58.5	58.1	64.0
South-east Scotland	4.4	10.3	7.4	5.5	6.7	4.6
South-west Scotland	10.7	9.3	12.0	14.0	11.1	9.1
England	1.4	2.2	2.2	2.4	4.7	3.6

PINKFEET

This species has shown an increase of 9,000 over the year and again this is the result of a very good breeding season. There were 29.9% young in a sample of about 1,500 birds with a mean brood size of 2.35, which are the best figures for twelve years.

The pattern of distribution within the country demonstrates very well the link between the early autumn numbers in any area and the availability of spilt grain, their first choice food supply. The table below shows that the north and east of Scotland carried a high proportion of the geese, up to the level of the late 1960s after the drop of the last two years. The proportion in southern Scotland was well down on recent years but that in England has recovered somewhat.

Regional distribution of Pinkfeet in November, 1968-1973.
Figures are percentages of the total population.

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
North Scotland	19.1	17.4	3.1	5.6	7.5	10.8
East central Scotland	49.7	42.8	66.9	51.5	54.1	59.0
South-east Scotland	14.7	22.7	18.3	27.8	30.4	16.2
South-west Scotland	0.6	3.5	4.4	3.0	0.7	0.4
England	15.9	13.6	7.3	12.0	7.1	13.5

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M.A. Ogilvie
Wildfowl Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester