

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

6th/7th November 1976

The seventeenth in the series of annual censuses of Greylag Anser anser and Pink-footed Geese A. brachyrhynchus took place over the weekend of 6th/7th November 1976. Compared with November 1975, the total of Greylags has fallen by 7,000 to 56,000, and that of the Pinkfeet by 2,000 to 71,000.

The numbers of geese found roosting in each county of Scotland and England are set out in the table below, together with the comparable figures for 1974 and 1975. The table overleaf shows the same figures for the regions and districts of Scotland. The subtotals are rounded to the nearest ten while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags have been omitted where possible.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	7 Nov 1976
Caithness	1070	5000	300	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	2270	6240	3020	180	250	80
Inverness	820	1450	200	-	-	-
Nairn, Moray	1850	2760	1160	-	-	-
Aberdeen	5170	11440	9860	13710	16830	9380
Angus, Kincardine	11140	4900	5060	8740	10520	5430
Perth	29530	12200	17080	24420	11760	7660
Fife	200	440	350	4710	1570	3830
Kinross	3700	3400	3400	7250	5600	5000
Stirling	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dunbarton	2000	600	300	-	-	-
Lanark	70	350	30	1000	1100	2430
Midlothian	330	180	620	3300	220	2000
East Lothian	30	150	300	3000	3500	5800
Berwick	400	580	230	2250	1200	250
Peebles	-	-	-	5500	3760	970
Roxburgh	2440	2200	2070	-	-	50
Argyll	1430	1770	1520	-	-	-
Bute	1120	2220	1380	-	-	-
Ayr	-	120	490	-	-	-
Wigtown	1640	1920	1610	-	-	-
Kirkcudbright	1100	1290	2030	-	-	-
Dumfries	700	700	850	1700	1710	650
Northumberland	480	2280	2480	-	40	-
Cumbria	1800	800	1360	160	240	370
Lancashire	-	-	-	11630	13890	26520
Humberside	-	-	-	450	-	500
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	740	960	170
BRITISH TOTAL	59000	63000	56000	89000	73000	71000

Weather and general conditions

The selection of the count weekend was a particularly difficult one this year because the natural choice of 6th/7th November coincided with a full moon. It was decided that it was better to try to stick to as near the same date each year rather than shift the count weekend earlier or later, and in the event a period of dense cloud and some heavy rain over the Saturday afternoon and evening covering most of the country effectively curtailed any inclination the geese may have felt to stay out on the fields and not flight in to roost. I am grateful to those observers who did further counts the following weekend as a check on this. In fact the overall distribution of the geese was so abnormal, thanks to a shortage of food in many parts of Scotland, that I think we have been fortunate in getting as good results as we have. Sunday's weather was mostly an improvement on Saturday's though some early morning mist curtailed visibility in a few areas.

	GREYLAGS			PINKFEET		
	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	<u>7 Nov</u> <u>1976</u>	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	<u>7 Nov</u> <u>1976</u>
Highland						
Caithness	1070	5000	300	-	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	2270	6240	3020	180	250	80
Inverness	820	500	200	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	950	-	-	-	-
Nairn	70	1010	30	-	-	-
Grampian						
Moray	1780	1750	1130	-	100	-
Banff & Buchan	1900	9500	8250	1750	6500	6250
Gordon	3270	1940	1610	11960	10330	3130
Kincardine & Deeside	800	1400	1000	-	-	-
Tayside						
Angus	10340	3500	4060	8740	10520	5430
Perth & Kinross	32680	13370	19160	27940	14730	9220
Central						
Stirling	550	2230	1320	3730	2630	3440
Fife	200	440	350	470	1570	3830
Strathclyde						
Argyll & Bute	2530	3930	2890	-	-	-
Cunningham	20	60	10	-	-	-
Renfrew	-	-	130	-	-	-
Dumbarton	2000	600	300	-	-	-
Strathkelvin	50	330	10	-	-	-
Lanark	-	20	20	1000	1100	2430
Kyle & Carrick	-	120	490	-	-	-
Lothian						
West Lothian	230	160	340	300	10	-
Midlothian	90	20	280	3000	210	2000
City of Edinburgh	10	-	-	-	-	-
East Lothian	30	150	300	3000	3500	5800
Borders						
Tweeddale	-	-	-	5500	3760	970
Berwickshire	400	580	230	2250	1200	250
Roxburgh	2440	2200	2070	-	-	50

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	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	<u>7 Nov 1976</u>	10 Nov 1974	9 Nov 1975	<u>7 Nov 1976</u>
Dumfries & Galloway						
Wigtown	1640	1920	1610	-	-	-
Stewartry	1100	1290	2030	-	-	-
Nithsdale	680	700	700	1700	1710	650
Annandale & Nithsdale	20	-	150	-	-	-
Northumberland	480	2280	2480	-	40	-
Cumbria	1800	800	1360	160	240	370
Lancashire	-	-	-	11630	13890	26520
Humberside	-	-	-	450	-	500
Lincolnshire & Norfolk	-	-	-	740	960	170
BRITISH TOTAL	69000	63000	56000	89000	73000	71000

GREYLAGS

The population has shown a third successive decrease and is now lower than it has been in any year since 1967. For the second year running Iceland experienced relatively poor summer weather and the breeding success of the Greylags in 1976 was again low, though not quite as bad as in the worst-ever summer of 1975. The percentage of young birds found in a sample of 2,367 examined in different parts of the winter range was 13.1%, while the mean brood size of 62 broods was 2.13. The very clean and early harvest in North and East Central Scotland, the usual autumn concentration areas, forced the birds to look elsewhere though there were slightly more in those areas than in 1975. Numbers in south-west Scotland and northern England were higher than in the last two years, while as a percentage of the total they have risen from 14.7% in 1974 to 21.7% in 1976. (See the table below.)

PINKFEET

This species, too, had a poor breeding season in 1976 and the total has dropped. However the decrease, of 2,000, is within the probable percentage error of the census. On the other hand the percentage of young, 11.3% from a sample of 1,437, and the mean brood size of 1.92 from 38 broods, would lead one to expect a drop of some thousands. It may be that last year's total was on the low side. The regional distribution was very different from any previous year with a staggering 37.9% in North England with over 26,000 birds concentrated on the South Lancashire moorlands. All other regions, except south-east Scotland, not surprisingly showed a decline from 1975, the largest coming in North and East Central Scotland. (See the Table below.)

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1973-1976.

Figures are percentages of the total population.

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	1973	1974	1975	1976	1973	1974	1975	1976
North Scotland	18.7	16.1	42.7	26.0	10.7	15.6	23.4	13.3
East Central Scotland	64.0	64.5	33.2	46.4	59.3	50.7	40.3	30.9
South-east Scotland	4.6	4.7	5.5	5.9	16.3	16.9	13.4	16.2
South-west Scotland	9.1	11.4	13.7	14.7	0.3	1.9	2.3	0.9
North England	3.6	3.3	4.9	7.0	12.0	13.0	19.0	37.9
East England	-	-	-	-	1.4	1.9	1.6	0.8

Enclosed with this report is a reprint of a paper which appeared towards the end of last year in the Wildfowl Trust's journal 'Wildfowl'. It records the changes in status and distribution of the two grey geese species in Britain since 1969, and is therefore a continuation of the two earlier papers (1969 and 1972) by the same authors which each dealt with one of the species. Some predictions are given which suggest a continued growth in both populations, though at a lower rate than in the past decade. The drop in numbers recorded this winter may mean that our predicted rates of growth were too optimistic.

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