

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN 9th/10th NOVEMBER 1968

About 60,000 Greylag Geese Anser anser and 65,000 Pink-footed Geese Brachyrhynchus were found in Scotland and England on 9th and 10th November 1968. There has been a slight increase in the number of Greylags compared with November 1967, though probably not a significant one, while the number of Pinkfeet is the same.

The table below shows the totals of both species found roosting in each county, compared with the results for November 1967. The county totals are rounded to the nearest ten birds, and the national total to the nearest thousand. Feral flocks are omitted where possible.

	GREYLAGS		PINKFEET	
	10th Nov. 1968	5th Nov. 1967	10th Nov. 1968	5th Nov. 1967
Gaithness	390	110	-	-
Ross and Cromarty	2000	830	250	-
Inverness	620	460	-	-
Gairn, Moray	780	660	-	-
Aberdeen	4810	5270	12200	15180
Angus, Kincardine	8780	5750	2650	2050
Forfar	30960	28200	24850	21130
Perth	870	1270	3520	4150
Highland	1190	680	1030	1540
Stirling	10	-	310	-
Dumfries	450	900	-	-
Midlothian	-	-	680	3760
West Lothian	1760	1870	4800	7120
Berwick	10	-	2200	800
Peebles	520	260	10	850
Roxburgh	20	-	1900	3800
Argyll	310	450	-	-
Highland	1560	930	-	-
Dumfries	3010	2500	-	-
Highland	150	-	-	-
Highland	820	1000	-	-
Kirkcudbright	720	1000	-	250
Dumfries	130	500	440	1000
Cumberland	700	120	840	-
Northumberland	110	150	-	-
Westmorland	-	70	150	30
Lancashire	-	-	710	1500
Yorkshire	-	-	600	3000
Lincolnshire	-	-	850	260
<b>BRITISH TOTAL</b>	<b>61000</b>	<b>53000</b>	<b>65000</b>	<b>65000</b>

No birds were recorded in Norfolk or in north Wales.

The weather during the count weekend was mixed with rain and sleet in some areas, and fine, though cold, in others. In general, conditions on the 10th were better than on the 9th. Fairly cloudy skies helped to minimise any adverse effect the moon, which was full a week before the count, might have had on the flying habits of the geese.

**GREYLAGS.** The summer of 1968 seems to have been the worst breeding season for the species that we have recorded. Counts at several localities in Scotland showed only 5.9% young birds in the flocks with an average brood size of 1.3. These figures are even lower than those recorded in November 1967, themselves the lowest found since we began making such observations in

1958. Reports from Iceland indicate a very late spring and cold summer with pack ice remaining in the northern fjords much later than usual. Such conditions could well inhibit breeding or lead to a high mortality of eggs and young.

Despite these very low production figures, the count appears to show an increase greater than the estimated number of young produced, 3,600. This anomaly could be due to errors in the total counts or in the recording of young, or a combination of both. We can state with some probability that over the last three years the population has remained at approximately the same level and the variation in the total number, 60,000, 53,000, 61,000, is an indication that with our counting methods we can expect errors of less than 10%. Although this means we cannot detect small changes it nonetheless is very accurate compared with many bird censuses.

**PINKFEET.** The poor weather in Iceland had a similar effect on this species with only 11.7% young birds present, average brood size 1.4. These figures are similar to those for last winter, again the lowest recorded. The total count shows no change from November 1967. This is probably coincidental, but we would expect rather smaller errors with this species in that they concentrate in fewer places than the Greylag. It is probably true for both species that the mortality from shooting last winter was lower than normal because of the restrictions on access to the countryside imposed during the foot and mouth epidemic. This factor would help counterbalance the very low production of last summer.

**ARRIVAL DATES.** There was a marked simultaneous arrival of Pinkfoot in several areas on 29th September and migration was noted this day and subsequently. A depression passed between Iceland and north Scotland on the 28th and that night there were clearing skies in Iceland and north-westerly winds to assist the birds' flight. The migration recorded on the Moray Firth and Strathspey, and arrivals noted on the east coast are both indicative of the geese being drifted further east than usual. The first Greylags arrived in early October but their migration was very prolonged and was still in progress over Strathspey on 28th October.

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