

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

5th/6th November 1977

The eighteenth annual census of Greylag *Anser anser* and Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* was held over the weekend of 5th/6th November 1977. Compared with November 1976, the total for Greylags was up by 7,000 to 63,000, while that for the Pinkfeet had fallen slightly, by 2,000 to 69,000.

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 comparable figures for 1975 and 1976. The sub-totals are rounded to the nearest ten, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Feral or indigenous flocks of Greylags are omitted where they can be identified.

| | GREYLAGS | | | PINKFEET | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 9 Nov 1975 | 7 Nov 1976 | 6 Nov 1977 | 9 Nov 1975 | 7 Nov 1976 | 6 Nov 1977 |
| Orkney | - | - | 60 | - | - | - |
| Highland | | | | | | |
| Caithness | 5000 | 300 | 4240 | - | - | - |
| Sutherland | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ross & Cromarty | 6240 | 3020 | 12670 | 250 | 80 | 150 |
| Inverness | 500 | 200 | 2450 | - | - | - |
| Badenoch & Strathspey | 950 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Nairn | 1010 | 30 | 130 | - | - | - |
| Grampian | | | | | | |
| Moray | 1750 | 1130 | 560 | - | - | - |
| Banff & Buchan | 9500 | 8250 | 6100 | 6500 | 6250 | 7500 |
| Gordon | 1940 | 1610 | 3370 | 10330 | 3130 | 4110 |
| Kincardine & Deeside | 1400 | 1000 | 1700 | - | - | - |
| Tayside | | | | | | |
| Angus | 3500 | 4060 | 1450 | 10520 | 5430 | 840 |
| Perth & Kinross | 13370 | 19160 | 12380 | 14730 | 9220 | 12600 |
| Central | | | | | | |
| Stirling | 2230 | 1320 | 1370 | 2630 | 3440 | 7860 |
| Fife | 440 | 350 | 250 | 1570 | 3830 | 5750 |
| Strathclyde | | | | | | |
| Argyll & Bute | 3930 | 2890 | 1620 | - | - | - |
| Cunningham | 60 | 10 | 150 | - | - | - |
| Renfrew | - | 130 | - | - | - | - |
| Dumbarton | 600 | 300 | - | - | - | - |
| Strathkelvin | 330 | 10 | - | - | - | - |
| Lanark | 20 | 20 | 50 | 1100 | 2430 | 620 |
| Kyle & Carrick | 120 | 490 | 140 | - | - | - |
| Lothian | | | | | | |
| West Lothian | 160 | 340 | 290 | - | - | - |
| Midlothian | 20 | 280 | 350 | 210 | 2000 | 5100 |
| East Lothian | 150 | 300 | 230 | 3500 | 5800 | 5100 |
| Borders | | | | | | |
| Tweeddale | - | - | - | 3760 | 970 | 5520 |
| Berwickshire | 580 | 230 | - | 1200 | 250 | 1200 |
| Roxburgh | 2200 | 2070 | 3200 | - | - | - |

| | GREYLAGS | | | PINKFEET | | |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 9 Nov 1975 | 7 Nov 1976 | 6 Nov 1977 | 9 Nov 1975 | 7 Nov 1976 | 6 Nov 1977 |
| Dumfries & Galloway | | | | | | |
| Wigtown | 1920 | 1610 | 1610 | - | - | - |
| Stewartry | 1290 | 2030 | 850 | - | - | - |
| Nithsdale | 700 | 700 | 140 | 1710 | 650 | 470 |
| Annandale & Eskdale | - | 150 | - | - | - | - |
| Northumberland | 2280 | 2480 | 1600 | 40 | - | - |
| Cumoria | 800 | 1360 | 820 | 240 | 370 | 180 |
| Lancashire | - | - | - | 13890 | 26520 | 8680 |
| Humberside | - | - | - | - | 500 | 230 |
| Lincolnshire & Norfolk | - | - | - | 960 | 170 | 200 |
| BRITISH TOTAL | 63000 | 56000 | 63000 | 73000 | 71000 | 69000 |

Weather and general conditions

Saturday 5th started with widespread rain gradually clearing from the west to give a showery afternoon, though there was more rain in some areas at about evening flight time. Sunday 6th started clear in many places but there was also some rain, while quite strong south-west winds occurred widely. Counting conditions were thus not particularly good.

In parts of Scotland there was a considerable spill of barley grain before and during harvest, providing plenty of food on the stubbles for the geese. This was especially so in the north and in east central Scotland, and in the Lothians. This is reflected in the regional distribution of the geese, as detailed below.

GREYLAGS

The increase in the population brings the total back to the level of two years ago. This upward change was slightly unexpected as a sample of 1584 birds aged showed only 11.2% young and a mean brood size of 2.2. However not only was the sample smaller than desirable, it was also, because of the unusual distribution of the geese, perhaps biased geographically as well. In the light of this year's figures it is now possible to suggest that last year's count, carried out on a weekend with a full moon and bad weather, was an underestimate.

As the main table, and the table of regional percentages shows, the distribution this autumn was most unusual, with very large numbers of geese (half the total) in the north of Scotland, and corresponding large decreases in East Central and South West Scotland. As already mentioned this was probably caused by the plentiful supply of food in the north on the stubbles. The Greylags have only just arrived by early November and it is possible that larger than usual numbers made a landfall in the north and then stayed there, after finding ample food.

PINKFEET

The slight drop in the total is certainly within the overall counting error and the situation could be regarded as one of no change since last year. However the breeding season in 1977 was not a good one, and there were only 8.5% young birds in a sample of 2170 birds examined, with a mean brood size of 1.95. Such a poor breeding success could have been expected to lead to a larger fall in numbers. Thus this species, too, may have been undercounted last year. However this creates a further problem because last year too was a poor breeding season, and again the decrease in numbers was very small, at only 2000. Thus one gets taken back another stage into believing that perhaps the 1975 was also too low. Clearly the figures of the last three years demonstrate, if nothing else, that even after all these years, our attempts at complete censusing are not always successful. Certainly we have seen some massive changes in regional distribution in the last few autumns and it may be this that is contributing to the problem. The distribution in autumn 1977 was closer to what, some years ago, we would have regarded as normal, with substantial numbers in north and east central Scotland and the Lothians, and rather few elsewhere. However Lancashire still held quite large numbers, though nothing like the record-breaking totals of last autumn.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in November 1974-77

Figures are percentages of the total population.

| | GREYLAGS | | | | PINKFEET | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|------|
| | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | 1977 |
| North Scotland | 16.1 | 42.7 | 26.0 | 49.9 | 15.6 | 23.4 | 13.3 | 17.0 |
| East Central Scotland | 64.5 | 33.2 | 46.4 | 32.5 | 50.7 | 40.3 | 30.9 | 43.5 |
| South-west Scotland | 4.7 | 5.5 | 5.9 | 6.6 | 16.9 | 13.4 | 16.2 | 25.4 |
| South-west Scotland | 11.4 | 13.7 | 14.7 | 7.2 | 1.9 | 2.3 | 0.9 | 0.7 |
| North England | 3.3 | 4.9 | 7.0 | 3.0 | 13.0 | 19.0 | 37.9 | 12.8 |
| East England | - | - | - | - | 1.9 | 1.6 | 0.8 | 0.6 |

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Also teams from the Aberdeen University Bird Club and the Carlisle Branch of the Solway Wildfowlers' Association.

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