

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GEESE IN BRITAIN

19th/20th March 1983

The second in the new series of annual spring counts of Greylag *Anser anser* and Pink-footed Geese *A.brachyrhynchus* was held over the weekend of 19th/20th March 1983. Totals of 53,000 Greylags and 80,000 Pinkfeet were found. These can be compared with November 1982 totals of 80,000 Greylags and 89,000 Pinkfeet. The drop in numbers of Pinkfeet through the winter is no more than would be expected to occur through mortality. The decline in the Greylags is larger than this, though less than the equivalent drop in the previous winter. Inability to find all the birds is certainly a contributing factor.

The numbers of the two species found roosting in each region and district of Scotland and each county of England, are set out in the table below, together with comparative figures for November 1981, and March and November 1982. The individual totals are rounded to the nearest 10, while the national totals are rounded to the nearest 1000. Where identifiable, feral flocks of Greylags have been omitted.

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	8 Nov 1981	21 Mar 1982	14 Nov 1982	19 Mar 1983	8 Nov 1981	21 Mar 1982	14 Nov 1982	19 Mar 1983
Orkney	160	220	600	390	-	-	-	-
Highland								
Caithness	4300	1530	4140	1760	-	20	-	-
Sutherland	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	27400	810	8510	1720	-	2760	-	4850
Inverness	5300	1500	720	-	-	500	-	-
Nairn	10	310	70	310	-	-	-	-
Badenoch & Strathspey	-	-	310	880	-	-	-	-
Grampian								
Moray	1580	2770	2480	1520	-	-	-	-
Banff & Buchan	4750	7250	11400	8150	5900	900	6200	3800
Gordon	6440	4430	5040	8300	7300	7950	6500	9200
Kincardine & Deeside	3980	500	10000	1570	-	30	-	-
Tayside								
Angus	2950	1220	3360	2370	3400	3920	11150	3840
Perth & Kinross	15030	7730	16900	6190	15530	14460	16050	15160
Central								
Stirling	1080	5240	1050	2870	2500	5500	5440	8700
Fife	2250	260	90	670	6150	2500	920	-
Strathclyde								
Argyll & Bute	2790	2620	1670	1680	-	-	-	-
Cunningham	150	190	100	110	-	-	-	-
Renfrew	140	-	-	310	-	-	-	-
Dumbarton	250	300	400	1000	-	-	-	-
Strathkelvin	40	90	70	-	-	-	-	-
Lanark	-	160	200	-	940	680	1220	140
Kyle & Carrick	460	840	350	560	-	-	-	-
Lothian								
Midlothian	2370	160	770	170	8730	5150	2120	4880
East Lothian	840	400	390	-	4510	20	6230	700
Borders								
Tweeddale	10	-	-	-	12340	460	9310	6480
Berwickshire	820	-	200	100	1000	1800	1320	500
Roxburgh	3950	1200	1510	1790	440	-	120	-

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	8 Nov 1981	21 Mar 1982	14 Nov 1982	19 Mar 1983	8 Nov 1981	21 Mar 1982	14 Nov 1982	19 Mar 1983
Dumfries & Galloway								
Wigtown	2190	3180	2600	1310	160	8300	-	7320
Stewartry	740	2070	1880	1400	-	50	-	20
Nithsdale	310	1340	800	3140	2210	8600	1860	7070
Northumberland	4130	4900	3850	3600	-	-	30	-
Cumbria	1300	620	450	850	20	1790	-	3700
Lancashire	-	-	-	-	18240	3000	18410	1710
Humberside	-	-	-	-	-	70	-	-
Lincolnshire/ Norfolk	-	-	-	-	530	1200	1850	2000
BRITISH TOTAL	96000	52000	80000	53000	90000	70000	89000	80000

Weather and general conditions

The weather was pretty good on both days of the weekend and few counters reported serious counting problems because of it. There were a few scattered showers in parts of Scotland and some longer periods of rain further south, but generally it was calm and bright, overcast in some areas, sunny in others.

GREYLAGS

The proportion of the November 1982 total found this March was about 66%. This compares with only 55% of the November 1981 total found in March 1982. I commented in the November 1982 census report that the rather low total found then (despite good breeding success) pointed to either higher than usual mortality during the 1981-82 cold winter, or to a number of birds being missed in the generally bad counting conditions of that weekend. This March count still does not resolve the question. If the November 1982 was a good one, then this would suggest that there was high mortality during the 1981-82 winter while the March 1983 count gives a measure of that extra mortality if we assume that about two-thirds is all we can expect to find after a mild winter. Some have died anyway, the remainder are too dispersed and not using regular roosts. However if the November 1982 was low because we missed some birds, then the drop to the March 1983 count increases, perhaps to the same percentage as in 1981-82, which would indicate that there was no extra mortality that winter, and that we can only find a little over one-half the birds rather than two-thirds. It is possible that future counts may help to clarify the issue, though there is always the chance that the waters will only get muddier.

The regional distribution of the geese for the March censuses of 1982 and 1983 is shown in the table opposite. There were substantially more birds in the north of Scotland in 1983 compared with 1982 and fewer birds in nearly all the other regions. This may reflect the difference between the two winters, with no significant cold weather in 1982-83 to force the birds south, or if they went south in the course of the winter, then they had clearly returned earlier than in the previous year. When comparing the March percentages with those in November it can be seen how there is an overall shift south and west into south-west Scotland and northern England.

PINKFEET

A decline of about 10% between November and March, as shown by the Pinkfoot totals this winter, is actually below the average mortality of recent years, about 12%, though by only a relatively small amount. There was no reason to regard last November's count as other than satisfactory, and we can conclude that the March count was a successful one, too, with no significant numbers of birds missed.

The regional distribution shown in the table below reveals increases in the north of Scotland, compared with March 1982, increases also in south-east Scotland and, just, in eastern England, but decreases in east central and south-west Scotland, and in north-east England. These latter areas were the refuge for birds driven south by the cold weather of 1981-82 and they took their time about returning north after it. So the distribution this year is perhaps more typical of the period after a mild winter. When compared with the November distributions it can be seen how much more important south-west Scotland is in the spring, and how dramatically the proportion in north-east England falls through the winter. North Scotland, too, becomes more important in spring than in autumn.

Regional distribution of Greylags and Pinkfeet in 1981-82 and 1982-83.

Figures are percentages of total populations

	GREYLAGS				PINKFEET			
	Nov 81	Mar 82	Nov 82	Mar 83	Nov 81	Mar 82	Nov 82	Mar 83
N.Scotland	56.2	37.3	54.1	46.7	14.7	17.4	14.3	22.3
E.C.Scotland	22.3	27.9	26.8	22.9	30.7	37.9	37.8	34.8
S-E.Scotland	7.5	3.4	3.6	3.9	30.0	10.7	21.5	15.7
S-W.Scotland	8.4	20.8	10.1	18.1	3.7	15.3	3.5	18.2
N.England	5.6	10.6	5.4	8.4	20.3	6.9	20.8	6.5
E.England	-	-	-	-	0.6	1.8	2.1	2.5

November 1983 census

Details of this census are enclosed herewith. It is planned for the weekend 12th/13th November.

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Dr M.A.Ogilvie
Wildfowl Trust
Slimbridge
Gloucester
GL2 7BT