

## NATIONAL WILDFOWL COUNTS

SPRING COUNTS OF PINK-FOOTED AND GREYLAG GEESE IN BRITAIN, 1989  
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### Summary

The early April 1989 census of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese in Britain found totals of 114,000 and 51,000 respectively. The equivalent figures in mid-April 1988 had been 115,000 and 20,000 respectively. Both species were more concentrated in eastern Scotland than before. Record spring numbers were recorded at several resorts.

### Introduction and Methods

In the second year of the present series of spring censuses of Pink-footed and Greylag Geese, counts were undertaken over the weekend of 1st/2nd April 1989, organised by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust under contract to the Nature Conservancy Council. In 1988 censuses had been held in mid-March and mid-April. A single census was organised this year, between the dates of last year's two, as the mid-March census had not found significantly more geese than in the standard wildfowl counts, and by mid-April very few Greylags were left. The same network of volunteer counters took part as in the annual November census, together with an expedition by DGS and P.Shimmings of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust to sparsely covered parts of northern and eastern Scotland from 28th March to 3rd April.

### Results

The count weekend was dominated by cold easterly winds which strengthened on the Sunday. It was fine in the east, but rainy in the west. In the previous weeks the weather had been fine and calm and there were reports of notable movements of geese.

Table 1 shows the results of the survey, broken down by regions/districts/counties, with the spring and November 1988 censuses for comparison. Coverage was very similar to that achieved in mid-April 1988, but an important Greylag site in Northumberland was not covered. Harris, Lewis and Shetland were covered for the first time, but only a few Greylags were found. Overall, virtually the same number of Pinkfeet were found as in mid-April 1988, despite the counts being two weeks earlier, but many more Greylags. Indeed almost as many Greylags were found as in mid-March 1988.

Note the much smaller number of Pinkfeet found in the Borders and Lothian in early April 1989 than in mid-April 1988, and the correspondingly larger numbers in Tayside (Perth/Kinross and Angus), though still well below the level in November. Very large numbers of Pinkfeet were found around the Moray Firth, and also much greater numbers of Greylags than last year. More Greylags were actually found in nearly all areas apart from northernmost Scotland.

TABLE 1. NOS. OF PINKFEET AND GREYLAGS COUNTED IN SPRING 1988, NOVEMBER 1988 AND SPRING 1989.

	PINKFEET				GREYLAGS			
	mid-March 1988	mid-April 1988	Nov 1988	early April 1989	mid-March 1988	mid-April 1988	Nov 1988	early April 1989
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55
Orkney	0	0	0	0	2100	300	990	2100
Caithness	10	60	3	16	5000	4100	1300	2800
Western Isles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	175
Suth'd/W Ross	0	0	8	8	50	30	53	210
Moray Basin	490	18400	400	20200	8200	9200	28800	19300
Banff & Buchan	8500	22300	22400	15400	2800	400	7900	6600
Gordon	10400	21700	2000	21000	3500	240	12000	2300
Kincardine & Dee	750	650	0	4500	2600	950	18300	650
Angus	4500	6100	35900	12500	470	490	6900	1700
Perth & Kinross	15700	11600	41100	16300	7900	1500	15100	5100
Central	2100	3600	6500	6100	200	1	120	
Fife	4000	54	7100	280	320	30	0	1700
Lothian	2900	9300	7500	3500	540	50	980	700
Borders	10900	6900	13900	210	3	0	7000	850
Strathclyde	800	160	1200	400	5200	620	3300	1700
Dumf & Gy/Cumbria	19300	12700	1000	12500	9800	1600	1400	2900
Lancashire	4600	1100	27400	1300	0	0	200	0
Northumberland	1	0	80	7	3500	2	7600	1800+
Humb/Lincs/Norfolk	910	0	6400	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	85900	114600	172900	114200	52200	19500	111900	50600

Table 2 (overleaf) gives the proportions of the total count found in each of six areas in the censuses between March 1988 and April 1989. The proportion of Pinkfeet in east central Scotland in early April 1989 was very similar to that in mid-March 1988, and much higher than in mid-April 1988. The percentage in south-east Scotland this April was very low, as mentioned earlier. The proportion of Greylags in Scotland from Central region northwards in early April 1989 was - conveniently! - between the level of mid-March and mid-April 1988, but bear in mind the rather low total count of this species.

TABLE 2. REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF PINKFEET AND GREYLAGS COUNTED IN SPRING 1988, NOVEMBER 1988 AND SPRING 1989, EXPRESSED AS PERCENTAGES OF THE TOTAL.

	PINKFEET				GREYLAGS			
	Mar 1988	Apr 1988	Nov 1988	Apr 1989	Mar 1988	Apr 1988	Nov 1988	Apr 1989
NORTH SCOTLAND	0.6	16.1	0.2	17.7	13.7	69.7	27.8	48.7
N.E.SCOTLAND	22.7	39.0	14.1	35.8	32.8	8.2	34.1	18.9
E.CENTRAL SCOTLAND	30.9	18.5	52.4	30.8	17.1	10.2	19.8	16.8
S.E.SCOTLAND	16.2	14.1	12.4	3.2	0.1	0.3	7.1	3.1
N.W.ENG./S.W.SCOT.	28.9	12.2	17.1	12.4	28.8	11.4	4.4	9.1
EAST ENGLAND	0.6	0.0	3.7	0.0	6.7	0.0	6.8	3.6

N.Scotland = Orkney/Caithness/W.Sutherland/W.Ross/Moray Basin

N.E.Scotland = Banff & Buchan/Gordon/Kincardine & Dee

E.C.Scotland = Angus/Perth & Kinross/Central/Fife

S.E.Scotland = Lothian/Borders

N.W.England/S.W.Scotland = Strathclyde/Dumfries & Galloway/Cumbria/Lancs

E.England = Northumberland/Humberside/Lincs/Norfolk

(NB: In the key to the equivalent table in last year's report, the Moray Basin was erroneously shown as having been included in N.E.Scotland)

Table 3 (overleaf) shows the numbers found in the spring censuses at all the most important resorts. Data from the mid-March 1989 wildfowl count is included where this gave a higher return than in the April census. For several resorts, especially in east central Scotland, higher numbers were found in early April than have previously been in the spring. Particularly noteworthy were the counts of 6,000 or more Pinkfeet at Crombie Reservoir and the Lake of Menteith, and of Greylags in Fife, Grampian and Findhorn Bay.

### Discussion

It is known that Greylags start to leave Britain in early March. The main reason for holding the census two weeks earlier this year was to try to locate more Greylags and discover further spring passage resorts. This aim was fulfilled, although the total count was still less than half that of the November 1988 census, which itself provided an underestimate. For Pinkfeet, the proportion of the November count found in the spring was again almost exactly two-thirds. This suggests that there are a large number of birds not being located in the spring, or that an early "wave" of emigration to Iceland occurred in each year. Both explanations probably apply. As already noted, an exodus was reported in the weeks running up to this year's count, while there has always been an element of under-recording in spring censuses. Either way, comparison of two year's data alone is unwise.

The next spring survey should probably be held at the same time. There is a need for two years of identical timing for comparative purposes, and early April would seem to be the better time for this.

TABLE 3. SITES WITH 1,000 OR MORE PINKFEET OR GREYLAGS IN THE SPRING COUNTS, 1988 AND 1989. (March/April maxima; \* = mid-March count; - = no count)

AREA	SITE	PINKFEET		GREYLAGS	
		1988	1989	1988	1989
Orkney	Mainland	0	0	2000*	2100
Caithness	Lochs	60	1*	5000*	2800
Moray Basin	Loch Eye/Cromarty Firth	6400	7000	1800	4100
	Inverness/Beaully Firth	8100	2600	670*	1800
	Findhorn Bay	2200	9800	3100	8300
	Loch Spynie	1300	770	3800*	3000
Banff & Buchan	Fedderate Reservoir	1500	1200	1000*	2400
	Loch of Strathbeg	20900	16500*	1800*	4300
Gordon	Slains Lochs/Ythan Esty	21700	21000	330*	910
	Haddo Country Park	190	20*	2400	2300*
Kincardine/Dee	Mid-Deeside (Dinnet Lochs)	750*	4500	2600*	650
Angus	Montrose Basin	4200*	4500	420*	0
	Duns Dish	300	1500	7	200
	Lour/Crombie Reservoir	2100	6200	0	720
Perth/Kinross	Bankfoot/Tullybelton/Dupplin	5700*	4400	270*	0
	Drummond Pond	0	0	2500*	1100
	Carsebreck	6300*	7200	1000*	1100
	Loch Leven	3200*	5100*	400*	1100*
Fife	Cameron Reservoir	4000*	3700*	200*	300*
	Kilconquhar Loch	0	0	320*	1700
Central	Lake of Menteith	2100*	6000	3600*	0
Lothian	Fala Flow	6800	3000	0	0
	Cobbinshaw Reservoir	1100*	300	0	2
	Gladhouse Reservoir	2500	0	0	0
Borders	Portmore Reservoir	1800*	170	3	0
	Westwater Reservoir	9100*	19300*	0	0
Strathclyde	Loze	0	0	1900*	1900
	Endrick Mouth, L Lomond	0	0	1000*	750
Dumf & Gall/	Stranraer	5	0	1100*	250
Cumbria	Wigtown Bay	7000	14000*	800	540*
	Loch Ken	6	0	1400	1100
	Upper Solway	10700*	9000*	160*	75
Lancashire		4600*	1300	0	0
Northumberland	Lindisfarne	0	0	1200*	-
	Caistron Quarry	0	7	1500*	1250

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