

(Preliminary confidential report,
not for publication)

THE NUMBERS OF GREYLAG & PINK-FOOTED GESE FOUND
IN GREAT BRITAIN ON 17th MARCH, 1963

On 17th March 1963 we found about 27,000 Greylag Geese Anser anser and 30,000 Pink-footed Geese Anser brachyrhynchus in Great Britain. On 11th November 1962 there had been about 38,000 Greylags and 58,000 Pinkfeet. The distribution of the two species in different counties in March and November is shown below. All county figures are rounded to the nearest ten birds and the national total to the nearest thousand. (The November figures show a number of changes from those used in the report circulated immediately after that count.)

	GREYLAG		PINKFEET	
	Mar.1963	Nov.1962	Mar.1963	Nov.1962
SCOTLAND				
Gaithness & Sutherland	30	10	-	-
Ross & Cromarty	840	580	-	40
Inverness	200	190	30	-
Nairn	180	230	-	-
Moray	1220	850	-	-
Aberdeen	1170	1610	1600	1270
Angus	2630	3800	1810	3100
Perth	5190	16910	3070	12430
Fife	260	420	3100	9170
Kinross	440	1500	3100	650
Stirling & Clackmannan	130	20	330	970
Dunbarton	150	380	-	-
Renfrew	40	-	-	-
Lanark	30	400	3050	4460
Midlothian	140	1180	2540	4760
E.Loathian	-	-	380	680
Berwick	-	290	600	3500
Peebles	-	-	840	1450
Argyll	1190	1060	-	10
Bute & Arran	5610	2200	-	-
Ayr	960	240	-	-
Dumfries	590	810	6000	2000
Kirkcudbright	890	3310	1220	270
Wigtown	4010	1180	500	-
Total SCOTLAND	25900	37170	28170	44760
ENGLAND				
Northumberland	?	120	-	-
Cumberland	70	150	1260	860
Westmorland	330	210	-	-
Lancashire	-	-	40	4150
Yorkshire	-	-	-	2060
Lincolnshire	-	-	430	6000
others	-	-	400	50
Total ENGLAND	400	480	2130	13120
BRITISH TOTAL	27000	38000	30000	58000

There were no Pinkfeet or Greylags in Wales on either 11th November or 17th March, although several hundred Pinkfeet visited north Wales in January and February.

This was our first attempt at a census at the end of the winter. When the count was first planned we did not know that it would be the severest winter for very many years in most parts of the British Isles. Given a nearly complete search of known haunts, I had expected to find that the numbers of both species were about 75% of the November totals, roughly about 29,000 Greylags and 44,000 Pinkfeet. This expectation was based on estimates of the average mortality-rate and of the proportion of the total annual losses occurring between mid-November and mid-March obtained from recoveries of ringed birds in the last twelve years.

The number of Greylags found is not much less than expected. At the level of accuracy of the counts themselves and of the estimates of losses, the discrepancy is so small that it seems possible to say that the hard winter added little to the number of Greylag casualties, despite the unusual movements and concentrations the weather brought about. The Pinkfeet situation is very different: the population seems to have suffered nearly twice as many casualties as in a normal winter and to have been reduced to little more than half its size in November.

It may be argued that many Pinkfeet evaded being counted because they had been found to disperse to unusual places in January and February or else had already begun to return to Iceland. I do not think that many were "lost" in these ways. Fortunately, it should be possible to check this March count by another one in November. Since we can tell fairly accurately the proportion of young birds hatched in the summer amongst the November population we can get an estimate of the number of Pinkfeet surviving from this spring to next autumn. If the present count is nearly complete and reasonably precise we should find that next autumn there are rather less than 90,000 adults - allowing for casualties in the summer and on migration in spring and autumn.

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Warning note. These provisional figures are sure to require some modifications (even if only minor ones) in the light of information not yet received and it is too soon to arrive at the best possible assessment of the effects of the hard weather of early 1963 on our grey geese. The object of these counts is to find out how goose numbers are regulated, not to provide ammunition for either side in arguments between those for and against goose-shooting. I must ask you to treat these results as confidential.

28th March, 1963

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