

Whooper Swan 1960

Title

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Description and Summary of Results

During the 1950s the Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* attracted some attention because larger numbers were visiting central and eastern Scotland and in some districts there were complaints of damage to crops.

Whooper Swans are large and visible birds but enough are scattered in remote places to make a complete inventory of the British wintering population impracticable. However, overall the survey found at least 1840 in Scotland, 320 in England and 70 in Wales in November 1960, 1400-1600 from December 1960 to March 1961, and at least 3100 in November 1961. The total number present was most unlikely to have exceeded 4000. In the northern and western islands numbers were highest in October and March, presumably due to the presence of passage birds. On the mainland of Scotland, November numbers were much higher than those at other times, and in England and Wales the swans arrived rather later, with most in December, and left rather earlier.

The most important area for the species was NE Scotland with three major haunts: Loch Park (Banff), Loch Strathbeg (Aberdeen) and the Don valley from Monymusk to Fintray (Aberdeen). In November 1961 there were 630 on Loch Strathbeg, but unfortunately, because of restrictions due to foot-and-mouth disease, this site was not counted in autumn 1960. It seemed though that numbers generally in November 1961 were up to 30% higher in many areas than in the previous year.

Most flocks were of less than ten birds but about 80% of the swans were found in groups of more than ten. Only about 5% of flocks contained over 50 swans, yet in October and November these large groups contained nearly half the total recorded. In midwinter, especially in February, large flocks were less frequent. Early arrivals and those remaining in Britain into April and May were nearly all in small groups, very often ones and twos. The proportion of juvenile birds varied from year to year.

Reports of damage to grassland and crops in the winters of 1960-61 and 1961-62 were trivial and the suggestion that swans were assuming pest proportions was insupportable.

Methods of Data Capture

Observers were simply asked to send in all records of Whooper Swans during the survey period, although some specific effort was made to obtain records from the known wintering areas in Scotland from which very few counts had been made previously.

Purpose of Data Capture

The stated aims of the survey were to ascertain: 1) the status and distribution of the species; 2) the proportion of young in the wintering flocks; 3) the dates of arrival and departure; and 4) the general feeding habits, especially in relation to agricultural crops.

Data from the last were however not incorporated into the survey report although were used later as part of more detailed studies on the feeding habits and effects of the species on agricultural crops.

Geographic Coverage

All of Britain.

Temporal Coverage

The winter of 1960/61. Extra data from a co-operative count in November 1961 organised by the Wildfowl Trust were incorporated as needed and National Wildfowl Counts from 1947 to 1961 were used to provide comparisons. Some extensive (mostly aerial) surveys were made in March and November 1961 and in early April 1962, to provide up-to-date information on distribution in NW Scotland and the Outer Hebrides.

Other Interested parties

The survey was organised and run by the BTO and the Wildfowl Trust (now known as Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust).

Organiser(s)

Elizabeth Garden

Current Staff Contact

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Publications

The main report of the survey is:

Boyd, H. & Eltringham, S.K. 1962. The Whooper Swan in Great Britain. *Bird Study* 9: 217-241.

The survey was noticed in *Bird Study* vol. 7 for 1960 (September and December issues) and vol. 8 for 1961 (all 4 issues), and in *BTO News* number 12.

Available from NBN?

No.

Computer data -- location

None known.

Computer data -- outline contents

N/A.

Computer data -- description of contents

N/A.

Information held in BTO Archives

One folder containing some letters about setting up the survey.

Notes on Access and Use

Other information

Notes on Survey Design

Specific Issues for Analysis