

GREYLAG AND PINK-FOOTED GESE IN BRITAIN ON 6th NOVEMBER, 1966

About 60,000 Greylag Geese Anser anser and 76,000 Pink-footed Geese were found in Scotland and England on 5th and 6th November, 1966. There had been about 68,000 Pinkfeet present on 16th October. The numbers of both species are substantially larger than those in November 1965.

The following table records the numbers of geese roosting in each county where any were found in November in 1965 or 1966. The county figures are rounded to the nearest ten birds, and the national total to the nearest thousand. Feral flocks are omitted, where practicable.

	GREYLAGS		PINKFEET		
	6 Nov. 1966	7 Nov. 1965	6 Nov. 1966	16 Oct. 1966	7 Nov. 1965
Caithness	290	180	-	-	-
Sutherland	0	20	-	-	-
Ross and Cromarty	1,850	1,830	1,790	10	1,270
Inverness	750	100	-	-	-
Nairn, Moray	1,370	1,150	-	-	-
Aberdeen	4,560	2,540	14,290	5,090	11,640
Angus, Kincardine	5,280	3,530	890	330	980
Perth	31,440	18,440	24,520	30,140	18,560
Fife	410	800	3,950	7,500	6,500
Kinross	2,180	1,200	5,590	3,200	1,000
Stirling	10	0	-	-	-
Dunbarton	300	340	-	-	10
Lanark	240	30	2,550	1,040	3,080
Midlothian	730	1,380	1,460	3,260	4,520
East Lothian	-	-	2,750	330	260
Berwick	220	300	4,200	3,200	3,000
Peebles	420	0	2,300	2,520	330
Roxburgh	50	0	450	0	280
Argyll	1,190	1,130	-	-	-
Bute	3,800	6,300	-	-	-
Ayr	10	0	-	-	-
Wigtown	3,310	4,120	0	0	50
Kirkcudbright	700	860	290	0	0
Dumfries	690	240	3,700	5,020	7,800
Northumberland	140	150	-	-	-
Cumberland	310	40	0	700	300
Westmorland	80	40	-	-	-
Lanarkshire	-	-	2,860	2,900	2,200
Yorkshire	-	-	1,750	2,400	2,000
Lincolnshire	-	-	2,560	610	3,460
Norfolk	-	-	10	0	0
Anglesey	-	-	-	-	70
BRITISH TOTAL	60,000	45,000	76,000	68,000	67,000

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Lancs.

The weather during the weekend made counting difficult and unpleasant in some areas, particularly in the Lothians, but was generally kinder than had seemed likely. The searching of likely places was thorough and there were fewer discrepancies between the numbers found in the same area by independent observers than has sometimes been the case. It still seems improbable that we shall ever make a census free from doubts. What is not in doubt is that there were a great many geese, particularly in the east and north-east of Scotland. Perthshire alone held nearly 56,000 geese. Their preference for the north-east was presumably encouraged by the fact that for the second successive year the barley there had been heavily shaken by storms just before harvesting, shedding much of the crop on to the ground.

GREYLAGS. The increase from 45,000 on 7th November 1965 to 60,000 now is much the largest recorded in the last ten years. It may have been somewhat exaggerated if, as suggested at the time, immigration was not quite completed by the time of the 1965 count. In any event, the losses of geese between then and now must have been unusually small, for the recruitment of goslings was rather poor in relation to the large number of potential parents available. The last 'good' breeding year was 1961, when the total population was less than 37,000. Another 'good' season in 1967 could bring the numbers next autumn to over 70,000.

PINKFEET. The gain of 9,000 from November 1965 to November 1966 must, as in the Greylag, have been due more to low mortality than to the production of young birds. There seems no reason to suppose that either species has reached, or even approached, the greatest abundance that this country can support. But the run of five years in which the number of successful parents has been less than half the number of geese old enough to have bred suggests that conditions on the breeding grounds may be limiting. We need to find out more about this.

The rise of 8,000 from 16th October to 6th November is proportionately much the same as was found last year. This suggests that some immigration is likely to occur in the second half of October even in a year in which a massive and concentrated shift from Iceland to Scotland took place early in October.

Further counts this season. I hope we can make another national search on 4th/5th March, 1967. This is several weeks earlier than previous spring counts have been, because I want to be sure that no return migration to Iceland has begun by the date of the count. I also hope that checks of numbers at most major haunts can be made at intervals throughout this winter. The Goose Working Group of the International Wildfowl Research Bureau seeks to achieve a census of all the geese in Europe on 15th January 1967. But the likelihood of unfavourable weather here seems very great and a special effort to count ducks is also planned for that weekend, so that it seems better to concentrate on the ducks, and on White-fronted and Brent Geese in England and Wales, and to use the November and March counts to determine the size of our midwinter stocks of Greylags and Pinkfeet, which are independent of those on the continent.

Acknowledgements. These counts are the corporate achievement of the following host of enthusiasts: L. Adams, L.W.G. Alexander, A. Allison, D.G. Andrew, R.H. Baillie, E. Balfour, J. Ballantyne, R. Barker, J.A.G. Barnes, T.M. Barr, J.A. Black, C.G. Booth, T. Boyd, Mr. and Mrs. W. Brotherston, P.W. Brown, R.A. Bruce, H.O. Junce, R.A. Cadman, C.R.G. Campbell, Dr. J.W. Campbell, Captain I.P. Coats, A. Cowieson, Mr. and Mrs. C.H. Cowper, Mrs. K.K. Crawford, G.M. Crichton, G. Dall, D. Dewar, G. Dick, H. Dollman, T. Donaldson, J.L. Douglas-Menzies, C. Dunlop, J. Edelsten, F.J. Ellwood, Sir Robert Erskine-Phill, I.H. Evanson, D.F. Ferguson, W. Fidler, A. Fraser, Wing Commander R. Fursman, D. Glass, K. Goodchild, A.G. Gordon, R. Gordon, C.D. Grant, H.C. Gray, Miss F. Greig, R.W. Haig, W.A. Hall, Miss A. Harding, E.G. Hardy, J.F.D. Hargreaves, R.H. Harrison, C.G. Headlam, M. Hedley, A. Henry, D.J. Hindle, J.L. Hirst, W.G. Hughes, P. James, Mrs. P.F. James, Dr. D. Jenkins, Major-General Jenkins, I. Johnston, R. Johnston, M. Jones, Mrs. Laing, Miss S. Laing, D. Lambort, A. Leitch, Mr. and Mrs. J.A. Lister, A. Lodge, W.J. McCulloch, Mr. McGoldrick, A. MacDonald, D. Macdonald, J. MacGregor, K.S. Macgregor, R. McGuffie, J. McIntosh, A. Mackenzie, I. McLachlan, G. McLean, K.J. MacLeod, W.J. McNish, W. McWilliam, A. Mann, R.P. Mason, Miss S. Matheson, J. Maxwell, A. Miller, A.J. Mills, E.S. Mingay, Mrs. J. Morrison, W.M. Morrison, C.L. Munro, Dr. J.G. Munro, C. Murray, W. Murray, C.G. Nendick, Dr. F. O'Gorman, M.A. Ogilvie, D.W. Oliver, R. Oliver, T. Paterson, R.E.M. Pilcher, J. Potter, A. Pringle, C. Pringle, D. Pringle, J.D.H. Radford, Mrs. I. Rainier, A.B. Read, D. Rodhead, G.W. Reid, G.A. Richards, Dr. R. Richter, E. Roberts, E.L. Roberts, U. Robertson, Dr. E. Rusk, J. Russell, W. Russell, T. Huxton, W. Scott, R. Shaw, A. Shepherd, H. Shorrocks, M. Smith, R.P. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. R.W.J. Smith, D.L. Stark, J.A. Stewart, R. Stokoe, C. Tait, R.J.F. Taylor, Miss V.H. Thom, I. Thomson, P.J. Thompson, E. Thorpe, Mrs. E.H. Trevor, R. Walker, J.H. Wallace, R.C. Walls, L. Watkinson, Dr. A. Watson, A.D. Watson, J.T. Watt, J.R. Weir, D.M. White, P. Whitelaw, P. Whyte, J.S. Wiffen, W.H. Wild, P. Willins, J. Young, J.F. Young, J.G. Young, L. Young, Miss R. Young, T.E.R. Young. To all of you, and to any others left out by mistake, my warmest thanks.

16th November, 1966.

Hugh Boyd,
The Nature Conservancy,
12 Hope Terrace,
EDINBURGH, 9.