

Numbers of swans and ducks in Britain, 1984–5

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After a wet autumn the 1984–5 winter was dominated by two severe spells, from about 6 to 19 January and 8 to 20 February. There was also a cold period in mid-March. As in previous hard winters (e.g. 1978–9 and 1981–2), there was a rapid influx of Wigeon and Smew to Britain with the onset of cold weather on the Continent. Wigeon reached a record level and Smew attained their highest numbers since the early 1960s. Unusually, however, other species did not move south for a week or two, as if trying to “sit out” the cold spell. Then, in mid-January, abnormally large numbers of Bewick’s Swans, Goosander, Shelduck, and Pintail crossed the North Sea, with further influxes in February. Many Teal, on the other hand, left Britain when the severe conditions arrived, while the winter level of Shoveler was low. As in most hard winters, several predominantly freshwater species moved to the coast, especially Smew.

Among the most notable individual counts in 1984–5 were a record 5200 Bewick’s Swans on the Ouse Washes in February, 30,000–40,000 Wigeon at Abberton

Reservoir (January), 1100 Gadwall at Rutland Water (December), 16,000 Pintail on the Mersey Estuary (November), 1300 Goosander on the Beaulieu Firth (December) and 10,000 Coot at Abberton Reservoir (September). The autumn Wigeon numbers at Lindisfarne were very low (10,000, compared with the usual 30,000–40,000), while the Mersey Estuary held only 8580 Teal, instead of the normal 10,000–25,000. In Northern Ireland there were remarkable counts of 1162 Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* and 26,310 Wigeon at Lough Foyle in November.

The results of the January 1986 census of Whooper Swans are presented on pages 172–175, while those of the BTO’s 1983 census of Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* were published in *Bird Study* this year.

For further results of the counts, see the annual booklets produced by the Wildfowl Trust. A review of the counts since 1960 forms the core of the second edition of *Wildfowl in Great Britain*, recently published by Cambridge University Press.

Total number of wildfowl counted in Britain, 1984–5

Species	Seasonal maxima			
	1984–5	1983–4	1982–3	1981–2
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	6,830	5,830	5,410	*
Bewick’s Swan <i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	7,510	5,220	4,830	4,940
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	61,830	59,630	58,760	65,190
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	319,970	152,640	199,910	209,770
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	4,450	4,150	3,820	3,690
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	89,710	101,530	98,210	102,190
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	159,340	167,700	176,690	149,900
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	31,090	21,750	25,480	19,410
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	7,960	7,490	7,690	8,370
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	36,050	36,890	35,980	31,820
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>	43,120	41,000	43,560	43,440
Scaup <i>A. marila</i>	3,450	1,990	3,200	5,080
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	11,120	8,210	9,330	10,080
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	390	44	35	110
Goosander <i>M. merganser</i>	2,420	3,630	3,860	2,230
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	1,800	1,800	1,380	1,400
Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	81,970	77,810	74,760	*

* not included in analyses until 1982–3