

Numbers of geese in Britain and Ireland, 1985–6

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The 1985 breeding season was a very mixed one for the different populations of geese wintering in Britain. The best areas were in arctic Canada and western Greenland, and in Siberia, but the geese breeding in east Greenland, Iceland and Svalbard all did rather poorly.

The Pinkfeet breeding in Iceland and east Greenland had only an average breeding season but nevertheless reached a new record total, as did the Greylags, which also breed in Iceland. Despite the spells of cold weather during the winter, both populations should have benefitted from the abnormal quantities of spilt grain available on the British wintering grounds following the very poor harvest. As usual, though, the March counts were incomplete.

The European Whitefronts did quite well, though the peak count in Britain was

much the same as last winter. The Greenland Whitefronts, on the other hand, had one of their best seasons ever, and numbers have increased further from the low of 4–5 years ago, though still below the estimated population of the 1950s.

Neither the Greenland nor the Svalbard Barnacles had a good season, and the latter population was little changed on the year before. The Greenland population has not been censused since 1983.

Light-bellied Brent from Greenland and arctic Canada also had a good season and the population has reached the highest level since counts began in the 1950s. The small population in Svalbard did not do well, and numbers remain low. The Dark-bellied Brent Geese from Siberia, after two complete breeding failures, did moderately, though not outstandingly, well.

Counts and breeding success of goose populations in Britain and Ireland, 1985–6.

Species	Count	Month	% young	Av. brood size
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	128,000	Nov	13.4	2.3
	97,000	Mar	–	–
European White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons albifrons</i>	4,300	Jan	48.9	3.0
Greenland White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons flavirostris</i>	22,353 ¹	Nov	26.7	3.5
	21,752 ¹	Apr	–	–
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>	107,000	Nov	11.2	2.1
	51,000	Mar	–	–
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> – Svalbard	10,400	Oct	9.6	0.0
Greenland	–	–	10.7	1.8
Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla hrota</i> – Svalbard	3,100	Dec	32.0	–
– Greenland	24,100 ²	Nov	24.0	3.2
Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla bernicla</i>	82,000	Dec	27.0	2.6

Notes

¹ Supplied by H. J. Wilson, Forest and Wildlife Service, Ireland.

² Supplied by Michael O'Briain, Irish Brent Goose Study.