

Number of swans and ducks in Britain, 1983–84

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The 1983–84 winter was generally mild, although northern England and Scotland were hit by severe weather in mid-January, causing most inland waters to freeze and preventing counters from gaining access to many. Nevertheless, a record total of 1,753 sites, coastal and inland, were covered by the National Wildfowl Counts. The most noteworthy results were a further increase in Bewick's Swans (see pp. 5–12), some very high autumn counts of Wigeon and Mallard (with relatively low numbers in mid-winter), the remarkable concentration of 950 Gadwall on Rutland Water, a further reduction in the numbers of Scaup, and a decline in the massive flocks of dabbling ducks and Shelducks on the south shore of the Mersey Estuary, caused apparently by a

temporary shift in the main channel of the river coupled with favourable conservation developments on a number of adjacent sites.

Preliminary results of the 1984–85 counts suggest that, despite the extremely cold weather which gripped much of north-west Europe in January and February, Britain did not receive a much greater influx of wildfowl than would be expected in a mild winter. Instead, most birds apparently tried to "sit out" the frozen conditions on the Continent. Only Bewick's Swans, Wigeon and Smew reached Britain in exceptional numbers. The full results for 1984–85 will be published this autumn in the annual "Wildfowl and Wader Counts", obtainable from the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge.

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Species	Maxima 1983–84 & month	Highest single count and month	Av. max. 1978–79 to 1982–83
Bewick's Swan <i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	5,220 J	Ouse Washes (3,364 J)	4,690
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>	2,300 N	Loch of Strathbeg (382 O)	2,490
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	59,630 J	The Wash (13,700 F)	64,350
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	152,640 N	Lindisfarne (30,000 N)	194,070
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	4,150 N	Rutland Water (947 D)	2,980
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	101,530 D	Mersey estuary (11,050 D)	88,090
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	167,700 D	Ouse Washes (6,377 F)	163,860
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	21,750 J	Dee Estuary (11,265 N)	21,040
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	7,490 N	Loch Leven (680 O)	7,170
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	36,890 D	Loch of Harray (4,300 D)	34,480
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>	41,000 D	Loch Leven (4,830 S)	44,150
Scaup <i>A. marila</i>	1,990 J	Large Bay (1,400 J)	4,700
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	8,210 J	Firth of Forth (2,017 J)	9,180
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	44 J	Dungeness (20 J)	96
Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	2,160 O	Beaulieu Firth (720 D)	2,700
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>	3,630 D	Beaulieu Firth (2,150 D)	2,560
Ruddy duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	1,800 D	Chew Valley Lake (526 D)	1,260