

Numbers of swans and ducks in Britain, 1982–83

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After the severity of the previous winter, 1982–83 (the 36th season of the National Wildfowl Counts) was generally mild; the only cold spell was in early February, bringing a small influx of Bewick's Swans and Wigeon from the continent. Curiously, however, some of the patterns of distribution which occurred in the hard weather of 1981–82 were repeated, albeit on a smaller scale, in 1982–83. For example, the December count of Pochard and Tufted Ducks was lower than that for November. The likely cause of this reduction was not, as in 1981, ice, but a highly dispersed population, owing to very high water levels. By January the numbers were nearly back to normal.

One species whose long-term decline in

Britain gives rise to concern is the Scaup. Following the disappearance of the massive flocks off Edinburgh in the late 1970s, as the city's sewage system was modernised, the national total stabilised at a new low level. There has now been a decrease at the other resorts, to the extent that no more than 3,200 Scaup were counted in 1982–83.

The full results of the National Wildfowl Counts (which cover 1,000–1,500 sites, coastal and inland, each month from September to March) are published, along with those of the British Trust for Ornithology's Birds of Estuary Enquiry, each autumn, in booklet form. The annual "Wildfowl and Wader Counts" is obtainable from the Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge.

Total numbers of swans and ducks counted in Britain, 1982–83

Species	Maxima 1982–83		Highest single count	Av. max. 1977–78 to 1981–2
Bewick's Swan				
<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	4,830	F	Ouse Washes (2,792 F)	4,370
Whooper Swan				
<i>C. cygnus</i>	3,150	N	Loch of Strathbeg (663 N)	2,310
Shelduck				
<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	58,760	J	The Wash (16,948 D)	60,580
Wigeon				
<i>Anas penelope</i>	199,910	D	Ouse Washes (28,073 F)	181,040
Gadwall				
<i>A. strepera</i>	3,820	N	Rutland Water (493 D)	2,570
Teal				
<i>A. crecca</i>	98,210	D	Mersey estuary (26,100 D)	80,350
Mallard				
<i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	176,690	J	Humber (6,001 J)	151,890
Pintail				
<i>A. acuta</i>	25,480	J	Mersey estuary (13,750 J)	19,740
Shoveler				
<i>A. clypeata</i>	7,690	N	Ouse Washes (685 M)	6,830
Pochard				
<i>Aythya ferina</i>	35,980	N	Loch of Harray (4,500 F)	35,530
Tufted Duck				
<i>A. fuligula</i>	43,560	N	Loch Leven (3,455 O)	43,200
Scaup				
<i>A. marila</i>	3,200	F	Inner Solway Firth (1,244 J)	5,340
Goldeneye				
<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	9,330	F	Firth of Forth (1,549 F)	9,790
Smew				
<i>Mergus albellus</i>	35	F	Dungeness (10 F)	100
Red-breasted Merganser				
<i>Mergus serrator</i>	3,040	F	Beaully Firth (1,200 F)	2,570
Goosander				
<i>Mergus merganser</i>	3,860	F	Beaully Firth (2,400 F)	2,110
Ruddy Duck				
<i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	1,380	J	Chew Valley Lake (504 D)	1,010