

Numbers of swans and ducks in Britain, 1981 – 1982

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1981-82 (the 35th season of the National Wildfowl Counts) was the second cold winter in four years. Two spells of almost unprecedented severity occurred, from 8-28 December and 7-16 January, although conditions thereafter were unusually mild.

The previous hard winter, 1978-79, differed in that the cold weather spanned a longer period, but was less severe, started later, and was relieved by frequent short, mild spells. The notable influxes of many species from the continent which occurred then were repeated in 1981-82 but on a much smaller scale.

Local movements in response to the

weather were widespread. Teal, Pochard and Tufted Duck moved to estuaries in significant numbers in December and January, although many Pochard and Tufted Duck apparently left the country altogether, probably for France. The extensive flooding which followed the thaw attracted dabbling ducks, especially Wigeon, away from their regular haunts.

The feral population of Ruddy Ducks, based in the Midlands, suffered high mortality in the cold, but the counts during 1982-83 suggest that their numbers have made a quick recovery and are on the increase again.

Total numbers of swans and ducks counted in Britain, 1980-81.

Species	Maxima 1980-81		Highest single count	Av. max. 1976-77 to 1980-81
Bewick's Swan <i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	4,940	F	Ouse Washes (2,842 F)	4,030
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>	2,510	N	Loch of Strathbeg (519, O)	2,140
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	65,910	F	The Wash (17,233 F)	57,140
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	209,770	J	Ouse Washes (39,368 F)	175,560
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	3,690	N	Gunton Park, Norf. (630 S)	2,070
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	102,190	D	Mersey estuary (35,000 D)	72,510
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	149,900	J	Lower Derwent Ings (8,142 M)	147,450
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	19,410	N	Mersey estuary (11,440 N)	19,880
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	8,370	N	Loch Leven (696 S)	6,370
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	31,820	N	Cliffe Pools, Kent (1,620 J)	35,630
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>	43,440	N	Loch Leven (4,560 S)	41,250
Scaup <i>A. marina</i>	5,080	F	Firth of Forth (2,680 F)	5,300
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	10,080	F	Firth of Forth (1,278 J)	9,470
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	110	J	Dungeness, Kent (31 J)	87
Red-breasted Merganser <i>M. serrator</i>	2,140	N	Outer Moray Firth (1,054 N)	2,570
Goosander <i>M. merganser</i>	2,230	D	Beaully Firth (1,620 D)	1,890
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	1,400	D	Blithfield reservoir (477 D)	830