

Numbers of geese in Britain and Ireland, 1981–1982

M. A. OGILVIE

Over most of the arctic breeding grounds of the geese which winter in Britain and Ireland the summer of 1981 was a poor one, and in places disastrously bad. The peak counts (where known) and the breeding success of each of the identifiable populations of geese are set out in the table below. Moving from west to east, the Light-bellied Brent Geese from northern Greenland and Canada fared only moderately well. The Greenland Whitefronts did rather poorly and though there was not a complete census their numbers dropped at all their major haunts. The Barnacle Geese breeding in East Greenland had one of their worst breeding seasons ever and numbers on their main wintering site, Islay, in the Inner Hebrides, were well down on the previous winter. The Pink-footed Geese and Greylag Geese breeding in Iceland both had indifferent breeding seasons; the former dropped in numbers a little, the latter rose slightly to a new record level and once again became

Britain's most numerous goose.

In Svalbard the Barnacle Geese had a very poor season, their third in five years, and the population total dropped somewhat in consequence. Although there were no age counts of the Svalbard Light-bellied Brent it can be assumed that they too suffered in the miserable summer and it is believed that the total recorded below represents the entire population, present at Lindisfarne, Northumberland, during a period when severe weather is likely to have emptied their other haunt in northern Denmark.

The European White-fronted Geese rarely seem to have poor breeding seasons, and numbers in Britain were boosted by severe weather on the continent. However, the severe spells in Britain disrupted the birds normal wintering pattern and the total may have been higher than recorded here. The Dark-bellied Brent Geese from further east in the Soviet Union had a second successive bad breeding year.

Peak counts and breeding success of goose populations in Britain and Ireland, 1981–1982.

	Peak count	Month	% young	Av. brood size
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	90,000	Nov.	15.7	1.9
European White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons albifrons</i>	6,910	Feb.	33.0	2.5
Greenland White-fronted Goose <i>A. a. flavirostris</i>	—	—	14.3	3.1
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>	96,000	Nov.	13.9	2.0
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> —Svalbard	8,300	Oct.	3.2	2.3
—Greenland	—	—	7.3	1.7
Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla hrota</i> —Svalbard	1,800	Jan/Feb	—	—
—Greenland	11,700	Nov.	—	—
Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. b. bernicla</i>	60,000	Jan.	<1	0