

Numbers of swans and ducks in Britain, 1976–77 to 1979–80

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As foreshadowed in last year's WILD-FOWL, the regular short article on the numbers of ducks in Britain during the immediate past winter has ceased. Internal reorganization of the Wildfowl Count Scheme has led to the production of an annual report on each winter's counts, published in the September following. The report also contains the results of the Birds of Estuaries Enquiry, run jointly by the Wildfowl Trust with the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, which formerly had its own annual report. Although it is not possible to prepare information on the most recent winter for inclusion in WILD-FOWL, it is thought that a brief summary of the results for the winter before would be of interest.

The table sets out the highest monthly total in Britain for each of the commoner species during the winter of 1979–80 and

compares these with the figures for the three previous winters. Also shown is the month in which the peak occurred. It should be emphasized that the totals given are merely how many were counted and are not intended as estimates of the actual populations in the country. The proportion of the true numbers represented by the counts varies considerably from one species to another. If due allowance is made for differences in the cover attained during the counts it is possible to compare peak counts between winters and detect population changes. There was a considerable jump in numbers of several species between the mild winter of 1977–78 and the rather severe one of 1978–79, notably in Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard and Shoveler, as birds sought refuge here from colder areas. More surprisingly these levels were in most cases maintained in 1979–80 despite its mostly mild character.

Highest monthly totals of swans and ducks in Britain, 1976–77 to 1979–80.

	1976–77		1977–78		1978–79		1979–80	
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	6,168	D	5,914	D	6,188	D	7,040	J
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus</i>	3,247	J	3,250	F	4,337	J	4,610	F
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>	1,652	N	2,239	N	1,491	D	2,980	N
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	47,988	J	39,896	J	68,926	J	63,870	J
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	182,357	J	134,766	D	208,800	J	175,470	J
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	1,206	J	1,755	N	1,873	S	2,360	O
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	62,988	J	59,522	D	70,635	D	80,380	J
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	127,706	D	116,850	J	147,935	J	178,820	J
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	20,115	J	18,994	D	13,556	J	21,650	J
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	6,071	N	5,999	N	6,985	N	6,380	O
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	32,306	J	41,241	J	34,189	D	30,950	J
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>	33,682	J	38,806	J	40,104	D	42,750	D
Scaup <i>A. marila</i>	4,894	J	6,410	J	5,993	J	5,160	J
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>	8,471	J	10,154	J	9,961	J	9,460	J
Smew <i>Mergus albeola</i>	38	F	56	F	225	F	60	J
Red-breasted Merganser <i>M. serrator</i>	2,413	N	2,253	J	1,808	F	3,440	J
Goosander <i>M. merganser</i>	1,113	J	1,607	M	1,899	J	2,190	J