

Numbers of geese in Britain and Ireland, 1980–1981

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The table sets out the peak count (where made) and breeding success of each of the identifiable goose populations wintering in Britain. There was no single pattern to the arctic spring and summer in 1980 and breeding success was very variable in different regions. Iceland had a better than average summer judging by the performance of the Pinkfeet and Greylags, both of which reached new record population levels, with the former re-overtaking the latter as the most numerous species in Britain. Going west, the Barnacle Geese breeding in East Greenland fared a little better than in the very poor year of 1979, though the percentage of young was still well below average. There was no full census of this population, but numbers on Islay, in the Inner Hebrides, were monitored and showed little change on the year before. The Greenland Whitefronts, breeding in West Greenland, were also not censused, but from age counts on Islay and in Ireland, they had one of their best breeding seasons for very many years which will have helped to maintain their estimated population of c.15,000. With a

breeding range extending from north-east Greenland into arctic Canada, the Light-bellied Brent achieved a moderately good breeding success and the population increased slightly (O. J. Merne, pers. com.).

The Svalbard Barnacle Geese had a reasonably good season and increased their population to a new record total, more than recovering the ground lost after the disastrous breeding performance in 1979. The Light-bellied Brent Geese from that area were not monitored for breeding success and the total in Britain is probably under one-third of the whole population.

The European White-fronted Geese had yet another pretty good season and peak numbers in Britain were slightly up, though still only about half the total reached ten years ago. Further east the Dark-bellied Brent Geese breeding on the Siberian coast experienced one of their periodic total failures with virtually no young being produced at all. There was a consequent sharp fall in the peak count in Britain, and in the overall population total, of around 25%.

Peak count and breeding success of goose populations in Britain and Ireland, 1980–1981.

	Peak count	Month	% young	Av. brood size
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	95,000	Nov.	20.6	2.2
European White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons albifrons</i>	5,700	Feb.	35.0	2.7
Greenland White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons flavirostris</i>	—	—	23.3	3.1
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>	81,000	Nov.	20.2	2.3
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> —Svalbard	9,050	Oct.	22.7	2.2
—Greenland	—	—	11.4	2.0
Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla hrota</i> —Svalbard	700	Jan.	24.2	—
—Greenland	c. 9,000	Jan.	20.0	2.5
Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla bernicla</i>	66,500	Jan.	< 1	—