

Numbers of geese in Britain and Ireland, 1979–1980

M. A. OGILVIE

This short contribution replaces the section on wildfowl censuses and counts of earlier years. From the winter of 1979–1980 the long-running system of producing seasonal indices for six common species of ducks, based on a 'priority' sample of waters within the national wildfowl count scheme, has been changed. In future, estimates of population trends in the ducks will be based on analyses of a much larger number of waters in an attempt to reduce some of the biases inherent in selecting the sample. They will be published separately, while it may be possible to include a summary in next year's WILDFOWL.

Results from the annual censuses and monitoring of breeding success in the various goose populations wintering in Britain and Ireland are shown in the table. The summer of 1979 was remarkable in being very good, leading to high breeding success in a few areas, and extremely bad, with very poor goose production, in others. The Dark-bellied Brent Geese and the European Whitefronts breeding in the Soviet Arctic had the best of it, especially the former which also bred well the previous year. The world population of Dark-bellied Brent has now risen to about 180,000 (A. St Joseph, pers. com.) compared to 142,000 in 1978–1979, but the number coming to Britain has not risen to the same extent, perhaps indicating a filling up of British haunts.

European Whitefronts continue to de-

cline in Britain, whilst maintaining, or even increasing, their very high numbers in the Netherlands. Conditions there seem perfect for them, and fewer birds 'bother' to come west to Britain each winter. The Greenland race of the Whitefront has never been censused but a recent major paper reviewing its status and distribution estimated that there were currently about 15,000 birds in the population (Ruttledge & Ogilvie 1980). Breeding success is monitored annually; 1979 was very poor.

Svalbard had an abysmal summer, following a very, cold, late spring, and the Barnacle Geese there had one of their worst years ever, leading to a sharp decline of over 1,000 in the population total. The Greenland race, too, experienced poor breeding conditions and production of young was close to an all-time low. With only slightly below average performances from both Pinkfeet and Greylags, their populations showed very slight increases while the Greylag, by overtaking the Pinkfoot, became Britain's most numerous wintering goose.

Arctic Canada had a moderate summer, too, and the Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering in Ireland managed to produce some young and to maintain its numbers (O. J. Merne, pers. com.). No age counts of the Svalbard Light-bellied Brent were made but from the evidence of the Barnacle Geese breeding there, the Brents, too, will have done very badly.

Peak count and breeding success of goose populations in Britain and Ireland, 1979–1980.

	Peak count	Month	% young	Av. brood size
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	80,000	Nov.	14.7	2.1
European White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons albifrons</i>	5,000	Jan.	29.9	2.0
Greenland White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons flavirostris</i>	—	—	11.9	2.8
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>	81,000	Nov.	17.6	2.3
Barnacle Goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> —Svalbard	7,600	Oct.	3.6	2.5
—Greenland	—	—	8.3	1.8
Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla hrota</i> —Svalbard	1,050	—	—	—
—Greenland	8,300	Jan.	11.6	2.1
Dark-bellied Brent Goose <i>B. bernicla bernicla</i>	75,000	Jan.	33.0	2.4