

Wildfowl Counts in the U.K.

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1986–87 was the 40th season of the U.K. National Wildfowl Counts, organised by the Wildfowl Trust under contract to the Nature Conservancy Council. All the swans, geese and ducks are covered, together with Great Crested and Little Grebe, Cormorant and Coot, each month from September to March, at as many coastal and inland localities as possible. Supplementary censuses of several goose species are held, which include birds feeding on fields by day. A total of 1,870 sites were covered at least once in 1986–87, including 1,580 in January, when a special effort is made for the International Waterfowl Census. Nearly a thousand localities were visited in all seven months. A cold spell in the middle of January lasted about ten days. An extra count was undertaken at fifty major areas at the end of the month to gain extra information on any hard weather movements. The Table shows the highest monthly counts for each species in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

In October 1,100 Great Crested Grebes were found in the Loughs Neagh/Beg basin, N. Ireland. The cold weather apparently caused many to leave the U.K., as well as moving on to the coast. The largest counts of both Mute and Whooper Swans were also in Loughs Neagh/Beg (1,100 and 1,300 respectively). The increase in Bewick's Swans in Britain continued, with 8,000 in January, of which 6,200 were on the Ouse Washes.

The Icelandic Pink-footed Goose population also reached a record level, 138,000 being located in Scotland and northern and eastern England, containing 15.3% young. The February figure of 5,400 European Whitefronts included 3,500 at Slimbridge, containing 18.1% juveniles. A total of 23,300 Greenland Whitefronts were found in Britain and Ireland in the spring – the entire world population of this sub-species. The peak on Islay (where the flocks contained 10.1% young) was 6,500. Elsewhere in Scotland the proportion of juveniles was 11.8%, while in Ireland it was 16.6% at Wexford (which held 7,780 birds) and 14.4% elsewhere (among 4,100). Most of the Greylags in Table 1 were in the wintering concentrations in northern Britain,

which comprised 108,000 birds, with 19% young. The flocks of Barnacle Geese on Islay, the main wintering ground of the Greenland breeding population, contained 15.5% juveniles, those at Caerlaverock, the centre for the Svalbard birds, 11.9% (compared with 18.5% in the post-breeding flocks studied by a Wildfowl Trust expedition to Svalbard). For the third year in four Dark-bellied Brent Geese had an almost complete breeding failure, but the cold weather brought record numbers to Britain from the Continent in February, including 23,000 on the Wash. The autumn gathering of Light-bellied Brents at Strangford Lough, Co. Down, amounted to 14,500.

The Wash held 23,800 Shelducks at the beginning of February, the next largest concentration being 6,100 on the Dee Estuary in October. For the third winter running the total count of Wigeon in Britain was around 300,000. Many areas in the west carried abnormally large gatherings, while on the Ouse Washes the March count of 42,200 was the biggest for twelve years. As usual, Rutland Water held the most Gadwall – 1,000 in November. Many thousands of Teal left Britain in the cold snap, a well-documented movement. The Mersey Estuary's normal autumn concentrations of Teal and Pintail reached 8,350 and 6,000 respectively, somewhat lower than a decade ago, but still many more of either species than any other resort. The autumn level of Shoveler was the highest on record. Like Teal, Shoveler showed an exodus in the hard weather. There was also a slight movement to the coast.

As usual the Loughs Neagh/Beg basin held much the largest gatherings of diving ducks in the U.K., with peaks of 16,300 Pochard, 8,900 Tufted Ducks, 1,600 Scaup and 9,900 Goldeneye. One of the most notable counts of sea ducks in 1986–87 was that of 1,000 Velvet Scoters in Lunan Bay, Tayside, in September. Several hundred Smew reached Britain in the cold weather, including 22 at Dungeness, nowadays the species' main resort in the U.K. The annual assemblage of saw-bills in the Beaulieu and inner Moray Firths near Inverness amounted to 3,100 Mergansers and 1,200 Goosanders in January. A remarkable

