



## WILD GEESE

EIGHT species and subspecies of geese were recorded at the New Grounds during the season 1952-53. A single Greylag appeared, after two winters without one, and there were two Barnacles and a C nada Goose.

Two Lesser Whitefronts were seen, increasing the number of British records to twenty-two.

The highest number of geese present during the winter was 4700, in early January. This is the largest total recorded since the Trust was founded. The very large number was present for a short time only, but there were over 3000 geese from the beginning of December to the middle of January and 2000 or more for most of the rest of January and February.

Attempts to catch Whitefronts with rocket-nets were relatively unsuccessful, only two small catches being made, of fifty-four on 15 February and sixteen on 17 February.

### PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

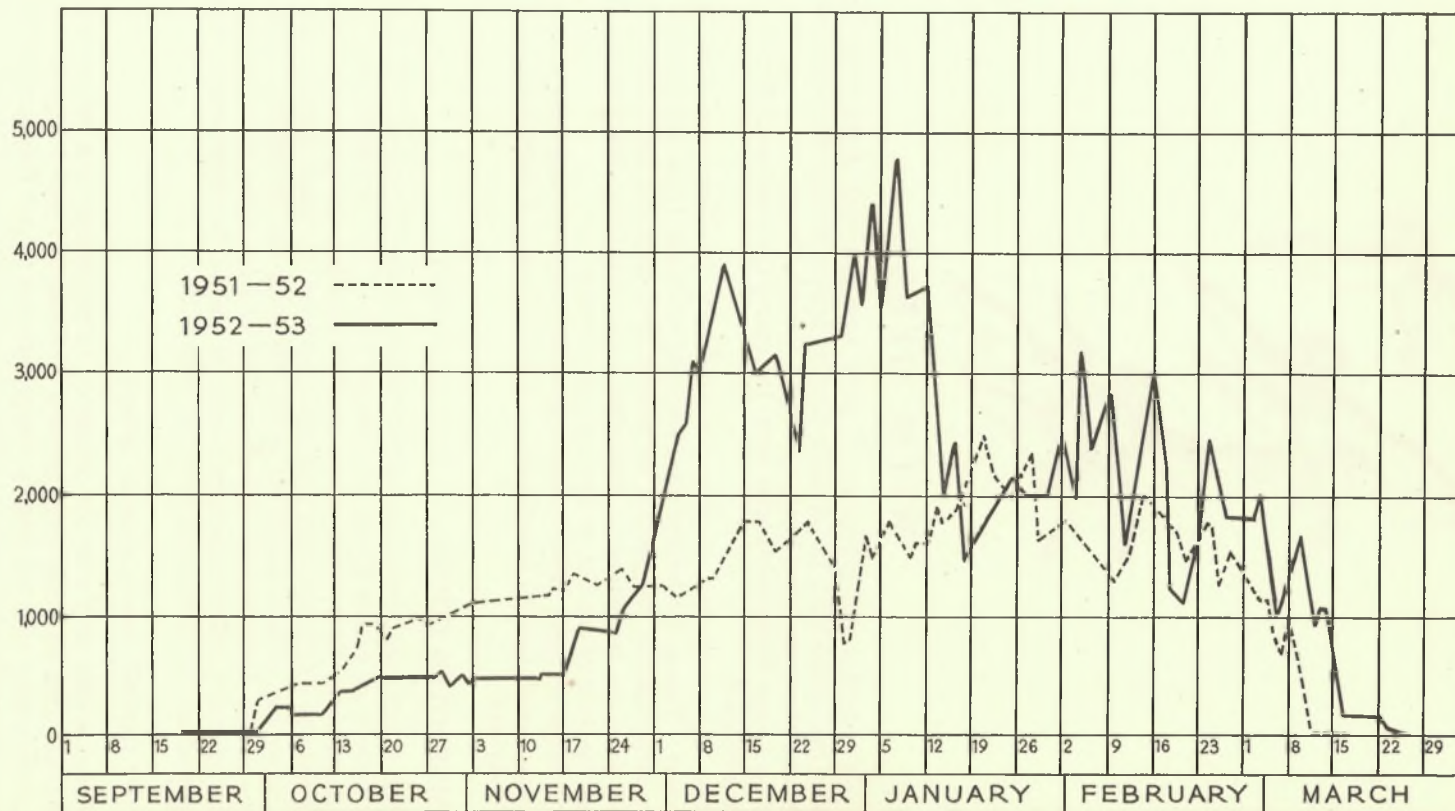
The arrivals and departures of this species in the autumn of 1952 resembled the pattern of earlier years, not that of 1951. The first three were seen on 20 September. There were sixteen on 30 September, thirty-seven on 1 October and sixty by 4 October. The total remained near this figure until the third week in November, with a maximum of seventy-three on 30 October, declining to forty-one on 23 November, eleven on 24th and not more than four thereafter until 2 January. None were seen during the rest of the winter until a single bird appeared on 18 March and remained until 25th.

### BEAN GOOSE (*Anser arvensis* subsp.)

A first-winter bird with the orange on its bill limited to a narrow transverse band was seen on many days between 10 December and 2 March. Another first-winter bird with bill largely orange was seen from 9 February to 13 March and a third with a bill similar to that of the first on 2 and 5 March.

Figure 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF WILD GEESE ON THE NEW GROUNDS 1951-53



Wildfowl Trust

A large, long-winged goose seen on 24 December and 25 January appeared to be a Bean  $\times$  Whitefront hybrid. Its back was unusually grey, the scapulars being very sharply marked, there were no black belly-markings, the neck was dark and there was very little white at the base of the bill. The bill was orange but had a white nail and was short for a Bean Goose.

**GREYLAG GOOSE** (*Anser anser anser*)

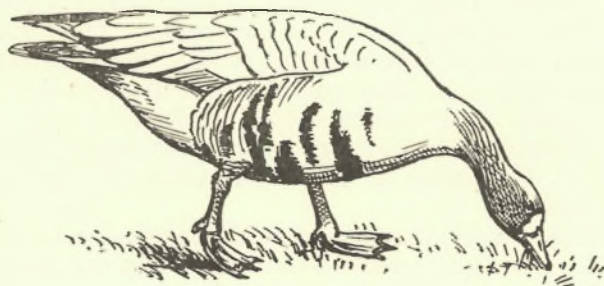
One 26 October to 27 November.

**EUROPEAN WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons albifrons*)

The first Whitefront appeared on 2 October. There were over four hundred by the middle of that month, but no further influx until mid-November. At the beginning of December there was a large and sustained increase to a peak of 3900 by 12th (see Figure 1 for a graph of the changes during the winter). The numbers then fell to 2400 on 23 December but rose to 4000 on 1 January and to at least 4700 on 6 January. By 8 January there were no more than 3700 and by 15th only 2000. From then until March the size of the flock fluctuated repeatedly, between limits of 1000 and 3100. The main departures took place from 10 to 17 March, although the last of the wintering flock did not leave until 26 March.

On 5 May 1953 a flock of thirty was seen on the river, by R. C. Philpott. This is an exceptionally late date.

Many of the geese ringed at the New Grounds in earlier years were seen again. None of the fifteen marked in February 1948 were noticed, but at least twenty of the sixty-nine marked with red rings in February 1950 were recognised, the numbers on four of the rings being read and the other birds being distinguished by individual differences in the black belly-markings. 129382, seen with a mate but no young on 9 December and 12 February, had also been identified in December 1951. Only four of the twenty-nine geese marked with blue rings in February 1951 were found, but twenty-three of the forty-eight marked with tall white rings in February 1952 reappeared. It had been hoped that the use of large numerals on these rings would make individual identification much easier, but the results were disappointing, only nine numbers being read.



**GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*)

A single adult 1 to 5 November. A group of three adults seen on several days between 18 November and 14 December and again 2 January. Single adults 4 January and 3 February.

**LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser erythropus*)

A first-winter bird seen on at least ten days between 27 November and 25 January, again from 17 February to 5 March and finally on 18 March. An adult reported on twelve days from 12 December to 1 March.

**BARNACLE GOOSE** (*Branta leucopsis*)

A first-winter bird remained from 30 November to 22 March. An adult was also present from 24 January to 13 March.

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*)

One joined the birds in the collection on 6 May 1953 and has remained.

**MARKING OF GEESE**

The capture of geese for ringing remains the principal activity of the Trust away from the New Grounds. In the autumn of 1952 two trips by the rocket-netting team resulted in the capture of 1219 geese. Eight catches were made in the period 12–27 October and a further eight between 12 and 25 November. Although the principal object of both trips was the capture of Pinkfeet, eighty-eight of the November catch were Greylags. The Pinkfeet caught included thirty-seven which already carried rings.

The rocket-netting technique remained much as described in the Fifth Annual Report, with only one major alteration—the substitution of cordite-propelled rockets for those using black powder as a propellant. The cordite rockets are substantially more efficient than the black powder ones, carrying the net over the geese more swiftly and, being smokeless and flashless, they are less likely to frighten the geese. Four catches of over one hundred were made. For the successful development of these rockets we are much indebted to Lord Geoffrey Percy, Lt-Col C. F. Tumber of the Royal Military College of Science, and Mr B. W. Johnson.

Although much valuable information on the numbers and movements of the Pink-footed Goose has been obtained from recaptures and recoveries reported to us by wildfowlers and others, it is proposed to await one more season's data before submitting the results to extensive analytical treatment. In view of the potential practical importance of this kind of data in providing information on which conservation policy can be based it is most undesirable to publish results prematurely. It is, however, intended to discuss both the methods and the results of this investigation at some length in the Seventh Annual Report.