

Wild Geese at the New Grounds, 1968-69

European White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons*.

The first arrivals of the winter were 10 on 27th October, the second latest date recorded. The next six weeks produced a trickle of additional birds until there were 114 on 9th December. The onset of a cold snap signalled a great surge in arrivals with 303 counted on 10th December, 690 on the 11th, 1,300 on the 12th and 3,000 on the 15th. Further influxes occurred later in the month to give a total of 3,900 on the 28th. This is the highest end of year figure since 1952. Arrivals continued over the next two weeks producing counts of 5,000 on 3rd January and 6,300 on the 14th. The flock remained at or near this very high level for the rest of the month with a peak count of 6,600 on the 29th. This is very close to the record count of 6,700 in February 1968. The very high numbers present in the 1967-68 winter we partly attributed to the decrease in disturbance during the foot and mouth epidemic. There was no such obvious reason this winter, unless there was a carry-over of the good effect from the previous year with the geese 'remembering' the better than usual conditions they found. However, the conditions did not remain so favourable during 1968-69, as in early February a cold spell with snow cover over the fields caused many of the geese to leave the area. The total dropped to 4,100 on 6th February. About 3,500-4,000 birds remained for the rest of February, the main departures starting in early March. There were 3,500 present on 6th March, 1,100 on the 7th, 600 on the 8th and 15 on the 9th. These last few stayed on during the cold weather of the

next two weeks, being last seen on the 24th.

1968 was one of the worst breeding seasons for the Whitefronts since we began collecting records in 1947. Only 13.2% young birds were counted in the flocks; average brood size of 1.6. This compares with the 22-year average of 28.1%.

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus*.

A pair of adults was first seen on 24th January and these stayed for the rest of the winter. Another adult, paired to a European Whitefront, was seen on 28th February and again on 5th March.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

An adult of the Russian race *rossicus* was first seen on 15th December and subsequently to the end of January.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*.

Two adult Pinkfeet were seen on 23rd January and frequently during February. They stayed on with the last 15 Whitefronts, departing with them on 24th March.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*.

A single Barnacle Goose appeared on 10th December. Two were present on 15th January and five on the 23rd. Only two were seen during February and a single bird was last seen on 5th March.

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*.

An adult bird was seen on 19th January and stayed to the end of the month. This is the seventh record for the New Grounds.

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Wild swans at Slimbridge, 1968-69

Bewick's Swans

The first Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* to arrive on Swan Lake this winter came earlier than ever, on 20th October 1968—20 days earlier than in the previous year. These first arrivals were all swans that had been to Swan Lake before: Pepper and Amber, Romeo and McJuliet, and Sahara and Gobi with one cygnet. The numbers built up very quickly and by Christmas there were 266.

The total number of swans identified this season was 439 and the most on one day was 366, 167 more than last season.

Comparisons with previous years can be seen from Table I which also shows the percentage of cygnets in the flock each year.

The percentage of cygnets was very low for the second year running. The largest brood was one of three cygnets, that of Lefty and Mr. Wrong. It is probable that this was due to bad weather conditions on the breeding grounds which, according to Russian sources, are on the southern half of the Yamal Peninsula and along the tundra bordering the Kara Sea. (Not all the swans from there