



WILD GEESE AT THE NEW GROUNDS 1956-57

THE winter of 1956-57 was the poorest for the goose watcher since the Trust was founded. The most geese seen were about 3300 on 2 February, and four species were recorded; only in 1951-52 was the maximum less than this, and only in 1947-48 had so few species been seen.

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

The first twenty-eight geese were seen on 24 September. The total rose to just over two hundred by the end of September, an unusually large number for that time. Further small additions occurred at fairly frequent intervals until early December, reaching a total of 980 on 8 December. Subsequently no substantial change occurred until after Christmas, when new arrivals brought the flock to 1800 on 4 January. More arrivals took the total to 2700 on 24 January, but some birds then left, so that at the end of the month only 2100 remained. A major influx then took place, and on 2 February the flock was estimated at 3300, the highest total for the season. After 5 February numbers dropped again to 2000, and remained at about that figure until nearly the end of the month. There was a return to 3000 on 26 February (an influx at this time seems to occur regularly), followed almost immediately by the beginning of the spring exodus: 1860 on 3 March, 1500 on 8th, 1475 on 11th, 336 on 13th, 3 on 16th, 2 on 18th. No more were seen until a solitary bird was noted from 11 June to 4 July.

Among the early arrivals the mean brood size was 4.67. It decreased throughout the season to only 2.50 at the end of February. Both these values are extremes, the mean brood size in October in the years 1949-45 being 3.46 and that for February being 2.66. First-winter birds made up 38% of the early arrivals and 35% of the flock on 1 January, but later in January and in February they accounted for only 27%. Evidently 1956 had been a successful breeding year, but losses of young birds during the winter must have been unusually heavy.

LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser erythropus*)

Three were seen in January and February 1957: a first-winter bird on 19 January and two in adult plumage on various dates between 19 January and 1 March. Both adults were seen on the same day, though not together, on 25 January and 10 February. Some of the records of single adults on other days cannot be definitely identified as one rather than the other of the two, although the specific identification is not in question.

BEAN GOOSE (*Anser fabalis*)

One seen on 29 December and 6 January.

PINK-FOOTED GOOSE (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

Seventeen seen on 2 October, increasing to 52 by 7th and fluctuating between 65 (4 and 11 November) and 29 (17 November) until late November, dwindling to one by 8 December. No more were seen except for a single juvenile, present from 10 January to 26 February, and a single adult seen between 26 February and 15 March. Twenty-two of 55 seen on 27 October were young birds, 21 in seven family parties and one unattached. Three of the parents carried rings, two put on in Iceland in 1953 and one apparently ringed somewhere in Britain in 1952. The proportion of young birds is higher than that encountered in rocket-netting catches elsewhere in Britain in October 1956, suggesting that the Slimbridge birds had a more successful breeding season than most.

WILD DUCKS AT THE NEW GROUNDS 1947-57

THE first five Trust Reports included notes on the status of ducks on the Severn estuary. These short annual summaries were discontinued because they seemed largely repetitive and of merely parochial interest. This review of ten years of observation has two main claims on the attention. First, as a summary of apparent changes in the status of species visiting the estuary of the Severn, and second, as a report on the effects of the development of the Trust collection on the numbers and habits of the ducks frequenting Berkeley New Decoy and the pens and enclosures which have gradually been constructed around it. The two are in practice not separate, for there is constant traffic between the river and the pens; but for some species it is appropriate as well as convenient to write as if they were.

The area of the estuary which has been most closely watched is that bounded in the north-east by Frampton Pill, on the south by the New Grounds, on the south-west by the breakwater at Purton, and on the west and north by the main river channel, which lies much nearer to the Forest of Dean shore (from the Severn Bridge to Awre) than to the New Grounds. Scarcely any observations have been made from the north-west shore itself. This omission is probably not serious, since the best refuges and feeding-places for ducks are on the south side of the channel. For the same reason, the comparative paucity of records