

Progress on bird ringing by The Wildfowl Trust during 1988

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The total number of swans, geese and ducks ringed by The Wildfowl Trust is shown in the Table below. Birds that have been ringed as part of Wildfowl Trust's projects, but using rings from other groups, are included for the first time. This has increased the total number of birds ringed to nearly 7500. Even without including this group, and despite a reduction in the catch at Blunham, the total ringed exceeded the levels for recent years with Abberton and Borough Fen making a very satisfactory contribution.

It is perhaps fitting that Abberton had such a good season, since the last full-time professional ringer in Britain, Roy King, moves from Abberton on 31 March 1989. Roy began ringing wildfowl at Abberton in the 1950s as an assistant to Major-General C.B. Wainright and took over full-time on the General's death in October 1968. By then, 42,667 ducks and 56,000 non-wildfowl had been ringed. Since 1968, Roy has been responsible for ringing another 44,428 ducks and several hundred other birds, mainly grebes and Coot *Fulica atra*, and has made an enormous contribution to The Trust's research programme. Including re-taps and controls, Roy has probably handled more than 125,000 birds! In March he moves to Kingsnympton, Devon, to look after estate matters for The Trust but has recruited a team of volunteers organised by George Brown to carry on ringing at Abberton under supervision.

Increased attention has been given to promoting wildfowl ringing throughout Britain by local groups supervised by The Wildfowl Trust. Considerable success has been achieved for target species such as Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchos*, Wigeon *Anas penelope* and Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* with local cannon-netting teams. In the next three years, increased attention will be given to these three species as well as to the maintenance of our effort in

catching Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*, Teal *A. crecca*, Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. It is now possible to obtain estimates of annual mortality rate from ringing and recovery data, using the BROWNIE mortality computer models developed in the USA. Analysis of survival and movements in relation to body condition when caught and variations in survival in different refuge areas can also be analysed. The models depend on achieving an annual target ringing total of some 400–600 per species. Considerable progress has been made with the inputting of the backlog of ringing data (including biometrics) in preparation for running the mortality models. All species, except Mallard, are complete. The possibility of completing the process for the whole of Britain (by going through the BTO's schedules of non-Trust ringing) is being investigated and a trial run for Teal has been completed. It is hoped that we can not only maintain our present ringing performance but increase it, particularly in parts of the range of British wildfowl which have not been covered in the past.

Many current wildfowl research programmes depend heavily on ringing and other marking techniques. The year 1988 saw increased ringing effort for several projects. Three hundred and sixty-five Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* were ringed with metal and plastic rings in Iceland last summer by a small team of scientists from Slimbridge. This has generated over 100 sightings in western Britain and Ireland, piecing together the movements of individuals and families from their summer breeding grounds to their winter haunts. Young Mute Swans *C. olor* have been ringed for several years at the traditional breeding colony near Abbotsbury, Dorset, adding to the ringed population – non-breeding birds are gathered together and ringed whilst flightless every four years or

Swans, geese and ducks ringed by The Wildfowl Trust, 1988.

	Abberton	Abbotsbury	Blunham	Borough Fen	Eastpark	Martin Mere	Penshorpe	Welney	Slimbridge	Other stations and overseas	TOTALS
Whooper Swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i>				93					1	424	518
Mute Swan <i>C. olor</i>		165		5	44				43		257
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus bewickii</i>									24		24
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>						328			23		351
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>									26	179	205
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>									103	55	158
Barnacle Goose <i>B. leucopsis</i>										106	106
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	7			4					13	158	182
Mandarin <i>Aix galericulata</i>									2		2
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	1		5	43	48		3	69	3	425	597
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	71		8	37			9		26		151
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	746	52	1	189			3	17	23	3	1034
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	588	82		733	44	17			647	57	2168
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	2			2					58	8	70
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	9		1	2			1		6		19
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	185		55		1		1		244		486
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>	671		336		1		11		37	1	1057
Scaup <i>A. marila</i>	4										4
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	22								1		23
Smew <i>Mergus albellus</i>	1										1
Totals	2307	299	406	1015	231	345	28	86	1257	1439	7413

so, and the next round-up is planned for 1989. Another 351 Pink-footed Geese have been ringed, mostly at Martin Mere, Lancashire, and these too have been ringed with plastic rings. This brings the total number of marked birds to over 600, and over 350 ringed birds have been seen (see previous report). Wigeon too have been the subject of a study that investigates how

birds from one site move during the winter months. Four hundred and twenty-five have been cannon-netted by local ringing groups and each has been marked with coloured plastic rings and a flash of yellow dye on the belly. It has been possible to establish that some Wigeon caught near Inverness, Highland Region, spend at least part of their winter further south at Martin Mere and

Welney. Similarly some Wigeon that spent the autumn in Britain have been seen in Denmark in late winter suggesting that there may be a considerable turnover of birds 'using' Britain between September and March.

During 1989 expeditions to Svalbard to catch Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, Iceland to catch Whooper Swans (see the

following report) and Greenland to catch White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* will boost the ringing effort for these species and add to our understanding of migration and mortality. Nearer home, Shelduck, Greylag *A. anser* in Scotland and Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* ringing will form part of projects looking at the requirements and habits of our wildfowl populations.

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