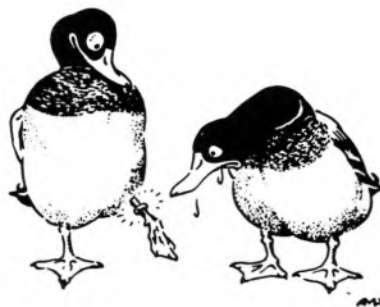


## Progress on bird ringing by The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust during 1989

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The total number of swans, geese and ducks ringed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust is shown in the Table below. Fewer birds were ringed than in 1988 (7413) partly because no one at Abberton is now catching birds on a full-time basis.

The only professional ringer employed by the Trust ceased full-time ringing at the end of March. Roy King left Abberton to become Estate Officer for the Trust at its Kingsnympton estate in Devon. He still acts as advisor, providing expert training and advice for amateur ringers at ringing stations. Abberton is now run by a small team of enthusiastic volunteers, working mainly at weekends under Roy's supervision. This change from a daily catching routine, the loss of some traps, extremely low water levels and a ban on activity around the reservoir in October because of algal blooms, meant that fewer ducks were caught in 1989. Despite these set-backs, nearly a thousand ducks were ringed and the volunteer team, led by George Brown, should be congratulated. Interestingly, all but 12 of the 102 Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* ringed in Britain to the end of 1988 had been caught at Abberton. Essex is not a stronghold of the bird and yet this year a further 12 have been ringed at Abberton. There have been six recoveries to date, all close to the site of ringing, giving little information about movements. Borough Fen, now designated an Ancient Monument and run by the Trust under a Management Agreement with English Heritage as a site of historical importance, caught over a thousand birds for the first time since 1975. A swan pipe is being constructed at Martin Mere to enable the ringing of our migratory swans to increase.

Our aim of dispersing the ringing effort to new volunteer trapping stations has met with some success. Wildfowl ringing has started at Derwent Ings (Yorkshire), Pett Levels (Sussex) and Rutland Water (Leicestershire), and it is hoped to encourage more new sites in 1990.

One major challenge is to establish wildfowl ringing on Strangford Lough (Northern Ireland). Many hundreds of ducks were ringed there in the 1960s and 1970s and the siting of the Trust's new Centre at Castle Espie should provide an incentive for ringing to start again.

After the successful 1988 expedition, Dr Eileen Rees once again travelled to Iceland in July and August and, with the help of Icelanders and a British party, managed to catch 108 Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus*, including 28 recaptures. Initial findings suggest that the survival rate of young hatched in the northeast Icelandic highlands is lower than that of birds hatched in lowland valleys. Sightings of individual swans ringed on the 1988 expedition was 43%, many being found in Ireland during the winter.

As part of the long-term population monitoring study at Abbotsbury, Dorset, 707 moulting Mute Swans *C. olor* were rounded-up on a fine July morning. A team of 60 volunteers from all over the country, and a few swan enthusiasts from the Netherlands, ringed 165 new swans and processed the remaining recaptured birds before a well earned lunch. Sadly, many of the 1989 cygnets died as a result of an outbreak of duck virus enteritis.

The native breeding Greylag Goose *Anser anser* population of the Uists has been the subject of a detailed population study for six years and this is now run by the Trust as part of its contract with the Nature Conservancy Council. Eighty-seven moulting adults and young were caught off the North Uist coast in 1989 and each bird was fitted with a unique coloured plastic ring in addition to a BTO metal ring.

A successful expedition to Spitsbergen led by Dr Jeff Black caught 716 Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* despite an exceptionally early season resulting in many of the non-breeders already flying when the team arrived. Of these, 254 had been ringed in the same areas in previous years. Over 90% of the birds caught have

been seen at Caerlaverock during the autumn. Thirty-eight Barnacle Geese of the Greenland population were ringed on Islay in February using cannon-nets, and 32 White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons flavirostris* were caught in Greenland on an expedition led by Dr Tony Fox.

Catching of Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* at Martin Mere was not so successful this year as last. The main cannon-netting site, baited with potatoes, attracted large numbers of swans in the autumn, making cannon-netting impossible on several occasions. Several attempts were made to catch in Scotland at Montrose, Loch Leven and on the north Solway coast, but these were largely unsuccessful because of poor weather and the small number of stubble fields left after an early harvest. Sightings of the 762 birds so far marked with engraved plastic rings have increased this year, leading to a better understanding of site loyalty and movements during the winter months. Several Lancashire-ringed Pinkfeet have been seen in Norfolk this autumn, a link long thought probable.

Just under 400 Wigeon *Anas penelope* were marked with plastic rings in 1989 as part of the 'turnover and within-winter movement' project. Most of the adult males' forewings were marked with a bright yellow dye allowing observers to pick out ringed birds in flocks. Some interesting movements and return patterns have been established and are summarised in the following report. Much of the catching effort has been undertaken by cannon-netting teams, in par-

ticular Brian Etheridge and the Highland Ringing Group.

A new design of walk-in trap was constructed at Slimbridge, specifically to catch Teal *A. crecca* at night. Small, portable traps were operated by David Paynter and Nigel Jarrett and proved extremely successful, with 220 Teal being caught between September and December. Several ringing groups have expressed an interest in using the traps in the future. Barry Hughes (a student at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) and Keith Goverd (Chew Valley Ringing Station) have caught some wildfowl at night using a bright light and a small boat. The birds are temporarily 'dazzled' and caught in a hand net. Although attempts to catch Ruddy Ducks have proved unsuccessful (see pp. 133-138), 15 Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* were ringed (in 1988, only 39 Little Grebes were caught throughout Britain).

Most Trust Centres and ringing stations are involved in marking species other than wildfowl. Passerines have been ringed at Borough Fen Decoy and Abberton for many years - indeed Major-General Wainwright contributed considerable early ringing data in Essex. A total of more than 1000 birds of over 40 different non-wildfowl species was ringed in 1989; some of these, for example Kingfisher and Redwing, are on the NCC list of target species for which ringing is of special value. A Constant Effort Site is planned for the Decoy wood at Slimbridge as part of a project run by the British Trust for Ornithology.

## Swans, geese and ducks ringed by The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust during 1989.

	Abbe	Abbo	Blun	Boro	East	Mart	Slim	Other	Total
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>		158		5	18		47	15	243
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus bewickii</i>							54	4	58
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>					38			127	165
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>						154		6	160
White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons</i>								32	32
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>			34		1		40	87	162
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>		8			1		12	68	89
Barnacle Goose <i>B. leucopsis</i>								492	492
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		10				14	11	25	60
Mandarin <i>Aix galericulata</i>							6		6
Carolina <i>A. sponsa</i>				1					1
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>			1	3	26		3	361	394
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>		34		6			49	9	98
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>		373	51	1	362		229	143	1159
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>		253	53		930	123	339	684	2589
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>			3		1		24	1	29
Garganey <i>A. querquedula</i>		1						1	2
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>				4			5	2	11
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>		22		87			106	3	218
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuligula</i>		248		84			13	31	376
Scaup <i>A. marila</i>		1							1
Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>								2	2
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>		12					2		14
Totals	965	263	212	1306	207	507	1285	1616	6361

Abbe - Abberton

Abbo - Abbotsbury (incl EGI ringed)

Blun - Blunham

Boro - Borough Fen Decoy, Peakirk

East - Eastpark, Caerlaverock

Mart - Martin Mere

Slim - Slimbridge

Other stations and overseas include:

Lanelli (Mute Swans), Chew Valley Ringing Station (ducks, grebes),  
 Derwent Ings (ducks), Welney (swans), North Uist (Greylags, Whooper Swans),  
 Iceland (Whooper Swans), Spitsbergen (Barnacle Geese),  
 Greenland (White-fronted Geese), Blagdon (Canada Geese),  
 Islay (Barnacle Geese), Bridgwater Bay (Shelduck),  
 Eden Estuary (Shelduck, Wigeon), Kirby Bellars (Wigeon),  
 Blithfield (Wigeon), Inverness Area (Wigeon), Rutland Water (ducks),  
 Pett Levels (swans and ducks).