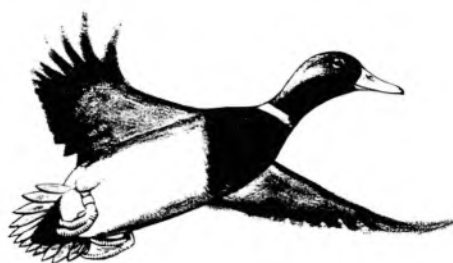


Progress on bird ringing by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust during 1992

CARL MITCHELL



The total number of swans, geese and ducks ringed by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) in 1992 is shown in the Table opposite; although the total is 25% down on 1991 (by 1626), target ringing was maintained for Teal *Anas crecca*, Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuliga*.

Abberton Ringing Station continues, under the supervision of Roy King and George Brown with help from volunteers, to provide good numbers of Teal, Tufted Duck and the only Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* to be caught in Britain. Whilst there is concern about movements of British Ruddy Ducks to European countries, there is, unfortunately, no evidence from ringing recoveries to prove these movements. Of the 120 Ruddy Ducks ringed in Britain since 1978, only five have been recovered - all close to or at the site of ringing. An increase in the number of Ruddy Ducks ringed would help to establish if and when migration to the Continent occurs.

The single pipe used at Abbotsbury Decoy is still fed and operated by Dick Dalley. 1992 proved to be a good year for Teal trapping, including an excellent catch of 32 new birds on 29 December. The swannery at Abbotsbury celebrates its 600th anniversary in 1993. Considerable information has been gained on the biology of colonially-breeding Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* through a colour-ringing project started in the late 1960s and run jointly by WWT and the Edward Grey Institute at Oxford University. Part of the 1993 celebrations will include a review of the ringing project.

Blunham, once again, had an excellent year, providing almost all the diving ducks caught in Britain. The continued success of Arnold Zwetsloot's trap is reflected in the totals - 912 birds being the largest number of wildfowl caught at any site.

Ringing at Borough Fen Decoy, and a small

amount at Peakirk, is now organised by Ivan Newton; numbers of birds caught there have, however, declined in the past few years from over 1000 in 1989 to less than 500 in 1992. WWT Centres seem to have had a poor year generally: there were no major swan catches at Martin Mere in 1992, and the Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* catch at Caerlaverock provided virtually no ducks. The number of re-trapped swans caught each winter is gradually increasing and, consequently, the number of newly-ringed birds forms a lower proportion of every catch. At Slimbridge the new 'South Lake' has drawn birds away from the decoy pond and the Rushy Pen so that the number of ducks caught daily on early feeds has fallen. Considerable effort has, once again, been put by Richard Chappell into the maintenance of the Slimbridge Decoy and the construction of a new hide overlooking the pond; this, however, caused some disturbance during the autumn months. Small 'teal traps' at Welney have provided a small number of ducks for ringing there, and, at Slimbridge, they provided 42 new birds.

Close liaison with other other ringing groups has been maintained. The trap at Icklesham, Sussex, constructed in 1990 by WWT staff, continues to do well with catches of Teal, plus surprisingly good numbers of Pintail *Anas acuta* and Gadwall *Anas strepera*. A male Garganey *Anas querquedula* caught and ringed on 4 April at Icklesham was trapped at Abberton 19 days later.

Two expeditions sought migratory swans in 1992. Eileen Rees and John Bowler were successful in their attempts to study and mark Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* near the Kanin Peninsula in northern Russia (60°20'N 53°40'E). They caught 72 birds and, after Eileen and John had left, a small team of Dutch scientists collaborating with the project managed to catch a further

Numbers of wildfowl ringed by the Trust in 1992. Some of these were ringed as part of The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's projects but with rings from other groups.

	Abbe	Abbo	Blun	Boro	East	Mart	Slim	Other	Total
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>		164			21	1	54	3	239
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus bewickii</i>						3	14	73	90
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>					46	4		335	385
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>					1	26		79	106
White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons</i>								92	92
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>							16	140	156
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>							2	224	226
Barnacle Goose <i>B. leucopsis</i>								118	118
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		4		1		89	1	40	135
Mandarin <i>Aix galericulata</i>				2			4		6
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	14		45	1	6		2	137	205
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	19		34	3			25	22	103
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	426	151	16	179		18	42	192	1024
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	192	57	2	267	26	16	179	122	861
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	2	1			1	24	26	28	82
Garganey <i>A. querquedula</i>	2							2	4
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	9							1	10
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	15		361				50	3	429
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuliga</i>	143		454				5	2	604
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>								20	20
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	11								11
Total	833	377	912	453	101	181	420	1633	4906

Abbe - Abberton, Essex

Abbo - Abbotsbury, Dorset

Blun - Blunham, Bedfordshire

Boro - Borough Fen Decoy & Peakirk, Cambridgeshire

East - Eastpark Farm, Caerlaverock WWT, Dumfries

Mart - Martin Mere WWT, Lancashire

Slim - Slimbridge Decoy & WWT Centre, Gloucester

Totals include one each of Scaup *Aythya marila* (Abberton) and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (Abberton).

Other sites include: **Frampton**, Glos (Canada Geese), **Grampian Ringing Group** (Pinkfeet), **Highland Ringing Group** (Pinkfeet and Greylags), **Icklesham**, Sussex (dabbling ducks), **Islay** (Barnacle Geese), **Ribble Estuary** (Shelduck), **North Uist** (Greylag Geese), **Derwent Ings** (Mallard, Teal), **Chew Valley Lake** (Canada Geese, ducks), **Wexford**, EIRE (Wigeon), **Tay Ringing Group** (Wigeon), **Mid Wales** (Goosanders), **Llanelli**, WWT (Mute Swan, ducks), **Castle Espie**, WWT & **Nottinghamshire** (Wigeon).

290 birds (not included in the ringing table). Olafur Einarsson and Richard Hesketh successfully caught over 270 new Whooper Swans in Iceland, with a further 64 being taken by our Icelandic colleagues. In all, including re-traps, 419 birds were handled.

The catching of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* in 1992 suffered several setbacks. Although cannon-nets were set on five occasions at Martin Mere, they were not fired for a variety of reasons (for example, fog and disturbance from wildfowling). However,

some success was achieved in ringing away from Martin Mere - three successful catches, two in Grampian Region (just north of Newburgh) and one in Highland Region (Loch Eye), totalled 79 new birds. Grampian Ringing Group and Highland Ringing Group were instrumental in the catching attempts.

Barry Hughes and I spent three days in Denmark in March at the invitation of the Kalø National Environmental Research Institute assisting Danish researchers to catch Pinkfeet; 120 birds were caught in two attempts. Efforts to catch Pinkfeet in Iceland, however, were unsuccessful. Although up to 12 birds were in the catching area on three occasions, technical difficulties with the Icelandic cannon nets prevented a successful fire.

Highland Ringing Group provided a good start to our attempts to catch wintering Icelandic Greylags *Anser anser* (see last progress report), providing 99 new birds in two attempts. These have also been ringed with engraved plastic leg rings, and marked on the belly with a temporary yellow dye to aid observers locating birds as they disperse during the winter. Forty-one native Greylags were newly-ringed on the Uists under the supervision of Paul Boyer, a local volunteer. Sightings of these sedentary birds have been collated at Slimbridge in an attempt to model population processes and to derive an independent assessment of mortality.

In July, I was fortunate to spend three weeks in west Greenland on an expedition to ring White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons flavirostris* organised by the Greenland White-fronted Goose Study. Ninety-five birds were caught in all, 90 newly-ringed and five re-trapped from a previous expedition. We were somewhat surprised to catch, in addition, ten Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* - the first to be taken in Greenland. Many sightings of the Whitefronts were made in the autumn, particularly from Islay, Mull of Kintyre and the Western Isles. Attempts to catch Whitefronts on Islay during the autumn, to support the research programmes funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, were unsuccessful, although one Whitefront was caught with 119 Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*. Of the Greenland-ringed Canada Geese, three were reported shot in Labrador, N.E. Canada (56° 43'N 61° 20'W) in the autumn - the wintering quarters of the remainder have yet to be revealed.

Stephanie Warren's study of two

populations of Canada Geese entered its third and final year, and catches were made at Chew Valley Lake (163 new birds) and Frampton (51 new birds).

South West Lancashire Ringing Group were, once more, out setting cannon nets for Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* on the Ribble Estuary in Spring 1992. Although the number of newly-ringed birds was only 35, the number of retraps from previous attempts is very high.

Flightless female and young Goosanders *Mergus merganser* were again caught near Rhayader, mid-Wales, in July with the help of WWT staff and Tony Cross. The 20 birds were also marked with single colour plastic leg rings in order to look at winter dispersal. Three recoveries so far reveal movements within Britain northeastwards to Clwyd, Cumbria and Grampian Region.

WWT cannon nets were fired 12 times in 1992 catching a total of 315 wildfowl including 175 Pinkfeet, 119 Barnacle Geese, four Greenland White-fronted Geese and 67 Wigeon (all of them target species).

Trapping of wildfowl requires techniques often quite different from those employed to net passerines or other birds. Geese and swans can be caught during the summer months when they moult their primaries and temporarily become flightless. In the winter, ducks are caught in swim-in cage traps ('Wainwright' traps), decoys or, in a very few places, larger 'swan' traps that are baited with grain. Occasionally nets are fired over grazing geese or Wigeon. The welfare of the birds must be considered at every level and each activity is controlled strictly by licences issued by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. To be able to ring a bird every person must undergo a period of training and become familiar, not only with trapping and handling techniques, but also with how to determine the age and sex of every bird. Normally, each bird caught is marked with a small metal leg ring bearing the address of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), who administer the ringing schemes in Britain and Ireland. If a bird is found dead or caught again alive, details of the ring number are sent to the BTO who then inform the finder and the ringer of all the recovery data.

Many WWT research projects rely on observations of colour-marked individuals. Any sightings of wildfowl bearing colour rings (with or without engraved characters), plumage dyes, or collars are welcomed. Every ef-

fort is made to trace the ringing details of such birds and these are forwarded to observers. Please send details of species, date, place and type of colour mark seen to:

Colour-marked Wildfowl, The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge, Gloucester, GL2 7BT.

Even if it is not possible to read any letters or numbers that are engraved on rings, it may be possible to tell where the bird was caught.

Ringing studies are not complete without reporting our results. In 1992, in addition to projects dependent on individual marking (e.g. goose and migratory swan projects), papers were written on the movements and dis-

persal of Shoveler in relation to wintering numbers in Britain and on the dispersal of Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* from Slimbridge in relation to disease.

In addition to general wildfowl ringing, WWT staff helped run the Constant Effort Site in the Slimbridge Decoy wood (362 new passerines ringed), and 33 young Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* were marked with engraved colour-rings at Washington WWT Centre. It is hoped to establish winter dispersal patterns from Washington and to investigate return rates of breeding birds.

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