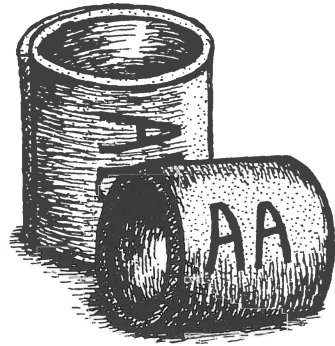


Progress in bird ringing by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust during 1994

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The number of swans, geese and ducks ringed by WWT in 1994 is shown in **Table 1**. The total (6,243) is up 8% on 1993 (by 474) and ringing targets were maintained for Teal *Anas crecca*, Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* and Wigeon *A. penelope*. The overall total is somewhat inflated by a new project that involved round-ups of moulting Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* in and around London and contributed 1,194 newly ringed birds (19% of the overall total). However, compared with 1993, the number of ducks (including Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*) caught in 1994 (3,613) is only 9% down on 1993.

Numbers of ducks caught at Abberton Ringing Station were up by 20% on 1993 and the total included 22 Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis*. In addition, seven Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, four Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* and 102 Coot *Fulica atra* were trapped and ringed. The Ruddy Duck wing-tagging project continued in 1994, although there were no sightings reported from anywhere other than the capture site and Hanningfield Reservoir, Essex.

Abbotsbury Decoy provided few ducks in 1994 although totals for both Teal and Mallard were up on 1993. There was no Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* round-up during the summer, although 94 cygnets were ringed at Abbotsbury in the autumn. Numbers of ducks caught in the trap at Blunham were down on 1993 (by 78%) and this affected the overall ringing totals for Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. Both the last two years' totals have been over 1,000 ducks but unfortunately, Arnold Zwetsloot was out of action during the autumn through injury, and no major

duck catches took place. Borough Fen Decoy had another good year, although Mallard formed nearly four-fifths of the catch total; over 100 Teal were also caught, the eighth successive year that this has been achieved.

No birds were caught in the Slimbridge swan pipe during the early part of the year since the main gate broke during the 1993-94 winter and awaited repair. During the summer the old swan pipe, built in 1969, was dismantled and a new pipe completed by early autumn. This was made possible by a special appeal to WWT members. The first catch in October proved a considerable success with 61 new Pochard being caught – although no swan catch was made. Small 'Teal traps' proved successful again in the autumn with just over 200 newly-ringed. These inexpensive traps are constructed from weldmesh netting and can be moved around a flooded meadow in response to the birds feeding behaviour at night. On the whole, the decoy at Slimbridge had a reasonable year, notably for Mallard, although the only ten Mandarin *Aix galericulata* caught in 1994 were trapped there.

Catching at Martin Mere met with limited success in 1994. A single swan catch in February provided the only new Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* (although the total catch involved 51 migratory swans) and very few ducks. The overall total is the lowest since catching started there in the mid-1980s. It is hoped to have a swan catch there in early 1995, which should also provide some ducks. Caerlaverock had one swan catch and although nearly 100 Whooper Swans were caught, only 34 were newly ringed birds. The 36 Wigeon caught

there are also valuable. An attempt to cannon-net a large flock of Pintail *Anas acuta* in September was unsuccessful due to equipment failure – unfortunately the effort invested in siting the nets carefully was not reflected in the outcome. There were no wildfowl ringed at WWT Llanelli nor at WWT Welney and only three Mallard were caught in a newly constructed duck trap at WWT Washington.

Two 'Wainwright' traps were built at Mahee Island, near WWT Castle Espie in August by the authors, and a third was constructed by Kerry Mackie. Once the perimeter predator-proof fence was completed in late autumn, catching started in earnest. In a little over ten weeks nearly 250 Teal had been caught and, in addition, the traps provided a small number of waders including 20 Redshank *Tringa totanus* and three Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*. The traps are sited on Mahee Island where a freshwater lake provides a roosting site protruding into the brackish Strangford Lough. Catching there will, we hope, provide evidence of the importance of the Lough as a strategic migratory and wintering site, particularly for Wigeon, Pintail and Shoveler *Anas clypeata*.

Liaison with other ringing groups continued in 1994. The 'Wainwright' trap at Loch Eye, Easter Ross, operated by Highland Ringing Group, produced 30 Tufted Ducks, small numbers of Wigeon and Greylag Geese *Anser anser*. The duck traps at Derwent Ings, South Humberside, run by Tim Dixon, had a better year than in 1993, and Tim continued last year's success at catching Black-necked Grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* with another four young birds trapped. In just two years, Tim has caught six out of the eight Black-necked Grebes ringed in Britain. The duck trap at Pett levels, East Sussex, run by Steve Rumsey and John Wilshire, had a relatively quiet year with 54 Teal being the highlight. The five 'Wainwright' traps built at Rutland Water by Baz Hughes and the authors in December 1993, were operational for the first few months of 1994 although they failed to catch any Ruddy Ducks. The traps could not be manned during the rest of the year but will be operated again in 1995.

Ducks and geese caught at Loch Leven are included in the totals, and the successful cannon-netting attempts by Gordon Wright and Alan Lauder have provided excellent numbers of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* and Wigeon (both species caught as part of WWT projects). Teal, Shelduck and a single Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* were added bonuses. Cannon-netting of Wigeon in Nottinghamshire continued into 1994 with considerable success and Adrian Blackburn was granted his own licence to operate the nets during the summer. His first catch in the autumn was of 106 birds.

Two expeditions sought migratory swans on their breeding grounds. John Bowler and David Paynter were successful in their attempts to catch Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus* in northern Russia, in collaboration with Danish, Russian and Dutch researchers. Olafur Einarsson continued the excellent effort in catching 290 new Whooper swans in central Iceland and 101 retraps. Two birds caught by Olafur and Dr Colin Pennycuik of Bristol University, were fitted with satellite transmitters (see Bewick's and Whooper Swans *Cygnus columbianus bewickii* and *C. Cygnus*: the 1994-95 season, this issue).

The catching and ringing of Pink-footed Geese suffered several set-backs in 1994. Cannon-nets were fired twice at Martin Mere in the spring but provided only 44 new birds. There were no catching attempts during the autumn there. Nets were set in Aberdeenshire and at Montrose Basin in March although both attempts were unsuccessful. David Patterson, using nets belonging to the North Solway Ringing Group, did rather better, catching 31 new birds near the Caerlaverock Centre in April. In addition to the 153 Pinkfeet caught at Loch Leven, another ten new birds were caught by Highland Ringing Group during their attempts to catch Icelandic Greylags – also successful with 286 new birds from catches in both the spring and autumn.

A major project looking at the movements and population dynamics of Canada Geese in and around London was initiated in 1994. Due, in part, to

Table 1: Numbers of wildfowl ringed by WWT in 1994. Some of these were ringed as part of WWT's projects using rings from other groups.

	Abbe	Abbo	Blun	Boro	Cast	Caer	Mart	Slim	Other	Total
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>		148				5		49	57	259
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus bewickii</i>									43	43
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>						34	20		290	344
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>						32	44		163	239
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>						3			309	312
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>						5			1194	1199
Barnacle Goose <i>B. leucopsis</i>									234	234
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	4						14	3	114	135
Mandarin <i>Aix galericulata</i>								10		10
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>			17			36		1	631	685
Gadwal <i>A. strepera</i>	83		44	1				10		138
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	83	74		111	248			203	231	950
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	102	47	12	418	58	44		158	366	1205
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>	8		1		3	1	3	5	5	26
Garganey <i>A. querquedula</i>	1								2	3
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>	10		3	3				1		17
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	19		140	1			2	63		225
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuliga</i>	92		56		4			3	32	187
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>	22									22
Total	424	269	273	534	313	160	83	506	3671	6243

Totals include one Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (Martin Mere) and nine Goosanders *Mergus merganser* (mid-Wales).

Abbe Abberton Ringing Station, Essex (George Brown, Graham Ekins, Roy King)

Abbo Abbotsbury, Dorset (E.G.I., Dick Dalley and others)

Blun Blunham, Bedfordshire (Arnold Zwetsloot, Peter Zwetsloot, Ivan Newton)

Boro Borough Fen Decoy, Cambridgeshire (Ivan Newton, Tony Cook)

Cast WWT Castle Espie, County Down (Kerry Mackie, Paddy Mackie, James Orr, Alex Portig)

Caer WWT Caerlaverlock, Dumfries (Richard Hesketh, David Patterson and others)

Mart WWT Martin Mere, Lancashire (Chris Tomlinson, Andy Wooldridge, John Turner and others)

Slim WWT Slimbridge, Gloucester (Decoy and Swan Pipe, Richard Chappell, David Paynter and others)

Other sites include: Grampian Ringing Group (Greylags), **Highland Ringing Group** (Greylags, Pinkfeet, ducks), **Icklesham**, Sussex (dabbling ducks), **Islay** (Barnacle Geese), **Ribble Estuary** (Shelduck), **Derwent Ings** (dabbling ducks), **mid-Wales** (Goosanders), **Loch Leven** (Pinkfeet, ducks), **Rutland Water** (ducks), **London lakes** (Canada Geese and Greylags) and **Nottinghamshire** (Wigeon) and also **WWT Foreign Expeditions: Iceland**, Whooper Swans (Olafur Einarsson), **Russia**, Bewick's Swan (John Bowler and David Paynter)

considerable team effort and some good luck, 1,746 Canada Geese and eight Greylag Geese were caught and fitted with engraved plastic rings. Some of the Canada Geese had been caught in previous years and fitted only with

metal rings, yet 1,184 were new birds. To the end of 1994, over 1,000 resightings had been reported and the value of this marking effort will become apparent in future years.

Over 230 Barnacle Geese were caught

with cannon-nets by Steve Percival and Mike Peacock at the RSPB's reserve on Islay. This forms part of a long-running population study based on engraved plastic rings allowing individual recognition. Another successful attempt to catch Shelduck on the Ribble Estuary by the South West Lancashire Ringing Group provided 75 new birds and the catch included a good number of retraps.

Despite catching 29 Goosanders *Mergus merganser* on one day on the River Wye in July, 20 proved to be too young to be fitted safely with BTO rings – thus the total number of newly ringed

birds did not reflect the effort involved.

We were invited by the National Environmental Research Institute (Denmark) to establish a duck ringing station on Mön, in the southwestern Baltic Sea. A large 'Wainwright' trap and several small portable 'Teal traps' were constructed with Ebbe Bogebjerg Hansen and, by the late autumn, 45 Teal had been caught. The area supports a large number of moulting males in the summer, and considerable numbers of Teal on passage. The benefits of these traps, and those made to the same design in future years, could be valuable in revealing movements through this

important region of the Baltic.

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