

Progress on bird ringing by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust during 1990

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The total number of swans, geese and ducks ringed by The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in 1990 is shown in the Table below. Fewer birds were ringed than in 1988 (7413) or in 1989 (6361) and some of the ringing stations had particularly small catches.

Abberton Ringing Station continues under the supervision of George Brown, a local volunteer. Unfortunately due to very low water levels in the autumn, the traps were out of operation during the peak trapping times and this is reflected in the ringing totals. An increase in the number of flight ponds close to the decoy at Abbotsbury is partially responsible for the low number of ducks caught there in recent years. During the early 1980s, Abbotsbury regularly contributed one fifth of all the Teal *Anas crecca* caught in Britain, but only 137 have been caught there in the last four years. Martin Mere had a particularly active ringing year with the completion of a new swan pipe and continued Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* catching (see below). The ringing totals for each of the last four years have been successively larger and, this year, Martin Mere contributed 20% of the overall total. The decoy at Slimbridge has undergone extensive refurbishment and credit is owed to Richard Chappell for his voluntary efforts. Construction of a permanent large duck trap was completed by Trust staff at Icklesham, Rye Bay in Sussex and a total of 304 wildfowl was caught there. This exceptional 20-hectare former farmland site, under the supervision of Steven Rumsey, has been flooded and is now managed for birds and bird-ringing. Passerine ringing totals at Rye Bay are staggering (19,692 in 1988, 31,564 in 1989 and over 50,000 in 1990) and, with the provision of a permanent trap for wildfowl, it is hoped to increase the number of ducks caught there.

The ringing of Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* on our estuaries continued, with considerable success on the Ribble marshes. Over 130 birds were newly ringed in several cannon-netting

attempts over a week by the South-West Lancs Ringing Group. Others were caught on the Eden Estuary (Tay Ringing Group) and the Solway (Paul Baker). Sightings and recoveries of these birds are, however, still few.

The study of Icelandic Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* continued with a further 189 being newly-ringed and 34 recaptured in July and August by Dr Eileen Rees and several Icelandic colleagues. As in some previous years, Bewick's Swans *C. columbianus bewickii* caught at Slimbridge in December were marked with yellow dye on the tail and wing-tips. This is in an attempt to obtain further information on the distribution of the Slimbridge-wintering flock in the breeding range, which Dr Rees and Dr Dafila Scott visited in 1991.

Once again a large number of migratory swans feeding on bait prepared for Pinkfeet at Martin Mere prevented the use of cannon-nets for capture on several occasions. However, a total of 249 Pinkfeet was caught in five successful catches there. The last catch on 8 November was of eight Pinkfeet that were feeding at night in the newly-constructed swan pipe. Resightings of engraved plastic rings used on the geese were particularly informative; eleven birds were seen in southern Iceland in April and May 1990 by a small team of observers, led by Dr Tony Fox, undertaking staging ecology studies. The link between wintering areas in Lancashire and Norfolk was further established with the sighting of 16 birds in Norfolk which had originally been caught at Martin Mere - this brings the total number of birds reported there to 25.

As part of a PhD study by Stephanie Warren at the Trust, three round-ups of moulting Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* were undertaken. One hundred and fifty birds were caught and ringed in Suffolk and over 200 were caught in Avon. These birds have been marked with engraved plastic rings so that individuals can be monitored.

Seven Goosanders *Mergus merganser* were

caught on an upland river in central Wales as part of a project organised by local ringers. To date, very few have been caught in this area which has recently been colonised and there is interest in the question of where these birds spend the winter.

The newly-constructed swan pipe at Martin Mere proved a considerable success. With the aim of catching migratory swans, waterfowl are encouraged into the large netted pipe with bait. The first attempt at catching involved dropping a netted gate over the entrance of the pipe. Seventy-eight Bewick's Swans, one Whooper Swan, 28 Shelduck and over 1000 Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* were caught in that first attempt - the largest single wildfowl catch in Britain.

The British Schools Exploring Society 1990 Svalbard Expedition gave me the chance to attempt to catch Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* in an area not previously visited by the Trust. One hundred and eighty-four Barnacles were caught and marked with engraved plastic rings. Six of these had been previously caught by the Trust - three in Svalbard and three at Caerlaverock. The Trust's long-term population research into Svalbard Barnacle Geese involves extensive data collection on colour-ringed individuals. Under the supervision of Paul Shimmings at Caerlaverock, up to 95% of all those birds bearing colour-rings are seen. During the autumn of 1990, 159 (86%) of the birds caught during the summer 1990 expedition have been seen back on the winter quarters.

Cannon-nets were used at Caerlaverock in October to catch these same wintering Barnacle Geese - the first successful catch there since 1982. One hundred and thirty-six geese were caught in one net including 22 birds caught previously, and one bird that had been caught on the summer 1990 expedition.

The first Greenland Whitefronts *A. albifrons*

flavirostris to be caught in Britain for many years were cannon-netted on behalf of the Trust by Malcolm Ogilvie on Islay. With the approval of the BTO, the 22 birds were marked with orange neck-collars as has been the custom for some years in Ireland. These birds will be followed closely over the next few years and recommendations made to the Nature Conservancy Council Scotland about action needed for their conservation.

An analysis of Shoveler *Anas clypeata* movements was completed in 1990. Surprisingly, only 2455 of this cosmopolitan duck have ever been caught in Britain (approximately 40% at Abberton) and, of these, only 420 have been recovered. The investigation showed that many of the birds that breed or are hatched in Britain move south to France and the Iberian peninsula to winter, and that a large number of those wintering in the British Isles breed in continental Europe and USSR.

A Constant Effort Ringing Site was set up in the decoy at Slimbridge. This is a contribution to the BTO's work on the Trust assessment of trends in migrant passerines, and the work is carried out by research and other staff during their spare time. A total of 411 birds was caught.

Sightings of any wildfowl marked with plastic rings, wing-tags or neck-collars are most welcomed and should be marked "Colour ring sightings" and sent to Slimbridge. Every effort will be made to trace the original ringer, who will forward ringing and sighting details to the observer.

We aim to continue our present wildfowl ringing policy for a further year, during which we will conduct a thorough review. This will concentrate on the need to ring large numbers of Mallard and on setting realistic targets for marking other species.

Numbers of wildfowl ringed by the Trust in 1990. Some of these were marked as part of The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust's projects but with rings from other ringing groups.

	Abbe	Abbo	Blun	Boro	East	Mart	Slim	Other	Total
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>		100			38		49	6	193
Bewick's Swan <i>C. columbianus bewickii</i>						74	26	1	101
Whooper Swan <i>C. cygnus</i>					62	1		196	259
Pink-footed Goose <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>						249		1	250
White-fronted Goose <i>A. albifrons</i>								22	22
Greylag Goose <i>A. anser</i>					7		12	28	47
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>							25	357	382
Barnacle Goose <i>B. leucopsis</i>					114			231	345
Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				4		30	4	185	223
Wigeon <i>Anas penelope</i>	6			2	30		1	167	206
Gadwall <i>A. strepera</i>	22		49	8			25	4	108
Teal <i>A. crecca</i>	172			191	4	13	19	208	607
Mallard <i>A. platyrhynchos</i>	125	25	1	455	152	839	555	284	2436
Pintail <i>A. acuta</i>				1		1	34	1	37
Shoveler <i>A. clypeata</i>				1			4	3	8
Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	5		101			3	89	12	210
Tufted Duck <i>A. fuliga</i>	44		291	1			14	17	367
Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i>								23	23
Goosander <i>Mergus merganser</i>								7	7
Ruddy Duck <i>Oxyura jamaicensis</i>							4		4
Total	374	125	442	663	407	1210	866	1753	5840

Abbe - Abberton
Mart - Martin Mere
Boro - Borough Fen

East - Eastpark, Caerlaverock
Blun - Blunham

Abbo - Abbotsbury
Slim - Slimbridge

Totals include one each of Wood Duck *Aix sponsa* (Slimbridge) and Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* (Slimbridge) and three Mandarin *Aix galericulata* (Slimbridge).

Other sites include:

Redgrave Lake, Suffolk (Canada Geese), **North Uist** (Greylag Geese, Eider, Whooper Swan), **Islay** (White-fronted Geese, Barnacle Geese), **Broomfleet**, Humberside (Shelduck, Wigeon), **Ribble Estuary** (Shelduck), **Mid-Wales** (Goosander), **Welney WWT** (Bewick' Swan, Whooper Swan) **Blithfield**, Staffs (Wigeon), **Lindisfarne NNR** (Wigeon), **Svalbard** (Barnacle Geese, Pink-footed Goose), **Iceland** (Whooper Swans), **Rye Bay**, Sussex (Dabbling ducks), **Rutland Water** (Dabbling ducks), **Chew Valley Lake** (Canada Geese, Mute Swan, Mallard), **Tay Ringing Group** (Shelduck, Wigeon), **Derwent Ings** (Mallard, Teal), **Highland Ringing Group** (Wigeon, Teal), **Llanelli** (Mute Swan).