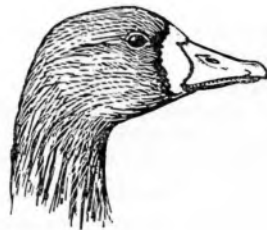


No objection can reasonably be made to the kills on the breeding grounds. These are places where it is essential for the human inhabitants to use every available source of food. They are killing for survival, not sport. The rounding-up of moulting geese, formerly practised by the Samoyeds, has been prohibited, at least in some places, and may have died out with the Samoyeds in others, but shooting is widespread, though the human population is small.

All the figures in Table I, especially those for spring and summer, would have to be increased if the annual mortality was substantially greater than 28%. But even if this became necessary it would still remain true that, because the losses are widely dispersed, the numbers killed in any country and even more in any one locality would not be impressively large. A kill of 200 in Britain or even 540 in central Russia from a population of 7000 does not *appear* excessive.

Yet a population of 7000 is a small one, and, as such, relatively more vulnerable than one of ten times the size. Even if, as it should be, the British population of the Whitefront is considered as part of the north-western European population, of about 15–20,000, the total may still appear precariously small. A similar total for the population of the Brent goose *Branta bernicla* in the same area has been considered alarming enough to warrant the introduction of special legislation for its protection. And yet the *albifrons* population appears to be maintaining itself without particular winter protection and in the face of extensive spring and summer losses.



THE FIDELITY OF A WHITEFRONT GANDER

By Jack Williams

I have two Grey Lag Geese which commenced to lay on 15 and 16 April 1955 respectively. After the second bird had laid three eggs in the same nest as the first one, she went and made another nest some 100 yards away and laid three more eggs in it. The first one contrived to lay in the original nest, and on laying the sixth egg commenced to sit. The second goose never attempted to sit at all: she finished laying at the sixth egg and then forsook the nest.

As soon as the first goose commenced brooding, a Whitefront gander that I have had for some 18 years went in attendance, never leaving the sitting goose and guarding her with great ferocity. This he had done on previous occasions with other unpaired sitting geese: the first a farmyard Toulouse Goose which he attended on for two seasons and, after she was removed, a Pinkfoot Goose a year or two after.

Very unfortunately, after the first Grey Lag Goose had been brooding for a week, on 29 April she became very seedy and died the following day. Whereafter the Whitefront gander became very perturbed and literally forced the

second Grey Lag Goose on to the nest and eggs. She did not brood at all tightly in fact, did not seem to relish the task—which was quite understandable considering she had made another nest elsewhere, and never showed any inclination whatsoever to brood in her own nest. However, she stuck it out for two days to 2 May, when she finally decided that it was no job for her.

The gander followed her about all day calling all the time, but on the morning of 3 May I saw that he was missing, so had a look round for him, and eventually found him brooding the forsaken nest. The next day he was still there and I was a bit sceptical about his powers of broodiness. I managed to hold him off with a forked stick and felt the eggs which were perfectly warm, and the nest well made up. This I did periodically during the ensuing three weeks, and each time I found the eggs perfectly warm, and in addition he had added down to the nest. I tried in vain to find some farmyard goose eggs near hatching to reward him for his fidelity and perseverance as I'm quite confident he would have reared them. But by 24 May I was still unsuccessful and decided to destroy the nest, as he was becoming very pale and thin through lack of adequate food and water.

In all that whole time I never saw him off the nest once. Although undoubtedly he must have come off during the night at some time or other, by the bad condition he was in he must have done it very sparingly, otherwise he would not have lost condition to the extent he had.

After he had been relieved of his duties for from a week to ten days, he began to look his old self again. I only hope the day is not far distant when I can find him a mate of his own species so that he can have a family of his own, as I feel no goose was ever more deserving.

By the 1956 breeding season I had removed the Greylags from the same enclosure and taken them some distance away, where incidentally they bred. The Whitefront gander took no particular interest in any of the other geese until an unattached Pink-footed Goose made a nest and laid six eggs. On remaining at the nest at the third egg, the gander seemed to notice that she was alone, so promptly went on guard beside her and never left his station, guarding her fiercely all the time until I broke up the nest on finding the eggs infertile after the goose had been brooding some three weeks.

