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RSPB HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS

PETER HOLDEN AND RICHARD GREGORY **Fifth Edition**

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RSPB HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS

Fifth Edition



PETER HOLDEN
AND RICHARD GREGORY

Illustrations by
Hilary Burn, Martin Elliott, Alan Harris,
Peter Hayman, David Nurney, Stephen Message,
Laurel Tucker and Dan Zetterström

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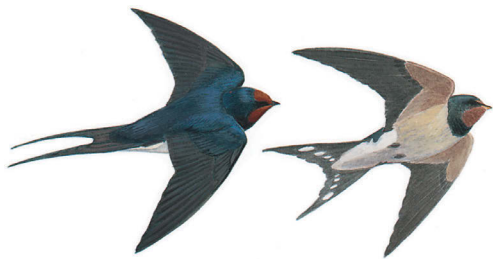


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Acknowledgements

This is the fifth edition of a book that was originally conceived 20 years ago. The idea was to create a new, accessible guide that would provide information about all the birds commonly seen in the British Isles.

Bringing the original idea of Peter Holden and Tim Cleeves to fruition required the help and goodwill of a great many talented people. Sadly, Tim is no longer with us and is greatly missed, but we have the same access to amazing information and outstanding artwork, originally published in the *Handbook of Bird Identification* and produced by a number of highly-skilled bird artists.

Our thanks go to Nigel Redman who commissioned the first edition of this handbook and to Julie Bailey for her continuing support and involvement as commissioner of the subsequent editions. Marianne Taylor produced the original detailed maps, and this edition

has benefited from the ever-patient co-ordination and editing of Jenny Campbell and from our new designer Rod Teasdale. Thanks also to Mark Eaton, Mark Holling, and RSPB colleagues for their expert assistance.

Much of the data for this book comes from a network of volunteer fieldworkers, past and present, whose observations and species counts have been made public through the publications of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, the British Trust for Ornithology, the RSPB and BirdLife International. We hope this book will inspire more fieldworkers and conservationists in the future.

We thank the RSPB for, once again, endorsing this book and helping to ensure that it reaches the ever-growing audience who love nature and the countryside and want to discover more about birds and are concerned for their future.

Peter Holden and Richard Gregory



Population trends of British birds



A team of seabird survey staff and volunteers look for Manx Shearwater burrows on the Isles of Scilly (Ed Marshall/RSPB Images).

The UK is very fortunate to have an excellent set of bird monitoring programmes led primarily by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) working with many partners. These programmes allow conservationists to assess and begin to understand population changes in many of our bird species. This monitoring, in part, stems from a rich tradition of amateur naturalists contributing to biological recording and enquiries in the UK, and that tradition is thriving today. Each year, thousands of dedicated and skilled volunteers give their time to biological surveys, and the bird monitoring schemes in the UK are arguably some of the best in the world.

The BTO leads on the monitoring of the more common and widespread breeding and wintering species, namely through the Breeding Bird Survey and the Wetland Bird Survey. At the same time, the RSPB, with the assistance of the country conservation agencies and other groups, helps to organise regular national surveys of our rarer breeding birds. The Rare Breeding Birds Panel collates records of our rarest nesting birds annually. Each scheme is designed to capture vital information on different species at different times of the year. As a set, the surveys provide near-complete coverage of UK bird populations, although there remain gaps and the information could always be added to and improved. These

conservation organisations are always looking for new volunteers to help with monitoring and conservation efforts (see [p317](#)).

Many birds set up breeding territories each year and advertise and defend them with distinctive songs and displays. This behaviour makes the breeding season a particularly good time to count birds because birdwatchers can detect them more easily and attempt to estimate numbers. The Breeding Bird Survey involves counting birds in a large sample of specially selected grid squares across the British Isles twice each year to give a complete picture of how our common breeding birds are faring. National surveys of our rarest breeding birds tend to focus on smaller and localised areas to count or estimate the total number of breeding pairs or territorial males. For some of the UK's rarest birds living on nature reserves, skilled birdwatchers can count nearly every individual bird or nesting pair each year.

The distribution of our breeding seabirds, however, demands a different approach to monitoring. Counting millions of seabirds on far-flung cliff colonies is a challenging task, particularly for hole-nesting petrels and shearwaters that only return to their burrows under cover of darkness. Therefore, occasional complete Seabird Censuses of important sites are conducted every 15 years or so and are

supplemented by annual counts from a large sample of colonies as part of the JNCC*/RSPB Seabird Monitoring Programme. This approach means annual monitoring for seabirds is not as complete as it is for land birds; even so, it provides an invaluable picture of how populations are changing.

Outside of the breeding season, this territoriality in bird behaviour tends to break down, and large numbers of wintering birds join our resident birds. Some are land birds, but many are waders and wildfowl coming primarily from above the Arctic Circle, attracted to our shorelines, estuaries and waterbodies each winter. Many of these sites are protected areas or nature reserves and they are specifically managed for these birds. The Wetland Bird Survey visits sites where wetland birds congregate in good numbers to census their populations in a systematic fashion in the non-breeding season. That involves making several counts through the course of the winter to gauge the size and health of these internationally important bird populations.

In addition to these core programmes, there is a range of volunteer-based surveys and schemes, including Garden Bird-Watch, Garden Bird Feeding Survey, Bird Ringing Scheme, Nest Record Scheme, Heronries Census, BirdTrack and the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. Each of

these is carefully designed for a particular purpose, and they involve different time commitments and levels of skill from volunteers (see [p317](#) for further information).

Wild bird indicators

Together, these surveys provide the foundation of bird conservation in the UK, as they do in other countries. They provide a health check on our bird populations and show how they are changing. They help to shed light on the environment and point to the pressures acting on wildlife, and can highlight potential solutions when wildlife is in trouble. Conservationists bring this excellent information together to chart the fortunes of our bird populations overall and for particular groups. The data also allows scientists to assess the conservation status and extinction risk of bird species in the UK and to review and refresh conservation priorities regularly, which means conservation efforts can be directed towards the birds most in need of urgent help and to the most pressing conservation issues.

This unique dataset allows us to look at the ups and downs of individual species in summer and winter, as well as groups living in different habitats, and build a picture of how our birds are faring. In the same way that miners kept caged Canaries as an early warning to alert them to the presence of poisonous gases, birds

* The JNCC is a public body that advises the UK Government and devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation.



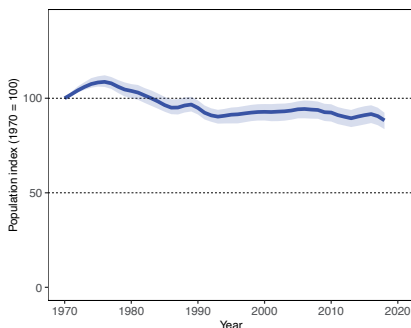
Lapwings are declining on farmland and wet grassland (Kevin Sawford/RSPB Images).

Population trends of British birds

may signal and alert us to alarming environmental issues. Indeed, alongside other information, bird populations are increasingly used as official government indicators of environmental change. To do so, scientists combine population trends of individual species into a single measure. We exclude the very rarest birds because their numbers can change dramatically driven by local factors, like conservation actions, and by pure chance, which makes them less useful as indicators. In each case, the indicator describes the average trend in the relative abundance of the constituent bird species in the UK from 1970 (or sometimes later) to 2018, with the index set to 100 in the first year. Shading shows the possible margin of error, and the number of different bird species included in each index is given in parentheses.

British breeding birds

Taking all breeding bird species together from 1970, which was when comprehensive monitoring began, there is a modest fall in numbers; the index of these 130 bird species is down by 11% (see graph, right). It is, however, important to recognise that the average trend, combining all recorded species into one, hides lots of variation. Some birds are booming in numbers and flourishing, while others show worrying declines. Birds such as the Buzzard, Red Kite, Avocet, Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Collared Dove and Cirl Bunting have all prospered, expanding their ranges in Great Britain and increasing in number. For the birds of prey, increases in numbers are a direct result of conservation action to remove harmful chemicals in the countryside and to reduce illegal persecution. For the Avocet and Cirl Bunting, bespoke habitat management has been the key to success. For other species, their adaptable nature seems to have allowed them to take advantage of a changing environment and climate. Cetti's Warbler and Collared Dove colonised Great Britain naturally, first appearing in the 1950s and 1960s, and spreading widely. Meanwhile, the Turtle Dove, Grey Partridge, Capercaillie, Willow Tit and Corn Bunting are increasingly threatened, and although conservation organisations and our government know much about the pressures on those populations and have many actions in place to help them, the scale of their efforts seems insufficient to turn their fortunes around.



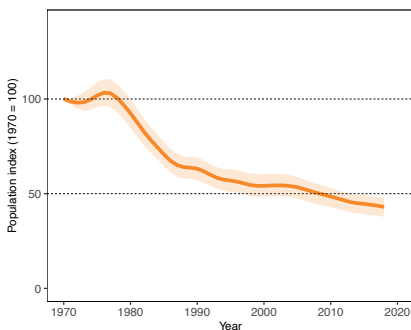
Population trends of breeding birds (130 species).

Farmland breeding birds: Next, looking at species that are dependent on farmland for nesting and foraging, we see a much larger fall in populations, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. The farmland bird index, made up of 19 species, has fallen by 55% since 1970 and the trend continues downwards (see graph, below). Some of the birds most in trouble are the Grey Partridge, Lapwing, Turtle Dove, Starling, Skylark, Corn Bunting and Tree Sparrow. Curiously, however, not all birds living on farmland are in decline, since the average pattern again hides considerable variation. There is a trend for those birds with very particular habitat requirements to be declining and for more adaptable and generalist birds to be doing better. Some of the birds bucking the trend include Jackdaw, Woodpigeon, Stock Dove and Goldfinch, all of which have increased strongly. The Woodpigeon appears to have benefited from increased cereal and rape cultivation in winter, providing it with vital food at this time of year. The Goldfinch adapted rapidly to an increase in garden feeding and that may have provided a recent boost to its populations.

For many farmland birds, there is a simple relationship between their fortunes and farming practices. As agriculture has modernised and changed to meet growing food demands, many birds have lost their preferred habitats for nesting and feeding, which has driven their numbers rapidly downwards. Farmed land covers around three-quarters of the UK, so the way farmers manage that land has a profound effect on our bird populations. The loss of mixed farming systems and of trees and hedgerows on farms, along with a move to autumn sowing of crops and an increase in potent pesticide and

Population trends of British birds

fertiliser use have all taken their toll on our wildlife. Agricultural expansion is the most widespread form of land-use change around the world, and it is recognised as the major factor driving the loss of nature here in the UK, in Europe and globally.

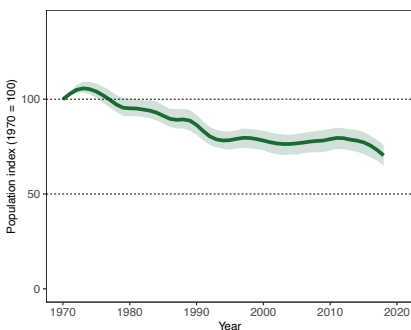


Population trends of farmland breeding birds (19 species).

Woodland breeding birds: Forest covers a much smaller area in the UK – only 13% – compared to most European countries, where more than 30% (and generally growing) of land is forest. We have lost much of our native broadleaved managed woodlands, though forest area has increased recently and seems set to do so further. Taken overall, woodland bird populations have fallen and continue to decline. The woodland bird index, made up of 37 species, has fallen steadily by 29% since 1970 and dipped in recent times (see graph, right). The loss of mixed native forests and traditional forest management, combined with an ageing tree stock and changing tree composition (especially towards non-native commercial monocultures), as well as growing browsing pressure on understorey vegetation from deer have had a significant effect, in some cases for the better, but mostly for worse. A prominent example is the demise of the Nightingale from many parts of England, which is linked to loss of suitable habitat and a reduction in traditional rotational coppicing of woodland. Coppicing creates young shrubby vegetation upon which the Nightingale and other species depend for nesting and breeding. Again, there is a tendency for more specialist birds to be doing worse and more adaptable ones to be doing better. Birds in trouble include Capercaillie, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Nightingale, Marsh and Willow Tits, Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher and Lesser Redpoll. In contrast, populations of Blackcap and Nuthatch have more

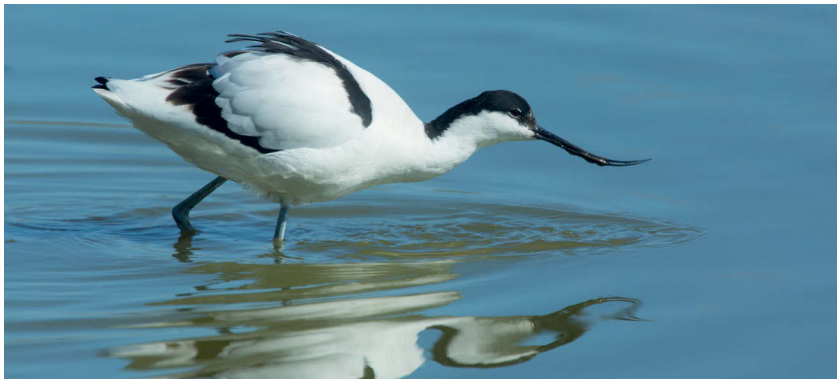
than doubled over the same period, and those of the Great Spotted Woodpecker have more than trebled. Although we can't be sure, it seems that changes in woodland, combined with other factors like garden feeding and climate, have helped.

Most farmland and woodland birds are residents, but others like Turtle Dove, Nightingale, Tree Pipit, Spotted Flycatcher and Wood Warbler are migrants travelling long distances to winter in West and Central Africa and return to breed in the British Isles. These journeys put an extra strain on populations as they navigate across continents vulnerable to severe weather and dependent on many stop-over sites where they can feed and rest before moving on. So their fate might also be determined, in part at least, by factors along their migration routes.



Population trends of woodland breeding birds (37 species).

Water and wetland breeding birds: The index of water and wetlands birds comprises 26 species and includes birds nesting on lakes and rivers, in reedbeds and wet grasslands. It is a diverse group of birds. Birds living and breeding in wetland sites in the UK show a shallow decline, the index down by 17% from 1975 when it began (see graph, opposite). Some of these 26 birds are on the up, benefiting it seems from the creation and better management of wetlands and perhaps a warming climate. They include Little Egret, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Cetti's Warbler and Reed Warbler. The Little Egret is a prime example: a recent colonist that first bred in England in 1996, it has spread rapidly, as have other egret species. The Little Egret was once a great rarity but now, with luck, can be seen daily in many parts of Britain. One group of birds, however, stands out, and that is the group nesting in wet grasslands, whose

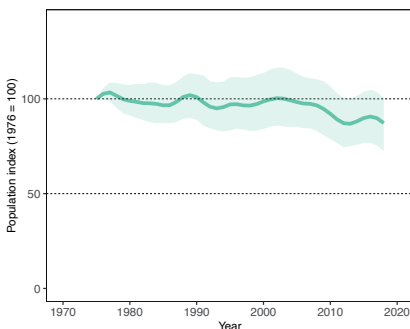


Avocets have not only increased, but colonised new areas (David J Slater/RSPB Images).

numbers have fallen by about half. Most are ground-nesting wading birds, such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe, but the Yellow Wagtail is also dependent on this habitat. The steady loss of suitable wet grasslands through wetland drainage, conversion to arable cultivation and land abandonment have combined with more modern grassland management, a move from hay meadows to silage production and increased predation. These changes have put extra pressure on these iconic birds, and they are all red- or amber-listed in the UK (see [p13](#)).



The number of breeding Goldfinches is increasing rapidly (Ray Kennedy/RSPB Images).



Population trends of water and wetland breeding birds (26 species).

Breeding seabirds: Moving from land to the sea, the UK is home to internationally important numbers of breeding seabirds, and for some, such as Manx Shearwater, Gannet and Great Skua, we hold most of the global population placing an extra responsibility on conservation organisations to protect the UK's breeding colonies. Regular Seabird Censuses provide a stocktake of our seabirds every 15 years,

while annual surveys help to fill the gaps. Based on those sample surveys, we can index 13 seabirds. An index based on those trends has dropped 28% from 1986 when it began, and alarmingly so since 2000 (see graph, below). Arctic Skua, Kittiwake and Herring Gull have all declined sharply; Shag, Fulmar and Little Tern to a lesser extent. One seabird in the index has increased since 1986, the Razorbill, while most of our seabird populations are declining. While many seabirds are falling in number, other marine species are fluctuating or increasing in abundance in response to changes in the pressure of commercial fishing as well as sea surface temperature rises linked to climate change. The ocean systems close to us are changing rapidly, with knock-on effects on the food webs in our seas. For many seabirds, these shifts create real problems when their main prey, and the

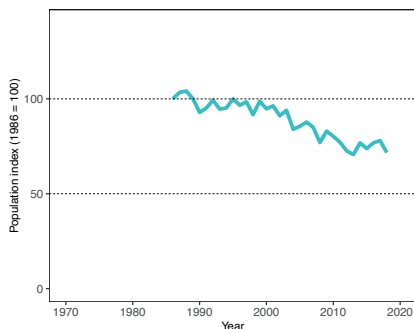


The Kittiwake is a declining seabird (Ed Marshall/RSPB Images).



Turtle Doves are one of several declining African migrants (Steve Knell/RSPB Images).

food for their young, shifts its ranges, decrease in number or simply disappear. For example, the breeding success of Kittiwake can be linked to the health of sand-eel populations, which are themselves connected to commercial fishing and sea surface temperatures. The situation is complex, and our internationally significant seabirds face an uncertain future.



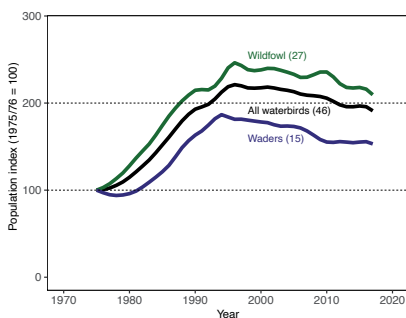
Population trends of breeding seabirds (13 species).

Wintering waterbirds

Waterbirds make up the bulk of the birds that come to our shores and lakes each winter, and the index of their populations has roughly doubled over the last 40 years (see graph, right). The wintering waterbird index was 82% higher in the winter of 2017/18 compared to the winter of 1975/76. Both wildfowl and waders have increased strongly, however the trend hides significant detail. Populations of Whooper Swan and most wintering geese, including Greylag, Barnacle, Brent and Pink-footed Geese, are generally flourishing. Numbers of wintering Gadwall are also increasing in line with a growing breeding population. In contrast, Bewick's Swan, White-fronted Goose, Pochard, Scaup and Eider have shown

declines. Similarly, while the indices for Avocet and Black-tailed Godwit populations have increased more than seven-fold, those for Ringed Plover and Dunlin have declined.

The number of wintering waterbirds is affected by a range of factors, such as breeding productivity above the Arctic Circle where most breed, the prevailing weather conditions, and the suitability of their stopover or wintering sites. Those of us studying bird populations believe the rise in numbers is the direct result of new site creation and better site protection and management, as well as changes in winter cropping that provide new food resources to which some species can switch. A warming climate may also have encouraged birds to overwinter in increasing numbers. However, we are losing other populations that are increasingly able to winter further north and east in Europe. As with other groups, it is a complex picture, but is very much a true conservation success story as improved protection of the birds and their sites across a flyway stretching from Africa and Europe to the high Arctic has allowed many populations to recover and grow.



Population trends of wintering waterbirds.

Using this book

This book aims to help as many people as possible develop a greater understanding of the birds that share our towns, gardens and countryside, and other habitats that make up the rich mosaic of the British Isles.

The accounts on the pages that follow describe 272 species that breed in Britain and Ireland or are seen here regularly, and we have included a further 46 rare migrants or vagrants that occur less frequently but might be encountered by a lucky observer.

The birds are mostly arranged in the most recent scientific order, with closely related species appearing together. However, we have changed the order very slightly in a few places to allow certain similar-looking species to appear on facing pages. Each account begins with the species' usual common English name followed by its scientific name, beneath which are species tables offering basic information in a readily accessible form, and then the following sections: Identification, Habits, Voice, Habitat, Food, Breeding, Movements and Migration, Conservation and Distribution.

SPECIES TABLES

The species tables indicate each species' conservation status (see below) and detail recent data on population trends and numbers of breeding and wintering species, the breeding season, the average number of eggs laid per clutch, incubation and fledging periods of species that breed in the UK, and, where it is known, a species' average lifespan and the maximum recorded age. We also include the length of the bird from bill tip to tail tip, and, to give an impression of size, the average body weight.

Species of conservation concern

Traditionally, conservation has focused on preserving our rarest species: those on the brink of extinction and nesting in Britain and Ireland in tiny numbers. The protection of the last of our native Red Kites in Wales in the early part of the 20th century, and nest guarding of the Ospreys in Scotland after their return, are examples of this vital work. But today, there is unprecedented pressure on our native wildlife from land use and climatic change.

As we have learnt more about the distribution and abundance of bird populations, we have begun to understand that many species we once regarded as common and abundant are also potentially endangered and threatened. The familiar Song Thrush was one of the first to start to disappear and was soon followed by House Sparrow and Starling. Many characteristic and iconic birds of farmland and woodland have crashed in number. Although not in danger of imminent extinction in Britain, these declines represent an enormous loss of nature and raise concerns about the future of these species and the health of the natural environment.

The first Red Data list of British birds was published in 1990, and since then scientists have regularly come together to update those species most at risk using the latest information. In the newest iteration of the red list, known as *Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the population status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man*, 67 species are red-listed. The list covers all regularly occurring British birds, excluding vagrants and introductions. In this handbook, we use the same 'traffic light' system for colour-coding each species green, amber or red to indicate increasing conservation concern according to a range of set criteria as defined by the Red Data list. Some birds are listed as 'Not assessed' because they are vagrants, rarities or recent colonists.

The **'red list'** includes those birds that are globally threatened, have declined historically, and those whose breeding or non-breeding populations or ranges have declined very strongly.

The **'amber list'** includes those birds that are threatened in Europe, where falling populations or contracting ranges are more moderate, those that have previously been included on the red list and are now recovering, those whose populations are highly localised or occur here in internationally important numbers.

The '**green list**' is for those birds that meet none of the above criteria – although their populations often show modest rises or falls from year to year and need to be monitored, alongside other species.

We describe all the common plumages – adult, juvenile, breeding and non-breeding – as well as some flight poses and other aids to identification. Illustrations show adult plumage unless stated otherwise.

The '**See also**' notes cross-refer to other species that appear similar. These may be closely related, as in the case of Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, or appear superficially similar in the field such as Red-throated Diver and Cormorant.

IDENTIFICATION

This book is an excellent introduction to bird identification and provides the key features of each species with information on their behaviour. Identification is only a beginning and not an end. We aim to help the reader discover more about the life of each species and how it is faring in our modern world.

HABITS

This text describes key characteristics that may aid identification but also tells you more about bird behaviour.



The Little Egret, once exploited for its plumage, is a new colonist that is increasing in Britain (Ernie Janes/RSPB Images).

VOICE

The section on sounds is also intended to aid identification. Descriptions of songs and calls are highly personal and challenging to describe in words. We advise you to take advantage of the many excellent websites, including the RSPB's and others, as well as apps, to familiarise yourself with bird songs and calls.

HABITAT

It is essential to know where species usually live. We have looked beyond the main breeding habitat and included places where the bird may be found in other seasons. Readers should note, however, that many species can be seen away from their usual habitats – this is one of the joys and challenges of birdwatching!

FOOD

We have been specific by giving the common names of the most typical food items a species eats. For example, we list 'Bullhead, loach, minnow, sticklebacks and small Chub' as the food of Kingfisher, rather than the rather bland statement that the bird eats fish.

BREEDING

A summary of each species breeding in Britain and Ireland includes a description of the nest site and the roles of males and females. We provide further breeding information within the Species Tables (see [p11](#)). Readers should note that the timings given can vary depending on local conditions and from year to year.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

The movements and migrations of birds are among the natural wonders of the world, and we briefly cover this topic for each species.

CONSERVATION

Here, we summarise some of the issues affecting British bird populations and some measures conservationists are taking to reverse downward trends. For some, we also describe their status in Europe and the main threats facing the species.

DISTRIBUTION

The distribution maps show the approximate distribution of a species in the British Isles and the Distribution text describes the world distribution.

KEY TO MAPS

The maps offer an approximate indication of the distribution of each species around the British Isles at different seasons:

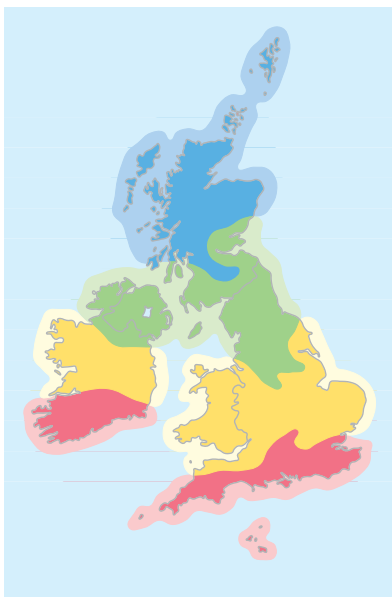
Green: resident, areas where species may be seen throughout the year and where they breed

Yellow: summer visitor, areas where the species may be seen in summer and usually breeds

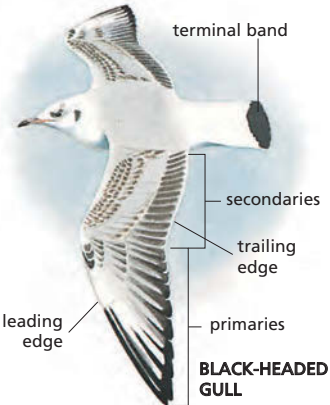
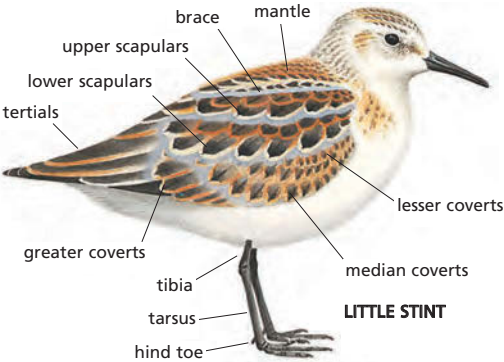
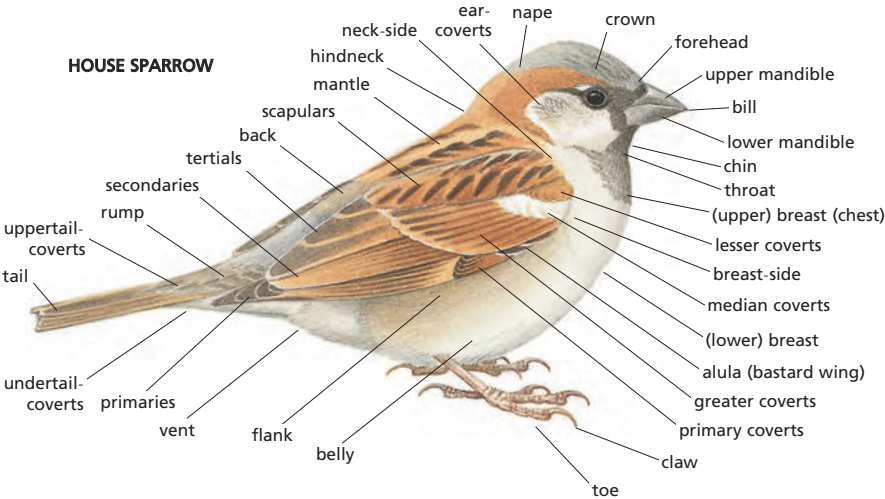
Blue: winter visitor, areas where species spend the winter but do not breed

Pink: passage migrant, areas that species may visit during migration – generally spring and autumn

For distribution at sea, we have restricted colours to areas where birds can be seen from the coast or on pelagic trips, so mostly inshore waters have been mapped.



Bird topography



male worn, spring



Some passerines change their appearance radically through feather wear rather than moult.

REDSTART



male fresh, autumn

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (individuals)	103,000
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Average: 11; Oldest: 28
Size and weight	56-61cm; 1.3kg

IDENTIFICATION

Similar size to Mallard but more upright and with longer neck. Plump with rather short black legs and small black bill. Head, neck and upperparts of the body are dark, apart from a small white neck-patch. Underparts variable, but under the tail always white. Three races visit Britain and Ireland: dark-bellied from Siberia and Russia, and two races of pale-bellied from Greenland and Spitsbergen. Dark-bellied race has breast and belly almost as dark as its back with some mottling. Pale-bellied races are similar except that the breast and belly are paler grey-brown. Juveniles are similar to adults but lack the white collar and have pale edges to folded wing-coverts. Geese become flightless for about 3 weeks in July and August, before migrating in autumn. See also: Barnacle Goose [p17](#), Canada Goose [p16](#).

HABITS

Swims frequently and rides high in the water. Often up-ends to reach food. In flight, wings look pointed and rather duck-like. Flies in lines that undulate, but less often in 'V's than other geese. Flocks containing families, pairs without young and individuals, often spread out across feeding grounds.

VOICE

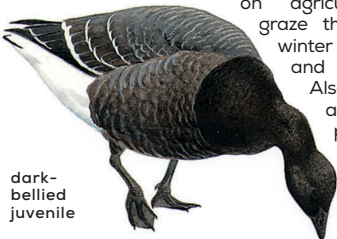
The single *waruk* calls mix together in flocks to form a dog-like yelping or babbling that carries a long way, and the clamour grows louder as flocks take to the air.

HABITAT

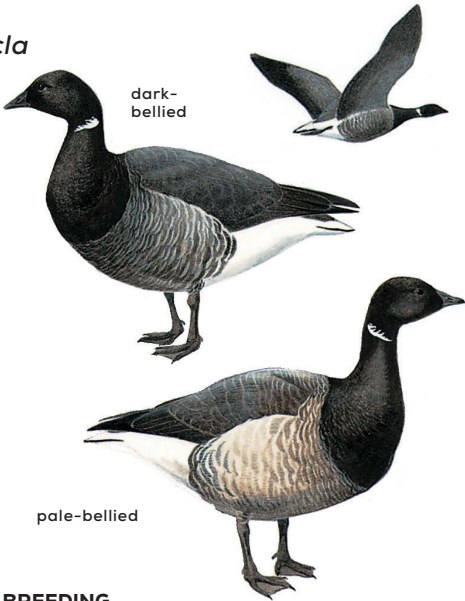
Winter feeding grounds are along sea coasts and estuaries where there are mudflats and intertidal zones with sufficient plant food. In recent years flocks have frequently moved on to adjacent farmland. Breeds on the Arctic tundra, close to shallow pools or the sea.

FOOD

Grazes vegetation on land or finds food in water. Traditional food is eelgrass that grows in some estuaries, but birds are increasingly grazing on farmed land and recreational grassland. Birds on agricultural land graze the shoots of winter cereals, grass and oilseed rape. Also eats algae and saltmarsh plants such as glasswort, sea aster and various grasses.



dark-bellied juvenile



dark-bellied

pale-bellied

BREEDING

Does not breed in Britain or Ireland. With only about 100 Arctic days in which to rear a family, severe weather or the early onset of winter significantly affects breeding success. Families migrate together and remain together until the following spring.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Breeding birds leave the Arctic by early September. They start to arrive at wintering sites in October and return in March or April. Greenland birds stop off in Iceland and Russian migrants feed around the Baltic.

CONSERVATION

All three populations that visit the British Isles have increased in recent years, which together represent nearly half the world population. Following a shortage of eelgrass in the 1930s, the wintering population dropped sharply. Conservation of the wintering areas, restrictions on hunting and their move onto farmland has helped recovery. Concerns remain: loss of sites to sea-level rise, disturbance by human recreation, conflicts with farming and a lobby to allow the species to be shot again are factors that need careful management.

DISTRIBUTION

Breeds farther north than other geese. Dark-bellied race that breeds in Siberia and in northern Russia winters mainly in England and France. Pale-bellied race from Canada and Greenland winters in Ireland. Other pale-bellied birds breed in small numbers in Spitsbergen and winter in Denmark and north-east England - especially the Northumberland coast.



Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Conservation status	Introduction
Pop. trend (breeding)	Strong increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	54,000
Wintering pop. (individuals)	160,000
Nesting	March–June
Eggs and broods	5–7; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	29; 40–48 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 6; Oldest: 31
Size and weight	56–110cm; 3.7kg

IDENTIFICATION

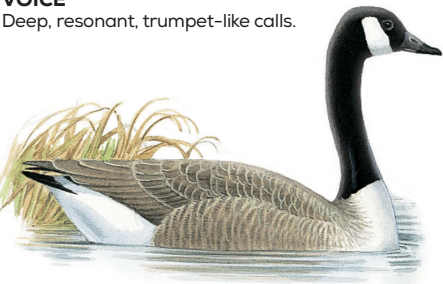
There is a wide variety of sizes of Canada Goose, depending on which race a bird belongs to, although most birds in Britain are among the largest. Male larger and heavier than female. A large brown goose with a black neck and head and broad white band from back of face joining under chin, pale brown breast and flanks and white under the tail. The bill and feet are black. Juvenile similar to adult. Flight feathers are moulted simultaneously and the bird is flightless for 3–4 weeks in June to July. **See also:** Barnacle Goose [p17](#), Brent Goose [p15](#).

HABITS

Gregarious outside the breeding season. Swims frequently and up-ends to reach food in deeper water. Grazes on land. Flies with powerful wingbeats, often in rather ragged flocks, but will form lines of 'V's on longer flights. Roosts in large flocks on water or mud banks. Flocks walk or fly to these roosts at dusk.

VOICE

Deep, resonant, trumpet-like calls.



HABITAT

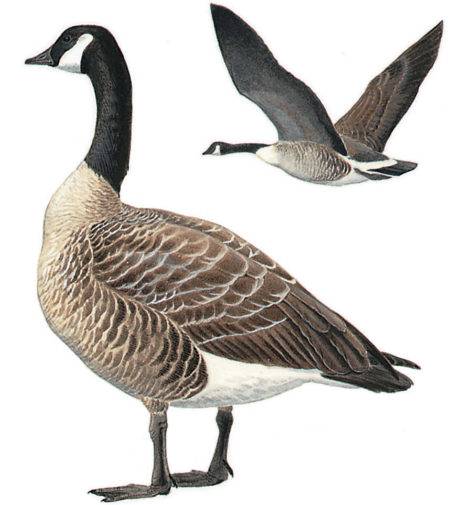
Lives near lowland lakes, often in urban and city parks, and also around flooded sand and gravel pits, and reservoirs. Tolerates lakes surrounded by trees, but these geese also need short open grass areas for feeding. Some Yorkshire birds nest on moorland in heather and rushes well away from open water.

FOOD

Feeds on roots, tubers, stems, grass, leaves, fruits and seeds. Other plants include winter wheat and other cereals, grain, beans, clover, rushes and pond-weeds. Also eats the leaves of crack willow and strips leaves from the common reed.

BREEDING

Often nests in loose colonies in which there are separate territories that are defended, especially by the male, until the young have left the nest. Female builds nest on the ground. She gathers twigs, leaves,



reeds and grasses and lines it with down feathers from her body. Nests are usually near water and under the shelter of a bush or at the base of a tree – often on islands. Female generally starts laying in late March and incubates while the gander stands guard. Goslings leave the nest soon after hatching and are tended by both parents – the female brooding them at night while they are small. Young stay with their parents until the following breeding season and breed when 3 years old.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

In its native homeland of North America, different races of Canada Geese vary from being long-distance migrants to sedentary. In Britain, a regular moult migration has gradually developed with young birds from the Midlands and Yorkshire flying to northern Scotland to moult. They leave their breeding areas in May and return in September. Cold winter weather means that some birds from Britain cross the English Channel and visit France. The Scandinavian population migrates south for the winter.

CONSERVATION

Considered a nuisance in some public parks.

DISTRIBUTION

A native of North America; breeding in the north and wintering in the south. Introduced to Britain in the 17th century and into northern Europe where it has flourished. Widespread in England, southern Scotland and parts of Ireland. Wild birds of the smaller northerly race (Richardson's Goose) sometimes arrive in Britain or Ireland among flocks of Barnacle or White-fronted Geese.



Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Moderate increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	1,450
Wintering pop. (individuals)	105,000
Nesting	June–August
Eggs and broods	5–6; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	24–25; 44–45 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 14; Oldest: 28
Size and weight	58–70cm; 1.8kg



IDENTIFICATION

Smaller than Canada Goose. Black, white and grey goose with creamy-white face, dusky marks between eye and bill. Back of head, neck and breast are all black. Back blue-grey crossed with black-and-white bars. Flanks pale grey and lower belly gleaming white. Black legs are proportionally longer than most other geese. Black bill is small and rather delicate. Pale face of juvenile is more mottled and back is greyer with less distinct bars. Flanks are less clearly barred than adults. Moults flight feathers simultaneously and becomes flightless for 3–4 weeks before autumn migration. **See also:** Canada Goose [p16](#), Brent Goose [p15](#).

HABITS

Wings appear rather pointed in flight. The black-and-white head, and black neck and breast help to identify this goose, even at a distance. Usually seen in noisy flocks that contain family groups as well as single birds and pairs without young. It flies in 'V's and lines like other geese.

VOICE

Call is a single bark that is higher pitched than most other geese. Can resemble yapping of dogs, especially when heard from a distance.

HABITAT

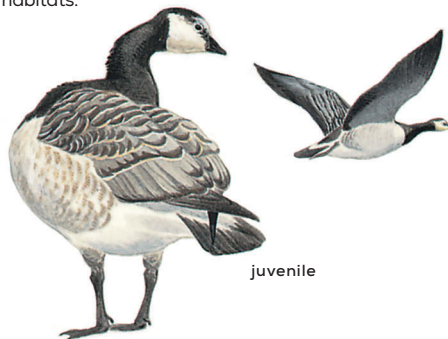
Visits coastal lowlands in winter, sometimes feeding on estuaries or bogs, but more often on nearby farmland, with clover, grass and cereal crops and in fields with some shallow water nearby. In the Arctic, many nest on steep, sheer cliffs near the sea or over-looking fjords close to rich feeding areas.

FOOD

Grazes vegetation, especially leaves, stems and seeds. Also uses bill to pull up roots and crush harder matter. In winter, eats plants such as rushes, grasses, clover, plantains, thrift, samphire, buttercup, wood-rush and daisies.

BREEDING

Some colonies nest on islands but many are on tall, inaccessible cliffs. Goslings jump from their nests soon after hatching. Although many perish, the fact that cliff-nesting continues must mean it is far safer than losing eggs or small young to foxes and other predators on more accessible ground. After breeding the young geese stay with their parents until the following breeding season. Pairs stay together for life. British breeding birds occupy a range of wetland habitats.



MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

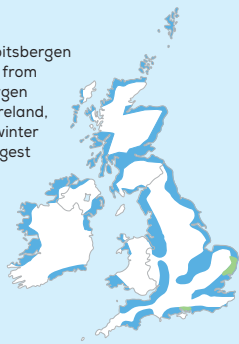
Three separate populations from the Arctic start to arrive in Britain and Ireland in October and stay until late March or early April. Greenland birds fly to Iceland before migrating to Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland. Spitsbergen birds migrate via the Norwegian coast to winter on the Solway Firth. Those from Siberia that breed on Novaya Zemlya winter in western Europe. A few of these sometimes cross the North Sea to reach eastern Britain.

CONSERVATION

Protected at all times. More than 20% of the world population winters in the British Isles. Numbers have increased over the last 50 years. There are also more than 1,000 feral breeding pairs in Britain, which are increasing. Where the birds are numerous there have been conflicts with farmers. The enrichment of pasture created an ideal habitat and birds are now competing with livestock. A combination of bird scaring, provision of refuges and government payments to farmers have helped solve this problem in the short term.

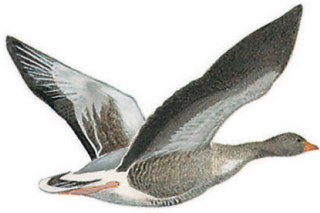
DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in Greenland, Spitsbergen and Arctic Russia. Birds from Greenland and Spitsbergen winter in Scotland and Ireland, and those from Russia winter in mainland Europe. Largest numbers are in Ireland, in western Scotland (especially Islay) and the Solway Firth. Smaller numbers visit eastern Britain.



Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

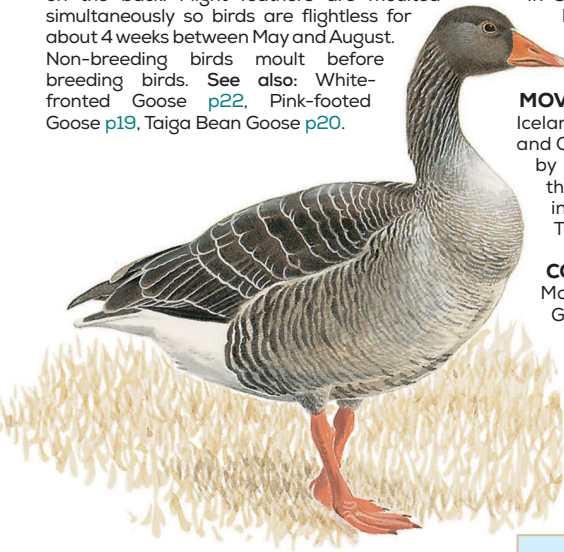
Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Strong increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	47,000
Wintering pop. (individuals)	230,000
Nesting	April–July
Eggs and broods	5–7; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	28; 50–60 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 8; Oldest: 24
Size and weight	75–90cm; 3.3kg



and reservoirs. Feeds on farmland during the day. Feral populations often inhabit urban areas, including parks.

IDENTIFICATION

A large goose, but usually smaller than most Canada Geese. Grey-brown with a thick neck and large head. The neck has four or five dark lines down the side formed by ridges of feathers. Back has a barred appearance and the pale grey breast and belly are slightly mottled with darker marks. Forewing and underwing are noticeably pale. Feathers under the tail are white. The large bill is orange with a white tip and the legs and feet are flesh-pink. Juveniles have darker bills and legs and less noticeable pale barring on the back. Flight feathers are moulted simultaneously so birds are flightless for about 4 weeks between May and August. Non-breeding birds moult before breeding birds. See also: White-fronted Goose [p22](#), Pink-footed Goose [p19](#), Taiga Bean Goose [p20](#).



FOOD

Eats roots, tubers, leaves, stems, flowers and seeds of plants such as grasses, sedges and rushes. Grazes on land or takes floating vegetation such as pondweed and duckweed. On farms it eats spilt grain, grass and root crops.

BREEDING

Breeds near fresh water and some nest close together in colonies. The nest is often under a tree or bush and comprises a mound of vegetation with sticks and lined with grass and feathers. In Scotland, the nest may be among heather. Female incubates while male guards a small territory around the nest. Young and adults stay together for the first year.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Icelandic Greylags migrate to Britain in September and October and return to their breeding grounds by April or May. Scandinavian birds travel through the Netherlands and France to winter in Spain. Others fly through eastern Europe to Turkey and North Africa.

CONSERVATION

Most domestic geese are descended from the Greylag. This species has a reduced European range because of habitat loss and drainage of its nest sites. Organised introductions into Britain in the 1930s and 1960s have successfully re-established breeding populations in many areas. Traditional wintering sites for migrant populations continue to require protection although conflicts with agricultural interests may need addressing in future.

HABITS

Flocks fly in lines or 'V's, but are less organised over short distances. In the air, it looks powerful and flies fast on broad wings. It runs further than other geese when taking off.

VOICE

Loud cackling and honking calls – can sound rather like sheep at a distance.

HABITAT

In Britain, breeds near freshwater lakes, often on islands, and visits local farms and meadows to feed. Elsewhere in Europe, nests in marshes, reedbeds and tundra. Winter flocks roost on estuaries, marshes, river islands, freshwater lakes

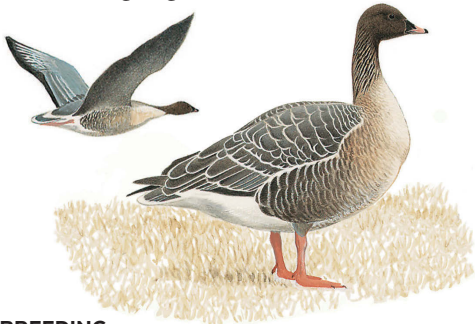
DISTRIBUTION

Once it was widespread in Europe, but breeding sites are now scattered in the north and east. These birds winter as far south as the Mediterranean or North Africa. Migrant Greylags winter in northern England and Scotland. Native wild populations in northern Scotland and the Western Isles are now integrated with a growing naturalised population.



Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (individuals)	510,000
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Average: 8; Oldest: 38
Size and weight	60-75cm; 2.8kg

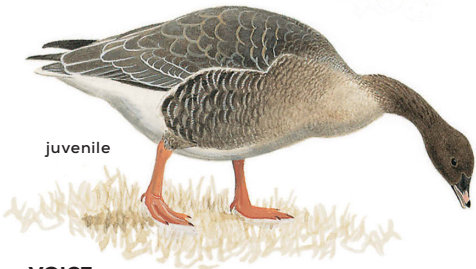


IDENTIFICATION

Smaller than Greylag Goose. Pinkish-grey, dark head and neck, and short pink bill with variable dark marks. Appears compact and daintier than other geese with shorter neck, darker, rounder head and greyer body. Legs and feet are pink. Pale edges to the back feathers give a barred effect and the underparts are closely barred. White line on body below its wings. In flight, blue-grey forewing is not as pale as Greylag. Juvenile is darker with dull, yellowish legs, less distinct barring on back and mottled underparts. Adults are flightless for about 25 days before migration. **See also:** Taiga Bean Goose [p20](#), White-fronted Goose [p22](#), Greylag Goose [p18](#).

HABITS

A sociable goose except when nesting. Winter flocks may be 40,000 birds that mainly consist of family groups. Flocks move from nighttime roosts to feeding areas at dawn and return at dusk. Feeding flocks travel up to 30km and roosts and feeding areas are used year after year. It also has 'rest stations' on grasslands or marshland pools. When landing, it frequently slide-slips and tumbles as it loses height.



VOICE

Call is higher pitched and less harsh than other geese – often an incessant and rather musical *wink, wink*.

HABITAT

Roosts on estuaries, mudflats, freshwater lakes, moorland pools and floodwater, and visits nearby farmland to feed. Winters in hilly areas, moors and mosses as well as lowland marshes. Prefers large fields, especially stubble in autumn, winter cereals, potatoes, sugar beet and other arable crops.

FOOD

Feeds on grain, winter cereals and root crops, including sugar beet, and also on grass. In summer, it eats leaves and shoots, roots and fruits, especially bistort, horsetails and cotton grass.

BREEDING

Pair bond generally lasts for life. In Iceland, it nests in inaccessible river gorges where it is safe from ground predators. In Spitsbergen, where there are fewer predators, it nests in flatter habitats. Both parents tend their young and families remain together in the first winter and only break up in spring.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

When young are 10-20 days old, families come together to moult. They form large, flightless flocks and some travel considerable distances on foot. There is also a moult migration of non-breeding birds from Iceland to Greenland in June. Once new feathers are grown, birds from Greenland fly first to Iceland, and then the majority move on to Scotland or England, arriving in October and returning in April.

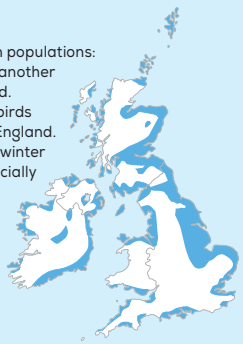


CONSERVATION

Around 80-90% of the European population winters in the British Isles. English numbers have increased, especially in Norfolk. The recent increase is probably due to favourable conditions – larger fields, easily found food on farmland in winter, and better protected winter roosts. Main threats are in its breeding areas in Iceland and Greenland where numbers are affected by hunting and by hydroelectricity schemes and potential mineral extraction.

DISTRIBUTION

There are two European populations: one in Spitsbergen and another in Iceland and Greenland. Greenland and Iceland birds winter in Scotland and England. Birds from Spitsbergen winter in western Europe, especially Denmark and the Netherlands.



Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

Conservation status	Red
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate decline
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (individuals)	230
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Oldest: 25
Size and weight	66-84cm; 2.8-3.2kg

IDENTIFICATION

Larger than Pink-footed and slightly smaller and less bulky than Greylag Goose. Taiga Bean Goose forms a species-pair with Tundra Bean Goose and they were only recently recognised as separate species. Taiga has a long, slender, almost 'swan-like' neck, a long orange-and-black wedge-shaped bill and orange legs. The adult is brown with a very dark sooty-brown head and upper neck, uniform brown upperparts with neat pale barring and white under the tail. The brown breast has fine, pale barring and there is a white line at the edge of its folded wings. The juvenile is similar to the adult but duller and sometimes paler. Some birds have white feathers around the base of the bill but not enough to be confused with a White-fronted Goose. In flight, the upperwing is uniformly dark. It molts all its flight feathers simultaneously and is flightless for about a month before its autumn migration. **See also:** Tundra Bean Goose [p21](#), Greylag Goose [p18](#), Pink-footed Goose [p19](#), White-fronted Goose [p22](#).

HABITS

Swims well but less often than most other geese. The dark brown upperwing and rather long, slender neck are obvious in flight. It is usually sociable, although the flocks tend to be smaller than those of other geese. In autumn, the flocks are first made up of families that are then joined by non-breeders. Flocks fly to their roosts at dusk and leave again at dawn. When airborne they generally fly in 'V' formation or in lines.

VOICE

Not as noisy as other geese – gives an *ung-ank* or an *ow, ow, ow, ow* call.

HABITAT

In Britain, it spends winter in open country. Winter roosts are on lakes or flooded fields close to the feeding grounds. The northern breeding grounds tend to be within pine 'taiga' forests or birch scrub, or in open areas of low wet tundra, on small offshore islands or near pools or streams.

FOOD

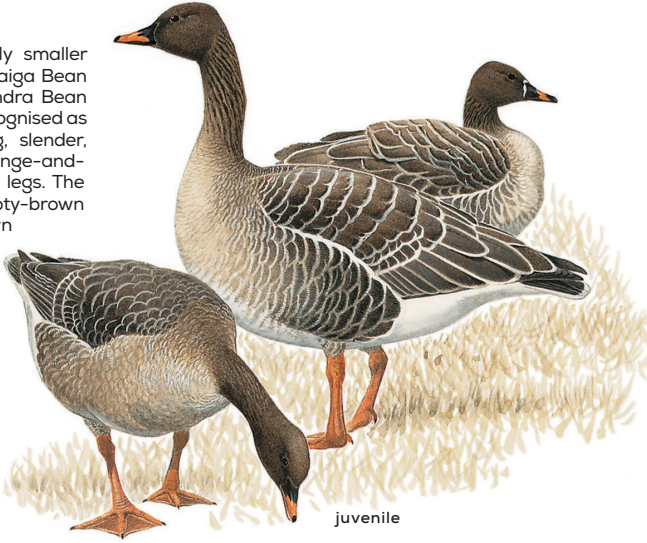
Feeds by grazing grasses, clover, cereals, potatoes and other crops.

BREEDING

These species do not breed wild in Britain or Ireland. Both parents tend the young and in autumn families migrate together, and stay together until the following breeding season.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

On their breeding grounds some of the forest birds move north to the tundra after breeding and before migrating south or west for the winter. Family parties arrive in Britain during late September and early October and leave in March.



CONSERVATION

Like other members of this family, these geese can be unpopular with farmers as they spend time on agricultural land during winter and graze grass and growing cereals. Research, however, has shown that this winter grazing does little economic damage to the crops. There are now fewer Taiga Bean Geese breeding in Sweden and Norway than there were 20 years ago, and this may have been caused by increased human disturbance, changes in agriculture and some direct persecution.

DISTRIBUTION

Visits the eastern coast of Britain, especially East Anglia and central Scotland. Also sometimes seen in the Northern Isles. Small numbers are occasionally seen elsewhere, usually in the company of other geese. Taiga Bean Geese breed in Scandinavia and northern Russia. Many birds winter in southern Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, and a few of these visit Britain.



Tundra Bean Goose *Anser serrirostris*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Stable
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (pairs)	300
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Oldest: 25
Size and weight	66-89cm; 2.4-2.7kg



IDENTIFICATION

Slightly larger than Pink-footed Goose and has a shorter, thicker neck than Taiga Bean Goose, the dark bill is shorter than Taiga's and deeper and stronger-looking, with a variable pattern with less orange. Legs are also orange. The male is generally a little larger than the female. The adult is brown, with a very dark sooty-brown head and upper neck, uniform brown upperparts with neat pale barring and white under the tail. The brown breast has fine, pale barring and there is a white line at the edge of its folded wings. The juvenile is similar to the adult but duller and sometimes paler. Some birds have white feathers around the base of the bill, but not enough to be confused with a White-fronted Goose. In flight, the upperwing is uniformly dark and underwing darker than Pink-footed. It moults all its flight feathers simultaneously and is flightless for about a month before its autumn migration. **See also:** Taiga Bean Goose [p20](#), Greylag Goose [p18](#), Pink-footed Goose [p19](#), White-fronted Goose [p22](#).

HABITS

It swims well but less often than most other geese. The dark brown upperwing and rather long, slender neck are obvious in flight. It is usually sociable, except when nesting, although the flocks tend to be smaller than those of other geese. In autumn, the flocks are first made up of families that are then joined by non-breeders. Flocks fly to their roosts at dusk and leave again at dawn. When airborne they generally fly in 'V' formation or in lines.

VOICE

Not as noisy as other geese – gives an *ung-ank* or an *ow, ow, ow, ow* call.

HABITAT

In Britain, it spends winter in open country. Winter roosts are on lakes or flooded fields close to the feeding grounds. The northern breeding grounds tend to be in open areas of low wet tundra and on small offshore islands or near pools or streams.

FOOD

It feeds by grazing grasses, clover, cereals, potatoes and other crops.

BREEDING

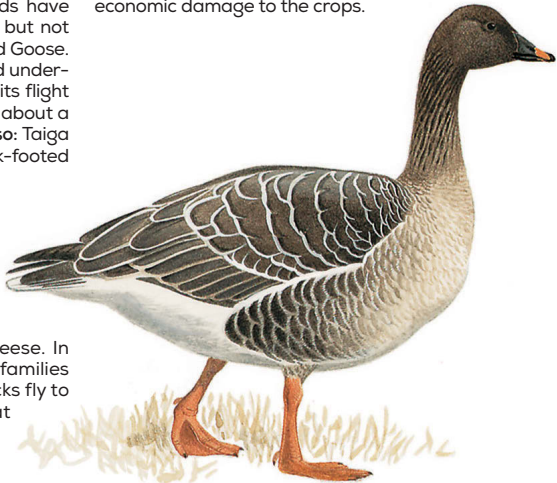
This species does not breed wild in Britain or Ireland. Both parents tend the young and in autumn families migrate together and stay together until the following breeding season.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Sometimes a small number of families accompany other geese and arrive in Britain during autumn, while others fly to Denmark and visit Britain after midwinter. They leave again in March.

CONSERVATION

Like other members of this family, these geese can be unpopular with farmers as they spend time on agricultural land during winter and graze grass and growing cereals. Research, however, has shown that this winter grazing does little economic damage to the crops.



DISTRIBUTION

Tundra Bean Geese breed in northern Russia and Siberia, and many winter in southern Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands, and a few of these visit eastern Britain in winter. Other races breed across northern Asia and winter in western China and Japan.

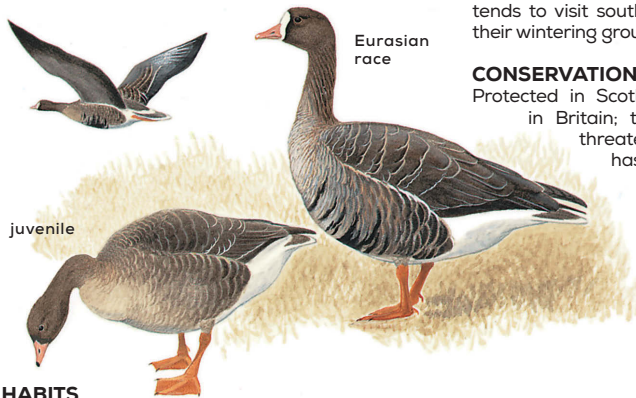


White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Conservation status	Red
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate decline
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (pairs)	13,500
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Average: 6; Oldest: 25
Size and weight	65-78cm; 2.5kg

IDENTIFICATION

Smaller than Greylag and appears larger and longer necked than Pink-footed Goose, with deeper chest and rather grey-brown head and white forehead. Body and neck are grey-brown with variable black, blotchy bars on underparts. Back is brown and crossed with pale lines. Legs are orange and the bill of the Eurasian race is pink. Greenland race is generally larger and darker, with a longer, heavier orange bill. Juvenile lacks the white forehead and black breast bars. The white forehead is gained during the first winter but it is the second autumn before black bars appear on the belly. In flight, wings appear longer and narrower than other geese. It becomes flightless for 25 days after nesting. See also: Tundra Bean Goose [p21](#), Pink-footed Goose [p19](#), Greylag Goose [p18](#).



HABITS

Rather agile, and can rise almost vertically from the ground. Flocks comprise many family groups and large flocks cross the sky in lines, 'V's and chevrons, especially at dawn and dusk and they fly to and from their roosts. Large roosts break up into smaller feeding groups during the day.

VOICE

Cackling calls that are higher pitched than Greylag and with a laughing sound to them.

HABITAT

Winters on low-lying, wet grassland close to coastal marshes, saltings, lakes and river valleys, including wet pastures and flood meadows. Feeds on agricultural land, including grass and cereal crops. In Ireland, visits raised blanket bogs. Breeds on the Arctic tundra, close to lakes, rivers and pools.

FOOD

Vegetarian. Eats leaves, stems, roots and seeds of a variety of plants. In winter, feeds on grain, potatoes, sugar beet, horsetails, rhizomes of couch grass and roots of cotton grass. Feeds during the day, and sometimes at night.



BREEDING

Wild birds do not breed in Britain or Ireland. Pairs form after 2 years, but do not normally breed until 3 years old. Once formed, pairs generally stay together for life. Both parents tend the young and the family stays together until the adults start breeding the following year, and even then the previous year's young may associate with their family group. On their breeding grounds, after the young have hatched, families join together. A few feral birds are free-flying in Britain and occasionally nest successfully.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

The race that breeds in Greenland (*A. a. flavirostris*) mostly winters in Scotland and Ireland. It crosses the Atlantic via Iceland and arrives in October. The race from northern Europe and Russia (*A. a. albifrons*) tends to visit southern England. Both races leave their wintering grounds in March or April.

CONSERVATION

Protected in Scotland. Both races are declining in Britain; the Greenland race is globally threatened. A ban on hunting in Iceland has probably helped stabilise numbers of migrants reaching the British Isles. In Ireland, the drainage of bogs has forced the species onto agricultural land where it has been doing well. However, disturbance at feeding and roosting sites, and the construction of windfarms in remote areas, are a cause for concern.

DISTRIBUTION

The species breeds across northern Russia, Siberia and North America. Two races visit the British Isles. One comes from the west coast of Greenland and mostly winters in and around Wexford in Ireland and on Islay in the Inner Hebrides. The other race comes from northern Russia and winters mainly in southern England, especially the Severn and Swale estuaries.



Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Moderate increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	6,500
Wintering pop. (individuals)	50,500
Nesting	March–May
Eggs and broods	4–7; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	34–45; 120–150 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 10; Oldest: 29
Size and weight	125–155cm; 8.5–10.8kg

IDENTIFICATION

One of our largest birds. Rounded head, long, graceful, S-shaped neck and pointed tail. Adult is white with orange bill and black base. Male has larger black knob at the base of the bill. Head is sometimes stained rusty orange. Juvenile brown/grey, becoming whiter by first autumn. Immatures have washed-out orange bill. Large black feet sometimes rest on the bird's back. Unlike Whooper and Bewick's Swans, the tail is pointed when up-ending. Moults June to November and becomes flightless for 6–8 weeks. See also: Bewick's Swan [p24](#), Whooper Swan [p25](#).

HABITS

Waddling walk. Takes off from water by running along the surface. Flies with neck extended and regular, slow wingbeats. Flocks fly in diagonal lines. Aggressive posture has arched wings, neck drawn back and rapid jerky advance across the water. Courtship takes place in late winter with synchronised head dipping and necks and breasts pressed together. Normally strictly territorial, but there are also traditional nesting colonies. Feeds mainly during the day but continues after dark.

VOICE

Mostly silent, but makes a loud hiss when angry and other snorting sounds. Loud throbbing *waou, waou* noise made by wings in flight. Young birds make a high-pitched whistle.

HABITAT

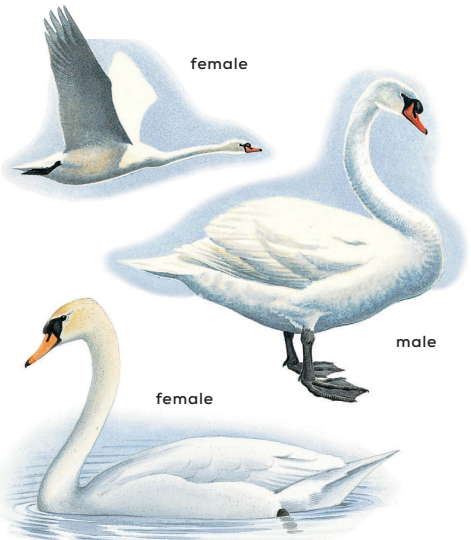
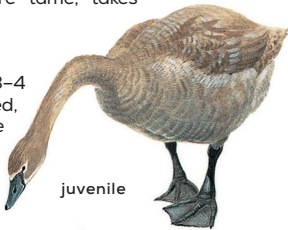
Breeds close to lakes with shallow feeding areas, slow-flowing rivers, canals and occasionally beside salt and brackish water. Visits arable fields, areas of short grass and some sheltered coastal waters.

FOOD

Feeds by dipping its head into water and sometimes up-ending. Also picks up grit from river bottoms. Eats aquatic plants and other vegetation. Plant food includes stonewort, starwort, hornwort, water crow-foot, various pondweeds, soft grasses and algae. Other food includes insects and snails. Grazes on short grass. Where tame, takes food from humans.

BREEDING

First breeds at 3–4 years. Once paired, 'divorce' is rare. The nest is built of reeds, rushes and other vegetation near water – on a



bank, an island or in a reedbed. The nest may be 4m wide and built by both sexes, male passing material to female. Eggs are incubated by female and guarded by male. Young feed themselves. When small the young may be carried on their parents' back, which helps to keep them warm and protect them from predatory pike. Young usually leave their parents' territory during their first autumn.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Some stay on territory all year, others move short distances and form winter flocks. Juveniles join flocks of non-breeders and remain in these flocks until reaching breeding age. Some travel to traditional areas to moult. In cold weather, some from Europe arrive in eastern England.

CONSERVATION

Once prized as a food for banquets, these swans were introduced to many parts of Europe, so that the present population is a mixture of wild and semi-feral flocks. It was specifically protected by law in 1387. A recent population increase may be due to better protection in most of Europe. Discarded fishing nylon line remains a hazard and vandalism continues to be a significant cause of nest failure in some urban areas.

DISTRIBUTION

This swan breeds wild in northern and eastern Europe and in parts of Asia. It has been introduced into North America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.



Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	-
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong decline
Breeding pop. (pairs)	-
Wintering pop. (individuals)	4,350
Nesting	-
Eggs and broods	-
Incubating and fledging	-
Lifespan (years)	Average: 9; Oldest: 28
Size and weight	115-117cm; 5.9kg

IDENTIFICATION

Our smallest swan. Rather goose-like, with a rounded head, smaller bill and shorter and proportionally thicker neck than Whooper Swan. Adult white with black-and-yellow bill. Yellow pattern at base of bill is highly variable, but generally rounder or squarer than the long pointed 'wedge' on a Whooper's bill. Neck and underparts may be stained rusty orange. Juvenile is uniformly grey with a flesh-coloured bill that darkens and becomes partly yellow during the first winter. Immatures have some grey on their head and neck until their second winter. When up-ending has a blunt-ended tail. **See also:** Mute Swan [p23](#), Whooper Swan [p25](#).

HABITS

In flight, the neck and body are shorter, and wings beat faster than Whooper Swan. In winter, it feeds and roosts in flocks. Generally, it feeds in water less than 1m deep, and also on saltmarshes and arable fields. It roosts on water, where it may continue feeding after dark, or visit arable fields at night.

VOICE

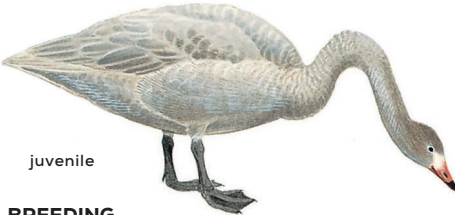
Call is a soft, mellow, yelping *oop, oop*, or *hoo, hoo*.

HABITAT

Visits low-lying wet pastures, flooded grasslands, saltmarshes, lakes and reservoirs in winter. Sometimes feeds on arable fields close to wetland roosts. Breeds on the Russian tundra where there are low, swampy, grassy areas with pools, lakes and rivers.

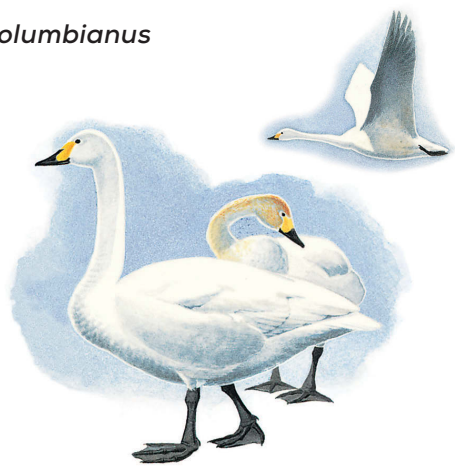
FOOD

Leaves, shoots and roots of pondweeds, milfoil, floating sweet grass, marsh foxtail, marsh yellow-cress and other aquatic plants, and rye grass and clover. Visits farmland to feed on waste potatoes, carrots and winter wheat.



BREEDING

Does not breed in Britain or Ireland. Nests further north than any other swan and breeding cycle completed in 100-110 days, before the Arctic weather deteriorates. Pairs stay loyal and 'divorce' is rare. When one bird dies more than half will find a new



mate within a year. Young form pairs during their second or third year. Breeding starts at 4-6 years old. Families stay together for the winter and return to their breeding grounds as a group. Some young associate with their parents until paired.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Bewick's Swans leave Siberia in the first half of September and arrive in Britain in mid-October. The Netherlands and Germany are other European wintering areas. Some migrants reach France and other European countries. Most British and Irish birds start their return migration before the end of March.

CONSERVATION

Almost half the European wintering population visits the British Isles. Until 1990 the population had been increasing but it is now falling in both Britain and western Europe. Many deaths are inflicted directly or indirectly by humans: flying into overhead cables being the most common. Lead poisoning from shotgun cartridges and illegal shooting on migration are other problems. The loss of traditional wetlands has resulted in 90% of the European winter population being concentrated at just ten sites. These critical sites require protection to ensure enough vegetation to sustain winter swans and good water quality. The relationship with farmers close to wintering sites will need careful management. In future, the effects of climate change and the growth in oil, gas and mineral exploration in Siberia may affect this species.

DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in northern Russia and in North America. Migrants fly to a small number of traditional wintering areas. The Russian population reaches western Europe, especially the Netherlands, Britain and Ireland. There are only a small number of sites where the majority of birds congregate.

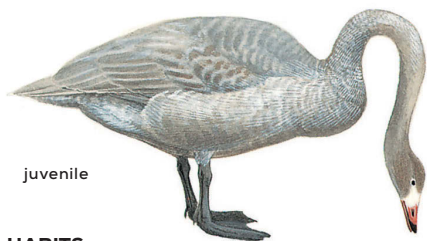


Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Moderate increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	28
Wintering pop. (individuals)	16,000
Nesting	May–July
Eggs and broods	3–8; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	35; 87 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 9; Oldest: 28
Size and weight	145–160cm; 9kg

IDENTIFICATION

Slightly smaller than Mute Swan with long bill giving 'Roman-nosed' appearance. Long, thin neck usually straight, often with an obvious kink at the base, but sometimes forming a graceful curve. Adult white with a black-and-yellow bill. Yellow on bill extends beyond the nostril and ends in a point. Some have rust-coloured staining that is lost during winter moult. Immature has a grey body that becomes whiter during its first winter. Some grey feathers remain until its second winter. Its bill is reddish-grey until the black and yellow appears. Larger than Bewick's Swan with longer body, longer wings, angular head, longer neck and triangular, not rounded, yellow patch on its bill. When up-ending it has a square-ended tail. Adults moult flight feathers after breeding and are flightless for several weeks. See also: Bewick's Swan [p24](#), Mute Swan [p23](#).



juvenile

HABITS

In flight, it looks heavier than Bewick's, with larger head, slower wingbeats and longer neck and body. In winter, it is often seen in flocks that consist of family units and non-breeders. Often feeds by up-ending.

VOICE

Distinctive loud whooping or trumpeting call.

HABITAT

In winter, visits lowland farmland near the coast or inland, with waterways, flooded fields or inland lakes. Also visits sheltered coastal bays. Feeds in shallow water or on land during the day, and roosts on open water at night. Main breeding grounds are boggy areas with pools and upland lakes, often with reeds or other vegetation. Some Icelandic feeding areas are rich in iron compounds, which stain the birds' feathers.

FOOD

Leaves, stems and roots of aquatic plants: pondweed, stonewort, marsh yellow-cress and horsetail. Also water snails. On farmland it eats potatoes, grain from stubble fields, grass, oilseed rape and winter cereals.

BREEDING

A small number of wild birds remain in summer in northern Britain and Ireland, and there is a small but growing breeding population. There are also a few feral birds that occasionally breed. It does not nest until 4–5 years old. Courtship begins in winter and most pairs probably stay together until one dies. The nest is close to water, often on a small island, and is a large mound of reeds and sedges built by both sexes. Eggs are laid as soon as the ice melts and are incubated by the female. Both parents tend the young, which feed themselves and are brooded at night. They remain with their parents for the first autumn and winter and the start of the return migration.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Migrants from Iceland arrive in Britain and Ireland in October and leave before mid-April. Generally found further north in Britain than Bewick's. Scandinavian and Siberian populations winter in eastern Europe and the Black Sea.



CONSERVATION

British and Irish populations have increased in the last 30 years. Threats are from collisions with overhead power lines, disturbance of the few nesting pairs and poisoning from lead from shotgun cartridges. The estuaries and wetlands visited during migration and for winter roosts need special protection.

DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in Iceland and Scandinavia. Also breeds in northern Russia and northern Asia. Winters as far south as the Mediterranean. Most Icelandic birds migrate to Britain and Ireland while those from Scandinavia winter in Europe, and a few of these arrive in eastern England.



Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Conservation status	Introduction
Pop. trend (breeding)	Strong increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	1,850
Wintering pop. (individuals)	5,600
Nesting	March–May
Eggs and broods	8–9; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	28–30; 70–75 days
Lifespan (years)	Oldest: 15
Size and weight	63–73cm; 2–2.5kg

IDENTIFICATION

Larger than Shelduck. A long-legged, sturdy-looking goose that stands erect when not feeding. When extended, the neck looks long and curved. It is buff-coloured with a reddish-brown back, pale grey underparts and a dark mark on breast. The neck and head are paler, mottled and with a brown patch around the eye and a narrow neck-band. Wings are dark with a green speculum and a conspicuous white wing-patch. The bill is small and pink. The legs and feet are also pink. Juveniles are paler and lack the eye- and breast-patches. It molts in winter and summer and may become flightless for a short time after breeding.



HABITS

It swims with its tail held higher than its shoulders and it may occasionally dive to avoid predators. In flight, the large white wing-patches are distinctive. Usually it feeds in family groups or in larger loosely formed flocks.

VOICE

Generally it is silent, but the male and female have different distinctive calls. The call of the male is a husky wheezing, and the female makes a high-pitched *hur, hur, hur, hur*.

HABITAT

This goose breeds around lowland lakes, especially ornamental lakes. Also on reservoirs and flooded gravel workings. In its native Africa, it is found in a wide variety of wetland habitats.

FOOD

The food requirements in Britain are not well known. It is mainly vegetarian, feeding on seeds and leaves of grasses and other aquatic plants. In South Africa, it visits farmland to feed.

BREEDING

The nest site may be in a variety of locations: under a bush, in a hole in a bank, or in a hole in a tree. In Africa, it sometimes uses buildings or the old tree nests of large birds such as herons. Eggs are laid in late winter and incubation is by the female. The young feed themselves and are looked after by both parents. They are slow to grow adult feathers and fly. The family stays together for weeks, and it is sometimes months before young birds become independent. Young probably first breed at 2 years.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

In Britain, the non-native population appears to be mainly resident. In Africa, movements are complex and appear to be linked to summer rains. In South Africa, some undertake movements of 1,100km.



CONSERVATION

The population appears to be growing rapidly in some places and colonising new areas in southern and eastern England. The first introductions were probably from South Africa in the late 1700s. By the 1960s there was a small population established in Norfolk and since then there has been considerable growth in the population and expansion westwards. In its native South Africa, the farming community sometimes considers it to be a pest.

DISTRIBUTION

Native to Africa, south of the Sahara and also the Nile Valley. A feral population breeds in scattered locations in England and Wales but is most common in East Anglia and it is currently colonising the south and east of England. There are other feral populations in Germany and Holland.



Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Stable
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate decline
Breeding pop. (pairs)	7,600
Wintering pop. (individuals)	47,000
Nesting	April–June
Eggs and broods	8–10; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	30; 45–50 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 10; Oldest: 24
Size and weight	58–67cm; 1.2kg

IDENTIFICATION

Larger than a Mallard. Large white duck with a bottle-green head and neck, chestnut breast-band and black 'shoulders'. The broad bill is blood-red and legs pink. Male larger and brighter than female with pronounced knob at the base of his bill in spring. The black-and-white wing, black-tipped tail and a dark streak down centre of belly show in flight. Juvenile less well marked with grey-brown back and head and whitish face and throat. Flight feathers molted simultaneously, and adults are flightless for 25–31 days between July and October. See also: Shoveler [p32](#).

HABITS

Swims high in water. Up-ends to reach submerged food. Also wades, sweeping bill from side to side to sift food out of mud. In flight, looks heavy, with slow wingbeats. Outside the breeding season forms loose flocks.

VOICE

Male usually silent or makes sweet-sounding whistles. The voice of the female is lower, giving a growling *ark-ark-ark* call.

HABITAT

Most numerous on sheltered coasts and estuaries with sandbars and mudflats. In recent years, it has adopted some inland sites, including gravel workings and reservoirs. Visits farmland near the coast. In western Europe, favours coastal habitats, but in central Asia lives around salt lakes and marshes, often in steppe and semi-desert many kilometres inland.

FOOD

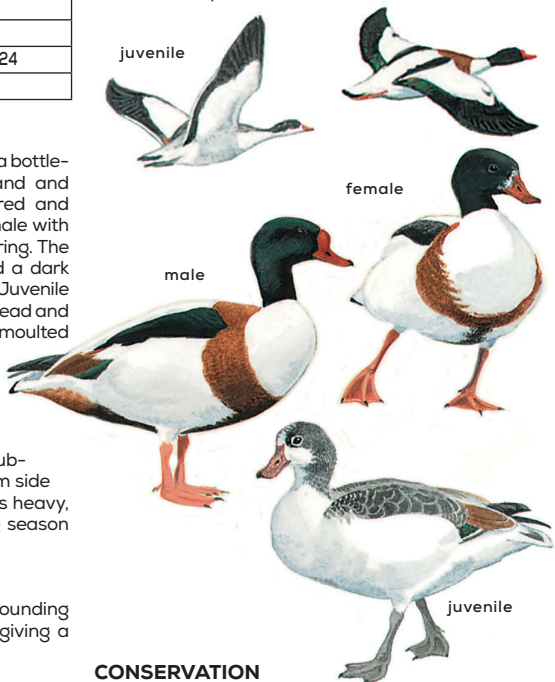
Eats invertebrates, including shellfish, crabs, shrimps, worms, sandhoppers and larvae of flies and other insects. Chief food on many estuaries is a tiny snail, *Hydrobia*. Small fish and some plant material are also eaten.

BREEDING

Nests among dense vegetation, in a hole, often an old rabbit burrow, or in other crevices or gaps under buildings, occasionally off the ground in a tree or building. Nests comprise straw, grass and down feathers from the female's breast. Eggs are laid in April or May and incubated by the female. Young feed themselves within hours of hatching. Female leads young to a food-rich area where they often mix with other young Shelducks. A few non-breeding adults ('aunties') often tend the crèches while the parents migrate to their moulting areas.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

After breeding most migrate to traditional moulting areas. Thousands gather in the Heligoland Bight off the German coast. Other moulting areas have recently been discovered on some British estuaries. Shelducks return slowly and territories may not be reoccupied until spring. Additional birds from western Europe arrive in Britain in winter.



CONSERVATION

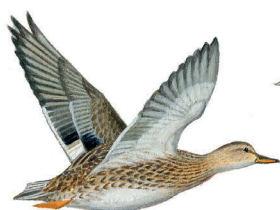
Numbers have increased recently and inland colonisation may have resulted from coastal breeding sites becoming overpopulated. Estuaries and coastal dunes have long been regarded as ripe for development and many feeding areas were destroyed in the 20th century. Port and marina developments, new harbours, increases in invasive plants such as *Spartina*, and recreational pressures all threaten the habitat on which it depends. Sea-level rise will reduce the intertidal zone on which Shelducks feed.

DISTRIBUTION

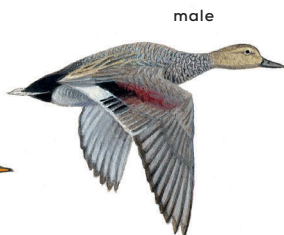
Breeds mainly around the coasts of Britain and Ireland, also a few inland places in England, southern Scotland and Wales. In Europe, restricted to the north-west coast, from France to Norway and a few scattered breeding sites along the northern Mediterranean. Also lives around the northern shores of the Black Sea and across central Asia to China.



Dabbling ducks in flight



female



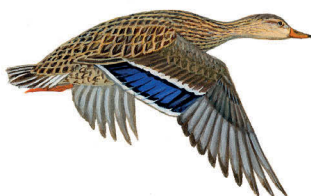
male

GADWALL p33

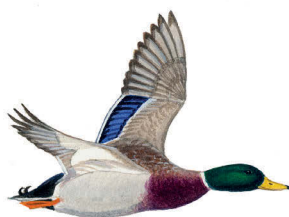
Fairly large with white underwing and obvious white speculum

MALLARD p35

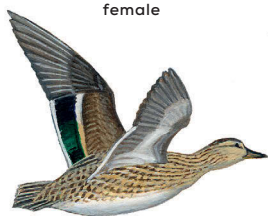
Large and heavy duck with broad but pointed wings and rounded tail



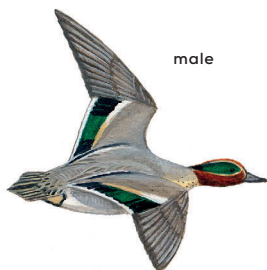
female



male



female



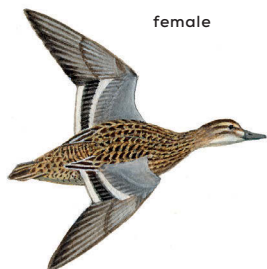
male

TEAL p30

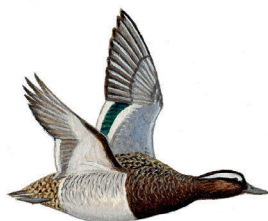
Pointed wings and rapid agile flight - often twisting and turning like waders

GARGANEY p31

Heavier and longer-necked than Teal

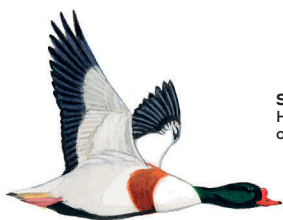


female



male

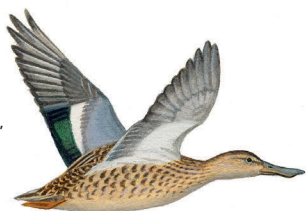
juvenile



male

SHELDUCK p27
Heavy and slow flight,
often in pairs together

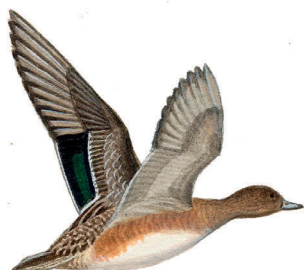
SHOVELER p32
Appears 'front-heavy'
with fast flight



female



male



female

male

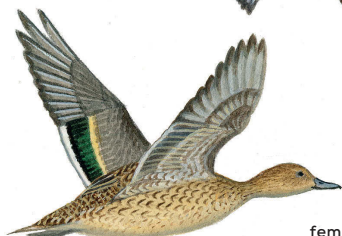


WIGEON p36
Narrow wings with
head and neck moving
up and down. Often
in flocks



male

PINTAIL p34
Long neck and tail,
and small head
obvious in flight



female

Teal *Anas crecca*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Moderate increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Moderate increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	5,000
Wintering pop. (individuals)	430,000
Nesting	April–June
Eggs and broods	8–11; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	21; 30 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 3; Oldest: 21
Size and weight	34–38cm; 323g



IDENTIFICATION

Much smaller than Mallard. A small, compact duck with a short neck. Male has chestnut head, dark green eye-patch that extends to back of head, grey body with white lateral stripe and spotted breast. Also has yellow patch on the side of its black tail. Female is like small, delicate, boldly marked female Mallard with small bill, dark crown and dark green speculum that is bordered by white stripes that show in flight. Wings are pointed and flight is very rapid. Moults during summer. Male in moult (eclipse) resembles female, but has darker upperparts and grey bill. Flight feathers are moulted simultaneously and birds are flightless for about 4 weeks. See also: Mallard [p35](#), Wigeon [p36](#), Garganey [p31](#).



HABITS

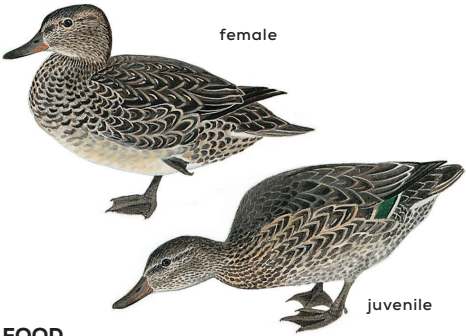
Gregarious, usually in small flocks except when nesting. An agile duck that can rise vertically from the water if disturbed. In flight, will twist and turn and their rapid wingbeats and pointed wings can make them appear more like waders than wildfowl. Often inactive during the day and feeds mainly at night.

VOICE

Call of male is a piping, far-carrying whistle, *prip-prip*. Female's call is a rapid, high-pitched quacking.

HABITAT

Breeds mainly on wet moorland, bogs and marshes in upland areas. Some nest in lowland marshes or near the coast. Some breeding sites may be in, or close to, woodland. In autumn and winter, visits lakes, ponds, gravel pits, reservoirs and coastal lagoons. In Europe and Asia, ranges from the edge of Arctic tundra to the fringes of arid deserts.



FOOD

Eats a variety of food that it finds in mostly shallow water, by pecking from the surface, filtering water through its bill, or up-ending. Chief food is seeds of rushes, grasses and other plants such as pondweed, dock, birch and buttercup. In summer, it eats animals such as water snails, fly larvae, water beetles and worms.

BREEDING

Pairs form during winter before moving to their breeding sites. Teal nest closer to the water's edge than most other duck species, which helps deter predators. A hollow is lined with leaves and grass, and down from the duck's breast. The female incubates and the male often leaves as incubation begins. Young feed themselves soon after hatching and become independent when they can fly. They are able to breed at 1 year old.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Most Teal are migratory, with birds from Iceland, northern Europe and Russia reaching Britain and Ireland during October and November and leaving again in March. In cold winters, additional Teal from the Netherlands may cross the North Sea or fly to France or Spain. In mainland Europe, many undertake a summer moult-migration after breeding.

CONSERVATION

About 30–40% of the European population winters in the UK and more in Ireland. The population appears to have increased since 1970. Planting commercial forests in traditional upland breeding areas may have caused some declines. Safeguarding remaining breeding areas and lowland wintering sites is essential.

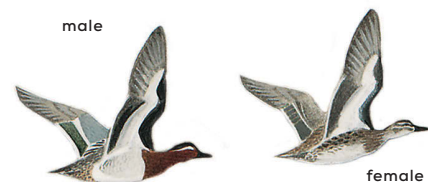
DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in scattered locations, especially northern England and northern and western Scotland. Found in winter in wetland locations throughout Britain and Ireland, although scarcer in upland and northern areas. Breeding range extends across northern Europe and Asia. Winters in central and southern Europe and parts of North Africa and Asia.



Garganey *Spatula querquedula*

Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Stable
Pop. trend (wintering)	-
Breeding pop. (pairs)	100
Wintering pop. (pairs)	-
Nesting	April-June
Eggs and broods	8-9; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	22; 35-40 days
Lifespan (years)	Oldest: 14
Size and weight	37-41cm; 351-500g



IDENTIFICATION

Much smaller than Mallard but longer than a Teal. Slightly oblong head shape, with flat crown and straight grey bill. Male has distinctive broad white stripes over the eyes that curve down and meet on back of neck. Breast mottled brown, flanks finely barred with grey, belly white and back has black-and-white drooping feathers. In flight, shows blue-grey forewing. Female similar to female Teal but paler with whiter throat, pale white patch at base of grey bill, darker eye-stripe that contrasts with pale stripe over the eye and diffuse dark line across face and darker crown. In flight, forewing of female is grey. Juvenile like female with stripy head and lacks Teals' pale line under tail. Moults between May and August, with the male starting first. Flight feathers are lost simultaneously and adults are flightless for 3-4 weeks. Male in moult (eclipse) resembles the female, but with the sides of the head heavily streaked. See also: Teal [p30](#).



HABITS

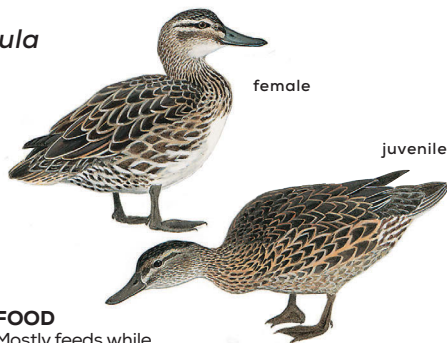
In flight, looks a little heavier and longer necked than Teal. Outside the breeding season, it is usually seen in pairs or small groups.

VOICE

Voices of male include a dry rattle and a burping sound used in display. Female has a quiet *quack* like a Teal.

HABITAT

It breeds in water meadows, flooded grasslands, and in reedy and marshy pools or ditches where there is plenty of cover from grasses, rushes and other vegetation. It visits similar habitats on migration and in the non-breeding season in Africa.



FOOD

Mostly feeds while swimming, either from the surface or up-ending. Eats insects and their larvae, including water beetles, flies and midges. Also feeds on water snails, freshwater shrimps, worms and the spawn and young of frogs. Plants are also eaten, especially the stems, leaves or seeds of water weeds, reeds, sedges, grasses, rushes, docks and duckweed.

BREEDING

Pairs form in winter and arrive together on their breeding grounds where a small territory is established. Nest is in a depression lined with leaves, grasses and down. During incubation the male generally leaves the area. Young can feed themselves soon after hatching.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

This is our only summer migrant duck. It arrives in Europe in March and returns to its African winter quarters between July and October. Where Garganeys are numerous, large gatherings often form while the birds moult before migration. Western European Garganeys have two distinct autumn migration routes, one through Spain and the other through Italy. In spring, however, most birds return via Italy.

CONSERVATION

The European population has declined sharply due to wetland drainage and poor management of its breeding sites. The small British population appears to be stable in number. Sympathetic management of wetlands in Europe and Africa is essential for the future of this species. Protection in its winter quarters and reduced pressure from hunting in winter and on migration would also help.

DISTRIBUTION

The Garganey breeds in scattered locations in England and a few sites in Scotland, but it is much scarcer in Wales and Ireland. Small numbers of non-breeding birds visit British wetlands in spring and autumn. Garganeys also breed in France, northern and eastern Europe, Russia and in central and eastern Asia. Most winter in tropical Africa although a few remain around the Mediterranean, and occasionally in Britain.

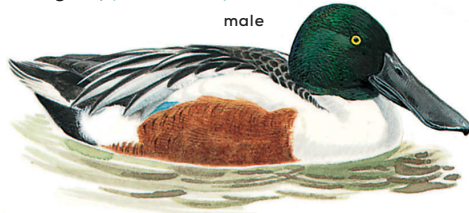


Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

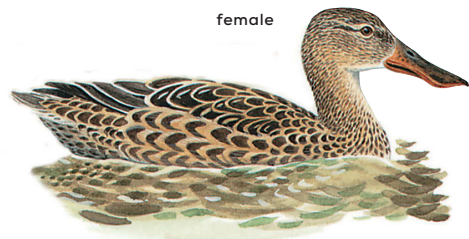
Conservation status	Amber
Pop. trend (breeding)	Moderate increase
Pop. trend (wintering)	Strong increase
Breeding pop. (pairs)	1,000
Wintering pop. (individuals)	19,000
Nesting	April–August
Eggs and broods	9–11; 1 brood
Incubating and fledging	22; 40–45 days
Lifespan (years)	Average: 3; Oldest: 22
Size and weight	44–52cm; 600–650g

IDENTIFICATION

Smaller than Mallard with long-looking body, flatter head and much longer, broader bill. Male has a white neck and breast, dark green head, orange flanks and belly, and white patch before black undertail. Dark back has long black, blue and white feathers. Female similar to slim female Mallard, but has white underwings and dark belly. In flight, both sexes show powder-blue forewings, males being brighter than females. Juvenile resembles female. Young males only gradually acquire adult plumage. Simultaneous moult of flight feathers results in birds being flightless for about 4 weeks. Male in moult (eclipse) resembles female with darker upperparts and redder underparts. **See also:** Shelduck [p27](#), Garganey [p31](#), Mallard [p35](#).



male



female

HABITS

Swims with breast low and huge bill nearly touching the water. When up-ending, the long wings cross over at the tips. Sometimes a group swims in a line or circle, filtering the water disturbed by the bird in front. Agile in flight and their pointed wings appear set far back, due to the thin neck and big bill. Outside the breeding season usually in small groups but sometimes bigger flocks.

VOICE

Generally rather quiet. Male has a quiet took, took call as rival males chase each other. Female makes a soft quacking sound.



male

female

HABITAT

Breeds in marshes or lowland wet grassland that is close to shallow open water. In winter, found on inland marshes, small lakes and pools, and around the fringes of reservoirs and other larger water-bodies. Small numbers visit coastal marshes.

FOOD

Up-ends and occasionally dives for food, but usually filters surface water through serrations along edges of the bill. Feeds on tiny creatures, including crustaceans, small water snails, insects and their larvae. Also eats seeds and leaves of water plants.



male
eclipse

BREEDING

Establish a small territory that they defend vigorously in the early stages of nesting. Nest is on the ground, close to water, in a hollow lined with grasses and down. Incubation is by the female. The male abandons his mate during incubation. The female tends the ducklings until they become independent.

MOVEMENTS AND MIGRATIONS

Shovelers are migratory. Most British and Irish breeding birds leave by October and fly to western Europe or North Africa. Others from Iceland, northern Europe and Russia winter in western Europe and Britain, and return between February and May.

CONSERVATION

Numbers breeding and overwintering appear to be increasing. Lowland wet grassland has been under pressure from drainage and changes in agricultural practice for many years. Many breeding sites are subject to flooding in spring due to changes in floodplain management. Best sites are usually protected and well managed; any increase would need more managed sites and new wetlands.

DISTRIBUTION

Breeds in eastern England, with smaller numbers in south-west England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. More widespread in winter, frequenting any suitable habitat in lowland Britain or Ireland. Breeds in Europe from the Baltic almost to the Mediterranean and eastwards across Asia to Mongolia. Also found in North America. European birds winter as far south as tropical Africa.

