

# NON-NATIVE BIRDS BREEDING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM IN 1996

MALCOLM OGILVIE AND THE RARE BREEDING BIRDS PANEL



Golden Pheasants *Chrysolophus picta* (Dan Powell)

From 1996, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel enlarged the list of species that it deals with to take in all those on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 instead of only those which were considered to be less common. At the same time, it was realised that the Panel, with its connections to the entire network of local bird recorders, was also ideally placed to monitor the scarcer introduced and naturalised non-native species. The need for such monitoring was one of the main conclusions of the joint BOU/JNCC conference on introduced and naturalised birds in the UK held in 1995 (Holmes & Simons 1996; Marchant 1996).

As explained by Ogilvie (1997), non-native species, whether the result of escapes from captivity or of deliberate introduction, can cause serious problems, for example to indigenous species or to agriculture, throughout the World. Britain has not been free from such problems, with Canada

Goose *Branta canadensis* an obvious example, while escaped Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* have spread from Britain to Spain and caused problems for native White-headed Ducks *O. leucocephala* there.

Almost 300 species of non-native birds have been reported in the wild in Britain and about one-sixth of these have been recorded as having bred in the wild (BOURC 1998; Holmes *et al.* 1998). Many species that escape never find a mate, however, or fail to find the correct habitat, food or climatic conditions to breed successfully. Those that do have the potential to acquire the status of pests and can cause significant economic and nature conservation impacts. This new initiative by the Panel will, with the much-appreciated co-operation of local bird recorders, put in place a national mechanism to track the establishment and spread of populations of these non-native species.

The information gathered will assist conservation agencies and the Government to fulfil Article 8 of the Biodiversity Convention, and other international treaties, such as the EU Birds Directive, which stress the need to ensure that releases of non-native species are closely regulated and do not result in ecological conflicts with native fauna or flora, whether in this country or farther afield.

This first report is not claimed to be complete: not all county recorders were able to send in information, though it is to be hoped that this will be possible in future years. It does, however, briefly set out the known status of most of the scarcer non-native breeding birds and is the first step towards regular monitoring of the situation throughout the UK.

Such monitoring will become much more effective if all birdwatchers will report the presence of escapes and, especially, any breeding activity to their local recorder. It is to be hoped that the dismissal of escapes as of no interest is already a thing of the past. Several species already deserve much closer study than has so far been paid them and we would encourage local bird clubs to organise surveys of some of them. For example, the Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* lives in areas of high human population density, but, until recently (Pithon & Dytham 1999), has received remarkably little attention.

All non-native species reported to the Panel as having bred in 1996 are listed below, together with those species known to breed regularly even if no actual 1996 records were received. For completeness, all the common non-native breeding species are included. Only records involving breeding or potential breeding activity are included, with the exception of the rarer pheasants. The mere presence of these highly sedentary and secretive birds is all that is normally reported, but it can be regarded as indicative of breeding.

The letters after the species' names are the categories used by the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC 1998):

- A Species which have been recorded in an apparently natural state at least once since 1st January 1950.
- B Species which were recorded in an apparently natural state at least once up to 31st December 1949, but have not been recorded subsequently.
- C Species that, although originally introduced by man, either deliberately or accidentally, have established breeding populations derived from introduced stock, that maintain themselves without necessary recourse to further introduction.
- E Species that have been recorded as introductions, transportees or escapees from captivity, and whose breeding populations (if any) are thought not to be self-sustaining. Species of which Category E individuals have been recorded as nesting, with their own kind, are marked with an asterisk (E\*).

The following species, shown as Category C in the British List, are dealt with in the Panel's reports on rare breeding birds (Ogilvie *et al.* 1999): Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Red Kite *Milvus milvus* and Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*. All other Category C species are listed below, including, for completeness, those common ones for which the Panel is not gathering information.

Records are given by county, in alphabetical order within England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### NIGHT HERON *Nycticorax nycticorax* (AE\*)

NORFOLK Up to 30 free-winged and unmarked birds of European race *nycticorax* breeding in a colony of Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* at Great Witchingham Park, associated with similar-sized captive flock. Reported as virtually sedentary and never wandering far.

LOTHIAN Although there are still some birds (of the American race *hoactli*) free-flying in Edinburgh Zoo which occasionally

wander, no breeding now takes place away from the Zoo.

These two long-standing colonies are apparently wholly dependent upon captive conditions and artificial feeding.

**MUTE SWAN *Cygnus olor* (AC)**

This species is not included in the Panel's list.

The most recent population estimate for Britain is 25,750 (Scott & Rose 1996).

**BLACK SWAN *Cygnus atratus* (E\*)**

ESSEX Pair bred on Raphael Park Lake, Upminster town centre, seen with two cygnets. Pair in Romford town centre did not breed.

WILTSHIRE Two pairs bred at Ramsbury Manor, seen with one and three cygnets respectively. Another pair and a single at two other localities.

Many singles and occasional pairs are reported from, particularly, the southern half of England, but these are the only breeding reports to be received.

**WHOOPEE SWAN *Cygnus cygnus* (AE\*)**

DUNBARTONSHIRE Two pairs bred, but both nests flooded and eggs destroyed.

These were the only known escaped pairs to breed, though several others were present at localities in England. Apparently wild pairs also bred in Scotland (Ogilvie *et al.* 1999).

**PINK-FOOTED GOOSE *Anser brachyrhynchus* (AE\*)**

No reports received.

In 1991, Delany (1993) reported a pair breeding in Lancashire, among a total of 88 birds recorded at 29 sites.

**WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE *Anser albifrons* (AE\*)**

ARGYLL Three full-winged pairs of the Greenland race *flavirostris*, from a waterfowl collection, bred on Islay away from the collection site, rearing four young.

In 1991, Delany (1993) reported a pair of the nominate race breeding in Norfolk, among a total of 77 recorded at 11 sites.

**GREYLAG GOOSE *Anser anser* (ACE\*)**

Not included in the Panel's list.

In 1991, Delany (1993) reported a total of 19,501 individuals at 447 sites.

**BAR-HEADED GOOSE *Anser indicus* (E\*)**

DERBYSHIRE Pair bred.

GREATER MANCHESTER Pair bred unsuccessfully.

HAMPSHIRE Pair at Eversley Cross.

A total of 85 was reported by Delany (1993) in 1991 at a minimum of 27 sites, with three broods at Stratfield Saye, Hampshire, the only breeding record.

**SNOW GOOSE *Anser caerulescens* (AE\*)**

HAMPSHIRE Six pairs bred (five at Eversley Gravel-pit, one at Stratfield Saye), but no young reared.

NORFOLK Large free-flying colony at Sandringham Park; no counts and not certain if bred, but 50 seen in spring 1995.

ARGYLL Two pairs bred, Coll. No breeding records from Mull, but Coll/Mull flock of 40-50 in both winters (1995/96 and 1996/97). These birds stem from a former waterfowl collection on Mull.

In addition to the free-winged flock on the neighbouring islands of Mull and Coll, Delany (1993) reported a further 120 at 26 sites, with young seen at three sites, in Bedfordshire, Hampshire and Norfolk.

**CANADA GOOSE *Branta canadensis* (ACE\*)**

Not included in the Panel's list.

The most recent census was in 1991 by Delany (1993) which found 63,581 at 1,210 sites throughout the UK. The average annual rate of increase since the previous survey, in 1976, had been 8.3%.

**BARNACLE GOOSE *Branta leucopsis* (AE\*)**

ESSEX Three pairs reared broods at Hamford Water.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE 15 pairs bred at Frampton Gravel Pits, with free-flying flock

there and at Slimbridge totalling about 70.  
 HAMPSHIRE 22-25 pairs (17-20 pairs at Stratfield Saye reared 47 young; four pairs at Eversley Gravel-pit and one at Eversley Cross all failed).

NORFOLK Six pairs bred (five at Pensthorpe, one at Hickling fledging five young); additional feral flocks totalling 177 at three localities.

SUFFOLK Up to ten pairs bred (up to seven at Heveningham Hall, where two pairs seen with young and flock totalled 122 in October, two at Kessingland Wildlife Park, pair at Weybread Pits).

ARGYLL Three pairs from a waterfowl collection bred unsuccessfully on Islay, away from the collection site.

Delany (1993) reported a total of 925 at 89 sites, with successful breeding occurring at 15 sites, compared with the 11 sites reported here.

#### **EGYPTIAN GOOSE *Alopochen aegyptiacus* (CE\*)**

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Pair bred on Aberdeen Pool; first breeding for county.

HAMPSHIRE Pair at Wellington Country Park did not breed, though had done in 1995.

KENT Single pairs at two localities, no young seen.

LEICESTERSHIRE Pair bred at Rutland Water.

NORFOLK Three pairs bred at two sites, four at two other sites, one or two pairs at 16 other sites, probably under-recorded.

SUFFOLK Up to seven pairs bred at six localities.

SURREY Pair with two young; second breeding record for county.

In 1991, pairs with broods were reported by Delany (1993) from 23 sites, all but two in Norfolk; single pairs bred in Leicestershire and Berkshire. The reports in 1996 indicate that the population is still spreading out from its traditional stronghold. The total population in 1991 was 906 at 47 sites.

#### **RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea* (BE\*)**

NORFOLK Pair bred, seen with two young.

Although many individuals and small groups of this species are present throughout the year, mainly in southern England, but also turning up in Scotland, breeding is rare and this is the only report.

#### **MUSCOVY DUCK *Cairina moschata* (E\*)**

DEVON No specific breeding records, but quite widespread and flocks of up to 75 reported.

NORTHUMBERLAND Pair bred on Derwent Reservoir; two young may have fledged from a brood of 15; two other adults present.

SURREY Quite common on town and private lakes and probably breeding, but not usually reported.

No reports were received of the breeding population in Cambridgeshire where a population of about 130 birds was recorded in 1991 (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

#### **WOOD DUCK *Aix sponsa* (E\*)**

CAMBRIDGESHIRE/HUNTINGDONSHIRE Pair on Little Paxton Gravel-pit in May.

GREATER MANCHESTER Male paired with female Mandarin Duck *A. galericulata*, seen with seven ducklings (but not proven hybrids which have never been recorded and are, in any case, highly improbable because of genetic incompatibilities between the two species).

KENT 24 pairs reported, of which two proved to breed, six probably did and 16 possibles.

SURREY Singles at two localities, one with female (but not known whether this species or Mandarin Duck).

Single birds and small groups are widely reported, but these are the only breeding or possible breeding records received.

#### **MANDARIN DUCK *Aix galericulata* (CE\*)**

ARGYLL Up to six pairs bred at two sites in Loch Eck area.

HIGHLAND Three pairs bred in Strathnairn.

DOWN Population of 20-30 pairs has become established along the Shimna River since 1978.

Although not on the Panel's list, these breeding records from outwith the main breeding range seem worth recording. The total British population was estimated at 7,000 individuals by Davies (1988).

**MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos* (AC)**

Not included in the Panel's list.

The British breeding population has been estimated at about 100,000 pairs (Owen *et al.* 1986), with a post-breeding total of about 500,000. Autumn numbers are nearly doubled by the release of an estimated 400,000 birds artificially reared for shooting purposes (Harradine 1982).

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL *Anas discors* (AE)**

ESSEX Pair nest-building on Connaught Water on 1st April.

This pair has been present there since at least 1994. This species is recorded as a Category E species, but has never been proved to breed in the wild in the UK (BOURC 1998).

**RED-CRESTED POCHARD *Netta rufina* (AE\*)**

GLOUCESTERSHIRE/WILTSHIRE At least 20 pairs on gravel-pits of Cotswold Water Park, with peak of 90 birds in December. No information available on breeding success.

INNER LONDON At least ten captive-bred young birds were full-winged after 1996 breeding season.

NORFOLK Large free-flying population at Pensthorpe, breeding status unknown.

Gibbons *et al.* (1993) estimated the total population in Britain in 1988-91 as under 100 individuals.

**RUDDY DUCK *Oxyura jamaicensis* (CE\*)**

This species is not on the Panel's list.

The total of 3,625 was counted in January 1997 (WeBS, per B. Hughes).

**CAPERCAILLIE *Tetrao urogallus* (BC)**

This species is not on the Panel's list.

The population was estimated at 2,200 in 1992-94 by Catt *et al.* (1994).

**RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE *Alectoris rufa* (CE\*) AND CHUKAR PARTRIDGE *A. chukar* (E\*)**

Neither of these two species is on the Panel's list.

Releases of Chukar Partridges and of hybrid Redleg x Chukar have been banned since 1992. The population of Red-legged Partridges was estimated by Gibbons *et al.* (1993) at about 90,000 territories during 1988-91, with perhaps 1.5 million individuals at the start of the shooting season, including released birds.

**SILVER PHEASANT *Lophura nycthemera* (E\*)**

NORFOLK Pair bred in 1994, but no report was received this year.

**REEVES'S PHEASANT *Syrnaticus reevesii* (E\*)**

SURREY Two males, Banstead, 21st February.

There have been a number of attempts to introduce this species, but none successful. Singles have been seen in recent years in a number of counties in southern and eastern England.

**COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus* (CE\*)**

This species is not on the Panel's list.

The British population of this species was estimated at 1.5-1.6 million females in 1989 (Robertson *et al.* 1989), although this is boosted by the annual release of an estimated 15-20 million hand-reared birds to supplement autumn populations for shooting (Potts 1990).

**GOLDEN PHEASANT *Chrysolophus picta* (CE\*)**

DERBYSHIRE Pair present, but did not breed.

ISLES OF SCILLY Several pairs breed on



35. Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* preening, Bharatpur, India (David Tipling)

Tresco, though no specific report received for this year.

NORFOLK 19 reported from five localities, under-recorded in Brecks; some evidence of decline.

SUFFOLK Records from two traditional areas, with three males reported at one and two males and a female at the second. Thought to be declining.

ARGYLL Up to 12 individuals on Mull, population apparently not self-sustaining.

AYR Female at Lugar in May.

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY Probably four to six males in Palnure/Stronard area, declining.

Estimating numbers of this secretive and elusive bird is virtually impossible, though there is some consistency about the reports of declines. The population was estimated at 1,000-2,000 in 1981-84 (Lack 1986). No report was received from Tresco, Isles of Scilly, where several pairs occur.

**LADY AMHERST'S PHEASANT**  
*Chrysolophus amherstiae* (CE\*)

BEDFORDSHIRE Population estimated at 100-200 individuals in 1991 (Trodd & Kramer 1991) had dropped to about 60 (less than 20% females) in 1995 and only 35 males in 1996 away from Luton Hoo, where there were only 15-20 (four or five females) with no breeding success. A three-year census of all suitable areas in the species'

stronghold is being conducted by the Bedfordshire Bird Club.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Breeds in two areas, perhaps ten pairs, but no recent survey.

The Bedfordshire population is thought to represent the majority of the British total (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

**ROCK DOVE (AND FERAL PIGEON)**  
*Columba livia* (AC)

This species is not on the Panel's list.

Sharrock (1976) guessed that the British and Irish populations probably exceeded 100,000 pairs. Gibbons *et al.* (1993) refrained from even guessing at a total, except to say that the number of wild Rock Doves had probably declined and the number of Feral Pigeons had probably increased in the intervening period.

**ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET** *Psittacula krameri* (CE\*)

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE Reported from four localities, breeding suspected at one.

KENT Several pairs bred at Foots Cray Meadows.

MIDDLESEX Breeding probable at Bushy Park.

SURREY Breeding reported from two localities. The roost at Esher Rugby Club reached a peak of 850 in December.

The size of the principal roost suggests a breeding population numbering hundreds of pairs. Estimates of the total population have varied in recent years from under 1,000 to 'several thousands' (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Peak counts in 1996 from the area covered by the *London Bird Report* (London Natural History Society 1997) were Surrey 1,198, Middlesex 174, Buckinghamshire 133, Kent 83, Inner London 4 and Hertfordshire 1.

Simultaneous counts at roosts in the London area and Kent in autumn 1996 to spring 1997 revealed an estimated total of 1,539 on 14th October and a peak count of 1,508 on 9th October (Pithon & Dytham 1999).

**MONK PARAKEET *Myiopsitta monachus* (E\*)**

DEVON Up to ten free-flying birds at Bickleigh Mill, Tiverton, associated with an aviary. In past years, several pairs have nested locally in trees and electricity poles, but it is not known if any did so this year.

SURREY Pair at Lonsdale Road Reservoir, 26th July to 3rd November, seen nest-building in September, success unknown.

Ones and twos of this species have been reported from scattered localities as presumed escapes take place.

**EAGLE OWL *Bubo bubo* (E\*)**

ENGLAND Pair bred at a location in northern England and is thought to have fledged three young.

The provenance of this pair is unknown. The only previous breeding record was of a pair which bred in Moray & Nairn in 1984 and again in 1985, fledging a single chick (Cook 1992).

**LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua* (C)**

This species is not on the Panel's list.

The British population was estimated to be between 6,000 and 12,000 pairs in 1988-91 (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

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