

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve

The Lindisfarne Wildfowling
Management Group Report
2023/2024



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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This report represents a comprehensive review of the work undertaken by the Lindisfarne Wildfowling Management Group (LWMG) over the past year, including wardening work undertaken by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) under contract to Natural England (NE).

This report contains information on the use of the reserve by wildfowlers over the 2023-24 season, all bag return details, incident reports, wildfowl peak count data and records of permit uptake and returns.

The report also contains the views of those managing wildfowling on the site and suggestions for future improvements.



Chapter 2 - Season summary

Season overview

Shaun McWilliams continued into his second season as Lindisfarne NNR Wildfowling Warden. A total of 399 wildfowling visits were monitored on the reserve with no incidents connected with wildfowling being recorded.

Following on from last season, the warden undertook spot bag checks. 76 were completed this season. The total bag count was 98.68 per cent accurate against the submitted bag returns, however there were some discrepancies in the number of shots fired.

Building on the success of last season, BASC continued with the induction programme for new permit holders, which gives an in-depth understanding of wildfowling law, best practice, quarry identification and any Lindisfarne-specific requirements. All new permit holders must attend the induction before wildfowling on Lindisfarne. There was 100 per cent attendance for the 2023-24 sessions, with 32 new permit holders benefiting from the experience.

Avian influenza continues to persist in the background on the reserve and is monitored continuously by daily observations, surveys and carcass removal throughout the season. However, there were thankfully no cases this season and subsequently no further actions were required.

Weather patterns during the season were such that there was no call from BASC for voluntary restraint or implementation of a statutory suspension due to severe weather of the shooting of wild ducks, geese or waders.

The warden observed one incident of illegal hare coursing with lurchers on the reserve's adjacent fields. There was also one incident of illegal bait digging which was dealt with by the warden in November 2023.

Count summary 2023/24 (warden counts are just the shooting zones, but the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) includes the whole NNR)

Wigeon

The warden peak count was 17,800. This was recorded in November 2023, down from 19,000 recorded in October 2022. However, the WeBS peak count was up at 19,599, recorded in October 2023, up from 16,431 recorded in October 2022. Interestingly, the overall wigeon bag total this season is the same as last season.

Pink-footed geese

The warden peak count was 9,500 and was recorded in October 2023. This is down from 11,700 recorded in October 2022. The WeBS peak count was down at 8,269 recorded in October 2023. This was up from 553 recorded in February 2023. The overall pink-footed goose bag total is down by 35.82 per cent this season from last.

Greylag geese

The warden peak count was 423 recorded in November 2023. This is up from 400 recorded in December 2022. The WeBS peak count was, however, less at just 53 recorded in October 2023, down from 331 recorded in September 22. The overall greylag goose bag total is down by 16.67

per cent this season from last. These counts are in reference to our UK breeding population and not migratory Icelandic birds.

Light-bellied Brent geese

The warden peak count was 4,000 recorded in October 2023. This is an increase on 3,900 recorded in October 2022. The WeBS peak count was, however, even higher at 4,500 recorded in September 2023, up from 2,850 recorded in September 2022.

Barnacle

The warden peak count was 5,200 recorded in October 2023, up from 2,600 counted in October 2022. The WeBS peak count was less at 2,189 recorded in November 2023, down from 2,850 recorded in October 2022.

Permit review

- 138 wildfowling permits were issued, up from 111 last season. 132 were full permits and 6 were complimentary.
- No introductory permits were issued this season.
- 32 of the 138 were new permit holders and all 32 attended the online training session(s) delivered by BASC.
- 30 of the 32 new permit holders went on to meet the wildfowling warden prior to their first outing on the reserve. The remaining 2 did not visit the reserve.
- Of the 138 permits issued, 113 of them visited the reserve during the 2023/24 season.
- 107 permits (94.69 per cent of the 113) were checked at least once by the wildfowling warden this season.

Visit and bag return summary

- 571 visits were made by permit holders to the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.
- 366 visits recorded a blank flight (no quarry taken), and on 284 of those blank flights, there were no shots fired.
- 29 permit holders submitted 'nil' bag returns (no quarry taken).
- 606 birds were shot this season: wigeon 79 per cent (476), teal 12 per cent (75), and pink-footed geese 4 per cent (24) of the total bag.
- Zone 6 was the most visited shooting area, with 114 visits, and unsurprisingly recorded the largest bag return of 103 birds.
- October was the most visited month, which coincides with the peak counts for most species.
- February was the least visited month.

Punt summary

- There was a total of 5 punt visits this season: 4 in October and 1 in November. This is down from 8 visits last season.
- There were two shots fired over two separate visits, totalling 83 wigeon harvested.

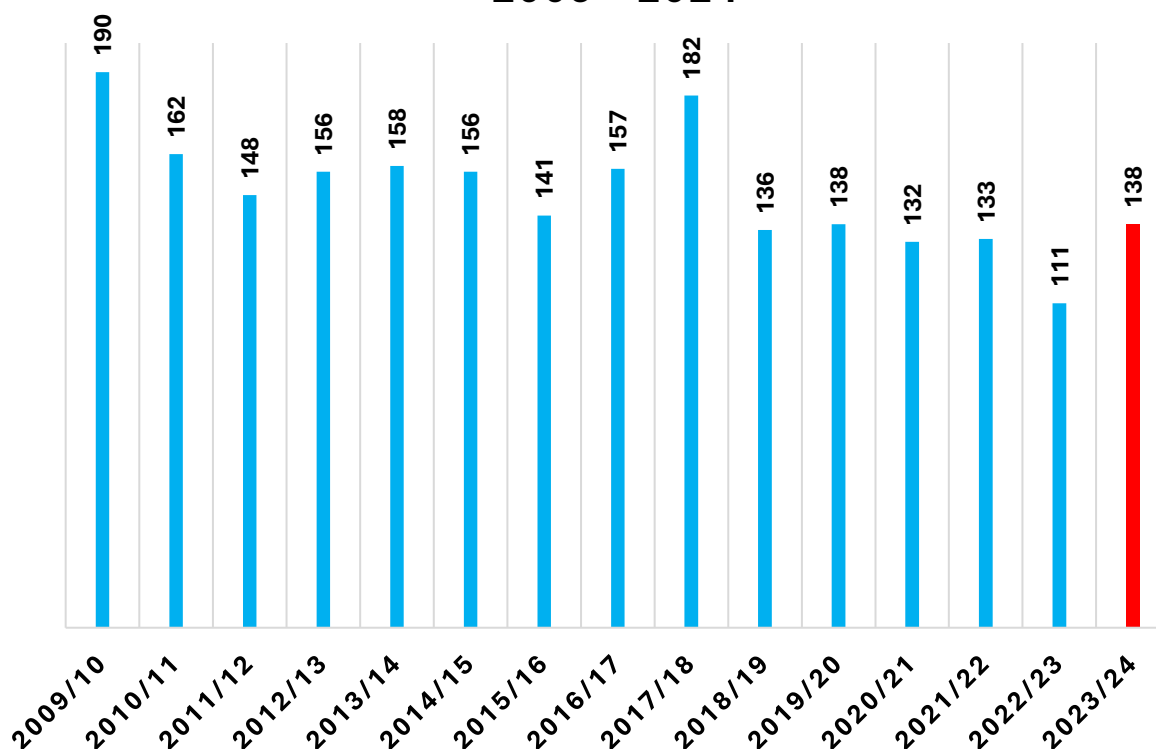
Chapter 3 - Permits issued

Seasonal permits were issued on a block basis by the BASC wildfowl and wetlands team via application to Beal Station.

Number of permits issued 2023/24:

| GROUP | ALLOCATION | NO. ISSUED |
|---|------------|--|
| Northumberland & Durham Wildfowlers' Association (NDWA) | 100 | (Number issued included in LWMG total) |
| Holy Island | 40 | 6 |
| Lindisfarne Wildfowl Management Group (LWMG) | 200 | 121 |
| Punt National | 4 | 4 |
| Punt Holy Island | 4 | 1 |
| Complimentary | 10 | 6 |
| Introductory | 8 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 200 | 138 |

NUMBER OF PERMITS ISSUED 2009 - 2024



Number of permits returned 2023/2024



| Season | No. issued | No. returned on time | No. returned late | No. not returned |
|--------|------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 23/24 | 138 | 136 | 2 | 0 |
| 22/23 | 111 | 103 | 8 | 0 |
| 21/22 | 133 | 117 | 14 | 2 |
| 20/21 | 132 | 120 | 12 | 0 |
| 19/20 | 137 | 125 | 12 | 0 |
| 18/19 | 134 | 129 | 5 | 0 |
| 17/18 | 183 | 178 | 5 | 0 |
| 16/17 | 155 | 155 | 0 | 0 |
| 15/16 | 142 | 142 | 0 | 0 |
| 14/15 | 153 | 148 | 0 | 5 |
| 13/14 | 157 | 157 | 0 | 0 |
| 12/13 | 153 | 149 | 0 | 4 |
| 11/12 | 148 | 131 | 0 | 17 |

There were four permit holders who needed additional prompts to submit bag returns and then subsequently two late returns for the season. Permit holders were contacted by the wildfowling warden, the reasons for the late return discussed and the conditions of the permit reiterated.

The warden will discuss late returns with the LWMG and seek advice to consider further actions. Of the four which needed further prompting, two are repeat offenders from last season. The two late returns were received within four days after the deadline.

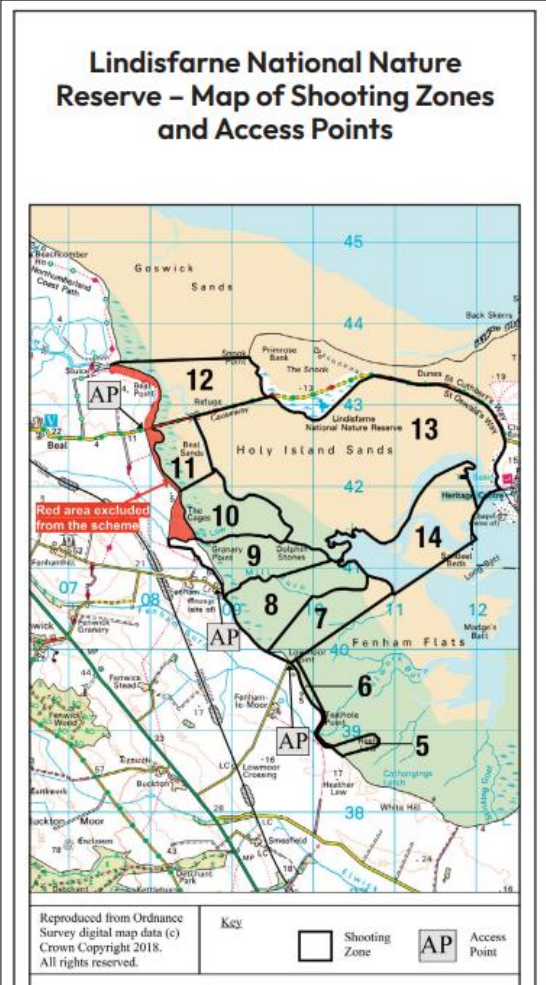
The number of permits issued has increased from 111 in 2022 – 2023 to 138 this season; this is a marked increase compared to the gradual decline over the past ten seasons.

Example of the 2023/2024 permit – front cover

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>RESTRICTIONS & CONDITIONS</p> <p>You must abide by the current restrictions and conditions supplied with this permit.</p> <p>Your completed bag return must be returned by 7 March 2024 to:</p> <p>Lindisfarne Warden, Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve, Beal Station, Beal, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 2PB</p> <p>Beal Office: 01289 381 470 Warden: 07831 306 720</p> <p>ENSURE YOU ARE AWARE OF THE CHANGES TO THE SHOOTING ZONE PRIOR TO YOUR FIRST VISIT</p> <p>BASC Wildlife Fund Stamp 2023/24 Capercaillie in the Cairngorms by Simon Trinder</p> <p>The purchase of the BASC Wildlife Fund's Habitat Conservation Stamp is a vital contribution to funds that are spent buying and managing land for the joint benefit of conservation and shooting. bascwildlife fund.co.uk</p>  | <p>NATURAL ENGLAND</p> <p>Lindisfarne Wildfowl Management Group (LWMG) Acting on behalf of Natural England</p> |  <p>WILDFOWL PERMIT</p> <p>Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve Northumberland</p> <p>PERMIT TO SHOOT 2023/2024 Valid from 1 September 2023 to 20 February 2024 MUST BE CARRIED AT ALL TIMES</p> <p>Signature: _____</p> <p>Permit No.: _____</p> <p>Address: _____</p> <p><small>Issued by BASC in their capacity as members of the LWMG. Supported by Northumberland and Durham Wildfowling Association, together with Newcastle Wildfowling Association.</small></p> |
|---|--|--|

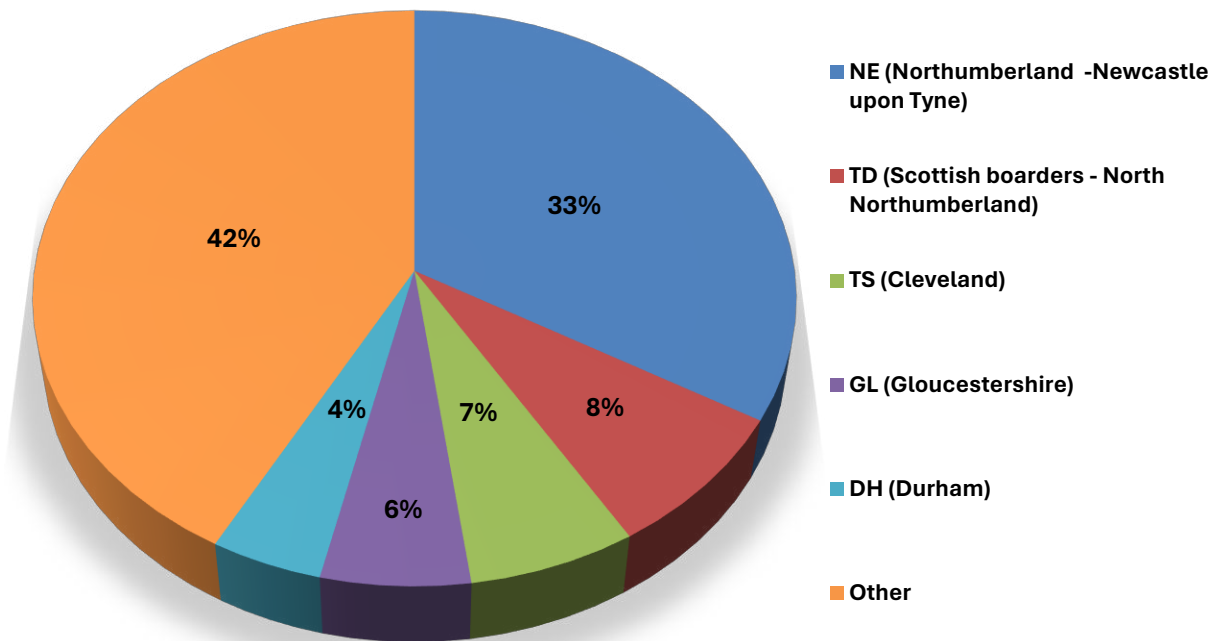
Example of the 2023/2024 permit – back cover

Right: The **no shooting zone** is clearly identified within the 2023/2024 permit application pack, to ensure all permit holders understand the new restrictions. Any rules and booking-in amendments will also be agreed and incorporated for the coming season.



Chapter 4 – Permit usage

Permits issued by postcode



Chapter 5 – Bag return information

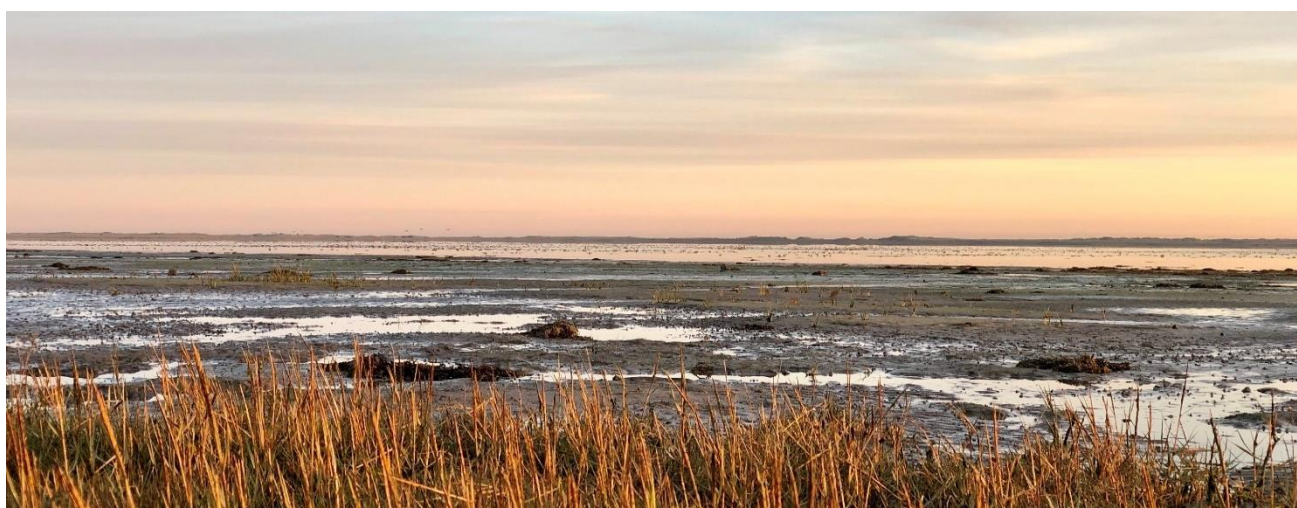
Breakdown of area visits and birds taken:

| 2023/24 season | | | | | 2022/23 season | | | | |
|----------------|--------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Zone No. | Visits | Total birds | Avg quarry per visit | Percent of total visits | Zone No. | Visits | Total birds | Avg quarry per visit | Percent of total visits |
| 5 | 69 | 64 | 0.928 | 12.08 | 5 | 63 | 46 | 0.73 | 12.02 |
| 6 | 114 | 80 | 0.702 | 19.96 | 6 | 73 | 73 | 1 | 13.93 |
| 7 | 73 | 66 | 0.904 | 12.78 | 7 | 53 | 65 | 1.226 | 10.11 |
| 8 | 19 | 8 | 0.421 | 3.33 | 8 | 21 | 17 | 0.81 | 4.01 |
| 9 | 71 | 93 | 1.31 | 12.43 | 9 | 55 | 110 | 2 | 10.5 |
| 10 | 34 | 33 | 0.971 | 5.95 | 10 | 29 | 29 | 1 | 5.53 |
| 11 | 33 | 18 | 0.545 | 5.78 | 11 | 26 | 66 | 2.538 | 4.96 |
| 12 | 101 | 103 | 1.02 | 17.69 | 12 | 134 | 199 | 1.485 | 25.57 |
| 13 | 50 | 85 | 1.7 | 8.76 | 13 | 60 | 102 | 1.7 | 11.45 |
| 14 | 7 | 56 | 8 | 1.23 | 14 | 10 | 28 | 2.8 | 1.91 |

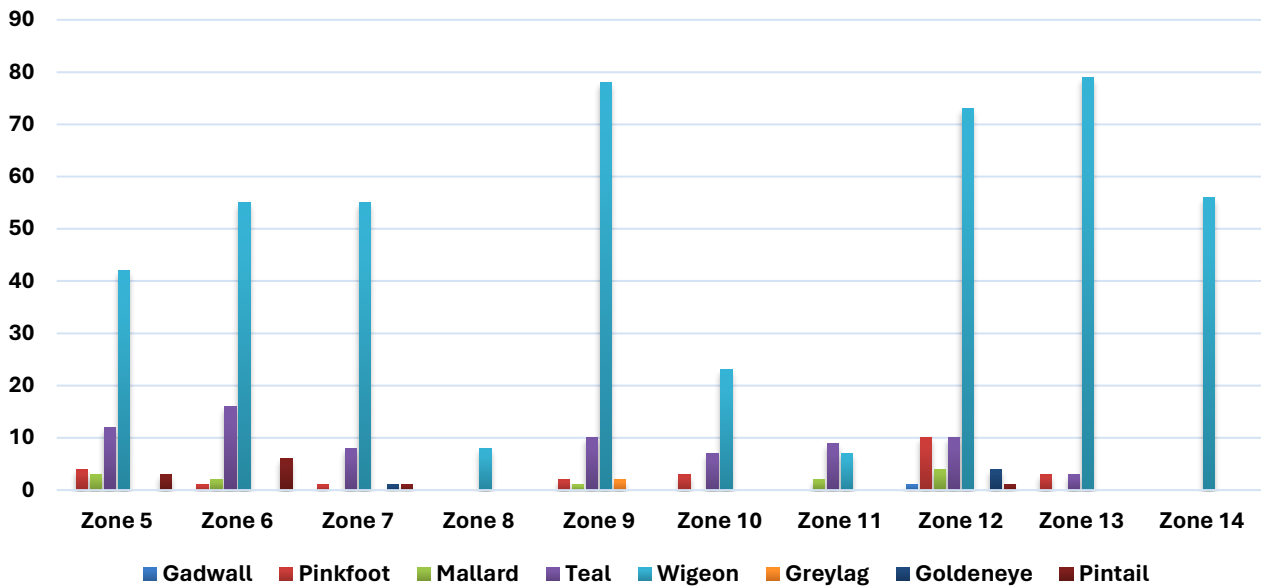
The table above shows a breakdown of visits, birds taken, average birds per visit and overall visits per zone over the entire National Nature Reserve (NNR) for the past two seasons. This data is key to understanding how wildfowlers use the site. Permit holders are now fully aware of the parking procedure on the causeway, and it is being used with confidence, as can be seen by the visits to zones 10, 11, 12 and 13, which are accessed from the causeway.

Visits to zones 5 and 8 followed a similar pattern to last season. However, visits were up in zones 6, 7 and 9; this could reflect the number of new permit holders exploring these areas, along with good parking options to allow for tide flighting.

There has been a minor drop in visits to zone 14; however, those venturing out had good results. It should also be noted that birds harvested from zones 13 and 14 include the returns of two successful punt shots.



Species taken from each zone 2023/24



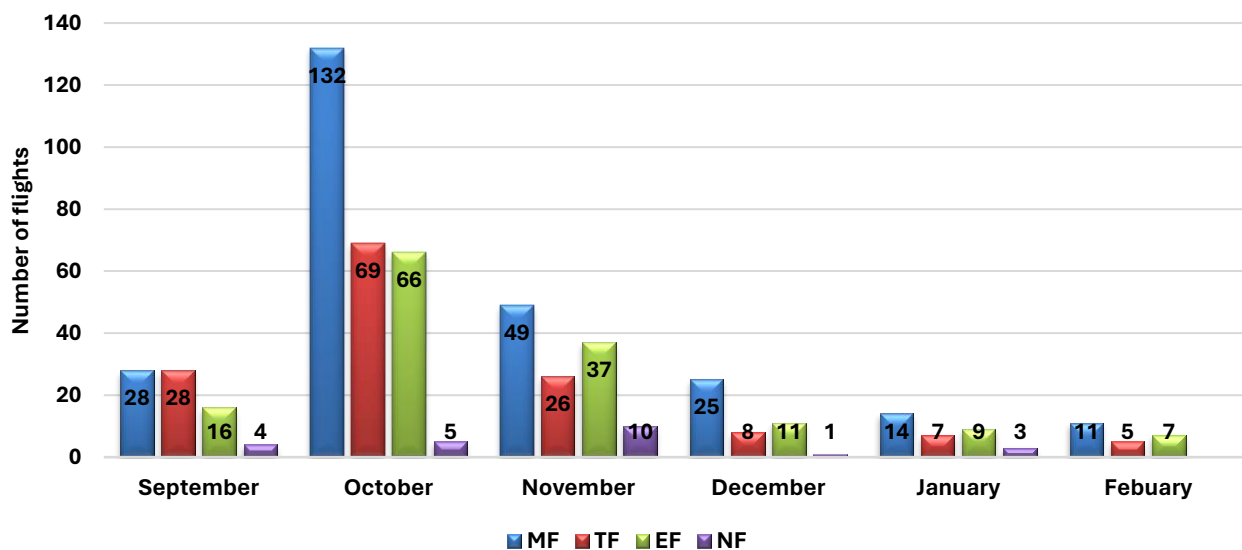
The table above shows a breakdown of the species taken in visits from each zone. As in last season, zones 9, 12 and 13 have been the most successful for wigeon, although wigeon were harvested from all the accessible shooting zones.

Zones 12, 5, 13 and 10 were the most successful for pink-feet, and zone 9 for greylag. However, the numbers of both pink-feet and greylag harvested were down from last season, with 24 pink-feet taken in 2023-24, compared to 67 last season, and 6 greylag taken, compared to 36 last season.

Zones 5, 6 and 9 gave the best results for teal.

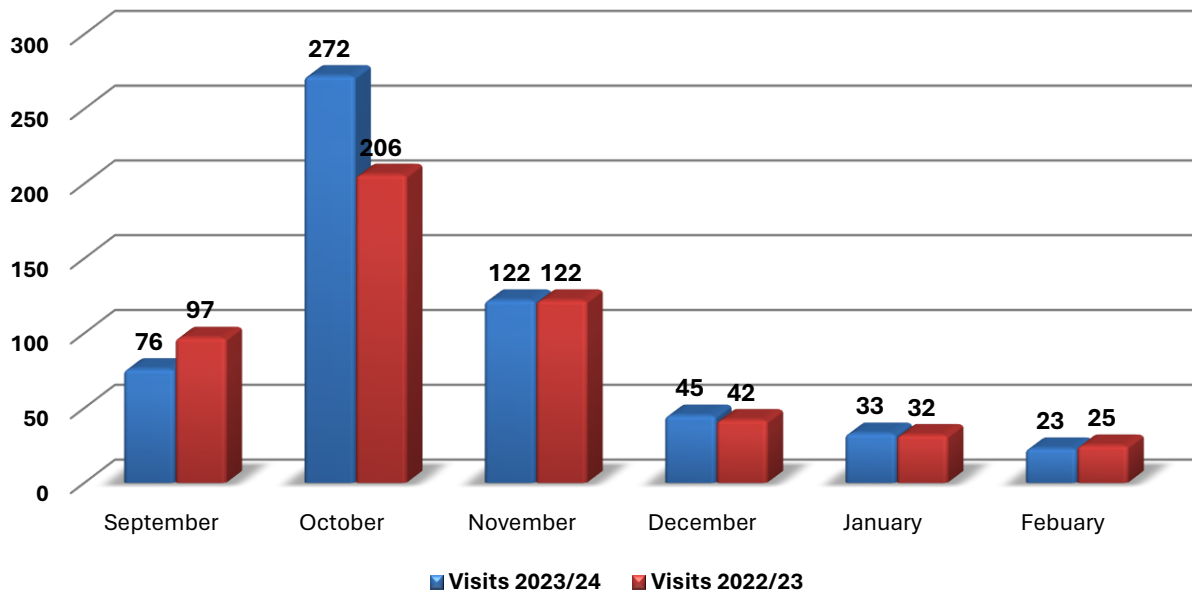
Pintail were mainly taken from zones 5, 6 and 7; this reflects the sightings and counts of the warden in these zones.

Flight type by month comparison 2023/24



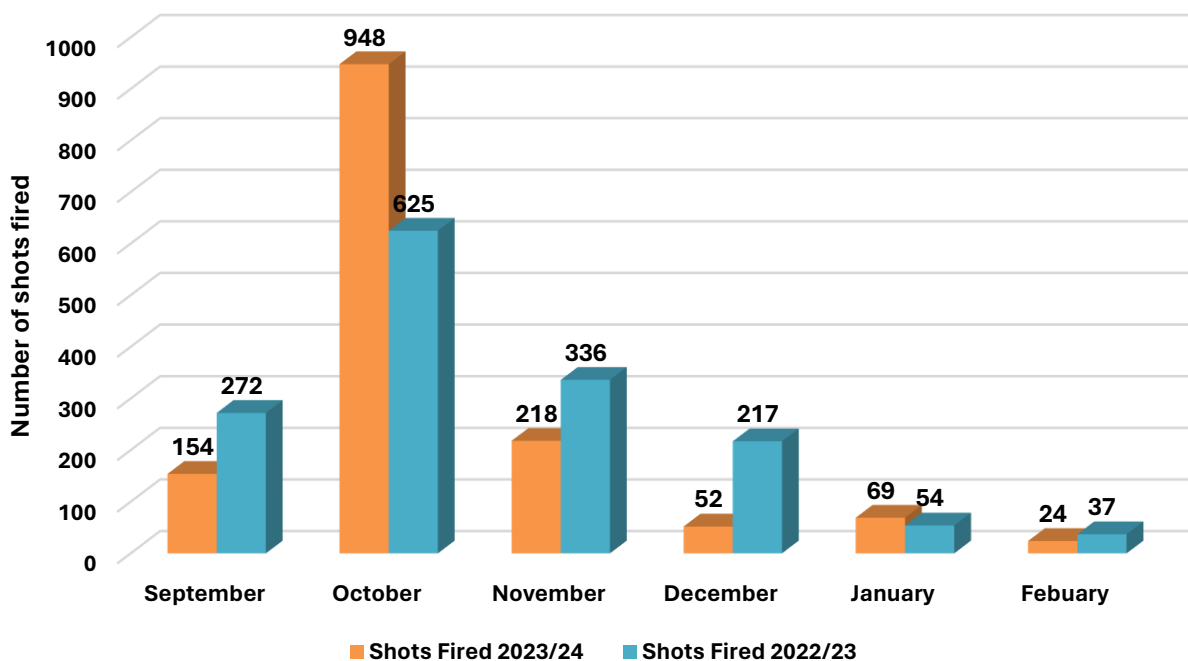
The table above shows that the pattern of flight preference is consistent with other areas around the country. Morning flights tend to be most productive, as bird movement often lasts longer and the light is increasing, providing more time for the traveling wildfowler. Whereas on evening flights the light fades, reducing visibility more quickly and making egress off the site and quarry retrieval more difficult.

Visits per month comparison



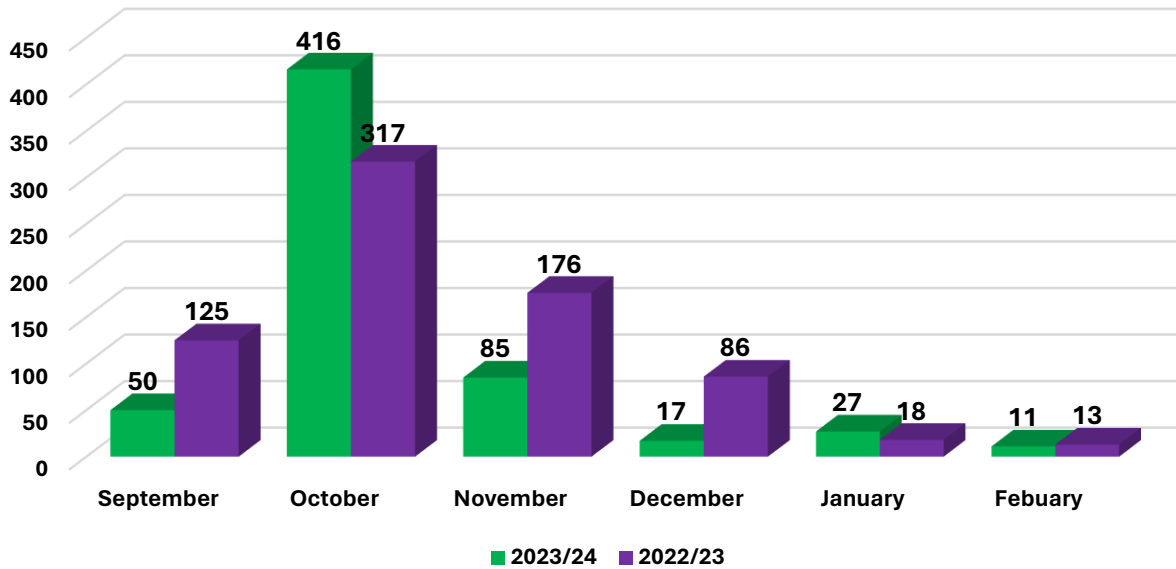
The table above shows that 272 permit visits were undertaken in October, up from 206 visits in the previous October; the number of visits clearly correlates with the peak bird counts. Visits in other months remain consistent with previous years.

Shots fired per month comparison



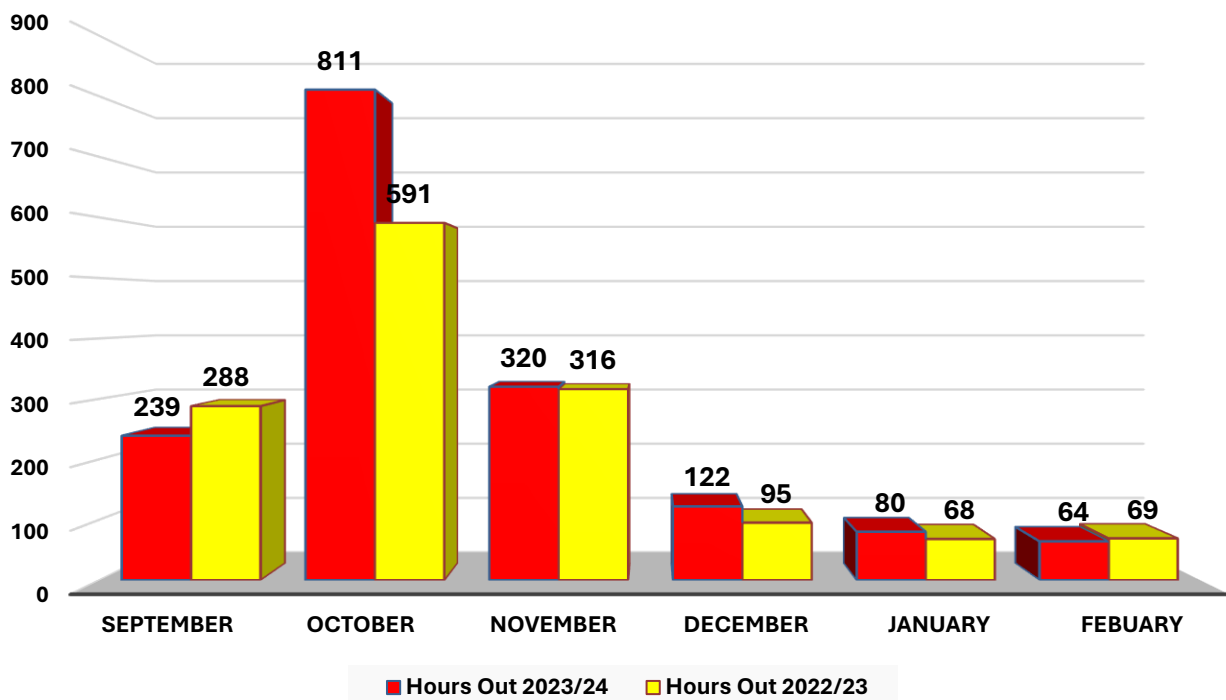
The table above shows that the number of shots taken was up in October from 625 to 948, and increased in January from 54 to 69. Shots taken were down in all other months compared to the 2022-23 season.

Birds shot per month comparison



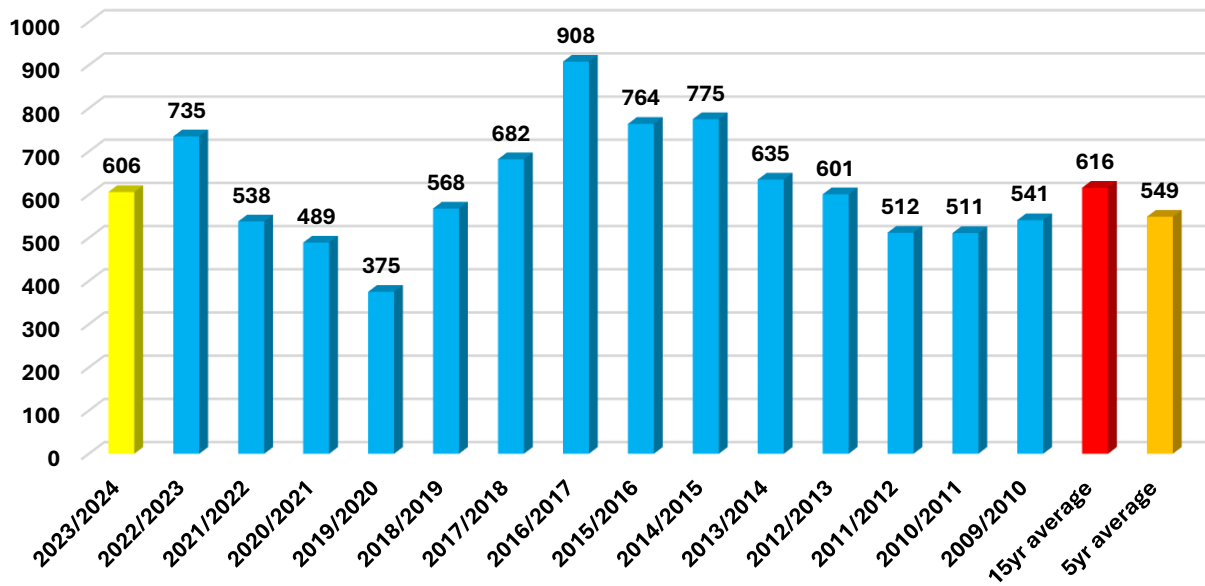
The table above shows that the highest number of birds taken was in October, consistent with previous years, the high birds counts, visits to the reserve and shots taken.

Hours out per month comparison



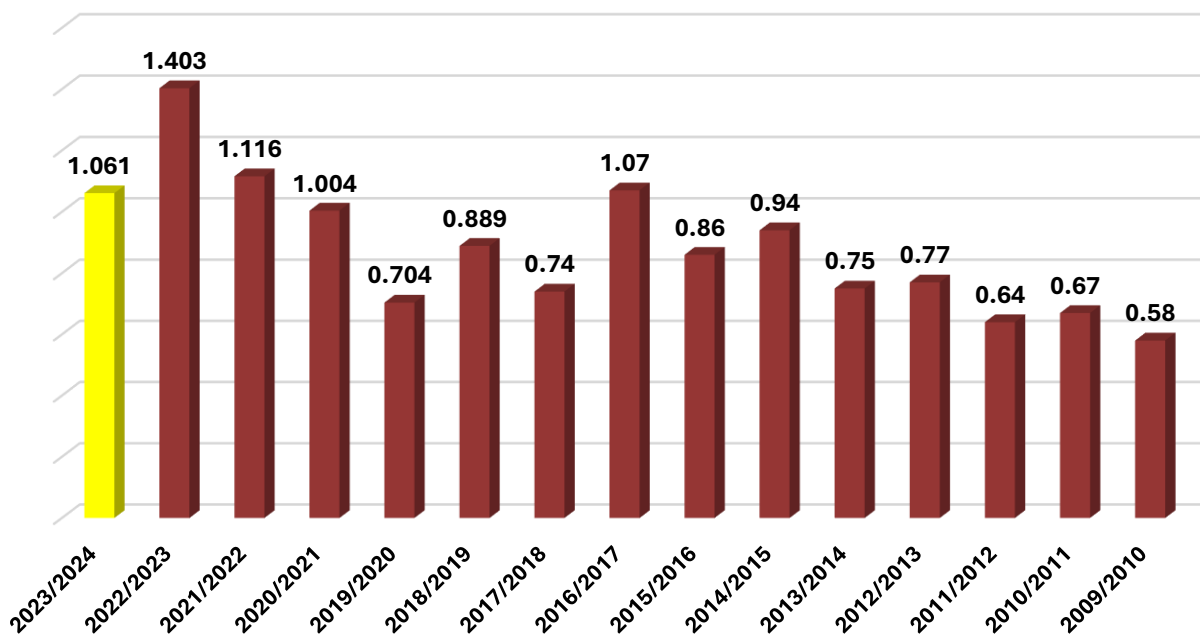
The table above shows that the number of hours wildfowlers spent on the reserve in the 2023-24 season was up in all months, except September and February. There were 811 hours of visit time recorded in October.

Total bag per season 2009 - 2024



The table above shows that 2023-24 was a successful season, with a total bag of 606 birds, although lower than last season. The total number of birds harvested is above the 5-year average and just less than the 15-year average.

Average quarry per visit 2009 - 2024

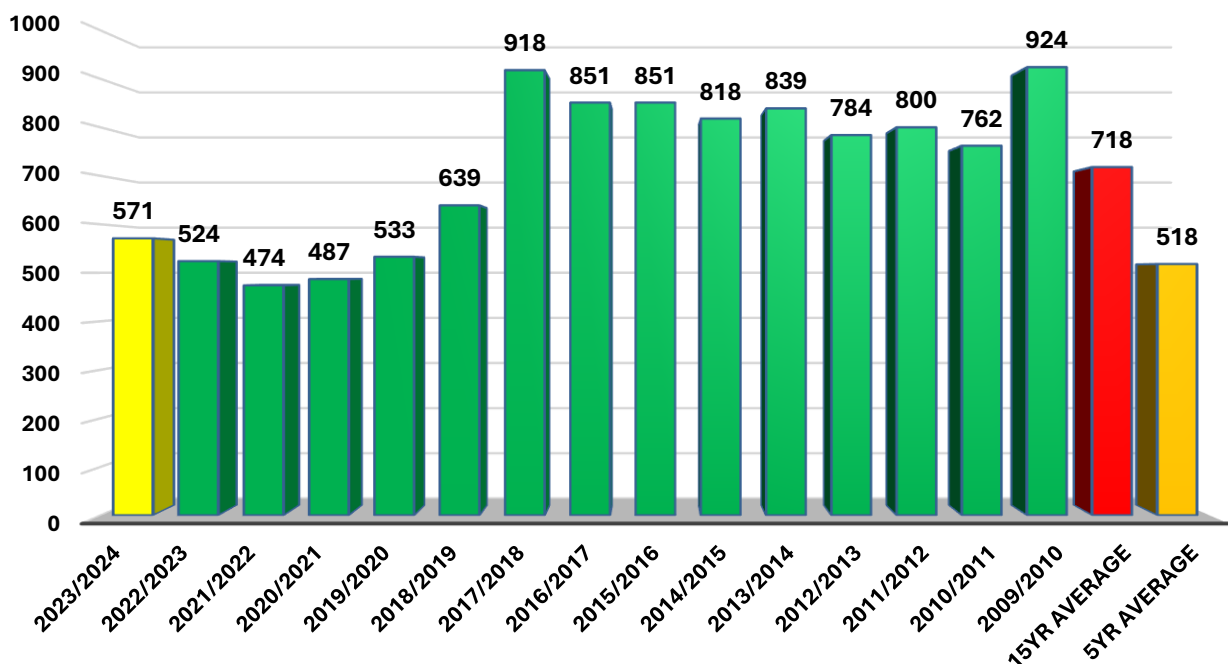


The table above shows that although the number of permits issued was up in 2023-24, the average quarry per visit fell from 1.403 birds in 2022-23 to 1.061 birds per visit.

Bag breakdown 2023/24 season

| 01/09/2023 – 20/02/2024 | | % of overall bag |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Canada goose | | |
| Greylag goose | 6 | 0.99 |
| Pink-footed goose | 24 | 3.94 |
| European white-fronted goose | | |
| Coot | | |
| Gadwall | 1 | 0.17 |
| Goldeneye | 1 | 0.17 |
| Mallard | 12 | 1.98 |
| Moorhen | | |
| Pintail | 11 | 1.82 |
| Pochard | | |
| Shoveler | | |
| Teal | 75 | 12.38 |
| Tufted duck | | |
| Wigeon | 476 | 78.55 |
| Common snipe | | |
| Golden plover | | |
| Woodcock | | |
| Total birds | 606 | |
| Total visits | 571 | |
| Individual visitors | 114 | |
| Visits without quarry | 366 | |
| Average quarry per visit | 1.061 | |
| Visits per km2 during the wildfowling season (173 days) | 0.100314644 | |

Number of visits per season 2009 - 2024



Key Points:

- There were 571 total visits by permit holders to the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.
- Of these 571 visits, 366 visits resulted in blank flights (no quarry taken).
- On 284 visits no shots were taken.
- 29 permit holders who visited the reserve submitted blank returns (no quarry taken over the 2023-24 season).
- 25 permit holders did not visit the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.

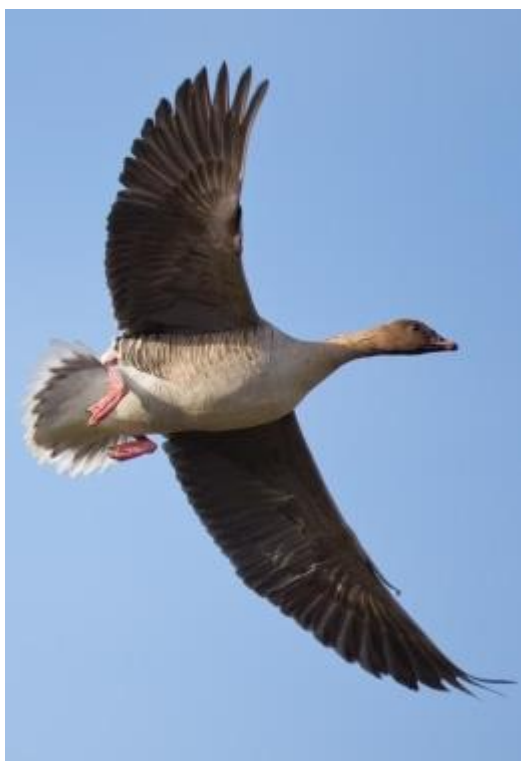
Punt bag composition 2023/2024 season

| Month | No. of visits | Shots | No. of wigeon | Other birds |
|--------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Oct | 4 | 2 | 83 | 0 |
| Nov | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The punt permit scheme allows a total of eight permits to be issued every year. There are four issued nationally and four to Holy Island residents.

Punt returns show five punt gunners took permits – four national and one Holy Islander. Four punt gunners took the opportunity to visit Lindisfarne this season. On five occasions punts were not launched due to high winds.

Bag composition 2023/2024 season



| Pink-footed geese | | Bag composition |
|-------------------|-----|-----------------|
| 2023/24 | 24 | 4 per cent |
| 2022/23 | 67 | 9 per cent |
| 2021/22 | 60 | 11 per cent |
| 2020/21 | 90 | 18 per cent |
| 2019/20 | 97 | 26 per cent |
| 2018/19 | 108 | 16 per cent |
| 2017/18 | 72 | 12 per cent |

The visiting pink-footed goose population decreased from a peak count of 11,700 birds last season to 9,500 in October of this season. This number of birds visiting the site remains high compared to past seasons.

Pink-feet as a percentage of the total bag composition are showing a gradual decrease since the 2019-20 season to date, falling from a high point of 26 per cent to just 4 per cent in 2023-24.



| Wigeon | | Bag composition |
|---------|-----|-----------------|
| 2023/24 | 476 | 79 per cent |
| 2022/23 | 476 | 65 per cent |
| 2021/22 | 376 | 69 per cent |
| 2020/21 | 343 | 70 per cent |
| 2019/20 | 213 | 57 per cent |
| 2018/19 | 377 | 66 per cent |
| 2017/18 | 413 | 60 per cent |

Warden peak wigeon counts decreased this season to 17,800, down from 19,000 birds recorded last October. However, there was a continued presence of wigeon throughout the season until February when numbers then dropped off, suggesting the visiting population was again ‘topped up’ as birds came into the reserve over a protracted period. It is possible that the continued higher temperatures on the continent helped to retain birds which may have historically migrated earlier.

Wigeon continue to make up the bulk of the total bag composition with 79 per cent, up from 65 per cent last season. Remarkably, the number of wigeon taken was 476 birds – the same as the 2022-23 season.

The increase in the number of wigeon taken as a percentage of the total bag is due to the reduction in other species taken, such as pink-feet, greylag and teal and not an increase in wigeon taken.

Chapter 6 - Wildfowl counts

The table below shows wildfowl counts for the 2023-24 season. The wildfowling warden conducted counts at least twice weekly. The counts concentrated on gaining accurate numbers for quarry species and non-quarry species.

Canada geese were not included, as the number of birds using the reserve remains low and local numbers in the area have remained stable, with no increase to be concerned about. We will continue to monitor the area population.

The warden peak counts often differ from the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts because of the higher frequency of counting (WeBS is monthly) and is therefore a more sensitive measure of actual birds using the NNR.

The NNR coordinated WeBS counts cover the whole NNR (in addition to Holy Island Sands and Fenham Flats, Goswick Sands, North Shore, Ross Sands, Holy Island and Budle Bay).

The map below shows the NNR WeBS count zones – highlighted grey.



Wildfowl warden peak counts of quarry species 2023/2024

| | SEPT | OCT | Nov | DEC | JAN | FEB |
|--------------------------|------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| WIGEON | 5500 | 15,000 | 17,800 | 4,700 | 1,580 | 1,100 |
| TEAL | 107 | 600 | 280 | 312 | 510 | 350 |
| MALLARD | 35 | 40 | 24 | 40 | 23 | 32 |
| GREYLAG GOOSE | 67 | 132 | 423 | 150 | 137 | 14 |
| PINK-FOOTED GOOSE | 400 | 9500 | 4,000 | 3,200 | 850 | 450 |
| PINTAIL | 35 | 130 | 155 | 150 | 250 | 320 |

Unusually, the peak migration count for wigeon was in early November; this has bucked the trend of peak counts in October. This may be symptomatic of the warmer temperatures being experienced on the continent in autumn, delaying the migration of wigeon. There were also high volumes of inland flood water across the UK providing alternative high value habitats to use. Further research is needed.

Peak migration for pink-feet was again in October, with 9,500 birds counted. There was a short spike in teal numbers seen in October. The highest count for pintail was in February, with birds seen towards the south of the reserve. Greylag numbers are up from 400 last year to 423 birds this season.

Wildfowl warden peak counts of non-quarry species 2022/2023

| | SEPT | OCT | Nov | DEC | JAN | FEB |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| BRENT GOOSE | 3,800 | 4,000 | 3,750 | 2,500 | 1,270 | 1,200 |
| WHOOPEER SWAN | 0 | 31 | 30 | 9 | 8 | 1 |
| BARNACLE GOOSE | 700 | 5,200 | 2,500 | 2,000 | 1,800 | 1,500 |

October saw the peak counts for brent and barnacle, with a large increase in barnacle geese numbers compared to last year, while whooper numbers were generally lower this year.

Peak WeBS counts for Lindisfarne NNR in 2023/2024

| SPECIES | BIRD COUNT | PEAK MONTH |
|---------------------------|------------|---|
| Wigeon | 19599 | Oct |
| Teal | 614 | Nov |
| Mallard | 71 | Oct |
| Greylag goose | 53 | Oct (Recorded during grey goose census roost count) |
| Pink-footed goose | 8269 | Oct (Recorded during grey goose census roost count) |
| Light-bellied brent goose | 4500 | Sep |
| Pintail | 125 | Feb |
| Barnacle | 2189 | Nov |

Chapter 7 – Severe weather and waterfowl shooting

During the 2023/24 season, no call for voluntary restraint or implementation of a statutory suspension was enacted concerning the BASC severe weather protocol.

Chapter 8 - The wildfowling warden

Warden’s duties

This season saw the continuation of the enhanced role for the wildfowling warden as he was employed from 1 August to issue the allocation of permits from the Beal Natural England Office. The warden was also retained after the close of the season until 24 March to enter bag returns and assist with the development of the LWMG Annual Report. This linear approach from permit allocation to entering bag returns oversees the whole process and allows for a more streamlined service for all stakeholders.

Once the season was underway, wardening duties continued to include monitoring wildfowling activity, at least twice-weekly bird counts, assisting with WeBS counts, grey goose counts, monitoring bait-digging activity and recording other disturbances on the reserve.

The monitoring of wildfowling activity included locations, numbers of shots fired, birds retrieved and time spent on the reserve. These duties were carried out in addition to routine work, such as checking permits, bag checks, ammunition checks, providing advice and information to wildfowling visitors and meeting and briefing new wildfowling visitors to the reserve.

As the warden is on the reserve, the role involves dealing with the public and educating them, not only about wildfowling but the general interest of the site for nature conservation.

The warden has also been involved in avian influenza monitoring, and duck wing collection for the BASC Wing Survey Initiative was implemented from November 2023.

The warden's routine for policing wildfowling

The warden's routine involved checking wildfowl and permits and monitoring activity at Beal, the Causeway, Fenham Mill and Fenham-le-Moor access points. Wildfowling was also observed from nearby vantage points. Following the morning flight, bag numbers were checked and recorded in the warden's monthly reports. The same routine was repeated for evening flights. The warden also monitored wildfowling decoying at tide flights from suitable vantage points around the reserve.

During the full moon period, the warden followed his regular routine returning to the marsh between 8.30pm and 11pm to check permits of fowling remaining on the reserve. The warden had a responsibility to monitor and record incidents and take any appropriate action.

Use of the reserve by wildfowling

As in previous seasons, September to November were the busiest months for wildfowling, with Fenham-le-Moor and Beal being the most popular areas.

Wildfowling reports

The warden continued to submit comprehensive monthly reports throughout the 2023-24 season. Any incidents and permit checks are logged along with bag checks, plus the bird count data observed within this report. Mid- and end-of-season reports are also delivered by the warden at the LWMG meetings.

Number of permits checked and monitoring visits by the warden – 2023/2024 season

| | Permit checks – total no. | Monitored visits |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| September | 30 | 67 |
| October | 58 | 200 |
| November | 14 | 79 |
| December | 4 | 21 |
| January | 1 | 13 |
| February | 0 | 19 |
| Total | 107 | 399 |

The checking of permits remains a vital function of the warden. It allows him to check wildfowlers are entitled to shoot on the site, make a note of any infringements and highlight any unlawful shooting. In addition to this it allows him to better assist wildfowlers with any queries they have on access and parking.

Three main access points are covered by the warden throughout the season. The Causeway, Fenham-le-Moor and Fenham Mill. These are the only vehicle routes and parking that can be used to access the shoreline in the shooting zones. The warden also monitors footpath access to the flats from Elwick to Beal.

Wing Survey data collection by the warden – 2023/2024 season

| Species | Adult male | Adult female | Adult | Juvenile female | Juvenile male | Juvenile | Total |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|-------|-----------------|---------------|----------|-------|
| Pink-footed goose | - | - | 0 | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| Pintail | 0 | 0 | - | 1 | 0 | - | 1 |
| Wigeon | 1 | 0 | - | 4 | 2 | - | 7 |

A total of nine wings were collected during the 2023/24 season by the wildfowling warden and the data was submitted to the BASC Wing Survey. Seven of these were wigeon and included one adult male, four juvenile females and two juvenile males. There was one pink-footed goose wing collected which was a juvenile (sex of geese species cannot be determined by wing sample). One pintail wing was submitted which was a juvenile female.

The majority of the wigeon wings submitted were shot in November. Based on the limited number of samples collected this season, very little can be evidenced at this time. More information on the wing samples and what they can tell us will be provided as seasons go by.

Number of bag checks monitored and recorded by the warden – 2023/2024 season

| | No. of recorded bag checks | Correct on return* |
|--------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| September | 14 | 14 |
| October | 21 | 20** |
| November | 19 | 19 |
| December | 9 | 9 |
| January | 7 | 7 |
| February | 6 | 6 |
| Total | 76 | 75 from 76 |

* The on-site bag check is followed up on the submitted bag return, checking the number of birds taken, species and number of shots.

**One teal was not submitted on the bag return, a swift investigation revealed a genuine mistake, which was subsequently rectified.

Wildfowling warden's observations by Shaun McWilliams

Permit allocation began from 1 August 2023, with applications being submitted by post and online. Natural England also implemented additional payment options allowing for BACS and credit card payments. There was some concern as to how the new payment options would work but the transition was flawless, mainly due to very good communication and collaboration between Natural England and me, including weekly meetings to discuss and clear payments. A total of 93 permit holders elected to pay by BACS or card.

The September season began with a heatwave across the reserve, with temperatures well up until the middle of the month. Due to the unseasonal heat, permit holders mainly held off coming to the reserve until the middle of the month when the weather changed to blustery showers.

Visits then started to build, peaking in October when I monitored 200 wildfowling visits and completed 58 permit checks along with 21 recorded bag checks and 19 new permit holder site inductions – a busy month. The rest of the season settled into normal routine, although permit applications and new permit holder inductions continued into December.

Wigeon were slow to build up in September, but bird numbers increased through October and into early November, with the peak count of 17,800 on 2 November. This slightly later peak count may be symptomatic of the general change in global climate as temperatures hold up later into the year on the bird's continental breeding grounds, thereby delaying migration.

The high count was below recent years where 23,000 were counted in both October 2021 and October 2020; 19,000 were counted in October 2022. As last year, wigeon remained on the reserve up until the end of the season when there were 1,100 counted and wildfowling were still taking birds in February.

Pink-feet started to arrive from 7 September with numbers increasing from 12 September, peaking in mid-October at 9,500 birds. The main roost this year was Holy Island North Shore, with smaller numbers using Holy Island Sands, the Sandrig – north to Goswick, and Ross Sands. Pink-feet numbers then dropped off by mid-December and only a small number were using the reserve in January and February. However, good numbers have been observed at Budle Bay and Adderstone, which is south of the main bay. There has been a lot of standing water on inland fields due to persistent rainfall, so the geese have had many inland options to find fresh grazing and access to water.

Teal were on the flats on the first day of the season, with 40 birds being counted on 1 September. However, there was a high count of 600 teal in on 9 October, but these birds quickly moved on. Teal were regularly observed on the Rocket Field and flying into the Island Lough at dusk, but their preferred location was in and around the Black Low where numbers were consistently high through late November and continuing into January.

Pintail numbers built up throughout the latter part of the season, with counts of up to 250 birds in January and 320 in February. Pintail were regularly observed off Teal Hole Point and Harvey's Island.

This season saw varying numbers of greylag on the reserve, these birds being a rather transient population; their numbers peaked on 14 November, with 423 birds counted. The greylag tended to stick to one area to roost, which was on the flats just off the Cages and the Blacks; most birds departed their roost heading north over Beal, Goswick and heading towards Haggerston. As with the pink-feet, numbers tailed off in the latter part of the season.

Small numbers of brent geese were on the reserve from 5 September, with numbers quickly building to 3,800 by the end of September. The high count of brent was on 9 October, when 4,000 birds were counted on the reserve, a strong showing.

Barnacle geese turned up on 22 September; early birds remained mainly in the south end, where they flighted between Elwick and Budle Bay. There was a large influx of birds in October when 5,200 birds were counted, and birds then spread north and could be observed using the Festival Field at Beal. Good numbers of barnacle geese have been present throughout the winter.

Whooper swans have been noticeable by their absence this winter, with only small numbers of birds occasionally using different areas and the odd bird staying close to the mute swans.

The winter saw a steady stream of visitors to the island, the causeway being in constant use. The occasional use of drones continues over the causeway and flats, but most people were understanding when talked to about the importance of protecting the bird roosts. There is obvious fascination regarding the incoming tide, with many visitors taking the opportunity to exercise dogs both north and south of the causeway.

I had one incidence of illegal hare coursing to deal with on 5 November, and this was reported to the reserve senior manager and the Northumbria Police Wildlife Crimes Unit. There was one incident of bait digging which I dealt with on 18 November.

Lindisfarne wildfowlers' plastic pick 2023/2024

The LWMG, made up of individuals from BASC, NE and local wildfowling clubs (Newcastle Wildfowlers Association and Northumberland and Durham Wildfowlers Association), as well as more than 25 other volunteers from the local wildfowling community, came together to address an accumulation of litter along the shores and pathways of Lindisfarne.

The team spent a day collecting litter, which ranged from plastic bottles to an entire car exhaust system, along the Lindisfarne NNR, demonstrating their commitment and passion for conservation of our estuaries.

BASC's wildfowling advisor and secretary of the LWMG, Chris Wright, said: "On behalf of the LWMG, I would like to thank everyone who participated in the litter pick, and NE for providing us with equipment and access to their compound. We look forward to next year's litter pick with hopes for another strong turnout and continued success."

"The same level of dedication to ensuring our coastlines remain pristine and welcoming to wildlife is shown time and again by many other wildfowlers across the UK, with similar litter picks being organised on a regular basis.

Efforts like this one by LWMG and wildfowling local to Lindisfarne help to enhance the visual appearance of a site, but, more importantly, also contribute towards the overall health of the ecosystem.”

Andrew Craggs, senior reserve manager at Lindisfarne NNR, said: “This annual event supports our programme of largely tidal borne litter, which is an on-going issue across the reserve. Thanks again to the LWMG for organising and the team of volunteers.”



Chapter 9 - Wildfowling season weather review by Andy Denton from Natural England

In a complete reversal of the dry conditions last season, this season was characterised by persistent heavy rain throughout. Temperatures on the whole were again very mild and continued a recent spate of mild winters with very few cold snaps. Wind and rain were constant, with a successive line of low-pressure systems rolling over the UK.

By the end of February there had been 10 named storms since the start of the wildfowling season. Nationally winter 2023/24 was the eighth wettest on record. The weather data used for this report is from a weather station located on Holy Island managed by Natural England.

Temperature

Temperatures were very mild across the wildfowl season owing to the Atlantic being the dominant force in the weather throughout the winter. December and February were exceptionally mild. The UK recorded a record for the highest minimum temperature on a Christmas Day with 12.4 Celsius being the daily minima in Exeter.

Although it wasn't as mild up on the north-east coast, it was still way above average for the time of year. The only noticeable cold period at Lindisfarne NNR was the first three days in December when temperatures only just crept above 0 Celsius, with the coldest temperature of winter recorded on 2 December at -4.9 Celsius.

Temperatures very quickly recovered, with maximum temperatures regularly more than double figures for the rest of the winter with the winter 'heatwave' peaking in February. Temperature across the whole of that month were between 2.5 to 3 Celsius above average.

The number of air and ground frosts were well below average too, meaning many of the wildfowl having access to food on the mudflats or adjacent fields for much of the winter.

Rainfall

This season was one of the wettest winters on record. September was a relatively dry month, with the ground still very hard and compacted from the summer but as we moved into October that all changed. Four successive months of well above average rainfall ensued. October and December were exceptionally wet, as can be seen in the table below.

The water table became extremely high and rain event after rain event created large amounts of runoff from fields and large areas of standing water that were still present in fields in late April. These were not just localised phenomena in the north-east but occurred countrywide.

Flooded fields were regularly used by wildfowl, likely altering the distribution of birds across the NNR and adjacent land. This was a marked difference from the previous year's rainfall which has been added to the table below for comparison.

| Rainfall (mm) | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Total |
|------------------------------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|-------|
| Boulmer 30yr Average | 55.5 | 68.4 | 77.6 | 62.1 | 58 | 43.9 | 365.5 |
| 2022 – 2023 Lindisfarne NNR | 80 | 45.4 | 70.2 | 52.2 | 26.4 | 27.1 | 301.3 |
| 2023 – 2024 Lindisfarne NNR | 38.2 | 120.8 | 82.4 | 115.8 | 84.4 | 33.4 | 475 |

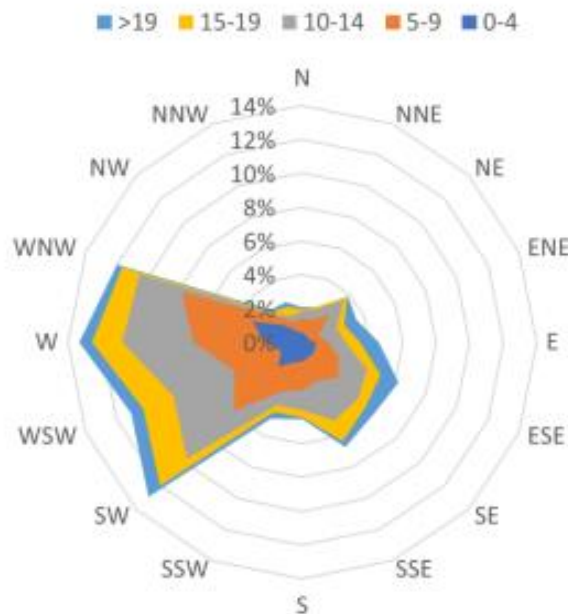
Wind

The Atlantic driven weather over the course of the winter has meant that the predominant wind direction has been westerly, as can be seen in the wind rose below. Weather from the west is often dominated by low pressures created and brought in on a strong jet stream that meanders around the globe at this latitude.

Unfortunately, this winter the jet stream often got stuck over the British Isles for sustained periods, leading to storm after storm with lashings of rain and mild south-westerly/westerly winds. This weather pattern can affect arrival of birds from the north and east as there are often no advantageous winds to use during migration.

Birds arriving in these unfavourable conditions might have fewer fat reserves due to having to fight the weather as well as make their mammoth migrations.

Wind Rose showing dominant wind direction at Lindisfarne NNR from Sept 2023 - February 2024



Chapter 10 - Lindisfarne Wildfowling Management Group members' views of the season 2023/2023

Andrew Craggs – Natural England LNNR senior reserve manager

Thankfully, no avian influenza was formally recorded during the season. We continue to participate in the grey geese census, with pink-footed geese roost peaks this season of 2,942 at Goswick Sands and 4,250 at Budle Bay during the evening of 14 October.

WeBS counts during September and October recorded the highest counts for light-bellied brent geese, with around 4,500, with wigeon peaking at 19,599 on 15 October. Numbers of wigeon dropped dramatically following the highs in October, with birds noted on inland wetlands and flooded fields. Barnacle geese continue to be a welcome feature of the NNR, with 1,500-2,000 spending the season with us.

Thanks again to Shaun and Chris and the rest of the BASC team.

Northumberland & Durham Wildfowlers' Association – club committee

By all accounts this season has been average for many wildfowlers, with the wet conditions inland benefiting the wildfowl and drawing them away from the reserve on a regular basis. However, bags of both ducks and geese were to be had across the shooting zones when conditions were favourable.

Once again, the restrictions at the northern end of the shooting zones were a handicap to wildfowlers trying to get to terms with the geese that favour that end of the reserve. Good numbers of barnacle geese took up residency throughout the season. Their yapping flights were a pleasure to see.

Once again, our thanks must go to the warden and the BASC team for all the time and hard work they put in to ensure we get the chance to continue wildfowling on this iconic site. To end on a personal note, this year saw the passing of Ken Ball, a good friend and a great ambassador to the Lindisfarne wildfowling community.

Puntgunning

The punt permit scheme allows a total of eight permits to be issued every year. There are four issued nationally and four to Holy Island residents. Four puntsmen took the opportunity to visit Lindisfarne this season.

Once again punting this season was totally influenced by the weather; on five occasions punts were not launched due to high winds. Of the three trips taken, two successful shots were made, taking 83 wigeon.

On one occasion, after a successful shot was taken on the first of two booked days, a puntsman decided not to go out on their second day as he did not want to take any additional birds – a sound example of the sustainable harvest ethos of wildfowling.

Northeast Joint Council of Wildfowling Clubs

There has been no activity under the Joint Council of Wildfowling Clubs.

BASC head of wildfowl and wetlands - James Green

The Lindisfarne wildfowling permit scheme continues to be seen as a wildfowling centre of excellence.

Each season brings new challenges, but I'm pleased to say that avian influenza wasn't one this year; however, the substantial volumes of rain certainly played a part, pulling birds to inland floods for much of the season, as was the case across the UK. I hope we return to some sort of normality for the 2024/25 season. This season remained a successful one, with bizarrely the exact same number of wigeon being harvested as per 2022/23, despite an increase in visits. Interestingly, the remaining bag was down by 50.19 per cent this season compared to last.

Lindisfarne wildfowling warden Shaun McWilliams continued to acclimatise to the role well, fostering brilliant working relationships with colleagues, permit holders and other site users. Together with the contributions of BASC's wildfowling advisor Chris Wright, Shaun injected fresh perspectives and innovation into the scheme. Notably, the revamping of the induction process for new permit holders went seamlessly this season. The induction process ensures new members are aware of all legal, best practice, and permit requirements when wildfowling at Lindisfarne.

I'm delighted to see traction with BASC's citizen science projects and I'm excited about the prospects for future data collection and analysis, particularly around the BASC Wing Survey for next season.

We remain grateful for the continued collaboration between BASC, Natural England, Northumberland and Durham and Newcastle Wildfowling Associations. Our continued proactive engagement will surely pave the way for further advancements.

Chapter 11 – Statement of accounts for wildfowl wardening scheme

August 2023 - March 2024

| Income | £ | Expenditure | £ |
|---|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Permit sales: | | | |
| 93@ £77 | 7,161.00 | BASC contract | 9,930.00 |
| 32@ £92 | 2,944.00 | BWF Stamp payment | 690.00 |
| 7@ £67 | 469.00 | | |
| 6@ comp | 0.00 | Mobile phone | BASC no charge |
| | | Printing of permits | BASC no charge |
| 2@ £5 Stamp donations | 10.00 | Printing of annual report | BASC no charge |
| | | Vehicle - fuel | NE no charge |
| | | Vehicle - lease | NE no charge |
| | | Vehicle - repairs | NE no charge |
| Total | 10,584.00 | Total | 10,620.00 |
| Total expenditure | 10,620.00 | | |
| Less income | 10,584.00 | | |
| Total | -36.00 | | |
| Additional contributions by Natural England | 36.00 | | |

Appendix 1 - Bag return comments

Permit No' 020: "First day, no wind, still a good day"

Permit No' 020: "Plenty of ducks in, no wind"

Permit No' 020: "Tough day, very rough sea, washed decoys in"

Permit No' 022: "Alone"

Permit No' 041: "Very wet and windy morning"

Permit No' 041: "Under the geese but too high, no shot taken"

Permit No' 083: "Thousands of barnies about"

Permit No' 106: "Self, no wind"

Permit No' 106: "Myself, wet, windy"

Permit No' 017: "Sleet"

Permit No' 027: "Breezy"

Permit No' 037 "None within range"

Permit No' 044: "Northern wind, torrential rain"

Permit No' 044: "Full moon, windy"

Permit No' 044: "Full moon, lots of brents and shelduck seen"

Permit No' 045: "Met up with warden"

Permit No' 067: "Storm Babet"

Permit No' 091: "Bright night, wind eased away"

Permit No' 111: "Storm Babette"

Permit No' 020: "Unexpected, good day for end of the season"

Permit No' 119: "First time at Lindisfarne, never seen ducks like that"

Permit No' 008: "Not a very successful season, try harder next season"