

Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve

The Lindisfarne Wildfowling
Management Group Report
2024/2025



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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 2024-25 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.



Chapter 2 – Season summary

Season overview

132 permits were issued for the 2024-25 season, with 489 visits made to Lindisfarne for the purpose of wildfowling, 346 of which were monitored by the wildfowling warden.

Bag checks following wildfowling visits are now an established part of the warden's routine and 100 were completed this season. When bag checks were cross-checked against submitted bag returns, they were found to be 100 per cent accurate for birds taken; however as in previous years, there were some minor discrepancies in the number of shots fired.

BASC continued with the highly successful induction program 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 2024-25 sessions, with 25 new permit holders benefiting from the experience.

The threat of avian influenza continues to persist in the background on the reserve and is monitored continuously by daily observations and surveys. However, there were 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 had to deal with one incident of a wildfowler not having their permit with them while out on the reserve. The warden issued a verbal warning and reported the incident to the Lindisfarne Wildfowl Management Group, who swiftly issued a warning letter to the individual concerned.

In September a permit holder was challenged by a member of the public who did not like wildfowling on the reserve. The warden was called; he then dealt with the situation and reported the matter to Natural England and BASC.

Count summary 2024/25 (warden counts cover the shooting zones, whereas the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) includes the whole NNR).

Wigeon

The warden peak count was 23,000 birds. This was recorded in October 2024, well up from 17,800 recorded in November 2023. However, the WeBS peak count was 23,192, recorded in October 2024, up from 19,599 recorded in October 2023. The greater number of wigeon on the reserve was not reflected in the birds harvested, with 293 birds taken this season compared to 476 in the previous two seasons.

Pink-footed geese

The warden peak count was 9,500 pink-feet recorded in late September 2024. This number of birds equals the high count of October 2023. The grey goose census peak count was 9,890 recorded in October 2024. This was up from 8,269 recorded in October 2023. The overall number of pink-footed geese shot is up from 24 birds last season to 52 birds this season.

Greylag geese

The warden peak count was 320 recorded in January 2025. This is down from 423 recorded in November 2023. The grey goose census peak count was however less, at just 27 recorded in October 2024, which is down from 53 recorded in October 2023. 10 graylag geese were taken this season, which accounts for 2.27 per cent of the total bag taken. These counts are in reference to our UK breeding population and not migratory Icelandic birds.

Light-bellied Brent geese

The warden peak count was 4,500 recorded in October 2024. This is an increase from 4,000 recorded in October 2023. The WeBS peak count was 4,077 recorded in September 2024, down from 4,500 recorded in September 2023.

Barnacle

The warden peak count was 5,000 recorded in October 2024, slightly down from 5,200 counted in October 2023. The WeBS peak count was higher at 6,740 recorded in October 2024, up from 2,189 recorded in November 2023.

Permit review

- 132 wildfowling permits were issued, down from 138 last season. 128 full permits and 4 complimentary.
- No introductory permits were issued this season.
- 25 of the 132 were new permit holders and all 25 attended the induction training sessions delivered by BASC.
- 23 of the 25 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 132 permits issued, 113 of them visited the reserve during the 2024/25 season.
- 101 permits (89.38 per cent of the 113) were checked at least once by the wildfowling warden during the season.

Visit and bag return summary

- 489 visits were made by permit holders to the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.
- 345 visits recorded a blank flight (no quarry taken), and on 242 of those blank flights, there were no shots fired.
- 56 permit holders submitted 'nil' bag returns (no quarry taken).
- 440 birds were shot this season: wigeon 66.59 per cent (293), teal 16.59 per cent (73), and pink-footed geese 11.82 per cent (52) of the total bag.
- 6 species from the quarry list were taken at Lindisfarne.
- Zone 12 was the most visited shooting area, with 87 visits, and recorded a return of 76 birds.
- October was the most visited month with 153 visits, which coincides with the peak count for wigeon and high counts of geese.
- February was the least visited month with 36 visits.

Punt summary

- There was a total of 4 punt visits this season: 2 in October and 2 in November. This is down from 5 visits last season.
- On two occasions punts were not launched on the second day as they had taken a successful shot on day one.
- There were 3 shots fired from 4 visits, totalling 96 wigeon and 1 teal.

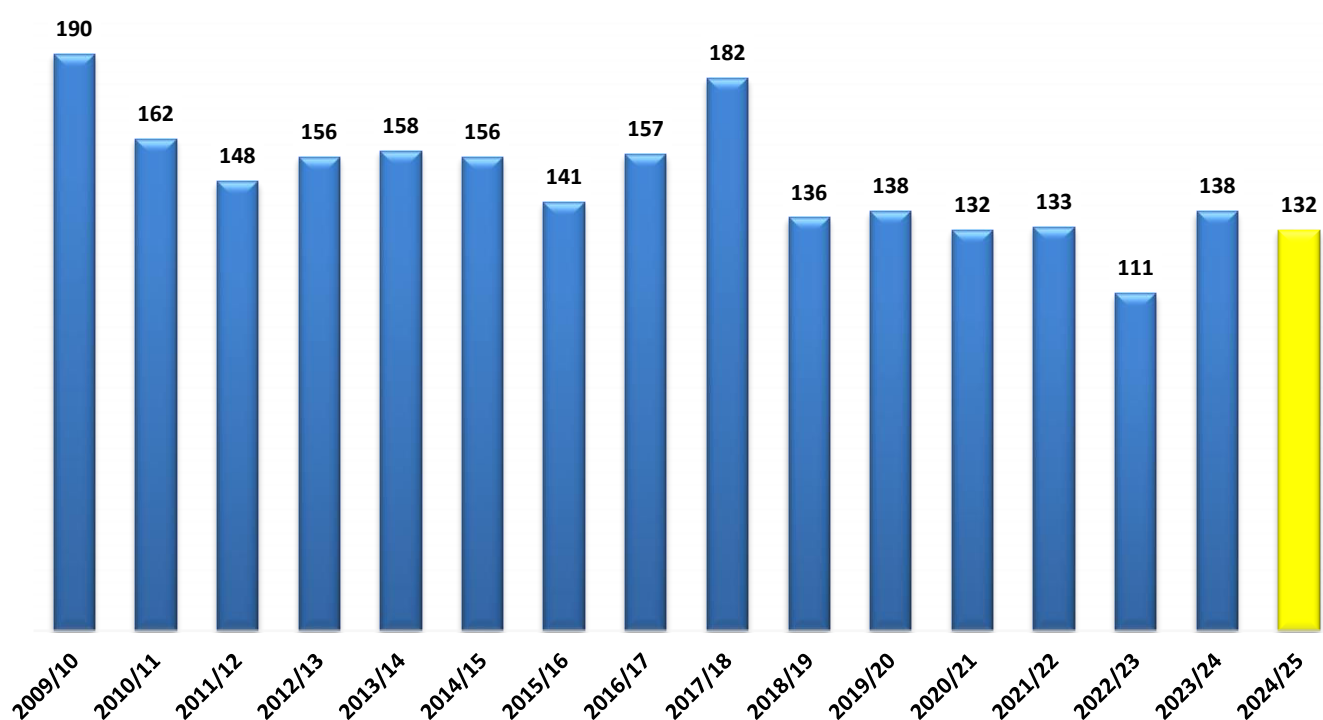
Chapter 3 – Permits issued

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

Number of permits available 2024/25:

GROUP	ALLOCATION	NO. ISSUED
Northumberland & Durham Wildfowlers' Association (NDWA)	100	(Number included in LWMG total)
Holy Island	40	7
Lindisfarne Wildfowl Management Group (LWMG)	200	116
Punt National	4	4
Punt Holy Island	4	1
Complimentary	10	4
TOTAL	358	132

Number of Permits Issued 2009 - 2025



Number of permits returned 2024/2025

Season	No. issued	No. returned on time	No. returned late	No. not returned
24/25	132	129	1	2
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

Most permit holders submitted their bag returns in a timely manner. However, there was one permit returned late and two which were not returned.

Late and non-returns will be submitted to the LWMG to consider further actions.

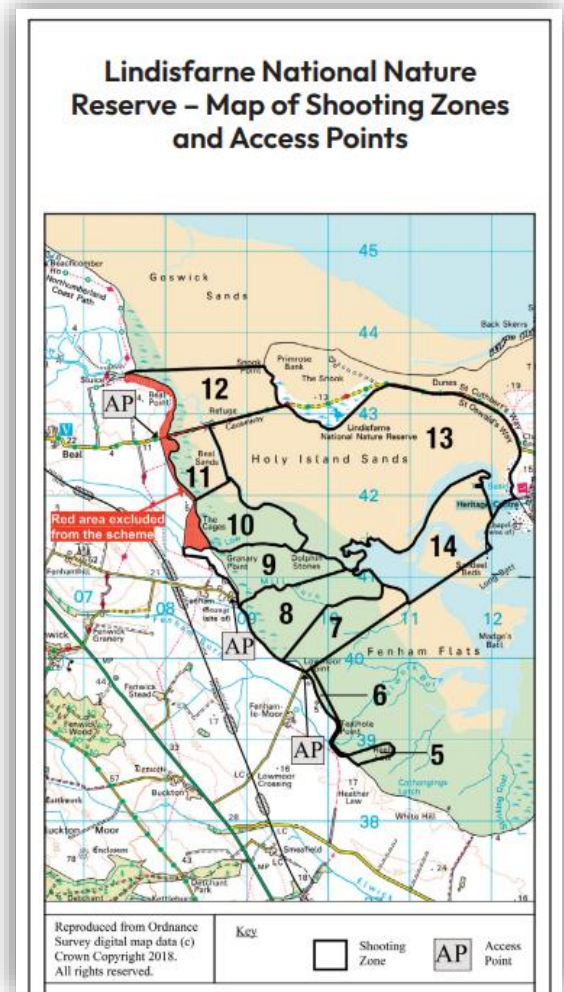
The number of permits issued has fallen from 138 in 2023– 2024 to 132 this season. However, the number is in line with the previous seven seasons.

Example of the 2024/2025 permit – front cover

RESTRICTIONS & CONDITIONS You must abide by the current restrictions and conditions supplied with this permit. Your completed bag return must be returned by 7 March 2025 to: Lindisfarne Warden, Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve, Beal Station, Beal, Berwick-upon-Tweed TD15 2PB Beal Office: 01289 381 470 Warden: 07831 306 720 ENSURE YOU ARE AWARE OF THE CHANGES TO THE SHOOTING ZONE PRIOR TO YOUR FIRST VISIT BASC Wildlife Fund Stamp 2024/25 Mallard first flight by Peter Partington 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. baschwildlifefund.co.uk 	UK HABITAT STAMP  2024-2025 BASC WILDLIFE FUND	WILDFOWL PERMIT Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve Northumberland PERMIT TO SHOOT 2024/2025 Valid from 1 September 2024 to 20 February 2025 MUST BE CARRIED AT ALL TIMES Signature: _____ Permit No.: _____ Address: _____ Issued by BASC in its capacity as a member of the LWMG. Supported by Northumberland and Durham Wildfowling Association, together with Newcastle Wildfowling.
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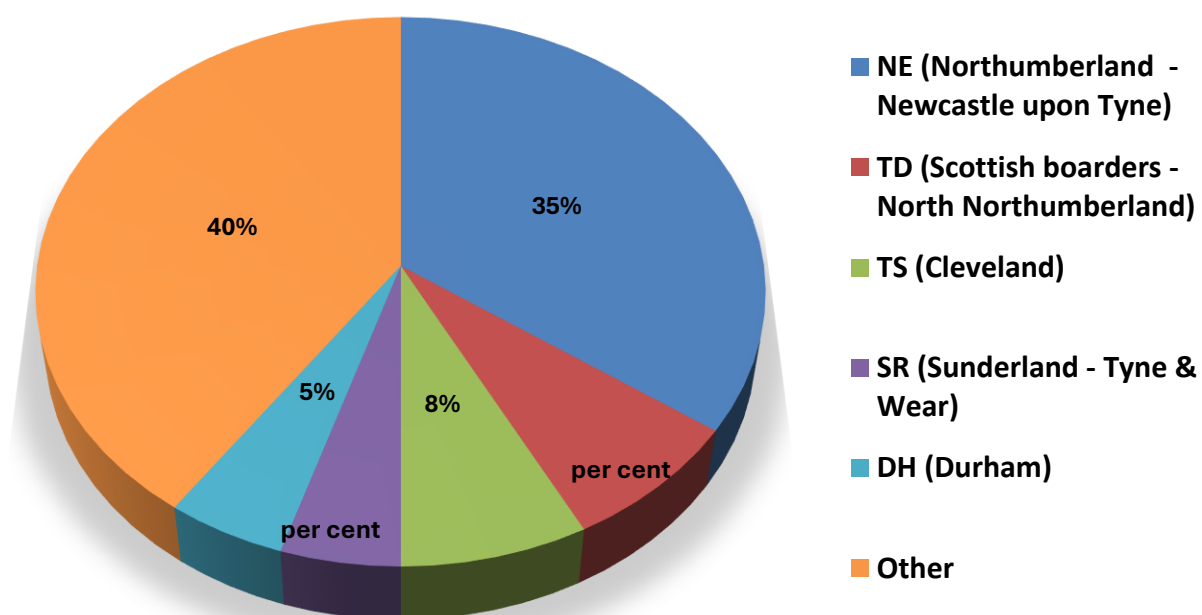
Example of the 2024/2025 permit – back cover

Right: The no shooting zone is clearly identified within the 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 2024 - 2025



Chapter 5 – Bag return information

Breakdown of area visits and birds taken:

2024/25 season					2023/24 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	73	53	0.726	14.92	5	69	64	0.928	12.08
6	58	25	0.431	11.86	6	114	80	0.702	19.96
7	63	27	0.429	12.88	7	73	66	0.904	12.78
8	36	30	0.833	7.36	8	19	8	0.421	3.33
9	68	88	1.294	13.90	9	71	93	1.31	12.43
10	50	19	0.38	10.22	10	34	33	0.971	5.95
11	14	24	1.714	2.86	11	33	18	0.545	5.78
12	87	76	0.874	17.79	12	101	103	1.02	17.69
13	37	79	2.135	7.56	13	50	85	1.7	8.76
14	3	19	6.333	0.61	14	7	56	8	1.23

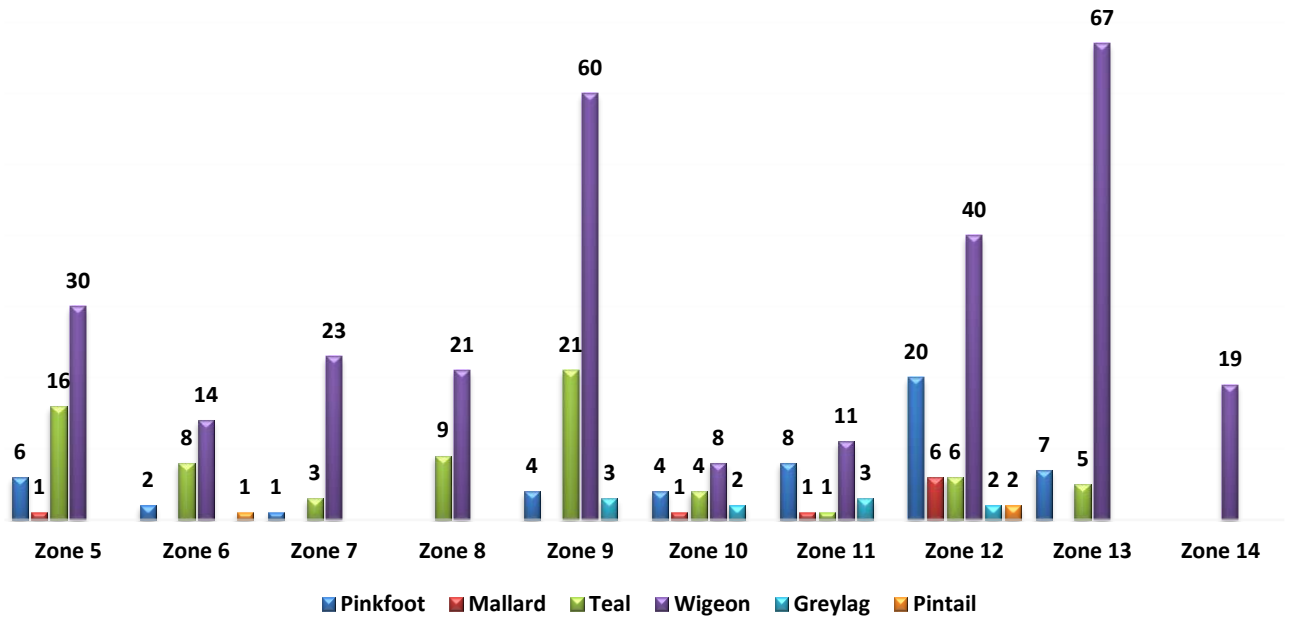
The table above shows a breakdown of visits, birds taken, average birds per visit and overall visits per zone over the shooting zones on National Nature Reserve (NNR) for the past two seasons. This data is key to understanding how wildfowlers use the site. Permit holders are now fully aware of the parking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

Visits to zone 11 are down on the previous season but this zone does yield a good return with 1.714 birds taken per visit. Visits to zone 9 are similar across the two seasons and this area continues to give good results. The decrease in visits to zone 14 continues.

The birds harvested from zones 13 and 14 include the returns of successful punt shots.

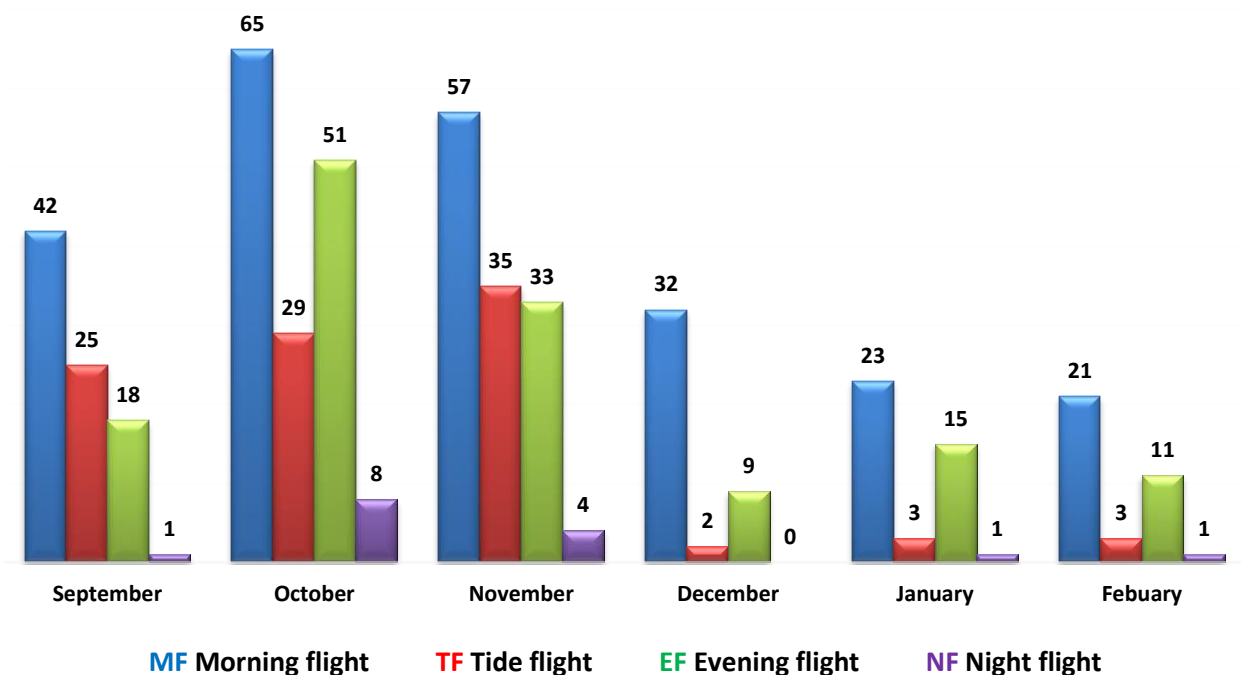


Species Taken From Each Zone 2024/25



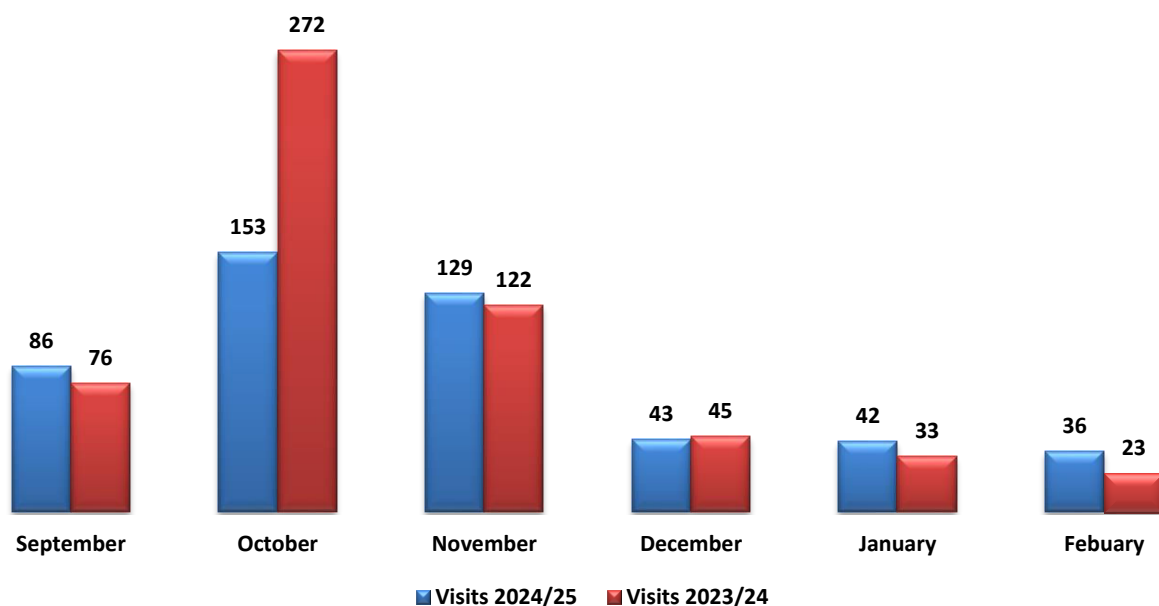
Above: Shows a breakdown of the species taken from visits to each zone. Zones 9, 12 and 13 have been the most successful for wigeon this season, although wigeon were harvested from all shooting zones. Zones 5, 11, 12 and 13 were the most successful for pink-feet, and zones 9 and 11 for greylag. The numbers of pink-feet and greylag harvested were up from last season, with 52 pink-feet taken in 2024-25, compared to 24 last season, and 10 greylag taken, compared to 6 last seasons. Zones 5, 6, 8 and 9 gave the best results for teal. Pintail were taken from zones 6 and 12, though they are mainly observed in zones 5 and 6.

Flight type comparison by month 2024/25



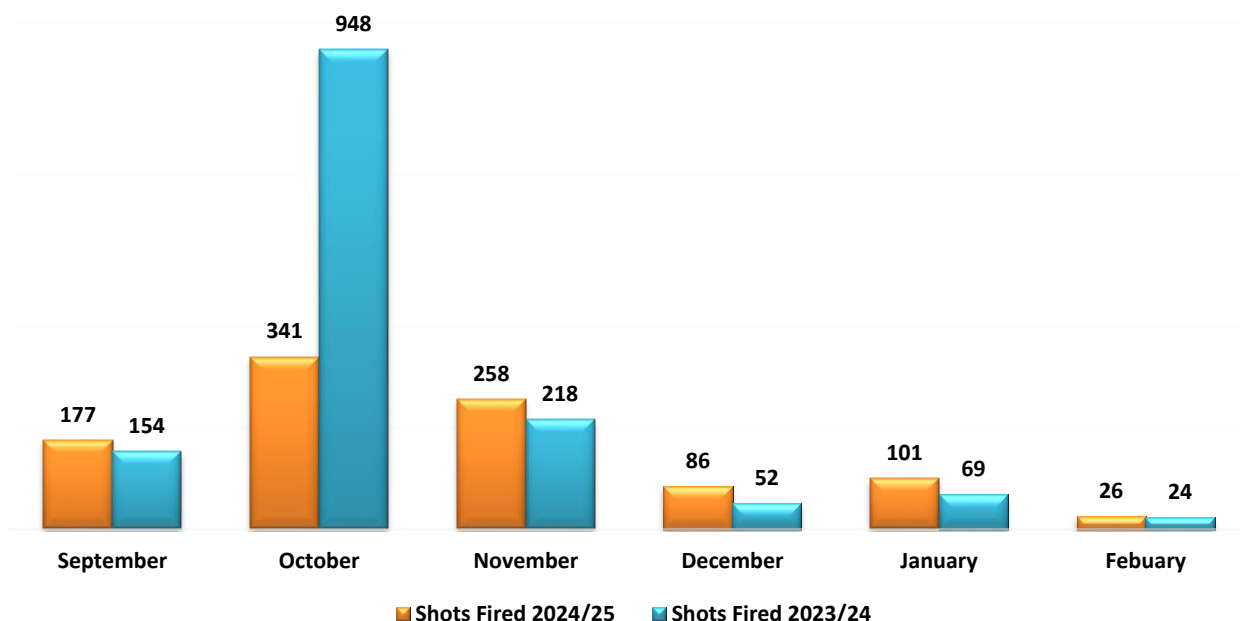
Above: Shows that the pattern of flight preference is consistent with other areas around the country. Morning flights tend to be most productive, as bird movement often lasts longer and the light is increasing, providing more time for the traveling wildfowler. Whereas on evening flights the light fades, reducing visibility more quickly and making egress off the site and quarry retrieval more difficult. The number of night flights is down to 15 from 23 the previous season. The table above shows that 153 permit visits were undertaken in October; this is significantly down from 272 visits the previous October. The drop in visits may be due to the very mild and settled weather experienced throughout October deterring wildfowlers from coming.

Visits per month comparison



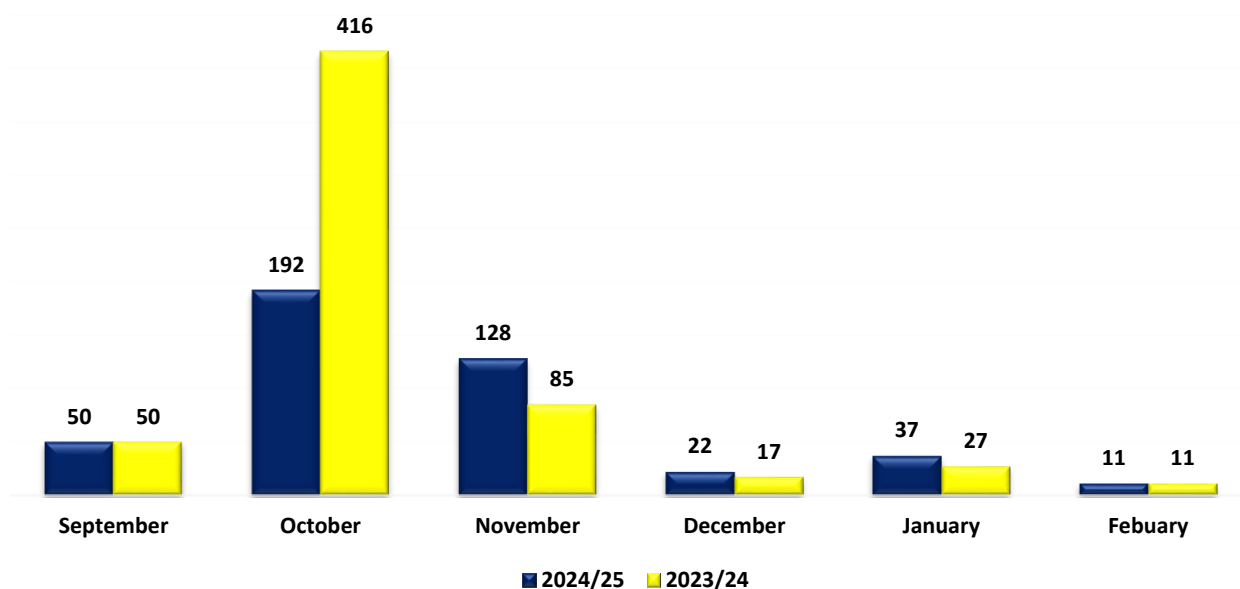
Above: Visits in other months are slightly up on previous years, except for December, which saw a small decline.

Shots fired per month comparison



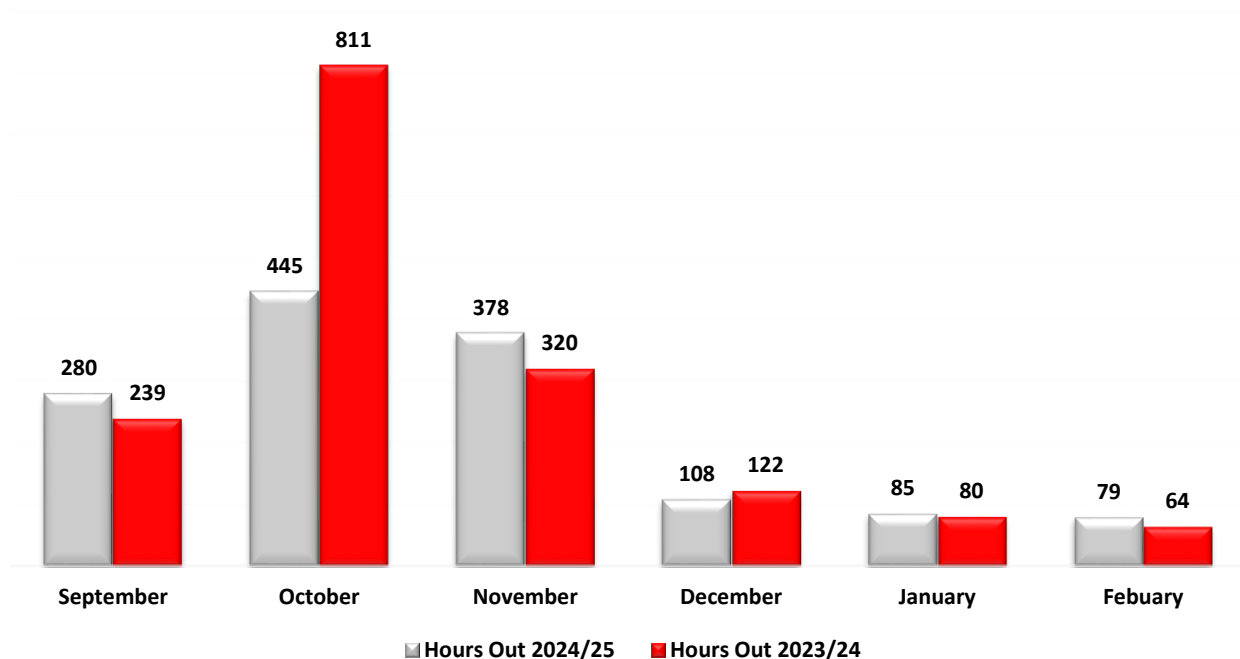
Above: Shows that the number of shots taken was significantly down in October from 948 to 341. Shots taken were up in all other months compared to the 2023-24 season.

Birds shot per month comparison



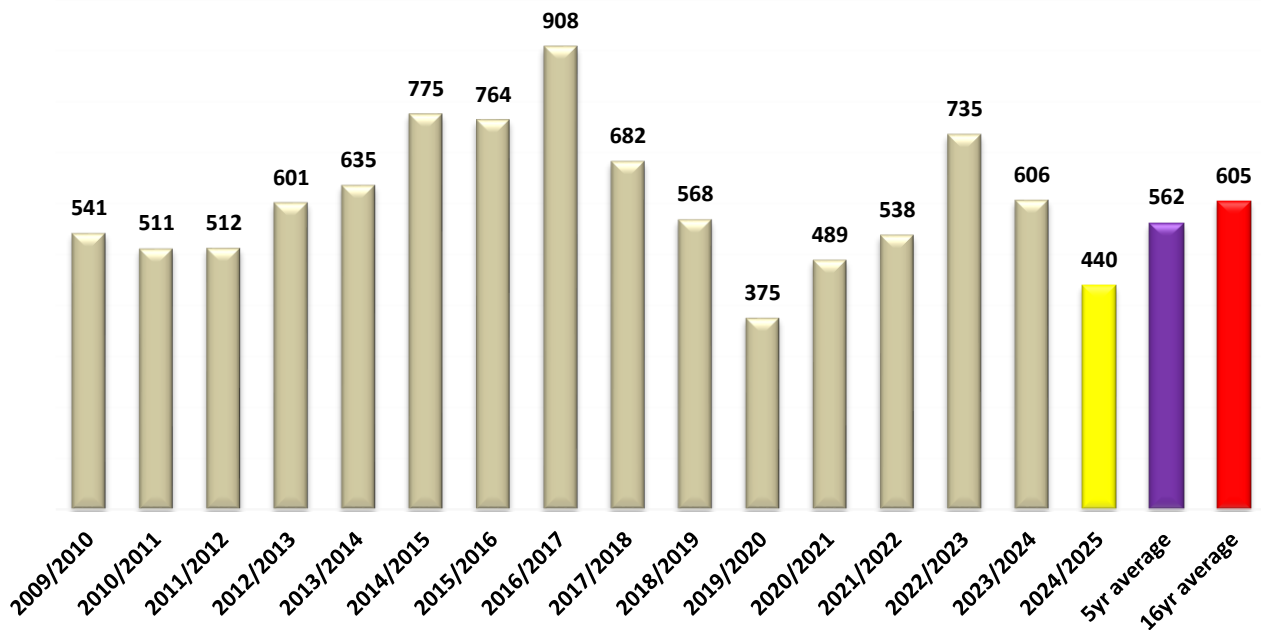
Above: The highest number of birds taken was in October, consistent with previous years. However, this season saw a dramatic decrease in number taken during the month. The birds taken in November, December and January were up on the previous season, whereas birds shot in September and February remained the same.

Total hours out per month comparison



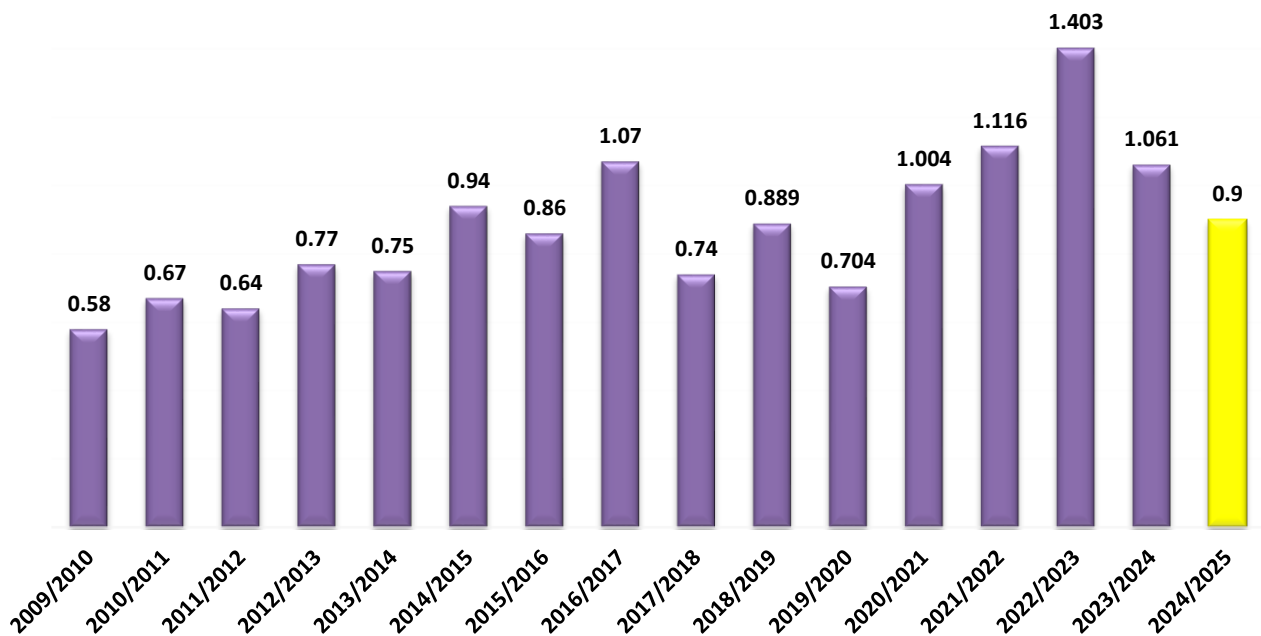
Above: Shows that the number of hours wildfowlers spent on the reserve in the 2024-25 season with a significant drop in hours out in October. Hours out increased in all other months except December.

Total Bag Per Season 2009 - 2025



Above: 2024-25 was a below average season for both the 5-year and 16-year average, with a total bag of 440 birds harvested. It is the second lowest total bag in the 16 years of recorded data available.

Average quarry per visit 2009 - 2025

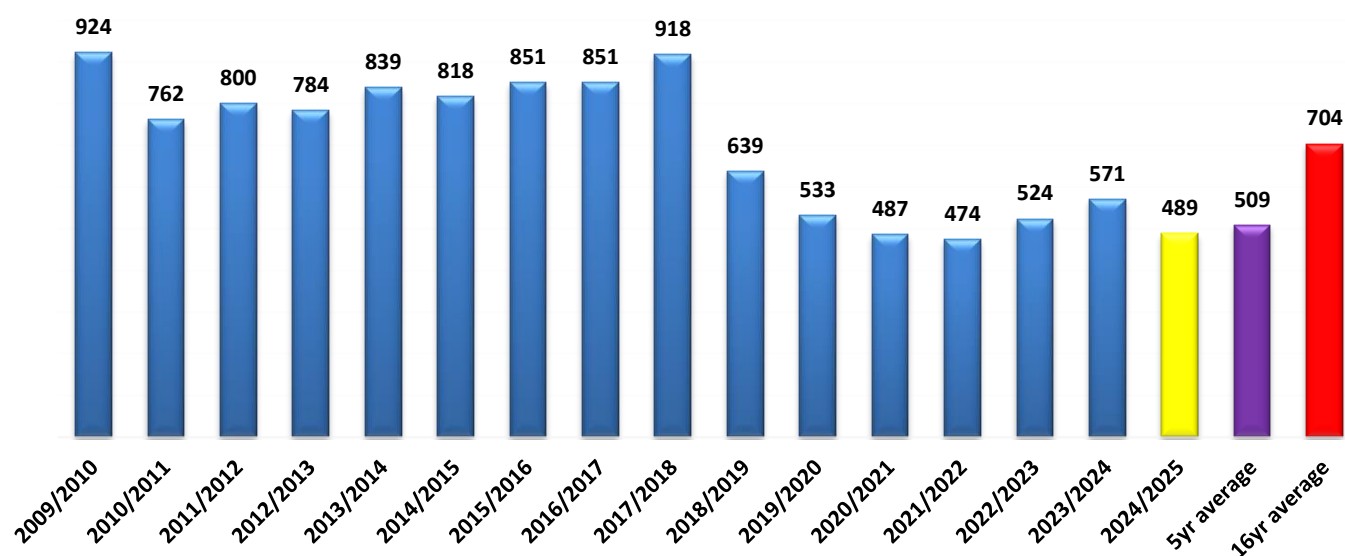


Above: Shows that the average quarry per visit fell from 1.061 birds per visit to 0.9 birds per visit.

Bag breakdown 2024/25 season

01/09/2024 – 20/02/2025		per cent of overall bag
Canada goose		
Greylag goose	10	2.27
Pink-footed goose	52	11.82
European white-fronted goose		
Coot		
Gadwall		
Goldeneye		
Mallard	9	2.05
Moorhen		
Pintail	3	0.68
Pochard		
Shoveler		
Teal	73	16.59
Tufted duck		
Wigeon	293	66.59
Common snipe		
Golden plover		
Woodcock		
Total birds	440	
Total visits	489	
Individual visitors	113	
Visits without quarry	345	
Average quarry per visit	0.9	
Visits per km2 during the wildfowling season (173 days)	0.085	

Number of visits per season 2009 - 2025



Key Points:

- There were 489 total visits by permit holders to the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.
- Of these 489 visits, 345 visits resulted in blank flights (no quarry taken).
- On 242 visits no shots were taken.
- 56 permit holders who visited the reserve submitted blank returns (no quarry taken over the 2024-25 season).
- 13 permit holders did not visit the reserve for the purpose of wildfowling.

Punt bag composition 2024/2025 season

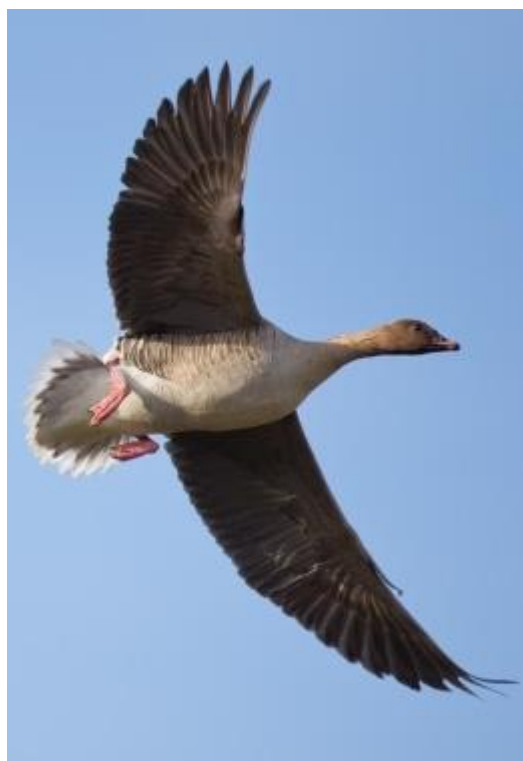
	No. of visits	Shots	No. of wigeon	Other birds
October	2	2	58	1 (teal)
November	2	1	38	0

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 two occasions the punts were not launched on their second booked day as they had taken a successful shot on day one – a sound example of the sustainable harvest ethos of wildfowling. On two occasions punts were not launched due to high winds.

Bag composition 2024/2025 season



Pink-footed geese		Bag composition
2024/25	52	12 per cent
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 peaked at 9,500 birds in late September, the same as the high count of 9,500 birds in October 2023.

Pink-feet as a percentage of the total bag composition increased to 12 per cent, however, this increase can be attributed to the lower take of wigeon this season. The number of pink-footed geese taken is still low compared to previous seasons.



Wigeon		Bag composition
2024/25	293	67 per cent
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

The warden peak count for wigeon was 23,000 birds in October, an increase from 17,800 birds recorded in November 2023, and 19,000 in October 2022. Wigeon numbers dropped significantly in November with birds departing with the November full moon. However, there was a continued presence of wigeon throughout the season until February, albeit in limited numbers.

Wigeon continues to make up the bulk of the total bag composition at 67 per cent, down from 79 per cent last season. 293 birds were harvested in the 2024-25 season. This is lower than previous seasons except for the 2019/20 season where 213 birds were taken.

The fall in the number of wigeon taken this season can most likely be explained by the mild and settled weather in October and early November, when wigeon fed and rafted on the open seas undisturbed by high winds and rough tides. This milder weather also deterred wildfowlers from visiting the site as can be seen by the reduced hours out and fewer visits recorded.

Chapter 6 – Wildfowl counts

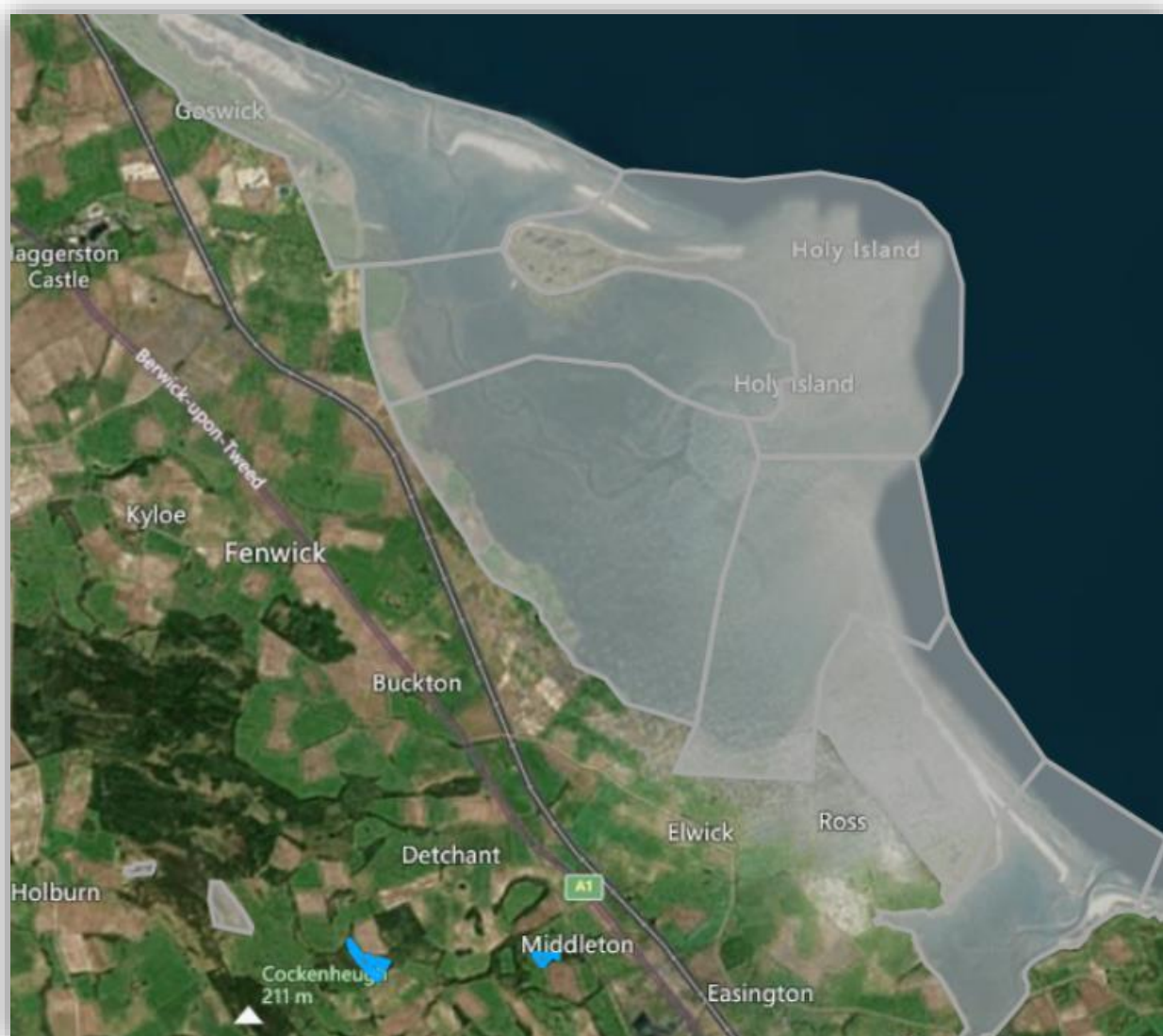
The table below shows wildfowl counts for the 2024-25 season. The wildfowling warden conducted counts at least twice weekly. The counts concentrated on gaining accurate numbers for quarry species and non-quarry species.

Canada geese are 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 2024/2025

	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB
WIGEON	10,000	23,000	22,000	1,700	1,250	830
TEAL	400	570	350	320	350	250
MALLARD	76	43	52	64	43	43
GREYLAG GOOSE	120	127	147	43	320	120
PINK- FOOTED GOOSE	9,500	9,000	5,200	4,500	7,200	5000
PINTAIL	80	160	160	162	250	350

This season saw the return of the wigeon peak migration count back to October, numbers built steadily through September and early October peaking to 23,000 birds by 25 October.

This high number of birds is significantly more than the 17,800 counted on the main bay last season. Birds enjoyed settled warm weather with light winds and fed undisturbed on the zostera through October into early November.

Wigeon then dispersed on the November full moon leaving 2000 on Lindisfarne by the end of the month. This migration pattern is like that which has been observed historically on the reserve.

Peak migration for pink-feet was in late September, with 9,500 birds counted, the same number as October 2023. However, there were good counts of pink-feet in every month of the season.

Teal numbers peaked again in October, but good numbers of teal were on the reserve throughout the season.

The highest count for pintail was again in February, with birds being observed towards the south of the reserve. On 12 February there was an incredible flight of 284 pintail which came in a single pack over the sea from the north.

Greylag numbers were down from a high count of 423 birds in November 2023 to 320 birds in January of this year.

Wildfowl warden peak counts of non-quarry species 2024/2025

	SEPT	OCT	Nov	DEC	JAN	FEB
BRENT GOOSE	3,900	4,500	4,300	1,900	1,200	800
WHOOPE SWAN	0	43	75	12	13	28
BARNACLE GOOSE	1,850	5,000	5,000	2,800	800	1,500

The number of migrating brent geese continues to steadily increase on the reserve with October giving the peak count of 4,500 birds.

Barnacle geese also came into the reserve in good numbers with 5,000 birds in October and November.

75 whooper swans were counted in November up from 31 birds last year.

Peak WeBS counts for Lindisfarne NNR in 2024/2025

	BIRD COUNT	PEAK MONTH
WIGEON	23192	October
TEAL	626	November
MALLARD	53	December
GREYLAG GOOSE	27	October (Recorded during grey goose census roost count)
PINK-FOOTED GOOSE	9890	October (Recorded during grey goose census roost count)
LIGHT-BELLIED BRENT GOOSE	4077	September
PINTAIL	351	February
BARNACLE	6740	October

Chapter 7 – Severe weather and waterfowl shooting

During the 2024/25 season, no call for voluntary restraint or implementation of a statutory suspension was enacted in England concerning the BASC severe weather protocol.

Chapter 8 – The wildfowling warden

Warden's duties

The wildfowling warden is employed from 1 August to issue the allocation of permits from the Beal Natural England Office. The warden is 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, the 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 wildfowlers 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 about the general interest of the site for nature conservation.

The warden is involved in the duck wing collection for the BASC Wing Survey Initiative which was implemented in November 2023. The monitoring for any case of avian influenza is also a priority.

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. Wildfowlers were 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 wildfowlers 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 'fowlers remaining on the reserve. The warden has a responsibility to monitor and record incidents and take any appropriate action.

Use of the reserve by wildfowlers

September to November were the busiest months for wildfowling, with Fenham-le-Moor and Beal being the most popular areas. Wildfowling visits were up in September, November, January and February, but visits in October and December were down on the previous season.

Wildfowling reports

The warden submits comprehensive monthly reports to Natural England and BASC throughout the season. Permit checks, bag checks and bird counts are recorded within these reports. Any incidents regarding wildfowling or members of the public are also recorded and reported into Natural England. Mid- and end-of-season reports are also delivered by the warden at the LWMG meetings.

Number of permits checked and visits monitored by the warden – 2024/2025 season

	Permit checks – total number	Monitored visits
September	37	75
October	33	105
November	25	94
December	2	22
January	2	24
February	2	26
Total	101	346

The checking of permits remains a vital function of the warden. It allows him to check wildfowling 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 assist wildfowling better with any queries they have regarding 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.

2024/25 Wing Survey data – by Heather Warrender (BASC Scientific Advisor)

Species	Adult male	Adult female	Total Adult	Juvenile male	Juvenile female	Total Juvenile	Unknown	Total
MALLARD	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
PINK-FOOTED GOOSE	-	-	0	-	-	0	1*	1
TEAL	8	6	14	8	7	15	0	29
WIGEON	41	26	67	20	25	45	0	112

**Wing submitted to Epicollect with a photo of the wrong side of the wing and therefore could not be aged.*

Overview

A total of 144 wings were collected during the 2024/25 season by the wildfowling warden and the data was submitted to the BASC Wing Survey. The sample was made up of 112 wigeon (38 per cent of total wigeon bag return), 29 teal (40 per cent of total teal bag return), 2 mallard (22 per cent of total mallard bag return) and 1 pink-footed goose (2 per cent of total bag). Although the sample size remains relatively small, for wigeon and teal it is largely reflective of the patterns we see in the entire BASC Wing Survey sample.

A male bias is to be expected in duck species due to higher mortality of adult females on breeding grounds. We see that this is more apparent in wigeon than it is in teal, which has also been observed within the wider dataset and the published literature regarding these species. Within the juvenile proportion of these populations, we would expect to see a 50:50 split within the sample which is also observed within the Lindisfarne wing sample.

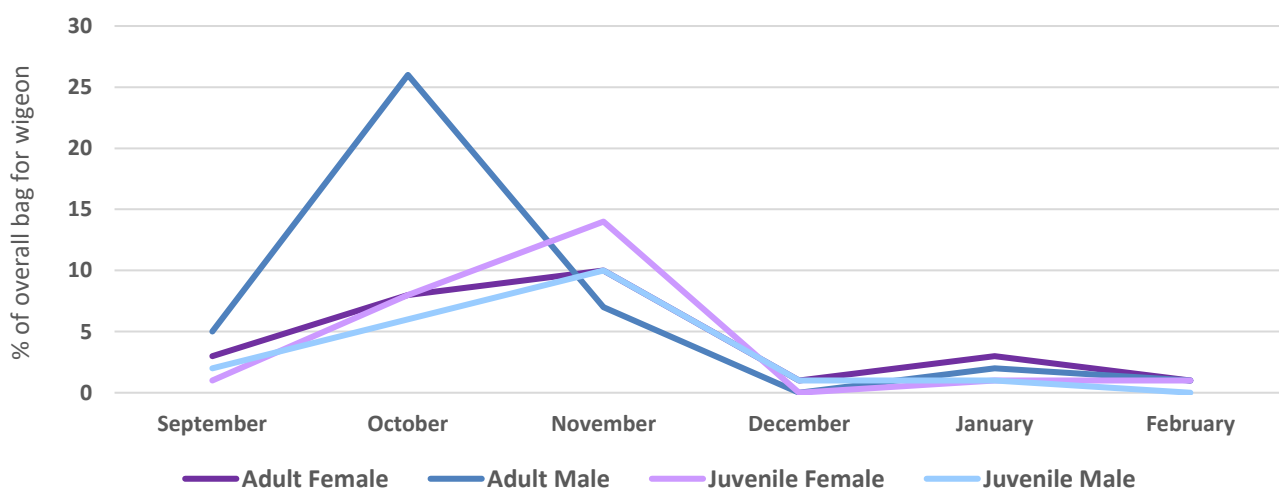
Ongoing monitoring of these datasets over the coming seasons will provide further insights into the wing samples and what they can tell us about the species which frequent the reserve. These findings will feature in future annual reports.

Wigeon

The peak month for wigeon wings submitted was October, closely followed by November, which coincides with the peak counts at Lindisfarne for this species as well as peak wildfowling activity. The sample shows that 60 per cent of the wigeon were adults and 40 per cent were juvenile. The adult proportion was heavily male biased, with 61 per cent adult male and 39 per cent adult female. The juvenile proportion was slightly female biased, with 56 per cent juvenile female and 44 per cent juvenile male. The number of adult males within the sample peaked in October, whereas the numbers of adult females and juveniles peaked in November.

Teal

October was also the peak month for teal wings submitted, closely followed by November, which coincides with the peak counts at Lindisfarne for this species, as well as peak wildfowling activity. The sample shows that 48 per cent of the teal were adults and 52 per cent were juvenile. The adult proportion was male biased, with 57 per cent adult male and 43 per cent adult female. The juvenile proportion was slightly male biased, with 53 per cent juvenile male and 47 per cent juvenile female.



The number of wigeon wings submitted per month split into age and sex categories

Number of bag checks monitored and recorded by the warden – 2024/2025 season

100 bag checks were undertaken by the warden on 62 permit holders. 113 permit holders visited the reserve, therefore 54.86 per cent of all permit holders who visited the reserve were bag checked.

	No. of recorded bag checks	Correct on return*
September	24	24
October	20	19**
November	21	21
December	15	15
January	11	11
February	9	9
Total	100	99

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

**The permit holder did not submit his bag return.

Wildfowling warden's observations by Shaun McWilliams

Permit allocation began from 1 August 2024, with applications being submitted by post and online. The BACS and credit card payment options were the preferred methods of payment. A total of 101 permit holders elected to pay by BACS or card.

September 2024 brought northerly winds and so the main migration started earlier than the two previous seasons, where the movement of birds was more protracted due to southerly winds and high temperatures. The highest tide of the year was recorded on 20 September at 5.6m.

Permit holders made the most of these conditions, with visits up on the previous September, most accessing the reserve from Fenham-le-Moor. Visits continued to build, peaking in October, however there were significantly fewer visits this October compared to last year. The rest of the season settled into the normal routine; permit applications and new permit holder inductions continued into December.

320 wigeon were on the reserve by 1 September and numbers continued to rise. A steady build-up of birds continued during the month, with 10,000 counted on the reserve by 30 September. Bird numbers increased over the following month, with a peak of 23,000 on 25 October. These excellent numbers, with a highest count in October, are back to what has been observed historically on Lindisfarne.

The first pink-footed geese were seen flying south on 9 October but were not counted on the reserve until three days later, with 9,500 counted at the month end. The main roosts this year continue to be Holy Island North Shore, Holy Island Sands and the Sandrig – north to Goswick, and Ross Sands. There were smaller numbers roosting off Harvey's Island later in the season. Good numbers of pinks were counted in every month of the season.

Teal were on the flats on the first day of the season, with 65 birds being counted on 1 September. Teal numbers are increasing on the reserve, as can be seen by the counts above. Teal were regularly observed on the Rocket Field and flighting to the Island Lough at dusk, but their preferred location was in and around the Black Low, where numbers were consistently high throughout the season.

Pintail numbers built up throughout the latter part of the season, with 350 birds on the reserve in February. Pintail were regularly observed off Teal Hole Point and Harvey's Island. On 12 February I was witness to an incredible flight of 284 pintail which came in a single pack over the sea from the north, the males resplendent in full breeding colours.

This season saw varying numbers of greylag on the reserve; these birds being a transient local population, their numbers peaked in January with 320 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.

Small numbers of brent geese were on the reserve from 1 September, with numbers building to 3,900 by the end of the month. The high count of brent was between 19 and 25 October, when 4,500 birds were counted on the reserve, a further increase from last season. Very good numbers.

Barnacle geese were first counted on the main bay on 30 September; the Elwick fields and rough grassland at Goswick both favourite places and frequently used.

Whooper swans came in October and the peak count of 74 whooper swans was on 5 November, this contrasts with the last two years where visiting bird numbers seemed to be dropping off.

The winter saw a steady stream of tourists to the island, the causeway being in constant use in, even in cold weather. 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.

I had to deal with one incident of a wildfowler not having their permit with them while out on the reserve. I issued a verbal warning and reported the incident to the Lindisfarne Wildfowl Management Group, who swiftly issued a warning letter to the individual concerned.

In September a permit holder was challenged by a member of the public who did not like wildfowling on the reserve. I was quickly called to the scene and dealt with the situation and reported this to Natural England and BASC.

Another enjoyable season.

Lindisfarne wildfowlers' litter pick 2024/2025

The annual Lindisfarne NNR wildfowlers' litter pick event, organised by the Lindisfarne Wildfowling Management Group (LWMG) with support from BASC, saw around 30 volunteers from the local wildfowling community come together to clean up the shoreline and raise awareness about the importance of maintaining this unique habitat.

On 22 February, the picturesque shores of the Lindisfarne National Nature Reserve (NNR) were once again the focus of a community-driven effort to preserve its natural beauty and ecological significance.

We spent the day scouring the shoreline and removing litter and debris. This yearly exercise helps ensure that this special place remains a sanctuary for wildlife and a place of inspiration. We didn't come away with as much litter as we had in previous years. That's a good thing, we hope, and it shows that little by little, our conservation efforts make a difference.

The enthusiasm and dedication are always inspiring. In fact, three of the volunteers came all the way from Bradford, a 3.5-hour drive each way, reinforcing just how much this place means to so many.

Lindisfarne and the adjacent Holy Island is renowned for its rich biodiversity and are of international importance to a variety of wildfowl species, making its preservation crucial for both wildlife and the local economy.

This collective effort not only enhances the natural beauty of the Lindisfarne NNR but also ensures a safe and clean environment for the diverse wildlife that calls this area home for the period that they are there – whether that's the winter, summer, or both.



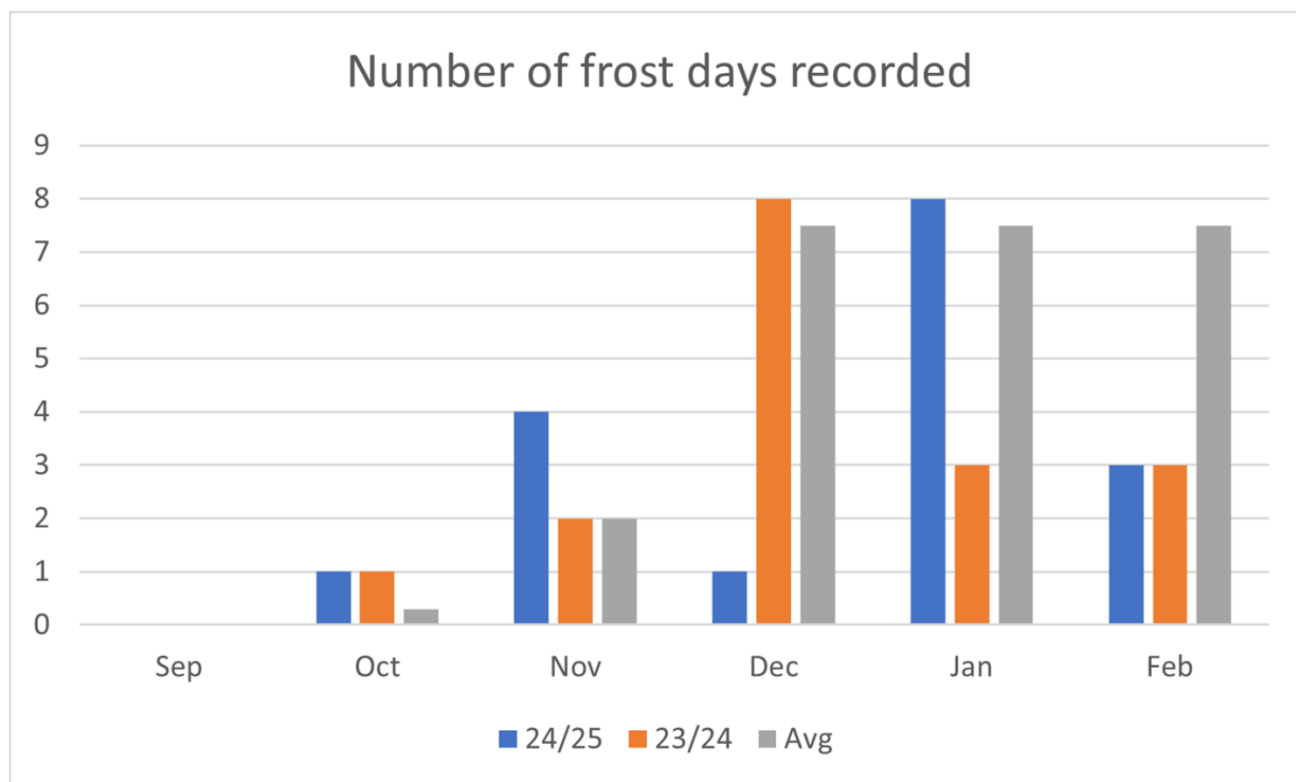
Chapter 9 – Wildfowling season weather review by Andy Denton from Natural England

The weather this season was very much split into two halves. Autumn started on quite a benign note, with average temperatures and rainfall, but as the season progressed it became progressively drier until by the end of the season we were moving towards drought-like conditions. There were occasional incursions of colder weather from the north, but they never lasted for more than a few days at a time.

High pressure was never far from the UK and its position relative to the UK ultimately drove the wind direction and temperature on the ground. With high pressure often dominant, there was a lot of anticyclonic gloom on the coast, meaning that it was a fairly dull, grey winter despite rainfall being well below average.

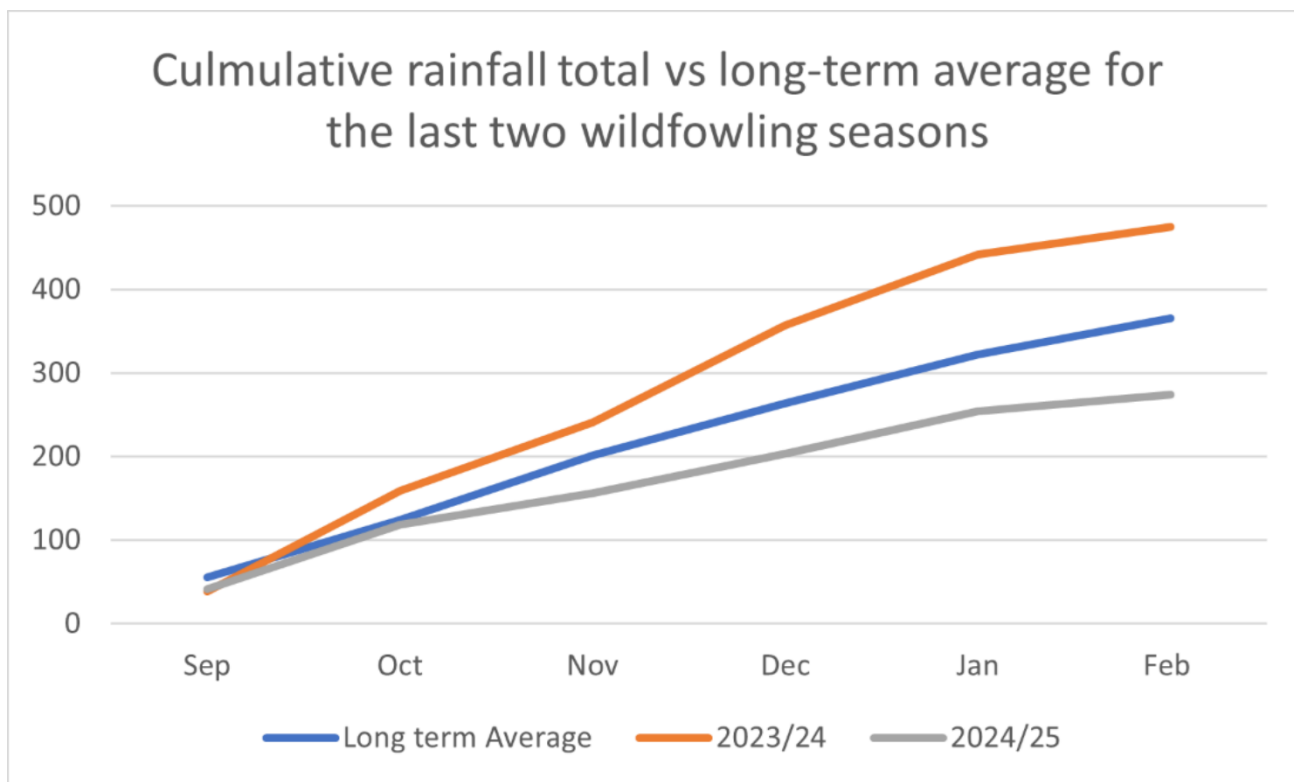
Temperature

Temperatures overall were above average, with occasional incursions of cold weather from the north. High pressure was largely moving over the south and north of the UK but sometimes retrogressing into the Atlantic, resulting in northerly winds flooding into the UK. At Lindisfarne NNR the high pressure would often trap the coastal mist and cloud close to the surface, resulting in chilly, dull conditions for days at a time. The most notable cold snap was at the start of January lasting on and off for 10 days. The lowest temperature was recorded on 10 January when it reached -4.8 Celsius, but temperatures recovered to above zero during the day. Without the prolonged period of cold weather there was no ask for voluntary restraint from wildfowling. There were only 17 days of air frost throughout the season; incidentally this is the same number as last season but well down on the 26 that would expect from the long-term average. This is another signal towards a trend of milder winters over the last couple of decades.



Rainfall

Monthly rainfall was below average throughout the season, with only 274.4mm recorded through the season compared to an average of 365.5mm. This is significantly down on 475mm recorded during the same period last year. October was the only month that recorded above average rain. This was enough to recharge the dune slacks across the reserve. The water table was already just below the surface after a wet summer. Having less standing water on adjacent land meant that wildfowl numbers generally held on the reserve before the numbers declined as usual around Christmas.



Wind

Wind has been predominantly west/ north-westerly again throughout the winter. With high pressure in charge for much of the season over the UK and into Europe, slack winds were commonplace but when the high pressure moved westwards towards the Atlantic occasional strong cold NW winds set up across the North Sea forming a wind barrier for migrating birds from the continent. The new year brought a stormier regime as Arctic air flooding over North America powered up the jet stream to extreme levels creating several named storms, the most notable of which was storm Eowyn on 24 January.

By barometric pressure this was the strongest storm in 10 years, but the effects were limited on the reserve as the worst of the weather was concentrated over the west coasts of Ireland and Scotland. However, the reserve still experienced 70mph gusts and periods of heavy rain. The barometric pressure dropped to 966.4mb – the lowest recorded on the reserve since the weather station was installed. As we moved into February, high pressure returned to take charge, initially giving us chilly easterly winds before becoming relatively slack and benign until the end of the season.

Chapter 10 – Lindisfarne Wildfowling Management Group members' views of the season 2024/2025

Andrew Craggs – Natural England LNNR senior reserve manager

Particularly strong counts for wigeon, with 23,192 during the WeBS count in October and a high of 1,950 in Budle Bay. The first grey goose roost count on 13 October recorded 9,890 across the three main roost sites of the NNR, with 6,400 at the Goswick Sands.

Pintail peaked at 171 recorded in mid-November and light-bellied brent geese peaked with 4,077 in late September. The NNR continues to grow as an internationally important site for Svalbard barnacle geese, with 6,740 recorded during the grey goose roost census on 13 October. Some 5,500 were recorded in Budle Bay and 1,240 alongside the pinks' roost on Goswick Sands.

Thanks again for the support of the BASC team.

Northumberland & Durham Wildfowlers' Association – club committee

Overall, the season started well with good opportunities at ducks on most flights. Although good numbers of geese were reported, getting on terms with them proved as difficult as ever. Once again, the weather didn't help throughout the season. Never mind, we're still looking forward to the next season.

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. This season the weather favoured punting, with settled conditions in October and November allowing all punt permits to be launched. There were also high numbers of wigeon on the main bay. Of the four trips taken, three successful shots were made, taking 96 wigeon and 1 teal.

On two occasions, after a successful shot was taken on the first of two booked days, punts did not launch on their second day, as they had taken a successful shot on day one – a sound example of the sustainable harvest ethos of wildfowling.

“Holy Island is one of the most iconic places to punt, not purely because of the scenery but because of the amount of history there too, including Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, his puntsman Steven Shuttler, not to mention Abel Chapman and Selby Allison.” Bob Singleton – punt permit holder Lindisfarne NNR.

Northeast Joint Council of Wildfowling Clubs

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

BASC Wildfowling advisor – Chris Wright

The Lindisfarne NNR Wildfowling Permit Scheme continues to be a well-oiled operation, demonstrating the value and importance of due processes and collaboration.

The 2024/25 season saw a very similar number of permits issued compared to the last seven seasons – 132, and 489 visits to the reserve, with the wildfowling warden monitoring 346 of those visits. Bag checks, which are now a routine part of the warden's duties, demonstrated 100 per cent accuracy in reported birds shot against the bag return forms submitted by permit holders. This reinforces the high standards expected by way of compliance from permit holders.

BASC's induction program for new permit holders maintains its reputation as both an essential tool and part of the scheme. Since running these inductions, there has always been a small number of new permits holders who were then unable – for whatever reason, to visit the reserve. During the 2024/25 season, 23 of the 25 new permit holders went on to visit the reserve and meet the warden. These inductions equip new participants with essential knowledge of wildfowling law, best practices, and site-specific features and requirements.

The season was again notable for the absence of avian influenza which is great. Wigeon numbers remained strong, with a peak count observed by the warden of 23,000, while pink-footed goose numbers reached 9,500. Of interest, the overall bag for the 2024/25 season (440) was one of the lowest recorded – below both the 5-year (562) and 16-year (605) averages. This, however, is of little surprise given the number of visits to the reserve this season (489), which is both lower than the 5-year (509) and 16-year (704) averages.

Weather patterns, as always, influenced much of the bird's distribution(s), particularly this season during the 'peak' months for quarry abundance. These periods represented poor wildfowling conditions, which subsequently resulted in fewer visits, and in turn fewer quarry harvested compared to these periods in previous years. I believe that these results indicate no less of an interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction to permit holders that frequented the reserve this season.

The Wildfowling Warden, Shaun McWilliams, continues to play an invaluable role, conducting regular counts, monitoring wildfowling activity, and engaging with both wildfowlers and the general public. A total of 100 bag checks were conducted on 62 permit holders, representing just over half of all permit holders who visited the reserve. The warden also contributed just shy of one hundred and fifty samples (over 30 per cent of the overall bag) to the BASC Wing Survey, collecting valuable data on wigeon and teal populations particularly. The findings from these datasets will be very interesting to see over the coming years – thanks to BASC's Heather Warrender.

The Lindisfarne Wildfowling Management Group remains committed to collaborative management, working closely with BASC, Natural England, and the local wildfowling associations. This proactive approach ensures the continued success of the Lindisfarne NNR wildfowling permit scheme.

Chapter 11 – Statement of accounts for the scheme

August 2024 – March 2025

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Permit sales:			
96@ £79	7,584.00	BASC contract	9,930.00
25@ £94	2,350.00	BWF Stamp payment	660.00
7@ £69	483.00		
4@ 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	NE no charge
Total	10,427.00	Total	10,590.00
Total expenditure	10,590.00		
Less income	10,427.00		
Total	-163.00		
Additional contributions by Natural England	163.00		

Appendix 1 – Bag return comments

“Early, few ducks there”

“Good wind, perfect conditions”

“Perfect, could not hit out”

“No wind, no geese, very hot”

“Blowing a gale, plenty ducks”

“Too hot, no wind”

“Like a summers day”

“No shot fired”

“Very calm, no wind, new moon”

“Storm Éowyn”

“Flat calm”

“1 cock wigeon”

“No opportunity to shoot”

“Thousands of barnacles again”

“First time on Pig Point, plenty birds, set up too far back”

“First wigeon, Harvey’s Island”

“In Black Low, birds well out of range”

“No wind”

“Dreich!”

“No shots”

“Tide out and moon flight”

“High tide, not much movement”

“Enjoyable few hours just watching, didn’t unsleeve the gun”

“Dolphin Stones, amazing barney fly past/over”

“Still no ducks close in”