

## On Pinkfoot changes in the Netherlands

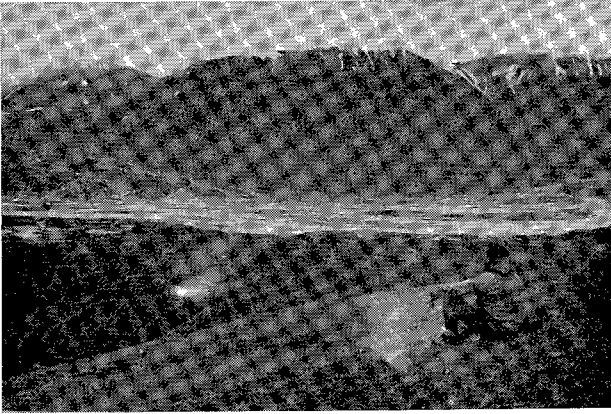
by

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(with 5 Text-figures)

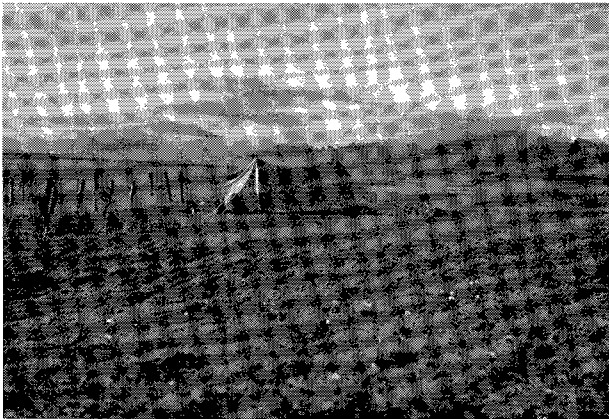
Pinkfooted Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus* banded in Spitsbergen by the British (Sherborne-Cambridge) expedition in 1954, have been recovered in the Netherlands and Belgium in two separate areas. One area is Friesland and the other is in the delta region of the Sheldt (Zeeland) and Belgium (Flanders). The details of the band recoveries are published in *Sterna* (Stavanger Museum), the Norwegian journal. The status of the Pinkfoot is probably masked by much larger numbers of the European Whitefronted Goose *Anser albifrons albifrons* and possibly also by Bean Geese *Anser arvensis*, though these geese may tend to choose different feeding habitats. None of the feeding habitats of these species has been described so far as I know. Some recent records of Pinkfeet in the Netherlands are listed in *Limosa* (e.g. TEN KATE), but it would be interesting if more were known about its status in the Netherlands and Belgium. Pinkfeet, which spend the summer in Iceland and Greenland, spend the winter in England, Scotland and Wales. Pinkfeet, which spend the summer in Spitsbergen, winter in Jutland, N.W. Germany and Friesland and they will move westwards in severe weather as far as France.

R. A. H. COOMBES, the wildfowler and naturalist, is well known to readers of *Limosa* for his publications on the variations and forms of Bean Geese *Anser arvensis* found in western Europe. This is a subject raised by S. ALPHERAKY in "the Geese of Europe and Asia" (1905) and soon after its publication by others in letters to the "Field", the "Zoologist" and probably in other British journals. Early in 1955, I visited COOMBES at the British Museum (Natural History) at Tring in England and he told me that he had never seen nor heard of large numbers of Pinkfeet in the Netherlands though he had asked friends in the Netherlands to keep a special look-out for them. Mr. COOMBES had not heard of Pinkfeet on Walcheren, where I knew there had been a considerable decrease in the number of Pinkfeet since 1901 (SMALLEY, 1932), which had been noticed at Veere by H. LEYBORNE POPHAM. For many years, LEYBORNE POPHAM (see obituary by MCNEILE) rented an estuary at Veere, on the island of Walcheren, the winter haunt of large numbers of Wigeon and other wildfowl, from the Dutch authorities, and used to go there for a week or two each season, as soon as his Dutch keeper telegraphed that the weather conditions were suitable; this usually meant cold weather with easterly winds. The length and number of visits varied from year to year. The keeper, J. DE BLIEK,



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Fig. 1. View across the Sassanelva to part of Vendomkjegla, where there was a large feeding flock of flightless breeding Pinkfeet 4/8/54, and to the slopes of Trehøgdenene. Some Pinkfeet choose nesting sites on the top or sides of the lower bastions of mountains. (British Vest-Spitsbergen Expedition 1957)



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Fig. 2. Camp on a raised beach below Skarvrypehøgda in lower Sassendalen. View up valley. In the distance behind the tent lies Trehøgdenene and to the right lie the ridges in the middles distance that block the entrance to Deltadalen and where the stream from Deltadalen cuts through a gorge to Sassendalen; it is presumably here that Pinkfeet have been found nesting. "This was a very typical colony, with nests easily accessible and scattered along the flat ground at the edge of a deep gorge" (PENNIE, I. D., and ANDREW, D. G. 1956. *Sterna*, 2, 49). In 1954 and 1955, Pinkfeet were nesting at a similar site further up Sassendalen close to the Eskerfossen. Nesting Pinkfeet can repel an attack from an Arctic Fox. I observed such an attack in Iceland in 1955. [British (Sherborne-Cambridge) Expedition 1954]

is dead but some of his family and others who knew or shot in this locality must still be alive. LEYBORNE POPHAM went there in December or later each winter. T. M. PIKE rented the wildfowling before LEYBORNE POPHAM. SMALLEY's account suggests that 'thousands' of grey geese, mainly Pinkfeet with a sprinkling of Whitefronts used to roost on the sandbanks during some part of the winter. By 1931, if not earlier, only a small flock of Pinkfeet was seldom seen in the winter.

Apparently the roosting sandbank became lower and covered by water at all high tides. Recently I have seen LEYBORNE POPHAM's game book from 1892 onwards, two books of press cuttings and his diaries from 1910—1925. There are other diaries prior to 1910 and after 1925 which I did not read. I was given this opportunity by Mrs. LLOYD OF ARDLEIGH, Essex, England, who is the daughter of LEYBORNE POPHAM. Over a period of years, both before and after the 1914—18 war, LEYBORNE POPHAM and T. M. PIKE wrote short notices on the wildfowling on Walcheren for the "Field" which is a British weekly journal. The diaries contain information on the shooting and weather. It appears that the marshes at Veere were connected at that time to the seashore and the shooting was mainly in the area around Zand Kreek and Veere Gat. The sandbank used by the roosting Pinkfeet and Whitefronts was called Scholleman. The lower part of the estuary and Zand Kreek were good for 'grey geese'. Most Pinkfeet were killed at the roosting sandbank, which was the last bank to disappear with the tide. After the 1906—07 shooting season, it became illegal to shoot Pinkfeet with a punt gun. After 1908, Pinkfeet were shot with a double barreled Bland 4-Bore gun from a punt.

In 1928, the shooting season was cut so that it ended earlier on 1st February, and prior to this it had been made illegal to shoot between sunset and sunrise, which would make it more difficult to use a punt. There was less shooting after the 1914—18 war. The number of Pinkfeet shot each year must have depended upon a number of factors including length and time of LEYBORNE POPHAM's visits to Veere as well as the number of visits made to the sandbanks to shoot geese. LEYBORNE POPHAM seems to have shot his last Pinkfoot on 27/1/14 as I have found no record after the 1914—18 war. He began shooting again at Veere only in the 1919—20 season. The one Pinkfoot was the only goose of any species shot in the 1913—14 season, but I cannot find any reason to attach significance to this. 11 Pinkfeet were killed by him in the 1912—13 season from the punt. From 1892 up to 1933 he records shooting 390 Pinkfeet and 78 Whitefronts from his punt and 13 Pinkfeet and 4 Whitefronts at daytime flighting ("In my experience Pinkfeet and Whitefronts congregate together far more than other varieties of geese"). He killed Pinkfeet and Whitefronts with the same shot from a punt ten times. In 1922 he wrote "grey geese appear to be getting scarcer in the South of Holland with the exception of Bean Geese

which seem to hold their own, but the Pinkfooted and Whitefronted Geese have to a great extent left the estuary probably owing to their favourite resort, a high sandbank, having become much lower and covered at ordinary tides..... Barnacle appear sometimes in considerable numbers". In 1919—22, he shot 6 Whitefronts and 8 Bean Geese. Of the 1922—23 season he wrote "wild geese did not figure in the bag; they are scarce now in winter where some years ago they used to be so plentiful. Bean Geese still frequent the marshes in fair numbers. Barnacle turn up in frost, but the main army of Pinkfooted and Whitefronted Geese, which used to afford such fine sport in the old days of the punt gun, seem to have almost deserted the estuary". Formerly "skeins of geese outlined against the sunset sky as far as the eye could see could be seen winging their way from the meadows on which they had been feeding to the roosting place on the sandbank". PIKE reported many thousand geese on the sandbank in a long black line perhaps 300 yards long and he noted that too intense cold drove all the wildfowl including the Pinkfeet out of the Netherlands, though the normal snow and frost brought very good shooting. The severe weather of 1890—91, for instance, caused the formation of ice and made the water-ways impassable. LEYBORNE POPHAM still shot Whitefronts after the 1914—18 war but they may have been less shot at since there were not sufficient numbers of geese on the sandbank to provide good shooting. 12 of the 82 Whitefronts were shot after the war. Bean Geese occupied a different habitat and still in 1927 they were in 'about their usual numbers on the soft marshes'. In 1928, 'grey geese', especially Bean Geese, were plentiful. On 27/1/33 large flocks of migrating Barnacle were going south. The period of 1919 to 1933 included periods when the weather was cold enough to drive the Pinkfeet from N.W. Germany and probably Friesland as well. However severe weather which is able to cause all the Pinkfeet to leave Germany may be severe further west as well and so prevent all but a small number from staying in the Netherlands in recent years. Many Pinkfeet may escape detection when their smaller flocks are associated with the larger flocks of Whitefronts. For example, one band was recovered at Zeeuws Vlaanderen which is an important locality for Whitefronts (TEN KATE, 1956). It is difficult to assess and interpret the importance of a particular band recovery without a background of observations as can be seen in the case of the Whitefronts in England and Wales (BOYD) where some localities are 'protected' and others receive 'unique' visits from Whitefronts.

Mrs LLOYD tells me that there is no mention of Pinkfeet in LEYBORNE POPHAM's diaries for the months of October and November for the seasons of 1901—05, 1906—07, and 1910—13 when many Pinkfeet were shot (58, 13, 17, 121, 62, 27, 30, and 11 Pinkfeet for the respective seasons) though he was in the Netherlands during those months of these seasons. I think this does not prove that

some Pinkfeet were not present at Veere in October or even late September. Punt gunning in the estuary was facilitated by an east wind and this is the wind which coincides with the colder weather, which often comes soon after Christmas, and sometimes before and is likely to have brought the peak arrivals of Pinkfeet.

It would be interesting to know the cause of the change in the status of the Pinkfoot at Veere. The "sprinkling" of Whitefronts may have decreased in number but the Whitefronts did not desert the locality. This change was associated with a change at the roosting place but some 'geese' were present at the sandbank after the 1914—18 war but not in sufficient numbers to provide good shooting. Pinkfeet will fly many kilometres from a favourable roosting place to their feeding grounds. It seems the Pinkfeet did not find a suitable roosting place nearby since he does not say whether the Pinkfeet continued to use the meadows for feeding or not. It is possible the change was due to another cause or a combination of causes such as a change in the land utilisation of the feeding grounds, the absence of other suitable roosting places within reach of the feeding grounds, the 'northward advance' of the wintering range due to climatic amelioration, change due to the provision of new feeding grounds in Friesland, East Friesland or Föhr. Tipperne on Ringkøbing Fjord in Denmark is an important locality for Pinkfeet for a part of the autumn and in the past Fiil Sø may also have been visited in the autumn. I do not know whether the change can be correlated with changes in the west of Jutland such as the opening of the Hvide Sande Canal on Ringkøbing Fjord in 1910 or the closing of the canal in 1915. I know of no evidence that human activities in Spitsbergen could have caused a big drop in the numbers of Pinkfeet sufficient to account for the thousands missing from Veere. Pinkfeet are still observed sometimes on Walcheren; from 10/2 to ca. 1/3/53 ca. 300 were seen (TEN KATE, 1954).

The status of the Pinkfeet in Zeeland at present may be like its status in Belgium. In Belgium (LIPPENS, 1941; VERHEYEN, 1943; VAN HAVRE, 1928), the Pinkfoot is a regular resident winter visitor in small numbers to the coastal region and the adjacent polders from the middle and late part of October until the end of February and sometimes until March. The band recoveries give no evidence of early arrivals, which may have become very rare at the present time. Possibly the first arrivals are at the same time as the arrivals of the larger flocks of Whitefronted Geese. The flocks are rarely of more than 10—30 birds and they are often seen in association with Bean and Whitefronted Geese. They are seen especially in the estuary of the Sheldt and also near Knocke and in Campine, but are very rare in the interior. In severe weather it is warmer near the coast and suitable feeding grounds are more likely to be there. It is probable that there is an influx from the east during hard winter weather, but during the period 1944—51, there may have been a

notable decrease in the numbers of wintering birds (LIPPENS, 1951). However, the numbers of wintering Whitefronts has risen since 1933 and especially since 1940, so this could have had a masking effect on the true status of the Pinkfoot or it may be due to smaller numbers of Whitefronts passing westwards into France and the British Isles or to a fall in the area of available feeding grounds in this region.

The most important localities for Pinkfeet in the Netherlands at the present time seem to me to be in Friesland. No doubt its status here has been and will continue to be affected by changes in land utilisation in the region and developments on the IJsselmeer. I know very little about the Pinkfeet in Friesland. The early autumn band recoveries suggest that a large flock is present annually early in October and it may contain breeding birds from particular localities in Spitsbergen. Arrivals in Friesland in October may depend upon conditions in Finnmark or Spitsbergen. It is possible that the conditions at Tipperne also affect the date of arrivals. Later arrivals would probably come from Föhr and East Friesland and depend upon conditions in those localities. The first arrivals may be of broodless adults.

Mr. TAAPKEN of Leiden has sent some information, which he received from Mr. KEUNING and Mr. HOEKSTRA, to Mr. Holger HOLGERSEN at Stavanger Museum. At Gaasterland near Sloterveer, where 204827 and 204832 were shot, there were about 400 Pinkfeet in October 1954. On 10th January 1955, there were about 5000 'grey geese' which included some (unknown number) Pinkfeet and on some days in January there were 10—12,000 'grey geese'.

At Rijsterbos, 205112 was shot from a flock of about 400 Pinkfeet. Flocks of ca. 1000 'grey geese' may be seen at the beginning of winter and they stay by the IJsselmeer during mild weather. In colder weather, they go further inland, apparently to the farms and villages. I expect that they would leave Friesland in weather like that of February 1956. Near Nije Mirdum (205848), the hunter first noticed Pinkfeet that autumn on 25th October 1954. On 15th December there were some small flocks of Pinkfeet and a larger flock of 50 birds. They usually leave in early February, but if the weather is hard they stay a fortnight longer. The birds concerned in these observations may have been the same as all the places are close to each other; the numbers in the area are probably increased by movements of Pinkfeet from East Friesland later in the winter. No doubt, after severe weather like that of February 1956, some Pinkfeet will remain much longer; ca. 50 Pinkfeet were seen at Lemmer 2/4/56 (TEN KATE). During the spell of severe weather in 1956 all the Pinkfeet left N.W. Germany and many passed westwards into France; on the way to France they may have stopped for a short time in Belgium or the Netherlands while others seem to have been present in the Netherlands throughout the spell of severe

weather. I do not know what effect, if any, the supply of bread, grain and vegetables to geese and swans in the Netherlands had upon the movements of the Pinkfeet in 1956 (Over et al.).

LEYBORNE POPHAM was at Lukovoia, Protoka, on the Yenesei, on 11/9/1894 and shot a Pinkfoot. The record in his game book does not state whether the bird was an adult or not. Other records of Russian Pinkfeet are given by ALPHERAKY (1905) and on 7/10/1956 one Pinkfoot, banded in Spitsbergen as a broodless adult in 1954, was recovered at Konakovo ( $56^{\circ} 40' \text{ N.}$ ,  $36^{\circ} 45' \text{ E.}$ ), in the Kalinin region of Russia. The location of this band recovery may fit in with the pattern of migration of part of the large population of European Whitefronted Geese which winters in western Europe and breeds in N.W. Russia (BUXTON, E. J. M., 1953, *Ibis*, **95**, 235). The recoveries of European Whitefronted Geese, banded in the British Isles, have been listed and discussed in the "Seventh Annual Report of the Wildfowl Trust" (p. 15). This band recovery was not unexpected and I had hoped there would be Russian recoveries; I thought these would be commoner in Pinkfeet banded as goslings, as first winter birds might be more likely than adults to become attached to flocks of Whitefronted Geese on the wintering grounds and go to Russia on spring migration<sup>1</sup>). I do not know of any evidence of regular breeding in northern Russia. Perhaps one could predict the occurrence of "Pinkfoot like" variants in flocks of the Tundra Bean Goose *Anser arvensis rossicus*. It is interesting that on 13/2/11 LEYBORNE POPHAM shot a Pinkfoot with yellow legs on Walcheren. The Wildfowl Trust expedition to Central Iceland in 1953 found three adult Pinkfeet with bright orange legs and bill markings (see also: ALPHERAKY) which they say should not be confused with the yellowish legs of some immatures nor with the orange stain which sometimes gives a yellowish suffusion to the skin of the leg and foot, but is a definite bright orange pigmentation invariably associated with a similar bill colour. LEYBORNE POPHAM's diary does not state whether the bill had yellow or pink markings. The causes of the variation and different forms of *Anser arvensis* and also their relation to *Anser brachyrhynchus* are interesting. The discussion by FORD may be helpful in the study of them. It is complicated by the lack of facts about the breeding population and their "flyways", though it may be possible to correlate museum specimens from these places with those from the wintering grounds (BERRY, COOMBES, 1951). Taiga Bean Geese *Anser arvensis arvensis* banded in Jämtland, Sweden, have been recovered at Ellington, Northumberland, England and in S.E., Scotland (Brit. Birds, 1956,

<sup>1</sup>) Wildfowl Trust Annual Report, 8, 13. (1957): At Slimbridge, England, the proportion of first-winter birds in large flocks of 'grey geese', which are mainly European Whitefronts, averages rather more than 30% (20—46% annual variation). 41 of 102 (36%) stray 'grey geese' of other species amongst the large flocks of Whitefronts observed in the years 1946—56 were in their first winter.

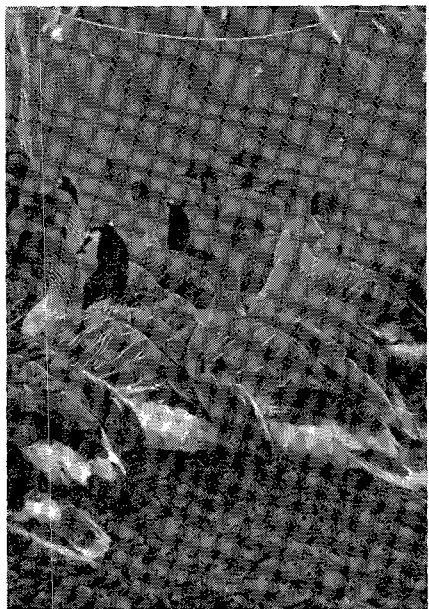


Fig. 3. Broodless (probably mostly non-breeding early moulting immature adults) Pinkfeet at Stormyrvatna, Reindalen, Vest-Spitsbergen, 16/7/54. It seems that small flocks of broodless birds collect at these lakes prior to moulting their remiges in the first days of July. In this catch were a few Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*.

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49, 438). Much of Iceland was covered with birch before the arrival of the Vikings, so it is interesting to speculate whether the geese there differed from the Pinkfeet on the highland tundra of Iceland. The comparison of the dates and localities from observations of years ago and of museum specimens in the Netherlands and Belgium (there are Dutch specimens in the British Museum of Natural History) with those from recent observations and band recoveries

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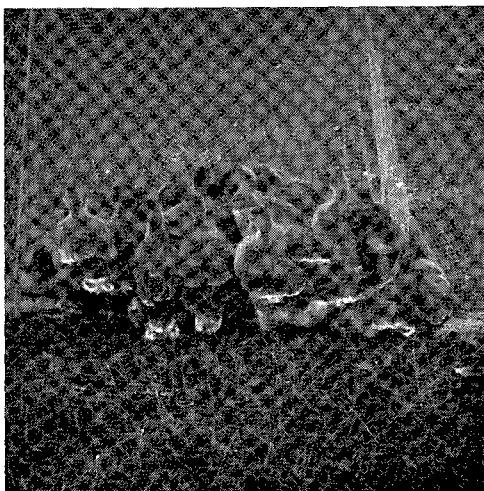
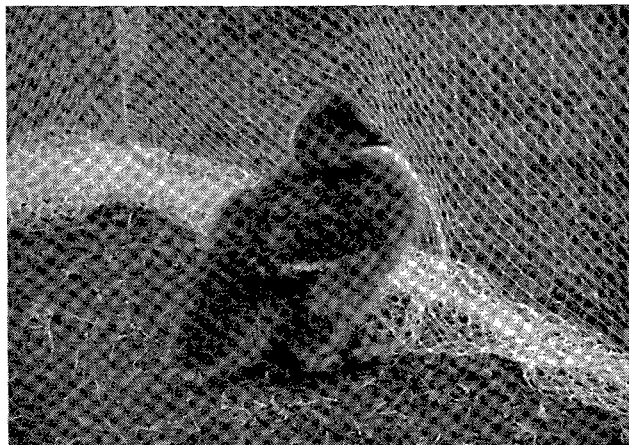


Fig. 4. Group of goslings, lower Sassendalen, 29/7/54.





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Fig. 5. A small gosling in catch on 4/8/54 in upper Sassendalen.

might be interesting and give a better picture of the changes in the region of southern Holland and Belgium. I believe that someone, probably an old wildfowler on Walcheren or on one of the islands near Walcheren, can say whether the change on the meadows used by the Pinkfeet, which roosted at Veere, was sudden or whether it was prolonged over a number of years and when it occurred. Also some people in Friesland, East Friesland, and Föhr can probably give reports that can be correlated with this and combined to give a better account of the change as it affected the status of the Pinkfoot in all important localities. The numbers involved in the change are large and it is certain that wildfowlers must have noted it. It might be interesting to know where Pinkfeet can be found annually in the Netherlands and Belgium and to know more about their status there in mild, 'average normal' and severe winters. It might be interesting to know the plant ecology of the most favoured localities and feeding habits of the Pinkfeet and compare them with those of the Bean and Whitefronted Geese.

I am grateful to R. A. H. COOMBES, Holger HOLGERSEN, Mrs LLOYD, J. H. MCNEILE and to hunters who returned bands and sent information. The bands were provided by Stavanger Museum in Norway. The Spitsbergen expedition, led by G. T. WRIGHT, consisted of 16 men and was mainly concerned with survey and geological studies. I was a co-worker with G. T. WRIGHT, C. PENNYCUICK, J. GOODHART, and F. T. BOLIN in the goose banding work; R. WILSON and R. WALKER helped on two days. C. SCOTLAND and G. LAMOUR, who were on a private visit to Spitsbergen, helped us on one day.

6th March 1958.

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## Nabeschouwingen over het voorkomen van de Kleine Rietgans in Nederland v

door

C. G. B. TEN KATE

Wanneer men de literatuur over het voorkomen van de Kleine Rietgans in Nederland in de laatste 60 jaar de revue laat passeren, lopen de mededelingen over de frequentie zeer uiteen.

We beginnen in 1897, het jaar dat ALBARDa zijn *Aves Neerlandicae* uitgaf. Deze zegt (p. 99): „Bezoekt ons jaarlijks in de wintermaanden, doch slechts in kleinen getale.”

Dan volgt in 1908 SNOUCKAERT's *Avifauna Neerlandica*, waarin (p. 122) nog wel wordt gesproken van: „niet in zeer grooten getale”, maar direct daarop volgt: „Toch..... meer..... dan men meestal geneigd is aan te nemen; in den winter 1905/06 ontving Artis alleen zestien stuks levend”.

Eveneens in 1908 publiceert VAN OORT zijn: „Contribution to our knowledge of the Avifauna of the Netherlands” (*Notes Leyden Museum* 30, p. 129—214). Hij noemt (p. 140) de soort „with *A. fabalis* the most common goose on migration” en citeert (op p. 155—157) een gedeelte van een brief van wijlen Mr. T. M. PIKE over het voorkomen van eenden en ganzen in herfst en winter in Zeeland, waarin de Kleine Rietgans „the most numerous goose” wordt genoemd, „which does not arrive here in full numbers till early December and in mild winters the bulk of them leave early in February”. Zij „feed by day in the surrounding islands of Zeeland