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Winter Populations and Movements of Wildfowl at Falsterbo Peninsula: January to March 1964

(Report from Falsterbo Bird Station No. 32.)

By

SHAUN L. ELLINTHORPE WHITE

Samman fattning: Sjöfågel kring Falsterbohalvön, beståndsstorlek och flyttning under januari —mars 1964 (Meddelanden från Falsterbo fågelstation nr 32).

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The coasts of Southern Sweden represent one of the more northerly wintering quarters of wildfowl in Europe, the majority of birds migrating in autumn for more southerly latitudes. However, some populations of the hardier species, both local and from areas to the north and east, winter in South Sweden. These wintering birds, unlike their southern counterparts, are faced with comparatively severe weather and this forces certain adapative behaviour patterns which take the form of sometimes complicated movements within the wintering area, primarily associated with fluctuations in temperature and ice-coverage. Some birds are forced to leave Sweden altogether.

This report is based on the observations made at the Falsterbo peninsula in connection with wildfowl in the period Jan. 4th to March 31st 1964, with notes from April where applicable.

Method of recording

In the period Jan. 4th to March 31st, regular daily watches were maintained on the migration passing Nabben, the southernmost point of the Falsterbo Peninsula and of S.W. Sweden. The procedure for observation was similar for each day: starting watch at sunrise and continuing till any movements had ceased, which usually entailed a watch of about three hours. Some mornings the watch would be greatly extended to cover late movement.

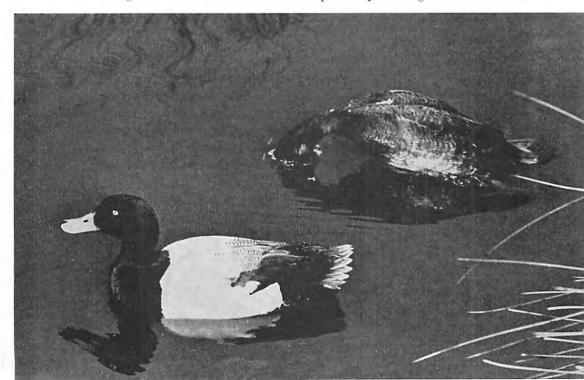
To supplement the visible migration record, regular counts every three or four days were kept on the wintering flocks of wildfowl around the Peninsula, the boundary being, and including, the Falsterbo Canal.

Wildfowl Observations from the Study Area

Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos)

The weather in the study period was mild, sea-ice forming on an extensive scale only twice, in early January and from the middle of February. This caused two peaks in the counts, the latter being more abrupt and short-lived than January's peak due to a complete coverage of all available feeding areas. During the peak in January a few feeding areas remained uncovered, providing a very crowded population of Mallard with sufficient food to make further movement unnecessary. In late January Mallard began to move north from Falsterbo, the decline being interrupted only by the cold spell in February when almost the entire population was forced to leave Sweden altogether (see Fig. 1 and Table 3). This evacuation was seen on the mornings of 20th and 21st from Nabben (see under Discussion). The return of these birds was noticed in the first two weeks of March and probably concerned true spring migrants as well, the sex ratio being about equal, unlike the previous predominance of males (see Table 2). It can also be seen from these tables that the peak in February was caused by male birds probably indicating that wintering

The winter population of the Scaup (Aythya marila) was composed almost entirely of females, except in late March, when the sex ratio was equal as a result of spring immigration of males. The female on the photo is just diving. Photo: Jan Rietz.



birds were involved from further north. These birds may have moved north from Falsterbo earlier in the mild weather. The steady decline of male birds preceding the influx certainly suggests this.

Teal (Anas crecca)

No Teal were seen till March 19th; then from this date a gradual increase was noticed, sex ratios being about equal.

Wigeon (Anas penelope)

Not seen till 25th March.

Pintail (Anas acuta)

Apart from the unusual records on Jan. 6th and 11th, not seen till March 12th.

Scaup (Aythya marila)

The population of Scaup at Falsterbo showed very little fluctuation, and no survival movements were forced, unlike in the other species. The counts show a steady decline throughout the period, with little or no connection with ice-coverage, the population supporting itself on a very small area of the Canal in the severest conditions of February. The population was comprised almost entirely of females, except in late March, when the sex ratio was equal as a result of spring immigration of males (see Tables 1 and 2).

Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula)

The winter population of Tufted Duck was confined almost exclusively to the Falsterbo Canal, and later spring migrants would frequent the small lakes of the Peninsula.

The peaks in the numbers can be attributed to ice-coverage, not so much at Falsterbo but further up the coast, the Canal remaining ice-free on all but one occasion.

Birds would tend to leave the canal as soon as the temperature rose above zero, no doubt for their preferred wintering haunts north of Falsterbo in the interior lakes of Scania. NILSSON (1962) notes a movement from the coastal areas to the inland waters towards Spring. On several occasions small northerly movements were seen from the canal, each time at the end of a cold period.

The peak in March comprised spring migrants and made the slight

preponderance of males cease. In high temperatures at the end of March the birds soon departed, only some 50 remaining.

As with Mallard, a complete evacuation took place in late February as a result of the only extensive ice-coverage.

Pochard (Aythya ferina)

Only small numbers of Pochard wintered at Falsterbo, all at the canal. As is usual with Pochard, there was a marked excess of males (see Table 2); no movements were seen.

Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula)

Surprisingly few Goldeneye were seen. The few that were occurred mostly in January and comprised nearly all males (see Table 2).

An area outside the study area showed a decrease from 762 birds in early January to 72 in late February (Trelleborg coast). Small spring migration was seen at Nabben in late March (see Table 3).

Long-Tailed Duck (Clangula hyemalis)

In January and February there were very few records of this species, and it was not until March that any large numbers were seen. In this month the birds seemed to frequent the coast and inlets more, and this may be the cause of the increase in numbers. Display was very much in evidence in March, but the preponderance of males was very large (see Table 2) and it was not until early April that the sexes were equal and paired-up. Many birds perished in March as a result of oil pollution.

Velvet Scoter (Melanitta fusca)

Wintering birds were not seen at Falsterbo till Jan. 17th but from this date were seen regularly (Figs. 1 and 2). Numbers were low and the birds very scattered, making the counts somewhat unreliable.

As with the Eider, W.—S.W. migration was seen in the last half of January and amounted to over 300 birds. This is a very large number for winter and is at present unexplainable. This movement is referred to under the discussion later, but it may be said here that the different wintering areas of the sexes may have some connection with this migration seen at Falsterbo, but lack of material from previous years makes only suggestions possible.

High counts in late March (see Table 1) were birds on spring

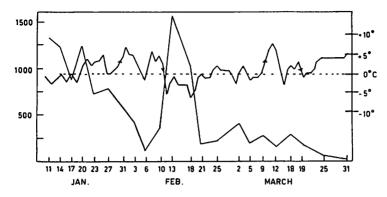


Fig. 1. Numbers of Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos) wintering at Falsterbo in 1964.

Temperature is plotted (arrowed line).

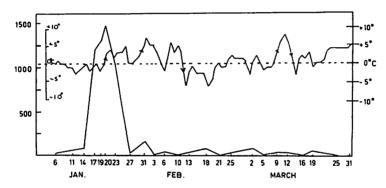


Fig. 2. Numbers of Goosander (Mergus merganser) wintering at Falsterbo in 1964.

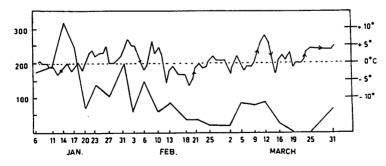


Fig. 3. Numbers of Scaup (Aythya marila) wintering at Falsterbo in 1964.

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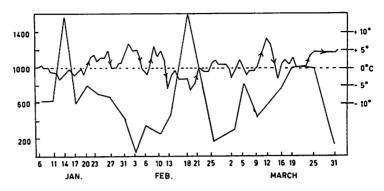


Fig. 4. Numbers of Tufted Duck (Aythya fuligula) wintering at Falsterbo in 1964.

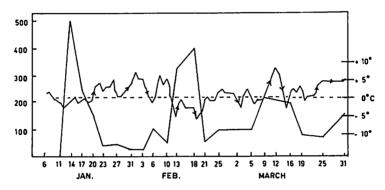


Fig. 5. Numbers of Coot (Fulica atra) wintering at Falsterbo in 1964.

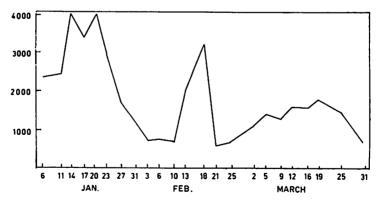


Fig. 6. Total numbers of all wildfowl species recorded at each count from Falsterbo in winter 1964.

12.1.

Table 1. Total numbers of wildfowl recorded at each count from Falsterbo Peninsula.

Species	6 11 14 17 20 23 27 rrhynchos 1300 1312 1220 860 1242 700 776							Fe	ebrua	ry			March										
	6	11	14	17	20	23	27	31	3	6	10	13	18	21	25	2	5	9	12	16	19	25	31
			-							1													
Anas platyrhynchos	1300	1312	1220	860	1242	700	776	556	425	100	380	1300	1000	200	210	400	200	280	170	300	200	40	30
A. crecca	-	_	- 1	-	_		-	_	_	1	32	_	_	_			_	_	- 1	_	1	8	13
A. penelope	l — I			-	-		_	-	-	-	2	-	_	-	_ ,	-	_	-	-	_	- 1	4	5
A. acuta		2	_	-			_		-	_	_	-	- 1	-	_	_	_	_	2	1	2	2	2
Aythya marila	181	199	320	247	71	140	101	195	54	148	60	90	40	40	27	30	84	80	90	40	6	- [70
A. fuligula	620	640	1570	590	784	721	522	440	5	335	40	165	1500	150	130	320	800	430	600	780	1000	500	170
A. ferina			2		6	1	2	2		2	2	2	30	12	-	25	10	-	- 1	-	6	2	-
Bucephala clangula	16	25	15	2	12	22	2	1	1	2	2	4	4	ı	5	2	_	_		-	-	-	- 1
Clangula hyemalis		_			2	1	11	12	4	1	2	10	40	44	52	87	112	118	114	180	207	70	20
Melanitta fusca		_	-	2	16	4	4	6	6	3	2	2	8	13	11	18	20	18	14	32	82	300	8
M. nigra			_	_		1	-	2	l	1		_	1	1	-	2	2	-	2	1	112	400	20
Somateria mollissima	3		4	1	3	2	4	6	4	2	1	3	6	2	5	4	8	2	1	4	3	6	2
Mergus serrator			71		11	30	3	3	3	5	4	4	6	3	4	6	2	2	5	8	€	18	12
M. merganser	49	46	81	1195	1463	1000	16	169	-	16	_	16	30	_ '	32	116	30	50	42	6	80	6	2
M. albellus		_	2.5			1	_	_	-	<u> </u>				_	_		_	-		1	2		-
Tadorna tadorna		-			_		_	1	2	L	3	-	_	1	2	1	3	2	5	4	6	18	30
Cygnus olor	7)	87	97	139	-	200	102	200	101	22	-	100	17	22	10	-	11	-		ı	22	10	-
C. cygnus	53	60	106	12		82	104	75	61	18	-	46	51	20	42	3	10	- 1	20	l	10	5	5

10 2 26 105

320 510

70 103 220 210 201

30

Fulica atra

500 252 170

Table 2. Sex or age percentages recorded in the counts. Predominant sex or age indicated in brackets for which the figures apply Blank spaces mean either no birds present (or too few) or undetermined.

	January								February							March							April	
	6	11	14	17	20	23	27	31	3	6	10	13	18	21	25	2	5	9	12	16	19	25	31	10
A (malas)	61	-0	0.0	7.	78	72	69	83	63	65	53	80	71	40	5.0	40	52	50	46	51	46	50	54	48
Anas platyrhynchos (males)	91	20	00	74 72 58	00	00				00	95	90	69	97	89					68			48	28
Aythya martta (temales)	72	20	70	72	86 64	51	96 49			54	24	45	20	57	54					39			48	49
A. jungua (males)	ാദ	-96	12	00				00	32	94	40	40						""	49	່າກ	50 50		40	40
A. jerina (maies)	- 1	- 1	- 1	98	99				TEL.	اہما	Į.		92			61								
Bucephaka clangula (males)	80	81	74		74	80											re al						ا ۾ ا	
Clangula hyemalis (males)				- 1		- 1	93										89	92			85		64	49
Melanitta fusca (males)				Al	l rec							6 ad						- 1		72	57			53
M. nigra (females)																	54	48	45					
Somateria mollissima (females or												-			- 1	1	1	ľ			·	ı		
imm.)		All	bir	ds fe	emal	le or	imi	m. iı	ı wh	ole	peri	od.				- 1					ł			
Mergus serrator (males)	761											ly n	ales		i	ł					- 1	-51l	49	
M. merganser (males)	58	58	62	99	99	991	52	97		80		80		- 1	69	98	71	64	54	67	53	- 1		
Cygnus olor (adults)	90	58 89	88	80	30	98			97			74		76			- 1	- 1	-	"	78			
C. cygnus (adults)			0.0	80		98						78	75	98	92		80		60		·"	اٽ	1	

Table 3. Winter movements of wildfowl recorded at Falsterbo. Totals for each monthly quarter.

Species		Jan	uary			Febr	ruary			Ма	March				
	4-7	8-14	15-21	22-31	1-7	8-14	15-21	22 - 29	1-7	7-14	15-21	22-31			
Anas platyrhynchos]			1900 S	133 S	200 N	300 N					
A. crecca					i	•					3 N				
A. penelope					1					16 N	3 N				
A. acuta				1							5 N	22 N			
Aythya marila		ł					2000 S	92 S		64 N	37 N				
A. fuligula			l	Ì							22 N	}			
			İ								(males)				
Bucephala clangula					}	1					42 E	16 E			
					_						(females	3)			
Clangula hyemalis		1 E	48 S	110 S	13 N	25 N		30 E	$500~\mathrm{E}$	180 E		1			
Melanitta fusca			210 SW		35 SW			l		1		204 E			
			(males)	(males)				, ,			20.37	00.37			
M. nigra		- 0117	111 033	001 031	400 73		IE	1 E			20 N	80 N			
Somateria mollissima		5 SW		391 SW		-1	1					1			
Manage computer	12 E	(all lini	n. or fen		(50% m	aies)					20 E				
Mergus serrator	12 12		(80% m	240 SW							20 15	ĺ			
M. merganser		18 W		140 SW								16 N			
m. merganaer		(males)	(males)	140011								10 1			
M. albellus		32 S	(maics)												
37. (10000000		(males)													
Tadorna tadorna		()		18				3 S		4 N					
Cygnus olor				- ~	15 W	35 N		" "		1					
C. cygnus					7 N					'					

migration or, to be more correct, resting on the sea, overhead migration taking place at the same time. Unlike the birds of January and February, which were all males, the migrating birds of March were equally divided, and many were paired. As with the Long-Tailed Duck, many perished as a result of the oil-spill.

Common Scoter (Melanitta nigra)

Apart from two records in late February, no wintering birds were seen. In the last half of March, however, migrating parties started to pass, heading north, reaching a peak in early April, the total being 2400 birds; most of these appeared to be females.

Eider (Somateria mollissima)

The local wintering birds at Falsterbo were too few and scattered for reliable analysis. In Table 1 can be seen the figures from each count, all of which were immature or female birds. No adult drakes were seen till spring migration started.

As with Velvet Scoter, unexplained W—S.W. movements were seen in January and are discussed in another section. Weather had no bearing on the movements, a steady trickle passing each morning, totalling over 500 birds.

It is well known that Eider on spring migration detour round S. Sweden in preference to an overland flight across south Sweden. This procedure was first seen at Falsterbo in the second week of February, half the birds being males. This was early for Eider to start migration, and indeed the movement was halted after some five days at the onset of the cold spell after some 400 birds had passed east. No more migration was seen till April 3rd, when the migration was resumed, lasting till April 14th. In this period ca 10 000 birds passed east on the south-coast route, and ca 4000 passed north on the west-coast route, a rather short migration period compared with other years and somewhat later in starting and earlier in finishing, with the exception of the early movement in February.

Summarising, there were three distinct movements of Eider in the period under study: the unexplained S.W. movements of January, the supposed early spring migration in the second week of February, and the true spring migration of April.

Red breasted Merganser (Mergus serrator)

This species seemed more common in January than in the rest

of the period with the exception of mid-April, when numbers were augmented by spring migrants.

Within the same period as the Eider and Velvet Scoter were passing S.W. so the Red-breasted Merganser were moving S.W. The motive behind these movements remains as unknown as with the other two species. In the period January 13th—24th, nearly 300 birds passed S.W., arriving at Nabben via the south coast. The majority of birds were males, indicating a northerly origin.

Goosander (Mergus merganser)

The local wintering population of Goosander showed little fluctuation and numbered some 10-20 birds, the sex ratio being about equal. There was, however, a slight relationship between low temperatures in Scania and influxes of Goosander at Falsterbo, all of which concerned adult males (see Table 1 and Fig. 2).

The unprecedented influx in the period 14th—20th January concerning an estimated 2000 birds, was probably true migration; records at the migration watch at Nabben revealed large S.W. movements in this period (see Fig. 2 and Table 3). All the birds were males, and it is possible this was the belated migration of male Goosander, a phenomenon known with this species.

Smew (Mergus albellus)

Apart from a comparatively large movement on January 14th, only odd records came from Falsterbo.

On January 14th, 32 birds flew S at Nabben, and the wildfowl counts revealed about 25 around the Peninsula. All the birds were males and therefore probably of northern origin.

'Cygnus' species.

The habitat of these species made counting difficult and unreliable, but the population seemed rather static, the only migration being in early February. Concerning age distribution, see Table 3. Few immature birds were seen till early spring.

Coot (Fulica atra)

This species showed the most marked reaction to cold weather, see Fig. 5. At the first sign of ice the Coot would arrive at the Canal and then would depart again when the temperature rose, no doubt for the inland lakes of Scania.

Discussion

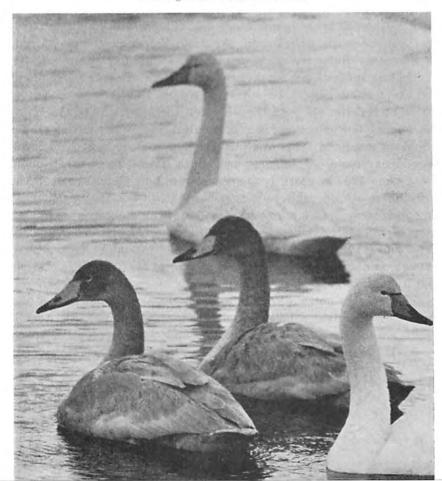
The graphs of the selected species in connection with numbers and temperature show marked relationship between sub-zero temperatures and high counts of wildfowl. While low temperature is the basic cause of all fluctuations, results from Falsterbo show that only the extent of ice-coverage dictated movements, and this in turn cannot be solely related to sub-zero temperature. Other factors are concerned with the formation of ice, such as salinity, depth of the water, and the state of the surface, which depends on the wind speed and surface area. If all these features are represented as favourable for the formation of ice (low salinity, shallow water, smooth surface due to lack of wind), then complete ice-coverage is experienced at only zero degrees. If, however, one of these elements is hostile to ice formation, especially wind, then ice formation is delayed or non-existent at zero degrees and below. If all elements are hostile, then the air temperature can be as low as -12° before any signs of ice appear.

Enough has been said to make it clear that direct comparisons in the graphs may be misleading; but, when increases in the counts at Falsterbo are caused (as most are) by non-local birds as a result of adverse weather further northwards, then a table of every wild-fowl locality in Scania would be required, giving details of ice-coverage for each day, a clearly impossible task. It was therefore thought that the temperature alone would be the only accurate general guide to the ice conditions in Scania. The temperature is the average taken from Falsterbo and Malmö at 16.00 hours.

The winter was mild in the period, the temperature seldom dropping below -12° C. In this range of temperature it is thought that no survival movements are forced by the action of the low temperature alone; observations from Falsterbo fully supported this view. Only if ice-coverage is sufficient to cover completely all available feeding waters is movement forced. These observations apply to the Falsterbo Peninsula, which must be regarded as a last refuge of birds taking part in any southerly survival movement other than crossing to Denmark or further. The Peninsula would tend to hold birds longer in adverse conditions than would a more northerly refuge where birds would be able to counter by coasting south. A typical example of this was seen at Falsterbo in mid-February. The temperature dropped on the 11th to about -12° C, and the most extensive ice

of the winter was quick to form throughout Scania in the very light winds. In the next two days a steady stream of Mallard, Tufted Duck, and Coot were seen to arrive in the little clear water left around the Peninsula, but no onward movement was seen till the 20th, by which time the population at Falsterbo had increased about fourfold. On the 20th ice-coverage was almost complete, certainly enough to cover all available feeding grounds; only then did the population begin to move south out of Sweden. On both the 20th and 21st many parties of wildfowl were seen passing Nabben flying south, and the count on the 21st indicated that nearly all the birds had departed from Falsterbo. Thus the situation of the Peninsula is somewhat unique in that it is very sensitive to southerly wildfowl movements, recording small and large movements. It would be interesting to learn the extent of its recruiting area, whether in fact only birds from

Whooper Swans (Cygnus cygnus). During the whole winter the family members are seen together. Photo: Jan Rietz.



Scania are concerned. Of course in severe winters such as 1963, when complete ice-coverage was experienced, Falsterbo would lose its character as a staging post for survival movements. Birds passing south are seen to ignore the Falsterbo Peninsula in such conditions and to fly straight on across Öresund (G. Roos in notes). A valuable feature from the diving-ducks' point of view is the presence of the Falsterbo Canal, a stretch of sheltered water that seldom freezes completely over due to the frequent passing of ships and a perceptible 'tide' running. Many hundred Tufted Duck, Scaup, and, to a lesser extent, Coot, Pochard, and Goosander gather in the Canal in severe weather when all else is frozen, and would otherwise be forced to leave Sweden altogether. As mentioned above, the Canal froze completely only once in the period.

The migration watches at Nabben revealed very interesting movements of Velvet Scoter and Eider in the last half of January. Between 15th and 28th, a total of 502 Eider and 370 Velvet Scoter were seen passing S.W. keeping this course till out of sight. All the Eider were females or immatures, and the Velvet Scoter all males. This indicates at least that their origin was probably from a northerly wintering area, as the difference in migratory behaviour within the populations of these species is well known: the male Velvet Scoter and female or immature Eider remain nearer the breeding area during winter. While this suggests Scandinavia as the source of these movements, the exact origin cannot be any one area, as the birds were seen to arrive at Nabben via both the west and the south coasts. Assuming the leading-line effect holding good, then widely separated origins would be indicated. This was further supported by visits to several prominent points on the west and south coasts: from the Halland coast some 130 km north both species were seen flying south in the morning in considerable numbers. Similarly, from the south coast the movement was tracked: as far east as Abbekås, some 50 km from Nabben, the movements were encoutered. If the course of these movements could be found, then the area might be revealed, but again no satisfactory answer can at present be given. It is possible that the birds concerned were wintering, or had been attempting to do so, further north, as of course many do. With a population of a species that is divided between migrating and wintering there is no doubt an intermediate behaviour, an undecided population so to speak. This being so, a certain amount of belated migration could be

expected. If migration is released by the first hostile phenomenon, probably falling temperatures, this would account for the repeated movements seen at Nabben.

It could be argued that other species of wildfowl would also be seen on belated migration, species that are also divided between migration and wintering. It must be pointed out that the Velvet Scoter and Eider are for the most part day migrants, whereas species such as Mallard, Tufted Duck, and Scaup are generally night migrants. Further, the watches at Nabben also recorded S.W. movements of the other day migrants, namely Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander. While not so pronounced and regular as those of Velvet Scoter and Eider, significant numbers were involved. On the 18th, 20th and 23rd these species were migrating, with the peak on 23rd, and 140 Redbreasted Merganser and 80 Goosander flew S.W. There is evidence then to suggest a protracted exodus of day-migrating wildfowl from Sweden in winter probably as a result of abortive attempts to winter. released by the onset of hostile conditions within the wintering area. These movements, performed in relatively mild weather should not be confused with the later survival movements of true wintering birds. As regards abortive attempts to winter, Roos (1962) mentions southerly movements of Mallard and Tufted Duck in late December which can be related to the first cold weather of the winter.

The use of sex ratios applied to migrating parties and populations proved interesting in determining, roughly, the origin of the birds. Full use is seen in the systematic list. Generally speaking, males tend to winter much nearer the breeding area; therefore it is only to be expected that the counts indicate a preponderance of males (see Table 2). This preponderance shows a steady decline with the coming of spring as females start arriving. The S.W. movement of *Mergus spp.* was comprised almost solely of male birds, and all three species were migrating in the same period.

Summary

1. Regular counts and migration watches were maintained for wildfowl at Falsterbo in the period January—March. The results are tabled under respective headings, indicating the total numbers at each count, with temperature indicated in the graphs, sex ratios,

and the migration observations. A systematic list with brief comments on the data is given.

- 2. The two species in sufficient numbers to make conclucions possible showed marked increases in number when extensive ice was present (Mallard and Tufted Duck). Complete exodus from Falsterbo of these species and to a lesser extent of the rest was experienced only when all feeding areas were covered by ice, this happening only once.
- 3. Unexplained S.W. movements of Velvet Scoter, Eider, and the three *Mergus spp*. took place in the last three weeks of January, all birds being males, the predominant sex of the northerly wintering populations.
- 4. Spring migration is briefly shown where recorded, and indicates an early departure N. for the Mallard, with slight increases in the counts in March of most species. Eider migration lasted only for about 10 days in early April, although a small 'spring type' movement was recorded in early February.

Sammanfattning: Sjöfågel kring Falsterbohalvön, beståndsstorlek och flyttning under januari-mars 1964 (Meddelanden från Falsterbo fågelstation nr 32).

- 1. Regelbundna sträckobservationer och räkningar av rastande andfåglar företogs vid Falsterbo under jan.—mars 1964. Resultaten framgår av tabellerna och diagrammen. I de senare anges också temperaturen såsom ett ungefärligt mått på issituationen kring området. Artvisa kommentarer ges i texten.
- 2. Vid ökande isläggning steg antalet viggar och gräsänder starkt. Först sedan alla vatten hade islagts, försvann dessa arter från Falsterbohalvön. Hos andra arter höll sig ett visst antal individer kvar även vid (nästan) total isläggning.
- 3. Tydliga SW-rörelser hos sjöorre, ejder och de tre skrakarterna fastställdes under de tre sista januariveckorna. Flockarna bestod av enbart hanar, något som antyder att nordligt kvarstannande kontingenter var inblandade.
- 4. Hos de flesta arter steg antalet ex. i mars som en följd av begynnande vårsträck. Hos gräsanden noterades emellertid en snabb bortflyttning under denna månad. Ejdersträcket kulminerade under tio dagar i början av april, men en kortvarig avårflyttning noterades i början av februari.

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