

A6.1a Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status	Conservation status
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 General Protection Schedule 1(1)	Species of European Conservation Concern SPEC 3 Unfavourable conservation status (vulnerable) but not concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979 Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book Rare

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	935	9	395 (42% of GB population)
Ireland	<10	1	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	7,158	71	395 (6% of the biogeographical population)

GB population source: Gibbons et al. 1997

Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1997

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Red-throated Diver has a northern Holarctic distribution. Its breeding range is circumpolar, and Red-throated Divers occur in all arctic countries, generally breeding south to about 60°N. In a few parts of the global range (*e.g.* Labrador, Sakhalin Island and the UK the range extends further south to about 50-55°N). The species is monotypic; that is, there are no distinct sub-species.

In Europe, it breeds across northern Russia, Finland and Scandinavia to Iceland, as well as in north-west Britain and Ireland. In Britain, the traditional distribution occurs in north and west Scotland with strongholds in Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles, Sutherland and Wester Ross (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Since the reduction of persecution sustained during the 19th century, the population has expanded into Islay, Jura, Perthshire and south-west Scotland.

Small waterbodies within areas of open moorland are the usual breeding habitat but nesting may also occur in lightly forested areas. In some areas, several pairs may nest close together (typically where there are several smaller waterbodies in an area), hence breeding density

may be high in some localities. For coastal pairs, most of the feeding during the breeding season is carried out in nearby inshore waters, little being done on the nesting lochs, whilst inland breeding pairs feed mainly in large, valley bottom lochs.

4. Population structure and trends

The biogeographic population used in this review is the European breeding population (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997) consisting of 7,158-10,502 pairs. In western Europe, Norway is estimated to have the largest population of about 3,000 pairs, followed by Iceland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997) and the UK which supports about 935 breeding pairs (Stone *et al.* 1997). The UK holds about 30% of breeding Red-throated Divers in the EU.

The species is strictly territorial but it does tend to aggregate – although this is typically a consequence of the aggregation of suitable nest sites. On open moorland, Red-throated Divers may breed on a pool smaller than 100 m², but where groups of pools exist, such as in the peatlands of the UK, greater densities of birds are found (Batten *et al.* 1990, Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Nesting on such small lochans is unusual however, and most breeding sites are between 0.1 – 10 ha in extent. No major changes in range have been recorded in Europe other than a decreased abundance in Fennoscandia at the turn of the century from which the population has not significantly increased after receiving legal protection (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In the UK, after the cessation of persecution at the end of the 19th century, there appears to have been a steady recovery of the population, especially in the south of the range (Batten *et al.* 1990). There is some evidence to suggest a 30% decrease from 1,350 pairs in 1980s to 945 pairs in 1994 (Gibbons *et al.* 1993, 1997) but as counting methods were not strictly comparable throughout, this must be treated with some caution.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Red-throated Diver supports, on average, 395 pairs. This amounts to about 42% of the British breeding population. Within an all-Ireland context, there have been no SPAs selected in Northern Ireland, and the suite contains about 6% of the international population (numbers in the UK are small in comparison to the larger numbers in Scandinavia). This total is contained within 10 sites (Table 6.1a.1) for which Red-throated Diver has been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

All 13 Red-throated Diver sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the national breeding population were considered under Stage 1.1, and ten of these sites were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. The largest, highest-density sites within the core range of Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland were included. Sites outside this area are of particular significance in maintaining range. Three sites in the main core of the range in Shetland (West Burrafirth; Fetlar; and Blackpark & Gutcher, Yell) were not selected under Stage 2 since these areas were either the smallest and/or had lower densities than the other selected sites.

All sites included within the suite have a high degree of naturalness, comprising blanket bog, wet and dry heath interspersed with oligotrophic pools, lochans and lochs. The sites are spread through the British breeding range, from Rum in the south to Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field in the north of Shetland, and including sites in the Outer Hebrides, northern mainland Scotland and the Orkneys.

Most sites selected are multi-species SPAs, important for a range of other birds, although Otterwick and Graveland in Shetland has been selected solely for this species.

Specific data on productivity are only available for sites on Rum, but as far as can be ascertained, the sites selected show normal levels of breeding success. Many of the sites have a very long recorded history of occupancy, especially in Shetland (Gomersall 1981, 1982; Johnston 1999), Orkney (Berry 1985; Booth 1984) and the Outer Hebrides (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1888).

Consideration was given to additional sites under Stage 1.4 in Argyll in the very south of the range in Scotland, since this is also the edge of the world range. No sites were selected here, however, since densities in Argyll are very low (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Distribution map for breeding Red-throated Diver SPA suite

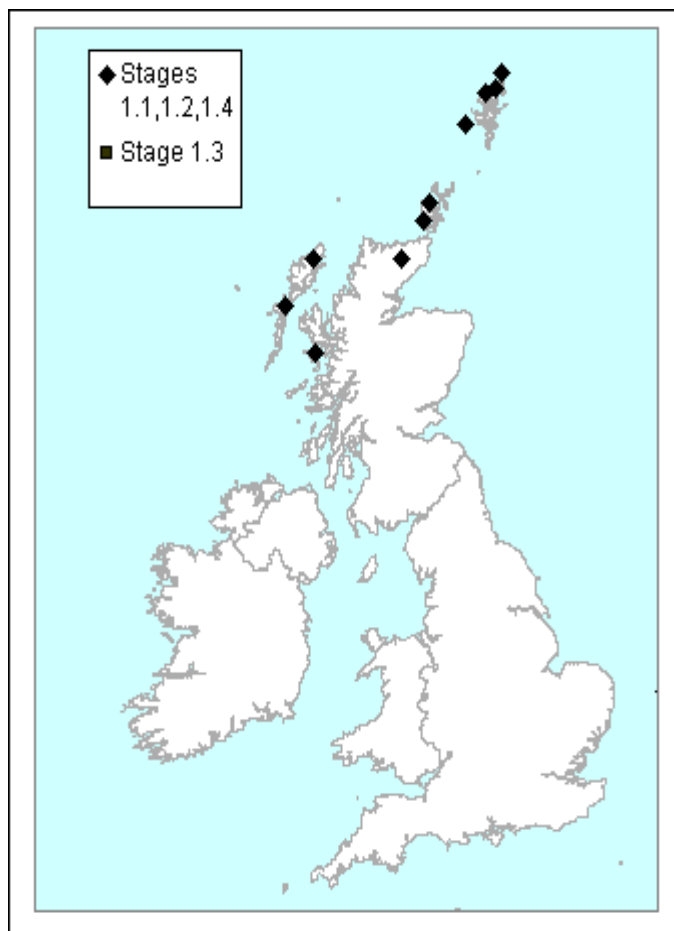


Table 6.1a.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands	89	1.3	9.5	1.1
Foula	11	0.2	1.2	1.1
Hermaness, Saxa Vord and Valla Field	28	0.4	3.0	1.1
Hoy	56	0.8	6.0	1.1
Lewis Peatlands	60	0.8	6.4	1.1
Mointeach Scadabhaigh	48	0.7	5.1	1.1
Orkney Mainland Moors	15	0.2	1.6	1.1
Otterswick and Graveland	27	0.4	2.9	1.1
Ronas Hill - North Roe and Tingon	50	0.7	5.4	1.1
Rum	11	0.2	1.2	1.1
TOTALS	395	5.6%	42.2%	