

A6.28b Wigeon *Anas penelope* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section 6.28a.

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	277,800	2,800	220,475 (79% of GB total)
Ireland	125,000	1,250	3,863 (3% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	1,250,000	12,500	224,338 (18% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Kirby 1995a

All-Ireland population source: Way et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The global and European breeding distribution of the monotypic Wigeon is summarised in section 6.28a. In winter, Wigeon undertake significant migrations south and south-west to winter on the coasts of Europe. Wintering areas are discontinuous, but occur especially on Atlantic coasts, the shores of the Mediterranean and Black Sea, some inland areas of North Africa and the Middle East.

As only a small number of Wigeon breed in Britain and most of the British wintering total originate from other parts of the species' European and Asian range. Recoveries of ringed birds indicate that Wigeon wintering in the UK breed in Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia, with a significant proportion of birds being recovered east of 60°E (Owen *et al.* 1986; Mitchell in press).

In winter, Wigeon are highly gregarious, and occur in large, mobile flocks that rapidly move to other areas should conditions change for the worse. Wigeon is largely a coastal species, feeding on mud-flats, coastal flooded grassland and saltmarsh pastures. In the UK, the species is also widespread on inland flooded grassland. The use of inland sites appears to have increased in recent years, as birds have adapted their feeding habits in response to changes in the availability of food (Batten *et al.* 1990), as well as the conservation management of key floodplain and other wetlands (Self *et al.* 1994).

4. Population structure and trends

Five biogeographic populations are recognised (Rose & Scott 1994). Of these, two populations occur in Europe. Wigeon wintering in the UK are part of the north-west European population. Most recent population estimates for Wigeon suggest a north-west European wintering population of 1,250,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997), of which over

300,000 occur in Great Britain (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). The remainder winter on the Atlantic and North Sea coasts of north-west Europe.

The north-west European population has steadily increased since the early 1970s, despite some fluctuations in this overall trend (Delany *et al.* 1999). Wigeon are particularly vulnerable to prolonged periods of severe weather (Ridgill & Fox 1990). Occasional reversals in the general upward trend of the biogeographic population may be attributed to these severe weather impacts. These can either result in a distribution shift (notably south and south-west to Iberia) or high levels of mortality.

Much the same trend has been seen in numbers wintering in Britain (Kirby 1995a; Pollitt *et al.* 2000), although numbers in Northern Ireland are lower than they were in the mid-1980s.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Wigeon supports, on average, 224,338 individuals (calculated using WeBS January site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97 – see section 4.4.1 and Appendix 2 for further explanation). This total amounts to about 79% of the British population, about 3% of the all-Ireland population, and about 18% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 38 sites where Wigeon has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.28b.1).

6. Classification criteria

All sites in the UK supporting more than 1% of the international population were considered under Stage 1.2, and all six were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further 32 sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3) where Wigeon was identified as an important component of non-breeding waterbird assemblages.

The 38 sites are distributed through most of the UK winter range, from the Moray Basin in north-eastern Scotland, Lough Neagh and Lough Beg in Northern Ireland, to sites on the south, west and east coasts of England as well as inland in the English Midlands. All these sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Boyd in Atkinson-Willes 1963).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives adequate coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Wigeon in the UK, and given that the species is widely dispersed in the UK in winter and increasing in numbers, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites under Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Wigeon SPA suite

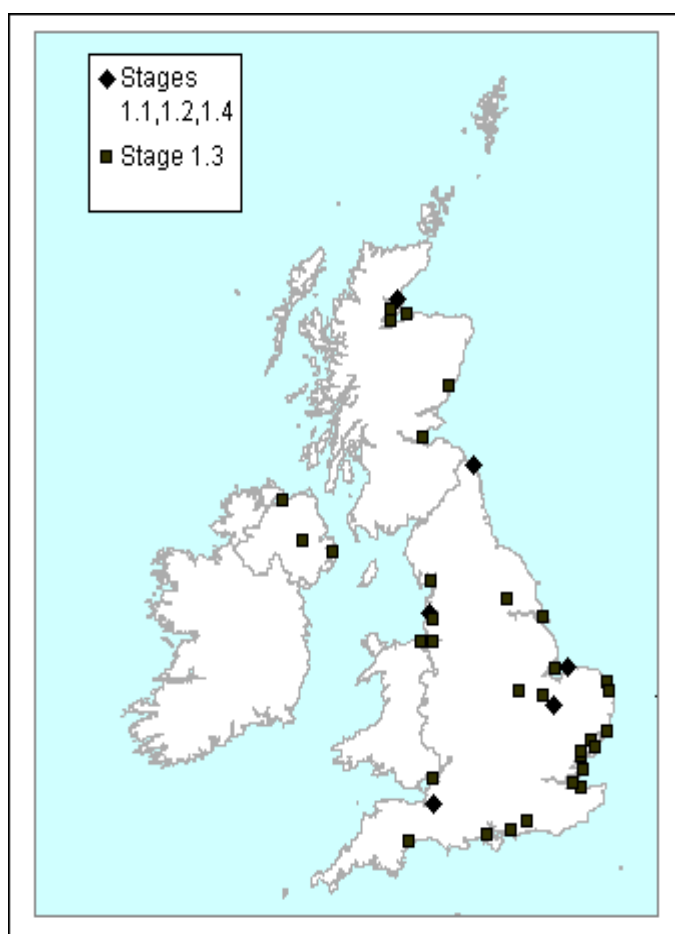


Table 6.28b.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Abberton Reservoir	2,888	0.2	1.0	1.3
Alde-Ore Estuary	4,366	0.4	1.6	1.3
Arun Valley	3,329	0.3	1.2	1.3
Blackwater Estuary	3,280	0.3	1.2	1.3
Breydon Water	4,320	0.4	1.6	1.3
Broadland	6,435	0.5	2.3	1.3
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	2,055	0.2	0.7	1.3
Cromarty Firth	10,476	0.8	3.8	1.3
Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet	15,304	1.2	5.5	1.2
Exe Estuary	2,379	0.2	0.9	1.3
Firth of Forth	2,139	0.2	0.78	1.3
Foulness	2,026	0.2	0.7	1.3
Hamford Water	2,314	0.2	0.8	1.3

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	4,941	0.4	1.8	1.3
Inner Moray Firth	6,800	0.5	2.5	1.3
Lindisfarne	13,375	1.1	4.8	1.2
Lough Foyle	8,107	0.7	6.5 (Ire)	1.3
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg	3,117	0.3	2.5 (Ire)	1.3
Lower Derwent Valley	9,323	0.8	3.4	1.3
Martin Mere	9,062	0.7	3.3	1.3
Medway Estuary and Marshes	4,346	0.4	1.6	1.3
Mersey Estuary	11,752	0.9	4.2	1.3
Montrose Basin	4,340	0.4	1.6	1.3
Moray and Nairn Coast	2,600	0.2	0.9	1.3
Morecambe Bay	5,838	0.5	2.1	1.3
Nene Washes	8,292	0.7	3.0	1.3
North Norfolk Coast	14,039	1.1	5.0	1.2
Ouse Washes	29,713	2.4	10.7	1.2
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	84,699	6.8	30.5	1.2
Rutland Water	4,236	0.3	1.5	1.3
Severn Estuary	4,667	0.4	1.7	1.3
Solent and Southampton Water	5,717	0.5	2.1	1.3
Somerset Levels and Moors	13,661	1.1	4.9	1.2
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	4,101	0.3	1.5	1.3
Strangford Lough	1,921	0.2	1.5 (Ire)	1.3
The Dee Estuary	3,624	0.3	1.3	1.3
The Swale	11,929	0.9	4.3	1.3
The Wash	3,241	0.3	1.2	1.3

TOTALS	224,338 (in January)	17.9%	78.7% 3.1% (Ire)
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