

A6.39b Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section A6.39a.

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	27,350	275	3,422 (12% of GB total)
Ireland	4,000	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	1,600,000	16,000	3,422 (0.2% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Kirby et al. 1993

Ireland population source: Pollitt et al. 2000

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The global non-breeding range of the Common Scoter includes the Atlantic, North Sea and Baltic coasts of north-west Europe and north Africa, with very limited areas in the Adriatic and northern Mediterranean (Snow & Perrins 1998). It additionally occurs in eastern Asia and North America (Rose & Scott 1997). Common Scoters wintering in UK waters are from the single biogeographic population (western Siberia/ western and northern Europe/north-west Africa) of the nominate sub-species.

Non-breeding Common Scoters can be found around most of the UK shoreline, with concentrations around the Moray Firth, Firth of Forth, north-east England, East Anglia, Carmarthen Bay, Cardigan Bay, north Wales, and north-west England (Lack 1986; Kirby *et al.* 1993).

The preferred non-breeding habitat comprises shallow offshore areas with sandy seabeds (Lack 1986).

4. Population structure and trends

There is generally poor monitoring at international level. Extensive surveys within the Baltic in 1993 led to a re-estimation of the size of the population of the nominate sub-species (1,600,000 individuals: Pihl & Laursen 1996). Lack of annual monitoring of the major centre of wintering Common Scoter in the Baltic (where 75% of the population occur) means that there is no information about annual or long-term trends (Delany *et al.* 1999). The best information available suggests that the biogeographical population is probably stable (Rose & Scott 1997).

Estimates of the UK non-breeding numbers have varied but the population appears to be stable, with 25,000–30,000 in the early 1980s (Lack 1986) and 27,350¹ from 1986–1991 (Kirby *et al.* 1993). The generally offshore occurrence of Common Scoters in British and Irish waters means that, as elsewhere, monitoring of this seaduck is poorer than for other non-breeding waterbirds.

Individual areas have suffered declines, notably Carmarthen Bay following the major *Sea Empress* oil spill in 1996 (Cranswick *et al.* 1999), although numbers here have since recovered following the initial significant mortality (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). The number of birds using the Moray Firth has also declined from around 10,000 individuals in the early 1970s to less than 3,000 by the mid 1990s (Owen *et al.* 1986; Kirby *et al.* 1993).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Common Scoter supports, on average, 3,422 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 12% of the British population and about 0.2% of the international flyway population. In an all-Ireland context, no sites have been selected in Northern Ireland. The suite comprises six sites at which Common Scoter has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.39b.1).

6. Classification criteria

No terrestrial site in the UK supports more than 1% of the international population of non-breeding Common Scoters as most of this large population spends the non-breeding season in the Baltic and off Denmark. Thus, no sites could be selected using Stage 1.2. Six terrestrial SPAs for Common Scoters were identified under Stage 1.3, given that the species is an important component of the non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities. All these sites (Lindisfarne; North Norfolk Coast; Firth of Forth; Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary; Ribble and Alt Estuaries; and Moray and Nairn Coast) were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites within the suite include some of the main non-breeding areas for Common Scoters in the UK (Kirby *et al.* 1993), from the Moray and Nairn Coast in the north, to sites on the west and east coasts of England. Further important areas lie offshore and have not been considered by this review of terrestrial SPAs (section 2.3). All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at all of these sites (Boyd in Atkinson-Willes 1963; Kirby *et al.* 1993).

¹ Note that the British total of 34,500 published by Kirby *et al.* (1993) erroneously includes birds wintering at Irish sites. These have been excluded to give a revised total of 27,350.

Distribution map for non-breeding Common Scoter SPA suite

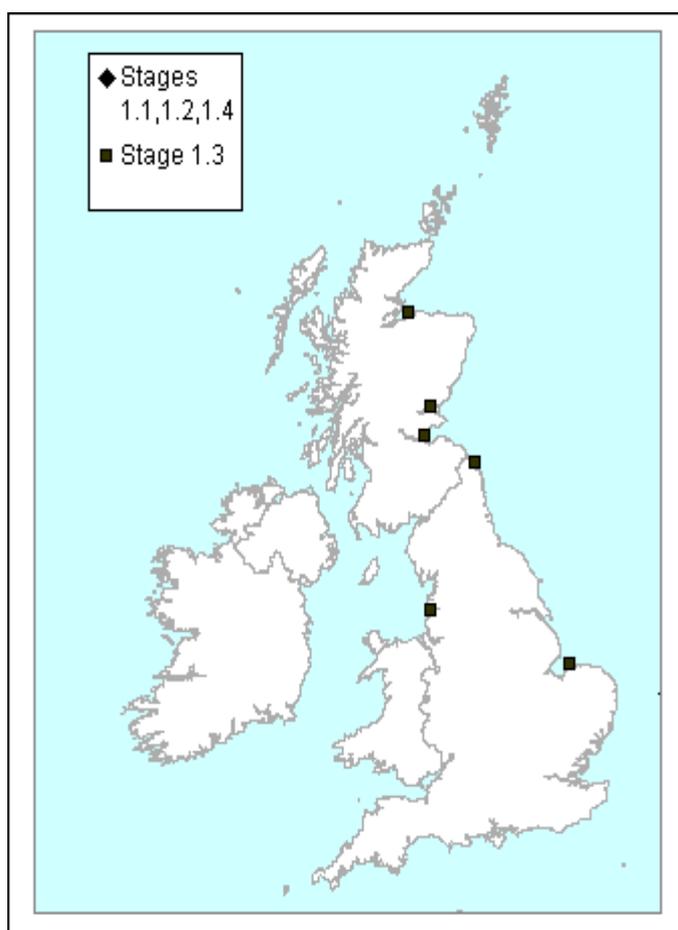


Table 6.39b.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Firth of Forth	2,653	0.2	9.6	1.3
Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary	1,444	0.1	5.3	1.3
Lindisfarne	654	<0.1	2.4	1.3
Moray and Nairn Coast	531	<0.1	1.9	1.3
North Norfolk Coast	2,909	0.2	10.6	1.3
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	582	<0.1	2.1	1.3
TOTALS	3,422 (in January)	0.2%	12.4%	