

## A6.47a Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* (breeding)

### 1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1) Schedule 4	Species of European Conservation Concern	<b>SPEC 3</b> Unfavourable conservation status ( <b>vulnerable</b> ) but not concentrated in Europe
Migratory		Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	<b>Table 2</b>
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	<b>Annex I</b>	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	<b>Endangered</b>

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	483	5	229 (47% of the GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>	180	2	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	8,332	83	229 (3% of biogeographical population)

GB population source: Sim et al. *in press*

All-Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

### 3. Distribution

Hen Harriers have a widespread global distribution, occurring in both North and South America as well as through temperate and boreal regions of the Palearctic, from the Atlantic coasts of western Europe to Kamchatka and Sakhalin (Potts 1998). Across much of this range, Hen Harriers are migratory, moving south from northerly breeding areas outside the nesting period. In the Palearctic, migrants winter in southern parts of Europe, the Middle East and through southern areas of central and eastern Asia. In North America, migrants move from boreal breeding areas in the northern parts of the USA and Canada to winter in central America, Mexico and the southern USA. Hen Harriers breeding in South America as well as in western Europe tend to be more sedentary, although they disperse locally outside the nesting period (Cramp & Simmons 1980). The species is polytypic, with the nominate race *C. c. cyaneus* occurring throughout the Palearctic. Two other races occur in North and South America respectively.

The distribution of breeding Hen Harriers in Europe shows distinct north/south, east/west contrasts. In northern and eastern Europe (Russia Ukraine, the Baltic States and Fennoscandia, breeding distribution is more continuous. In southern and western Europe, however, the species has a scattered breeding distribution – probably reflecting past and current patterns of persecution and land-use change. Its principal western European range

embraces the UK, France and northern Spain (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

In the UK, breeding is now confined to Northern Ireland, and northern and western Britain, especially Scotland, where strongholds include Orkney, the eastern Highlands, and Strathclyde. The species also breeds in the Isle of Man. It occurs sparsely in northern England, and is considered to be under threat of extinction in this region (Holmes *et al.* 2000).

Preferred breeding habitat is moorland with a high percentage of heather cover, but birds may colonise young plantations if there is suitable ground (Bibby & Etheridge 1993; Potts 1998).

#### **4. Population structure and trends**

Between 8,332 and 10,840 pairs breed in Europe, with the largest numbers (more than 1,000 pairs each) breeding in France, Finland and Sweden (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

The species was formerly widespread in the UK but was virtually eliminated in the 19th century due to heavy human persecution, particularly from game managers (Watson 1977; Booth *et al.* 1984; Holloway 1996). Small numbers remained in Orkney and the Outer Hebrides and these provided a nucleus for the recovery of the population and range that has occurred since the 1940s (Sim *et al.* 1999, in press).

Upland afforestation between the 1940s and 1970s favoured Hen Harrier recolonisation of mainland Britain and the population increased to an estimated 500 breeding pairs with a further 250-300 pairs in the island of Ireland by the mid 1970s (Watson 1977). The Scottish population was estimated at 377-451 pairs (Thom 1986), rising to between 479 and 594 pairs at the time of the 1988-1989 Scottish survey. At that time, the UK and Isle of Man breeding population was estimated at between 578 and 700 pairs (Bibby & Etheridge 1993).

The DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group survey reported an estimated 570 territorial pairs in UK and the Isle of Man in 1998 (Sim *et al.* 1999). Numbers in mainland Scotland and Wales have remained virtually unchanged since 1988-1989, but a decline of about 50% has occurred in England (since 1994) and Orkney (Sim *et al.* 1999, in press; Meek *et al.* 1998), with a substantial increase recorded in Northern Ireland (51 pairs). Population decreases have been linked to habitat loss and deterioration (notably in Orkney), nest destruction and the killing of Hen Harriers on grouse moors (Etheridge *et al.* 1997; Scottish Raptor Study Groups 1998; Holmes *et al.* 2000).

#### **5. Protection measures for population in UK**

##### **SPA suite**

The UK's SPA suite for breeding Hen Harriers supports, on average, 229 pairs. This amounts to about 47% of the British breeding population and about 3% of the international population. In an all-Ireland context, no sites have been selected for breeding Hen Harriers in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite contains 14 sites (Table 6.47a.1) where Hen Harrier has been listed as a qualifying species.

##### **Other measures**

The distribution and population size of the Hen Harrier in the UK is currently constrained by a significant extent of illegal killing and other persecution. The DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group (which met between 1995 and 2000) recently made a series of positive recommendations aiming to eliminate the causes of conflict between grouse moor managers and protected birds of prey (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000). These recommendations are being taken forward by government departments and their agencies, in collaboration with a number of organisations representing sporting, land-owning and nature conservation interests. The government-led Campaign Against the Illegal Poisoning of

Wildlife seeks to eliminate illegal killing and other persecution through enhanced education and public awareness.

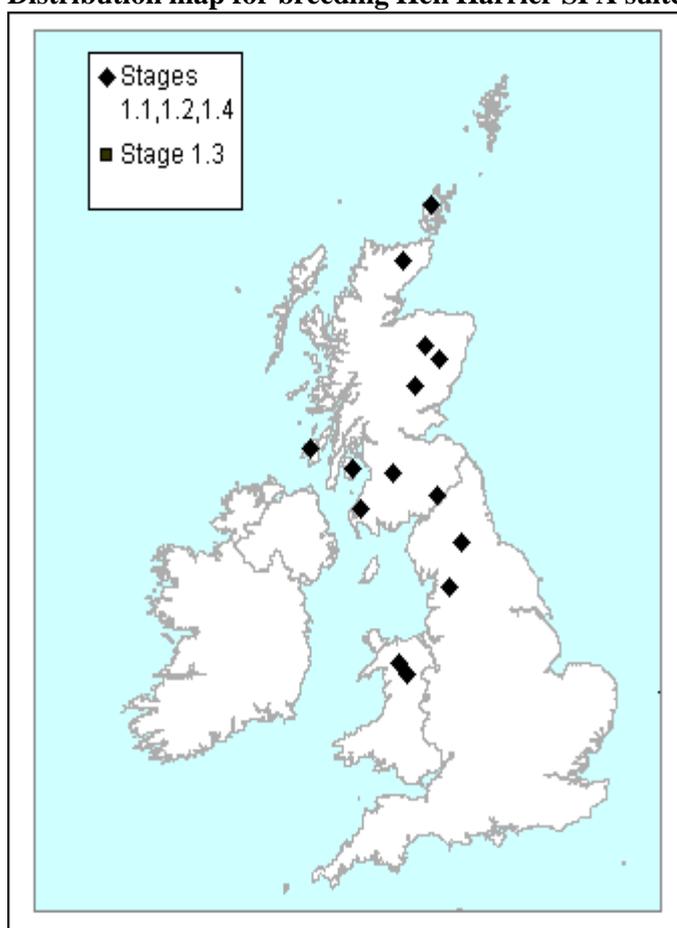
## **6. Classification criteria**

All sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the national breeding population were considered under Stage 1.1 and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Special attention was given to the Stage 2 factors of population size, breeding density and range. The six sites (Orkney Mainland Moors; Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands; Forest of Clunie; Arran Moors; Glen App-Galloway Moors and Langholm-Newcastleton Hills) supporting the largest and densest breeding populations were included to give comprehensive coverage of the species' population and the most suitable habitat. The remaining seven Stage 1.1 sites were included either because of their importance to maintaining range (Rinns of Islay; North Pennine Moors; Bowland Fells; Migneint – Dduallt; and Berwyn) or habitat (Ladder Hills), or because of the additional range and population coverage provided by a large, multi-species site (the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands).

An additional site (Glen Tanar) was considered under Stage 1.4, on the grounds of its additional coverage of range (it is the most easterly SPA for Hen Harriers in Scotland) and to a lesser extent, numbers. It was accordingly selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites within the suite are distributed through the breeding range of the population in Britain, and cover all current population centres, including localities in Orkney, throughout Scotland, northern England and northern Wales. Most sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other breeding birds, with the exception of Arran Moors, Glen App-Galloway Moors, Ladder Hills and Langholm-Newcastleton Hills which have been selected solely for their importance for breeding Hen Harriers. There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at many of these sites (e.g. for Orkney see Watson 1977; Booth *et al.* 1984; Holloway 1996). At other sites, although Hen Harriers were present formerly, they were persecuted to local extinction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the species has become re-established in the areas concerned.

### Distribution map for breeding Hen Harrier SPA suite



**Table 6.47a.1 – SPA suite**

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Arran Moors	24	0.3	5.0	1.1
Berwyn	14	0.2	2.9	1.1
Bowland Fells	13	0.2	2.7	1.1
Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands	14	0.2	2.9	1.1
Forest of Clunie	28	0.3	5.8	1.1
Glen App-Galloway Moors	20	0.2	4.1	1.1
Glen Tanar	2	<0.1	1.2	1.4
Ladder Hills	9	0.1	2.3	1.1
Langholm - Newcastleton Hills	17	0.2	3.5	1.1
Migneint - Dduallt	10	0.1	2.1	1.1
Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands	30	0.4	6.2	1.1
North Pennine Moors	11	0.1	2.3	1.1
Orkney Mainland Moors	30	0.4	6.2	1.1
Rinns of Islay	7	<0.1	1.5	1.1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>	