

## A6.49 Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

### 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 (rare) 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	Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	99	1	39 (39% of GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>			
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	4,732	47	39 (1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Stone et al. 1997

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

### 3. Distribution

The Osprey is a cosmopolitan species, with a wide global distribution. Through much of its range it is highly migratory. It breeds in boreal and temperate areas throughout the Palearctic region (Poole 1989; Cramp & Simmons 1980), from Europe to the Pacific coast. These birds move south to winter in Africa, India and south-east Asia. Ospreys that breed across much of North America migrate to winter in South America. Non-migratory populations are resident along the coasts of much of south-east Asia, New Guinea and Australia. Ospreys are polytypic: the nominate race *P. h. haliaetus* occurs through the Palearctic from Europe to Japan, whilst a further four sub-species occur in other parts of the world.

In Europe, the distribution of Ospreys is largely northern and eastern. Over 90% of the breeding population occurs in Sweden, Finland and Russia, but small numbers also occur in neighbouring countries, and remnant populations are found throughout southern Europe (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

In the UK, the breeding range is entirely within Scotland although an active re-establishment programme is under way in England. As elsewhere in the world, the species' UK distribution is limited by the availability of good fishing waters (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Gibbons *et al.*

1993). Preferred nest sites in Scotland are mature conifers, especially Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, although the species occasionally uses other trees and man-made structures (Thom 1986).

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

The total European population is estimated to be 4,732–5,249 pairs, with most birds occurring in Sweden and Finland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Throughout much of its distribution, the Osprey has suffered historical population declines due to persecution by man. In Europe, localised extinctions occurred in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). With protection, recovery in parts of the former breeding range occurred in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but from the 1950s to the 1970s widespread use of persistent organochlorine pesticides lowered reproductive success and slowed the spread of re-colonising birds in many countries (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997; Poole 1989). Widespread restrictions on pesticide use have allowed many populations to begin recovery since the early 1980s, aided in some countries by artificial nest construction (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Ospreys in Britain are thought to have become extinct in 1916, due to persecution and egg collecting. Despite regular records, no further nesting is known to have taken place until the 1950s, when one pair nested successfully in 1954 (Brown & Waterston 1962; Dennis 1987). A range of recently collected evidence, however, suggests that Ospreys may never have become completely extinct in Scotland. They are thought to have remained in very small numbers between 1916 and 1954 (Dennis unpublished). Intensive protection since the 1950s has led to an increase in numbers and 111 pairs nested in Scotland in 1997 (Ogilvie & the Rare Breeding Birds Panel 1996).

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

##### **SPA suite**

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Osprey contains the nesting sites or the feeding areas<sup>1</sup> used by, on average, 39 pairs. This amounts to about 39% of the British breeding population. The suite contains about 0.8% of the international population (numbers in the UK are very small in comparison to those in Scandinavia and eastern Europe). The species does not breed in Northern Ireland. This total is contained within nine sites (Table 6.49.1) where Osprey has been listed as a qualifying species.

#### **6. Classification criteria**

All nesting sites in natural (*i.e.* non-plantation) woodlands, and all feeding 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. Given that the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives good coverage of the Osprey population and range in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

The distribution of SPAs closely matches the core range of the species in Scotland. Many of the current nest sites were amongst the first to be occupied following re-colonisation in the

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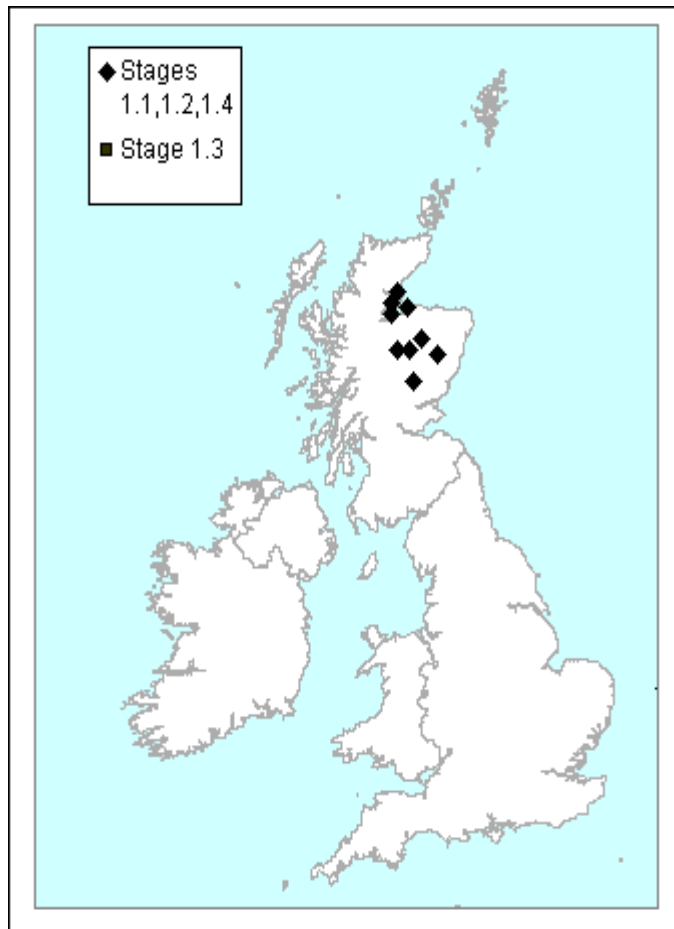
<sup>1</sup> Ospreys generally nest in woodland distant from their wetland feeding areas and only a few sites contain both requirements for the species.

1950s. Indeed, several of these sites were traditionally used prior to the human-induced extinctions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet is included as the most important feeding area for Ospreys in Scotland, lying at the northern edge of the species' British range. The other Moray Basin estuaries are also included as multi-species sites important also for feeding Ospreys.

All the sites in the suite have a high degree of naturalness, and all are multi-species SPAs. Indeed, many are in the ownership of nature conservation organisations and are subject to active conservation management.

**Distribution map for Osprey SPA suite (which includes both feeding and nesting sites)**



**Table 6.49.1 – SPA suite**

<b>Site name</b>	<b>Site total</b>	<b>% of biogeographical population</b>	<b>% of national population</b>	<b>Selection stage</b>
Abernethy Forest	2	<0.1	2	1.1
Cairngorms	2	<0.1	2	1.1
Cromarty Firth	1	<0.1	1	1.1
Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet	10	<0.1	10	1.1
Forest of Clunie	7	<0.1	7	1.1
Glen Tanar	2	<0.1	2	1.1
Inner Moray Firth	4	<0.1	4	1.1
Moray and Nairn Coast	7	<0.1	7	1.1
River Spey - Insh Marshes	4	<0.1	4	1.1

<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>39%</b>	
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