

A6.59a Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection	Species of European Conservation Concern
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	8,500	85	1,102 (13% of GB population)
Ireland	1,250	12	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	16,000	160	1,102 (7% of the biogeographic population)

GB population source: Prater 1989

All-Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The Ringed Plover is an arctic and northern temperate breeding wader. Its breeding range extends around much of the Arctic, from the east coast of Baffin island and Greenland, across the Russian tundra to the coasts of the Bering Sea in northern Chukotka. Through much of its range it is an essentially high Arctic breeding bird, but the range extends to the temperate coasts of north-western Europe as well as a few inland areas of Europe. There are two subspecies: the nominate race *C. h. hiaticula* which breeds from western Arctic Canada, through Greenland and Iceland to southern Scandinavia and the Baltic and south to France; and *C. h. tundrae* which breeds from northern Scandinavia and Finland east across northern Russia to the Bering Strait (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Smit & Piersma 1989; del Hoyo *et al.* 1996).

In Europe, some Ringed Plovers breed inland in Iceland, northern and central Scandinavia, as well as locally in Britain and Ireland. They also breed along some of the major river systems of Poland, Ukraine and Belarus. Elsewhere, the distribution is entirely coastal with a wide distribution in the Baltic, Denmark and along the coasts of the Wadden Sea (Fleet *et al.* 1994). England is towards the southern edge of the world breeding range, although a small number of pairs are found in north-west France.

Ringed Plovers have a wide breeding distribution around the coast of Britain and Ireland. In England, the extensive sandy and shingle beaches between the Thames and the Humber hold

most of the population, but the islands off western Scotland are also very important for the population. According to Prater (1989) the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland hold over 40% of the population in Britain and Ireland. The Southern Isles of the Outer Hebrides are alone estimated to support approximately one quarter of the British population (Fuller *et al.* 1986).

Southerly populations, such as those in Britain and Ireland, breed mainly on coastal sand, gravel and shingle beaches, upper saltmarshes and artificial habitats such as the shores of gravel pits and reservoirs; although short-grazed coastal pastures, Outer Hebridean machair (Fuller 1978) and arable fields in eastern England may also be frequently used (Prater 1989). Breeding Ringed Plovers are highly site faithful (Pienkowski 1984; Jackson 1994).

4. Population structure and trends

There are three biogeographical populations of Ringed Plover (Rose & Scott 1997), although there is considerable mixing at some times of the year (Smit & Piersma 1989). These are European breeding *C. h. hiaticula* that winter as far south as northern Africa; the high Arctic-breeding *C. h. hiaticula* from Baffin island, Greenland, Iceland and Svalbard that migrate to west and southern Africa (these are sometimes considered as the separate sub-species *C. h. psammodroma*); and the single population of *C. h. tundrae* that breeds in the Russian Arctic and migrates to the Arabian Gulf, east and southern Africa. Ringed Plovers that breed in Britain belong to the European/North African population.

The total of Ringed Plover breeding in geographical Europe is estimated at between 82,724–105,757 (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). This total, however, includes a significant proportion of the population of *C. h. tundrae* nesting in northern Scandinavia. Accordingly, for this review, an estimate of 16,000 pairs has been derived from winter estimates for the European breeding population of *C. h. hiaticula* (Rose & Scott 1997; see Annex 4).

In Britain and Ireland, an overall estimate of slightly less than 10,000 pairs (8,500 pairs in Britain, Stone *et al.* 1997, based on Prater 1989; 1,250 pairs in Ireland, Gibbons *et al.* 1993), represents almost 80% of the temperate breeding population of the nominate sub-species (Gibbons *et al.* 1993) and 63% of the biogeographic population.

Overall, the large European breeding population has remained reasonably stable in recent decades. The situation is complicated, however, with increases reported in Britain, Denmark and Germany, stability in Iceland, Sweden and Norway and decreases in Finland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In the Wadden Sea, habitat change has caused some populations to increase and others to decrease (Fleet *et al.* 1994).

In the UK, breeding range has increased in England and Wales, remained stable in Scotland, and contracted in Ireland (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Presumably this implies equivalent changes in population size, although there are no good quantitative data. Although the vast majority of pairs breed at the coast, an increasing number have bred at inland sites in England since the mid-1970s (Prater 1989). This tendency is also shown in northern Germany, where the inland birds often have higher reproductive success than those on the coast (Briggs 1983; Holz 1987). In Scotland, Ringed Plovers have long nested inland (Sharrock 1976). In 1988-91, this inland population in Britain was approximately double that in 1968–1972. Within the same period, numbers declined in many coastal areas, with breeding productivity at times falling below self-sustaining levels, due to increasing human presence on beaches and intense pressure from predators (Pienkowski 1984; Prater 1989).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Ringed Plovers supports, on average, 1,102 pairs. This amounts to about 13% of the British breeding population. The suite contains about 7% of the international population. Within an all-Ireland context, there have been no SPAs selected in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite contains five sites (Table 6.59a.1) where Ringed Plovers have been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

The four UK sites (North Norfolk Coast, North Uist Machair and Islands, South Uist Machair and Lochs, and Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast) known to support more than 1% of the international breeding population were considered under Stage 1.2, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Additional coverage using Stage 1.4 was assessed, given that the UK holds about 35% of the European population of Ringed Plover. Accordingly, Papa Stour was selected as having the next largest breeding population. Papa Stour contributes a large population to the species' suite as well as range coverage in the north of Scotland.

The sites are located throughout the UK range of this species, with representation of most of the main centres of occurrence. All the sites in the suite have a high degree of naturalness, and all are multi-species SPAs of importance for other breeding birds. Outside the network, Ringed Plovers have a wide breeding distribution around the UK coastline as well as inland.

Distribution map for breeding Ringed Plover SPA suite

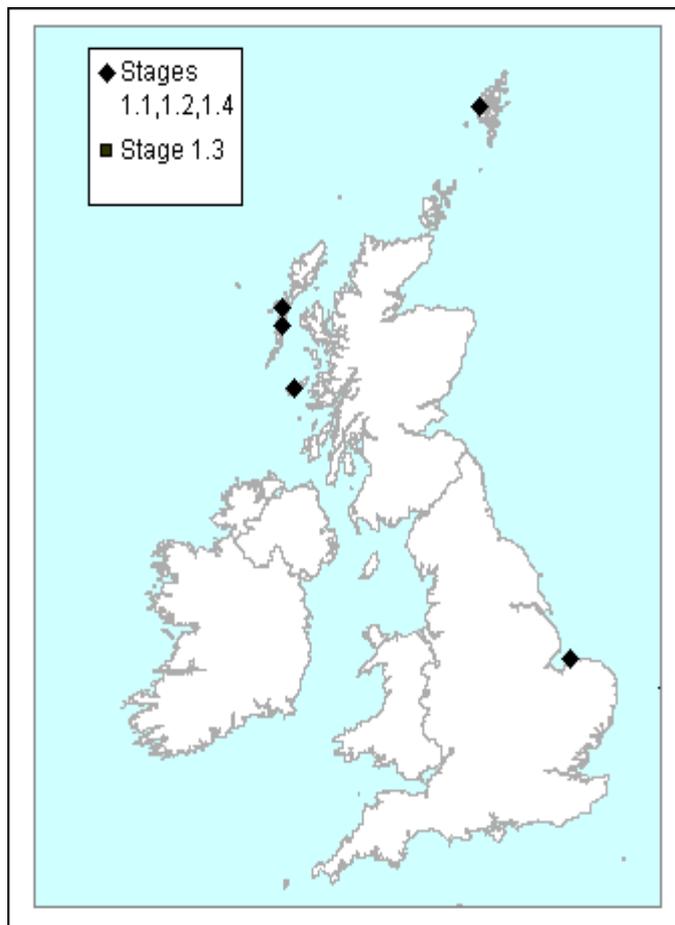


Table 6.59a.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
North Norfolk Coast	220	1.4	2.6	1.2
North Uist Machair and Islands	240	1.5	2.8	1.2
Papa Stour	89	0.6	1.0	1.4
South Uist Machair and Lochs	393	2.5	4.6	1.2
Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast)	160	1.0	1.9	1.2
TOTALS	1,102	6.9%	13.0%	