

A6.59b Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section A6.59a.

2. Population data

| | Population sizes (individuals) | Selection thresholds | Totals in species' SPA suite |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| GB | 28,600 (winter period) 30,000 (passage period) | 290 (winter period) 300 (passage period) | 6,169 (21% of GB population in winter) 14,199 (47% of GB population in passage periods) |
| Ireland | 12,500 | 125 | 643 (5% of all-Ireland population in winter and in passage periods) ¹ |
| Biogeographic population | 47,500 | 500 | 6,812 (14% of the biogeographic population in winter) 14,842 (30% of biogeographic population in passage periods) |

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Way et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The global distribution, taxonomy and population structure of Ringed Plovers is outlined in section A6.59a.

Birds from all three biogeographical populations of Ringed Plovers actually or potentially migrate through Britain and Ireland in spring and autumn. At these times of year, Ringed Plover populations in Britain and Ireland clearly include both birds that stay to winter, as well as those on passage to or from breeding grounds in Canada, Greenland, Iceland and Fennoscandia, or more southerly wintering locations. Many birds that breed in north-western Europe are known to winter close to their breeding grounds. Autumn movement occurs mainly in August–September, with the return to the breeding grounds occurring mainly during March–May. Nearctic breeders use staging points in Iceland, then north-west Europe (including Britain and Ireland) en route to their wintering grounds, mainly in West Africa. Icelandic breeders move through Britain, Ireland and the southern North Sea to winter from France south to North Africa (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Smit & Piersma 1989).

Some *C. h. tundrae* from northern Scandinavia and Finland also pass through staging areas in western Europe. Birds breeding in southern Scandinavia and the Baltic winter from Britain and Ireland to northern Africa and some British birds move south to Europe.

¹ Data were unavailable for passage periods at all sites in Ireland, hence, the passage population is taken to be the same as the winter population in calculating the UK passage period total.

The European winter distribution of *C. h. hiaticula* extends from the coasts of the western Mediterranean (where it is locally found in North Africa and from the Adriatic westwards), around the coasts of Iberia to the Wadden Sea (Meltofte *et al.* 1994).

Ringed Plovers are found on almost all the coasts of Britain and Ireland, with small numbers found on a few inland wetlands. Cayford & Waters (1996) estimated that over 66% of the Ringed Plovers counted on British coasts were in non-estuarine areas. Some continental European birds, mainly from the Wadden Sea and Baltic coasts, also winter in Britain and Ireland, whilst some British birds move south to mainland Europe (Lack 1986). There is evidence that Ringed Plovers show fidelity to their wintering sites on British estuaries (Spencer & Hudson 1979), as well as visiting the same sites during successive migrations (Insley & Young 1981).

On migration, and in wintering areas, Ringed Plovers feed on invertebrates on sand and shingle shores, sandbanks and mudflats, as well as on saltmarshes, short grassland, flooded fields and shores of artificial habitats (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). They roost communally, close to feeding sites along the shoreline, on sandbanks or bare arable fields, and in low vegetation.

4. Population structure and trends

Trends in numbers of those birds that breed in Canada/Greenland and winter in western and southern Africa, or those that breed in the Russian high Arctic and winter in south-west Asia and East Africa are poorly known. Overall increases in breeding populations have been reported in Britain, Denmark and Germany, whilst populations in Iceland, Sweden and Norway have remained stable (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Finland is the only country to have shown decreases.

The Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) 1997/98 autumn peak count of 23,000 was substantially higher than peak of the previous two years of 18,000–19,000, but numbers fell again in 1998/99 to around 21,000 (Cranswick *et al.* 1999; Pollitt *et al.* 2000). However, the WeBS autumn peak count is unlikely to represent the passage population in its entirety, because of the turnover of birds on migration (see Moser & Carrier 1983) and because of a potential mismatch between the timing of WeBS counts and the period of peak passage.

The European and North African wintering population of the nominate race is estimated at 47,500 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997, based on Smit & Piersma 1989), although numbers wintering in Europe and North Africa have increased considerably since the 1980s (Davidson 1998). Between 1981–1985 and 1988–1992 there was a 24% increase in numbers wintering in Britain, from 23,040 to 28,630 (Cayford & Waters 1996), which may reflect a documented increase in the breeding populations of Britain, Denmark and Germany. Since the early 1990s, evidence suggests that numbers wintering in Britain have continued to increase.

Current estimates of the British wintering total can be assessed by adding January 1998 WeBS counts (Cranswick *et al.* 1999) to non-estuarine winter counts of the same year and period (BTO unpublished). The total in Britain in 1997/98 was estimated at 44,000 (83% on non-estuarine coast). Although these new estimates are not directly comparable to the estimates of Cayford & Waters (1996) because of different assumptions, they are comparable to a combination of the 1984/5 Birds of Estuaries Enquiry (Salmon & Moser 1985) and the 1984/5 Winter Shorebird Count (Moser & Summers 1987), using the same calculation methods used for 1997/8 data. The total in Britain in 1984/85 was estimated at 35,000 (79% on non-estuarine coasts). Further investigation reveals that the considerable increase in the British wintering total from 1984/85 to 1997/98 is due to an increase in the use of non-estuarine coast from around 28,000 to 36,000 (22%). The increase in estuarine use has been minimal by comparison. Indeed, according to Cranswick *et al.* (1999) populations on

estuaries have remained constant since at least the 1970s. All-Ireland January counts in 1997/8 were similar to the previous two years (Colhoun 2000).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Ringed Plover supports, on average, 6,812 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 21% of British wintering numbers, about 5% of the all-Ireland population and 14% of the international flyway population. In passage periods, the SPA suite supports, on average, 14,842 individuals (calculated using WeBS August site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97, except for Ireland where passage data are poor and WeBS January site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97 have been used). This total amounts to about 47% of numbers passing through Britain and about 12% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 28 sites where Ringed Plover has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.59b.1).

6. Classification criteria

All 24 sites in the UK that support more than 1% of the international population of Ringed Plover in either the passage or winter periods were considered under Stage 1.2, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further four sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3, with Ringed Plover being identified as an important component of the non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites within the suite are distributed throughout the range of the non-breeding population in the UK, including Northern Ireland, the Outer Hebrides, and sites along the south, east and west coasts of England, and South Wales. All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Prater 1981).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives comprehensive coverage of numbers and range of passage and non-breeding Ringed Plover in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Ringed Plover SPA suite

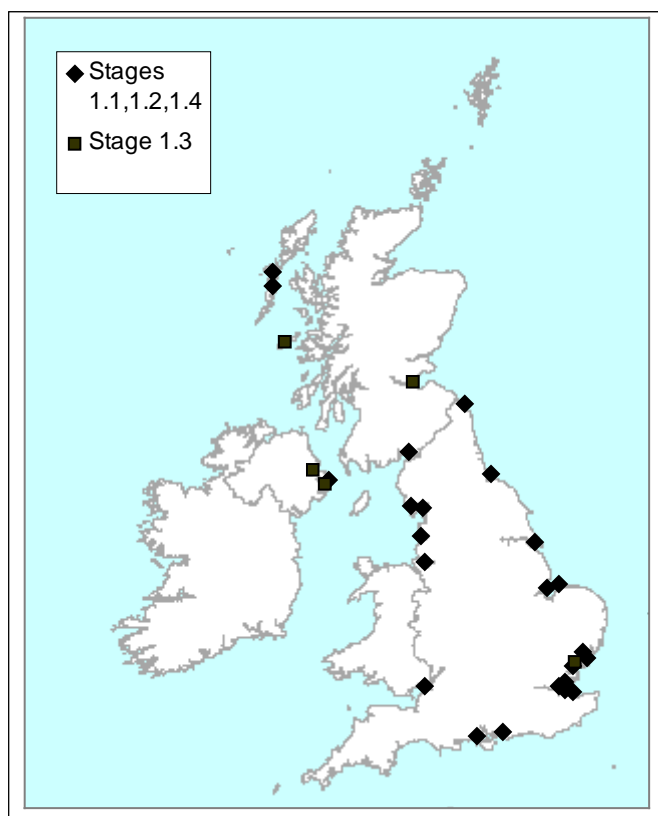


Table 6.59b.1 – SPA suite

| Site name | Season of peak use | Site total ² | % of biogeographical population | % of national population | Selection stage |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Belfast Lough | Winter | 148 | 0.3 | 1.2 (Ire) | 1.3 |
| Benfleet and Southend Marshes | Passage | 800 | 1.6 | 2.7 | 1.2 |
| Blackwater Estuary | Passage | 955 | 2.0 | 3.2 | 1.2 |
| Chichester and Langstone Harbours | Passage | 2,471 | 4.9 | 8.2 | 1.2 |
| Colne Estuary | Winter | 370 | 0.8 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Duddon Estuary | Passage | 628 | 1.3 | 2.1 | 1.2 |
| Firth of Forth | Winter | 413 | 0.9 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Hamford Water | Passage | 1,572 | 3.1 | 5.2 | 1.2 |
| Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast | Passage | 762 | 1.5 | 2.5 | 1.2 |
| Lindisfarne | Winter | 527 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 1.2 |
| Medway Estuary and Marshes | Passage | 1,337 | 2.7 | 4.5 | 1.2 |
| Mersey Estuary | Passage | 1,453 | 2.9 | 4.8 | 1.2 |
| Morecambe Bay | Passage | 693 | 1.4 | 2.3 | 1.2 |

² Data in site total column relate to season of peak use.

| Site name | Season of peak use | Site total ² | % of biogeographical population | % of national population | Selection stage |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| North Norfolk Coast | Passage | 1,256 | 2.5 | 4.2 | 1.2 |
| North Uist Machair and Islands | Winter | 590 | 1.2 | 2.1 | 1.2 |
| Outer Ards | Winter | 545 | 1.1 | 4.4 (Ire) | 1.2 |
| Ribble and Alt Estuaries | Passage | 995 | 2.0 | 3.3 | 1.2 |
| Severn Estuary | Passage | 655 | 1.3 | 2.2 | 1.2 |
| Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast) | Winter | 475 | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.2 |
| Solent and Southampton Water | Winter | 552 | 1.1 | 1.9 | 1.2 |
| South Uist Machair and Lochs | Winter | 490 | 1.0 | 1.7 | 1.2 |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries | Winter | 578 | 1.2 | 2.0 | 1.2 |
| Strangford Lough | Winter | 291 | 0.6 | 2.3 (Ire) | 1.3 |
| Teemouth and Cleveland Coast | Passage | 634 | 1.3 | 2.1 | 1.2 |
| Thames Estuary and Marshes | Passage | 559 | 1.1 | 1.9 | 1.2 |
| The Swale | Passage | 683 | 1.4 | 2.3 | 1.2 |
| The Wash | Passage | 1,185 | 2.4 | 4.0 | 1.2 |
| Upper Solway Flats and Marshes | Passage | 729 | 1.5 | 2.4 | 1.2 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|----------------------------------|
| JANUARY TOTALS | 6,812 | 13.6% | 21.3% 5.1% (Ire) |
| AUGUST TOTALS | 14,842 | 29.7% | 47.3% 5.1% (Ire) ¹ |