

A6.62 Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

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	Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex II/2 Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	43,200	430	38,684 (90% of GB total)
Ireland	4,000	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	158 (4% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	168,000	1,500	38,842 (26% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Cranswick et al. 1999

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Grey Plovers have a very restricted global distribution. They have an almost circumpolar breeding range, occurring in the high Arctic (generally north of about 68°N) from the Kanin Peninsula (c.42°E) east to the Bering Sea. In North America, they occur from Alaska to the western side of Baffin Island. The only region of the high Arctic where breeding does not occur is Greenland (Cramp & Simmons 1983; Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998). The species is monotypic.

The only breeding in Europe occurs in the northern parts of north-western Russia, although here, as elsewhere in the species' breeding range, there are few records and information is poor (Morozov 1998; Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998). Outside the breeding season, birds move south and west to winter on the coasts of north-west Europe, north and west Africa, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Their distribution is strongly localised to areas holding suitable habitats – principally the larger, muddier, estuaries and other soft-sediment coastlines.

In Britain and Ireland, Grey Plovers occur on most coasts, although they are mainly concentrated in the south-east and north-west of England (Davidson *et al.* 1991; Moser 1988; Tubbs 1991).

4. Population structure and trends

Globally, Rose & Scott (1997) recognise five biogeographic populations. Of these, birds occurring in Europe belong to the East Atlantic Flyway population which comprises those breeding in the western Russian high Arctic (west of c. 85°E). These birds winter from the Wadden Sea, along the Atlantic coasts of Europe south to West Africa (as far as the Gulf of Guinea) (Wetlands International 1999). The population is currently estimated at 168,000 birds (Smit & Piersma 1989). An estimated 26% of the East Atlantic Flyway population occurs in the UK (Cayford & Waters 1996).

The East Atlantic Flyway population has shown a long-term increase in numbers. Smit & Piersma (1989) reported a significant increase from 19,000 in the 1970s (Prater 1976) to 61,200 in the early 1990s in western Europe. More recent international collation of data (Davidson 1998) indicate that this trend has continued, with a possible 46% increase in the East Atlantic Flyway population since the 1980s. One of the biggest population increases has been in Great Britain where there was an increase of 103% between 1981–1985 and 1987–1992 (Cayford & Waters 1996). This upward trend has been particularly strong on estuarine sites.

The rapid growth of the East Atlantic Flyway population is thought to be a real increase in numbers rather than a reflection of better survey coverage. Possible causes include a shift in winter distribution (Cayford & Waters 1996), or a run of very successful breeding seasons during the 1970s (Moser 1988). However, there is strong circumstantial evidence (Tubbs 1991; 1996) that a significant factor has been reduction of shooting pressure on the wintering grounds – given the status of Grey Plover as a very popular quarry species early in the twentieth century (Byrkjedal & Thompson 1998).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Grey Plover supports, on average, 38,842 individuals (calculated using WeBS February 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 90% of the British population, about 4% of the all-Ireland population, and about 26% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 28 sites at which Grey Plover has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.62.1).

6. Classification criteria

All 15 sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the international population of Grey Plover were considered under Stage 1.2, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further 13 sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Grey Plover an important component of the non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites within the suite are distributed throughout the range of the population in the UK, from sites in Northern Ireland and Wales, to the Firth of Tay in eastern Scotland, and sites along the English south coast. All sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at many of these sites (*e.g.* Moser 1988; Prater 1981; Tubbs 1991).

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

Distribution map for Grey Plover SPA suite

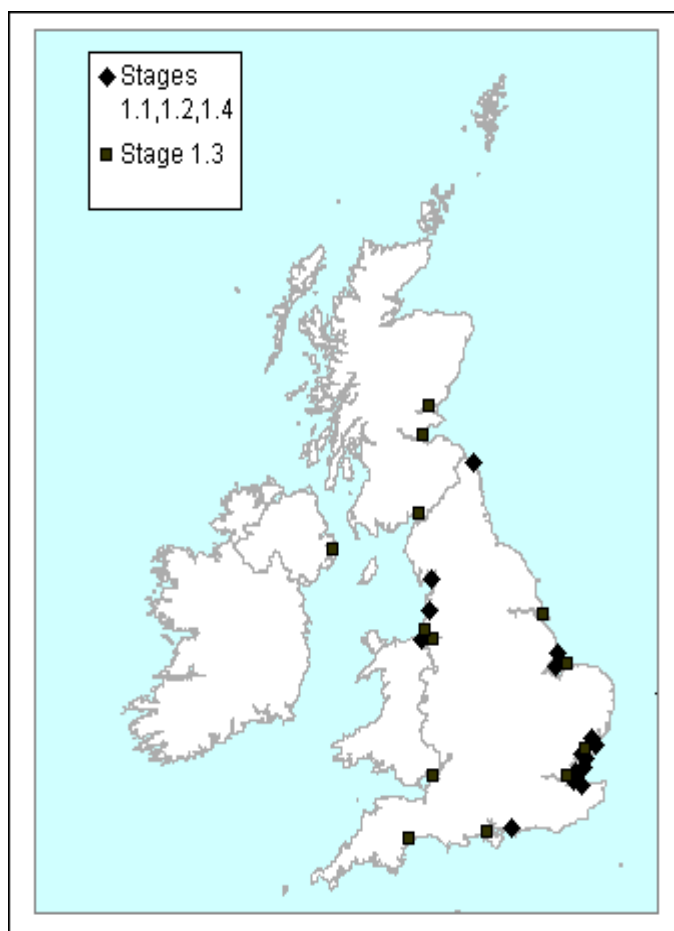


Table 6.62.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Benfleet and Southend Marshes	3,789	2.3	8.8	1.2
Blackwater Estuary	5,090	3.0	11.8	1.2
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	3,825	2.3	8.9	1.2
Colne Estuary	1,100	0.7	2.6	1.3
Dengie	2,411	1.4	5.6	1.2
Exe Estuary	471	0.2	1.1	1.3
Firth of Forth	704	0.4	1.6	1.3
Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary	933	0.6	2.2	1.3
Foulness	4,209	2.5	9.7	1.2

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Gibraltar Point	2,017	1.2	4.7	1.2
Hamford Water	3,251	1.9	7.5	1.2
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	1,338	0.8	3.1	1.3
Lindisfarne	1,570	0.9	3.6	1.2
Medway Estuary and Marshes	3,406	2.0	7.9	1.2
Mersey Estuary	1,013	0.6	2.3	1.3
Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore	525	0.4	1.2	1.3
Morecambe Bay	1,813	1.1	4.2	1.2
North Norfolk Coast	1,187	0.7	2.75	1.3
Ribble and Alt Estuaries	6,073	3.6	14.1	1.2
Severn Estuary	625	0.4	1.5	1.3
Solent and Southampton Water	1,426	0.9	3.3	1.3
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	3,660	2.2	8.5	1.2
Strangford Lough	194	0.1	4.9 (Ire)	1.3
Thames Estuary and Marshes	1,245	0.7	2.9	1.3
The Dee Estuary	2,193	1.3	5.1	1.2
The Swale	2,021	1.2	4.7	1.2
The Wash	9,708	5.8	22.5	1.2
Upper Solway Flats and Marshes	1,036	0.6	2.4	1.3
TOTALS	38,842 (in February)	25.9%	90.0% 4.0% (Ire)	