

## A6.68b Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (non-breeding)

### 1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	Species of European Conservation Concern	<b>SPEC 4</b> Favourable conservation status ( <b>secure</b> ) but concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	<b>Table 4</b>
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	700	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	316 (45% of GB total)
<b>Ireland</b>			
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	1,000,000	10,000	316 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

*GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996*

*Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997*

### 3. Distribution

Section A6.68a outlines the global distribution and taxonomy of Ruff.

In winter, Ruffs migrate south and west to the coasts of India, the Middle East and the Mediterranean Basin (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Most of the population, however, moves to sub-Saharan Africa, where the species is found in very large concentrations during the northern winter. Here they feed on flooded or dry plains, marshes or rice fields (Trolliet & Girard 1991; OAG Münster 1998).

In Europe, Ruffs have a very localised winter distribution, including the Low Countries and Britain, parts of coastal France, Iberia, and locally elsewhere around the Mediterranean basin (Snow & Perrins 1998).

In the UK, the species winters in small numbers both inland and on the coast (Lack 1986). Most sites are on the south and east coasts of Britain, with others in the north-west. Inland, the main areas are in the eastern half of central England (Lack 1986). Notable concentrations occur on the coasts of Dorset and Hampshire, in the Cambridgeshire Fens and on the coasts of Essex and north Kent (Lack 1986).

Ruffs use a wide range of habitats in the winter, including coastal marshes, intertidal zones, inland flooded fields and the muddy margins of lakes and pools (Lack 1986). Small numbers even occur on dry farmland with flocks of Golden Plover and Lapwing.

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

The small number of Ruff that winter in the UK are part of the Western Africa wintering population (Rose & Scott 1997), currently estimated at over 1,000,000 individuals, most of which winter in sub-Saharan Africa. The population is reported to be decreasing (Rose & Scott 1997), although rates of decline and causative factors are not known. Indeed, most of the population is very poorly monitored.

The Atlantic coastline of Europe is estimated to hold approximately 2,500 individuals, mostly in the UK and The Netherlands, whilst the Mediterranean supports approximately 3,500 birds (Snow & Perrins 1998), although trends are not apparent for these populations.

Ruffs began regularly wintering in Britain from 1934/35 and numbers have steadily increased since then (Lack 1986). As the UK is on the extreme north-west edge of the Ruff's wintering range, population levels fluctuate markedly from winter to winter depending on the severity of weather conditions (Lack 1986). By 1966–1971, numbers wintering in Britain were estimated at 1,200 (Prater 1973), rising by 17% to an estimated 1,400 in 1981–1984 (Lack 1986). The latter population count was extrapolated from Birds of Estuaries Enquiry results that found 670 birds in winter 1982/83. By 1987/88–1991/92, the number wintering in Britain was estimated at 700 individuals (Cayford & Waters 1996).

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

##### **SPA suite**

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Ruff supports, on average, 316 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 45% of the British population and less than 0.1% of the international flyway population. In an all-Ireland context, no sites have been selected in Northern Ireland. The suite comprises eight sites at which Ruffs have been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.68b.1).

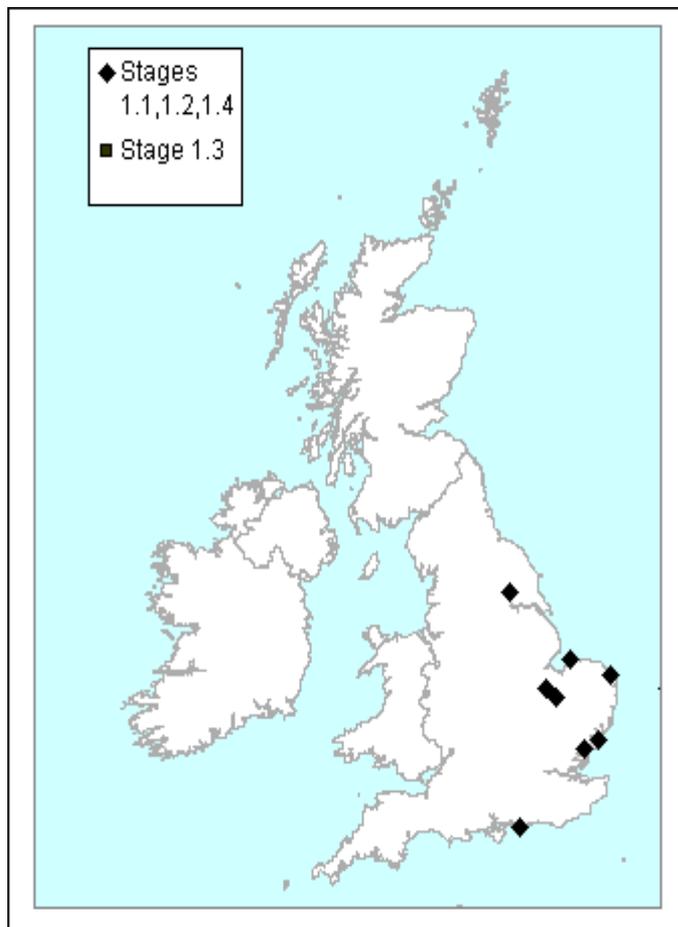
#### **6. Classification criteria**

All eight sites in the UK that were known to support more than 50 Ruff, were considered under Stage 1.1 (see section 5.1.2 for explanation of the threshold used). All were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements (Pagham Harbour; Ouse Washes; Lower Derwent Valley; Nene Washes; North Norfolk Coast; Hamford Water; Broadland; and Blackwater Estuary).

The sites within the suite are clustered in eastern England, from the Lower Derwent Valley in Yorkshire to the south coast at Pagham Harbour. This reflects the main centres of winter distribution of the species (Lack 1986). 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 Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives good coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Ruff in the UK, and in view of the very large size of the international population (over a million individuals), it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

**Distribution map for non-breeding Ruff SPA suite**



**Table 6.68b.1 – SPA suite**

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Blackwater Estuary	51	<0.1	7.3	1.1
Broadland	96	<0.1	13.7	1.1
Hamford Water	53	<0.1	7.6	1.1
Lower Derwent Valley	133	<0.1	19.0	1.1
Nene Washes	91	<0.1	13.0	1.1
North Norfolk Coast	54	<0.1	7.7	1.1
Ouse Washes	137	<0.1	19.6	1.1
Pagham Harbour	160	<0.1	22.9	1.1
<b>TOTALS</b>	316 (in January)	<0.1%	45.1%	