

A6.72b Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (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 SPEC 4 Favourable conservation status (secure) but concentrated in Europe
Migratory ✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(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	5,000	50 (during passage periods)	612 (12% of GB population)
Ireland	unknown	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	650,000	6,500	612 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cranswick et al. 1997

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The global and European distribution of breeding Whimbrel is described in section A6.72a.

Outside the breeding season, Whimbrels are long-distance migrants and occur widely, although thinly, on the coasts of the southern hemisphere during the northern winter. They are distributed from Australasia, through south-east Asia, India and the Middle East, and around most of Africa, South America and the west coast of North America (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

Only very small numbers winter in the UK and Ireland (generally less than 20 in each country) (Cranswick *et al.* 1999; Colhoun 2001). The BTO Winter Atlas showed most winter records along the southern coasts of England and Ireland (Lack 1986).

Most non-breeding Whimbrel occur during the spring and autumn migration periods, in transit through the UK and Ireland to and from their more northerly breeding areas in Iceland, the Faeroes and northern Scotland. Spring passage birds tend to be concentrated on the south coast of England, occurring from mid-April and reaching a peak in late April and early May

(Hutchinson 1986). Southward migration in autumn commences in July, peaking in August, and declining in September. At this time, largest numbers occur on the coasts of the North Sea and southern England, whilst in spring, numbers are reported to be greater in western Britain and Ireland (Prater 1981; Hutchinson 1986). However, analyses for this review show that numbers are higher on west compared to east coasts in spring as well as in autumn.

4. Population structure and trends

Whimbrel population structure is described in section 6.72a. Those occurring on migration in the UK belong to the European/western African population estimated at 600,000–700,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997), although it is probable that only a proportion of this population (*i.e.* birds breeding in Iceland, the Faeroes and northern Scotland) pass through Britain and Ireland.

There are no good national estimates for numbers of Whimbrel occurring in Britain and Ireland during passage periods. Migration is rapid and there appears to be rapid turnover at staging sites, complicating assessment of total numbers. Very large numbers have been recorded on occasion –for example, up to 3,300 were recorded moving north over Cork Harbour (Pierce & Wilson 1980), whilst Prater (1981) noted a roost of 1,500–2,000 at Steart Island in Somerset, and Ferns *et al.* (1979) noted high numbers on the Gwent and Somerset Levels.

For the purposes of this review, the national estimate of 5,000 adopted by WeBS (Cranswick *et al.* 1997) has been used as the best available figure.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Whimbrels supports, on average, 612 individuals. This amounts to about 12% of numbers occurring on autumn migration in Britain, and less than 0.1% of the international population. In an all-Ireland context, no sites have been selected for migrant Whimbrels in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite total is comprised of 11 sites (Table 6.72b.1) where Whimbrel has been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

No sites in the UK regularly support more than 1% of the international Whimbrel population in the non-breeding period (Stage 1.2). However, 11 sites were identified under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Whimbrel as an important component of a non-breeding waterbird assemblage. All sites thus identified were included within the suite. By definition, all are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds.

Distribution map for non-breeding Whimbrel SPA suite

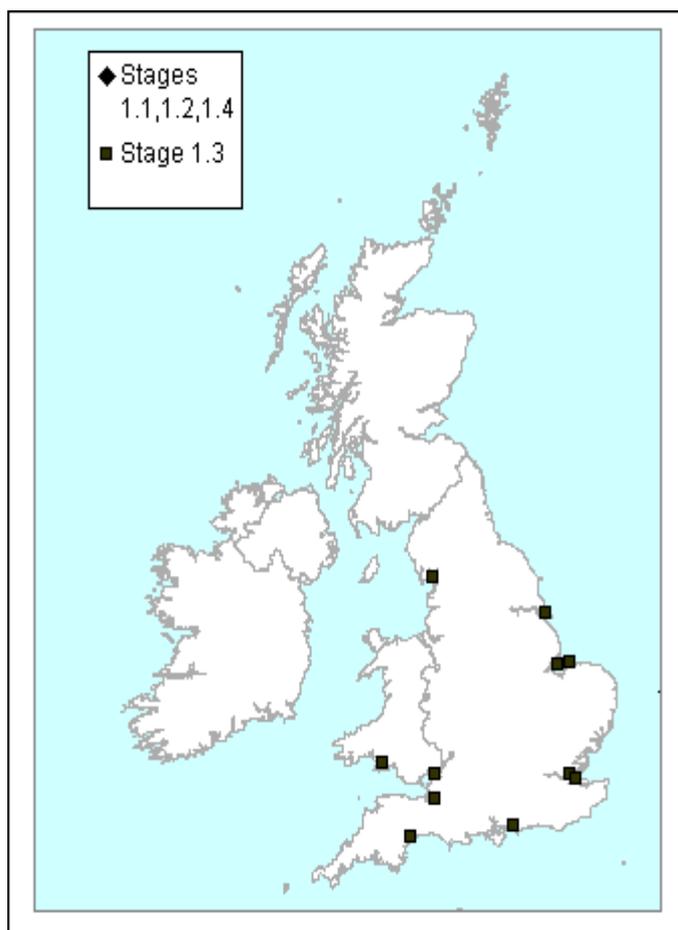


Table 6.72b.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical	% of national population	Selection stage
Burry Inlet	108	<0.1	2.2	1.3
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	135	<0.1	2.7	1.3
Exe Estuary	75	<0.1	1.5	1.3
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast	75	<0.1	1.5	1.3
Medway Estuary and Marshes	58	<0.1	1.2	1.3
Morecambe Bay	73	<0.1	1.5	1.3
North Norfolk Coast	58	<0.1	1.2	1.3
Severn Estuary	120	<0.1	2.4	1.3
Somerset Levels & Moors	52	<0.1	1.0	1.3
Thames Estuary and Marshes	101	<0.1	2.0	1.3
The Wash	410	<0.1	8.2	1.3

TOTALS	612 (in August)	<0.1%	12.2%
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