

A6.78 Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

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	
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 2
Wintering		EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Endangered

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	36	1	30 (83% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	65,500	655	30 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Stone et al. 1997

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeijer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Red-necked Phalarope has a wide circumpolar breeding distribution in tundra habitats. It is absent from high Arctic areas of north and east Greenland, Svalbard, the Russian high Arctic islands and the Canadian Arctic archipelago. Red-necked Phalaropes otherwise occur in virtually all parts of the Arctic, as well as some areas of the sub-Arctic. It is monotypic (Cramp & Simmons 1983). Outside the breeding season, the species undertakes a lengthy migration to overwinter at sea in sub-tropical, shallow inshore waters. Birds breeding in Scandinavia (and possible also Iceland) migrate south-east to winter off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula, between Oman and Yemen (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

The European breeding range extends from Iceland, through Scandinavia and to northern Russia. Those that breed in the north of Britain lie at the extreme south of the European distribution (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997), and are amongst the most southerly breeding Red-necked Phalaropes in the world.

In Britain, almost the entire population has recently been found on the island of Fetlar, Shetland. Although formerly more abundant at wetlands in western and northern Scotland (Everett 1971; Parslow 1973; Holloway 1996), breeding now only occurs sporadically at sites in the Northern Isles, Hebrides and Highlands (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

4. Population structure and trends

Two biogeographic populations have been described (Rose & Scott 1997); a Nearctic population of more than 2,000,000 individuals, and a Eurasian population, of which those breeding in the UK form part, comprising between 100,000 to over 1,000,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997). Largest numbers in Europe breed in Iceland (*c.* 4,000 pairs), with between about 800-1,500 pairs in each of Sweden, Finland and Norway (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

The European population (used as the reference in this review) is estimated as between 65,536–94,301 pairs. The European population as a whole appears to be stable although there has been a decline in Iceland (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

The UK breeding population has declined in size and range since the 1950s with a loss of regular breeding sites in the Hebrides and the Highlands (Yates *et al.* 1983; Batten *et al.* 1990; Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Total UK numbers have declined from about 60 breeding males in 1950 to 36 in 1995 (Stone *et al.* 1997).

UK declines have been linked to loss of suitable habitat through vegetation succession, drainage and agricultural intensification, especially in the Hebrides and Highlands (Everett 1971). Robbing of nests by egg-collectors is still a substantial threat to Red-necked Phalaropes breeding on some of the more remote sites. In Britain, Red-necked Phalaropes appear to require a mosaic of open water, emergent vegetation and marsh for successful breeding (Yates *et al.* 1983) and the loss of any part of this mosaic may make a site unsuitable. On Fetlar, management to maintain and extend this mosaic of habitats on the RSPB reserve can be successful in increasing the breeding population (O'Brien *et al.* 1997).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Red-necked Phalarope supports, on average about 30 pairs. This amounts to about 83% of the British breeding population. Red-necked Phalaropes do not breed in Northern Ireland. The suite contains less than 0.1% of the international population (numbers in the UK are very small in comparison to those breeding in Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia). The SPA suite comprises a single site (Table 6.78.1) where Red-necked Phalarope has been listed as a qualifying species.

Other Measures

A Biodiversity Action Plan has been published for this species (Biodiversity Steering Group 1998) and is being implemented as part of the UK's national response to the Biodiversity Convention.

6. Classification criteria

The only site (Fetlar) in the UK now known to regularly support more than 1% of the national breeding population was considered under Stage 1.1, and was selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Consideration of additional coverage using Stage 1.4 was problematic since away from Fetlar, the occurrence of the Red-necked Phalarope was irregular in the early 1990s. Following the success of active wetland habitat management on Fetlar (O'Brien *et al.* 1997), however, and the application of these techniques to the restoration of sites of former importance elsewhere, this situation may change in the future.

Fetlar is a multi-species SPA with a very long recorded history of occupancy by Red-necked Phalaropes. The island has held most of Shetland's Red-necked Phalaropes since at least the beginning of the twentieth century (Venables & Venables 1955; Everett 1971).

Distribution map for Red-necked Phalarope SPA suite

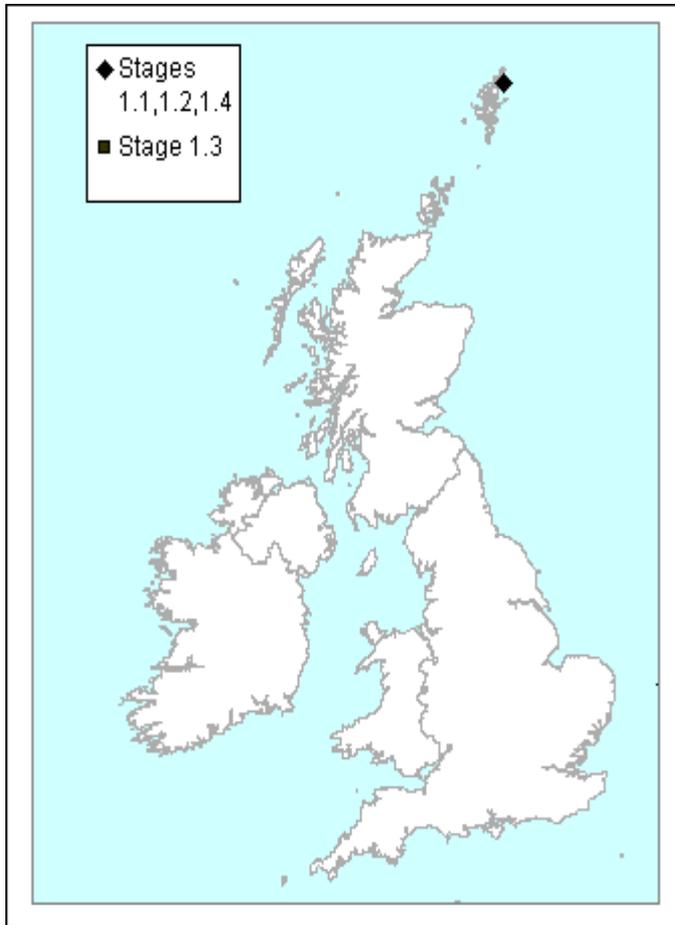


Table 6.78.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical	% of national population	Selection stage
Fetlar	30	<0.1%	83%	1.1
TOTALS	30	<0.1%	83%	