

A6.99 Fair Isle Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes fridariensis*

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		(UK) Species of Conservation Importance
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	37	1	37 (100% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	37	1	37 (100% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: SNH

Biogeographic population source: SNH

3. Distribution

The Fair Isle Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes fridariensis* is an endemic sub-species of Wren *T. troglodytes* confined to the small island of Fair Isle, located in the North Sea half way between Orkney and Shetland.

Fair Isle Wrens are resident and sedentary (Thom 1986). They are closely associated with cliffs and gully systems on the island, with a preference for the more sheltered inlets, or 'geos' (Williamson 1958b). Although, they occur around the entire coast of the island, they do show some preference for the less exposed north and east facing shores.

When nesting they are absent from the crofting areas on the island, maintaining territories along the cliffs and geos, but when the young fledge there is some dispersal into cultivated habitats, especially during severe winter weather. The feeding ecology of the Fair Isle Wren has not been subject to intensive study. They may feed on the small marine invertebrates and fly larvae found amongst seaweed washed up on the boulder beaches at the foot of geos (Williamson 1958b).

4. Population structure and trends

The first Fair Isle Wren population census was carried out in 1950, and the population has been monitored annually since. Population estimates are based on singing males, which are

relatively easy to census, and monogamy is assumed for this sub-species (Armstrong 1955). The population has fluctuated between 36 singing males in 1950, no more than 50 in 1957, a maximum of 52 in the mid-1960s and a minimum of 10 in 1981. Despite these fluctuations the population was in general decline between 1950 and 1987, but appears to have recently recovered and remained stable at around 30–35 singing males between 1994 and 1998 (Aspinall 1988; Fair Isle Bird Observatory annual reports).

As part of the SNH-funded Ranger Service, which is currently run through the Fair Isle Bird Observatory, methods are being developed to allow more accurate censuses to be made in future. The causes of the general decline in population are not fully understood. Severe wet and windy winter weather may play a part (Williamson 1958b; Aspinall 1988), particularly as the species is known to experience low breeding densities following cold winters (Marchant *et al.* 1900; Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

The UK's SPA suite for Fair Isle Wren contains the habitats used throughout the year by, on average, 37 pairs. This is the whole of the British and international breeding population, which is restricted in distribution solely to Fair Isle in Shetland (Table 6.99.1).

All the cliff habitats of the island are within the SPA, as are the uplands in the north. The only areas excluded from the SPA are the in-bye pastures, gardens and housing, which represents the majority of the southern end of the island. The island is part of the Shetland Environmentally Sensitive Area, and croft management throughout is likely to be beneficial to the sub-species under this scheme.

6. Classification criteria

Fair Isle was selected under Stage 1.1 after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

Fair Isle is a multi-species SPA also holding important seabird populations. The SPA contains the entire coastal habitat of the island (the main breeding areas for the Wren) as well as moorland areas in the north of the island. The Fair Isle race of Wren was first described in 1951 (Williamson 1951) although it has clearly been long present on the island. The SPA is thus also the type locality.

Distribution map for Fair Isle Wren SPA suite

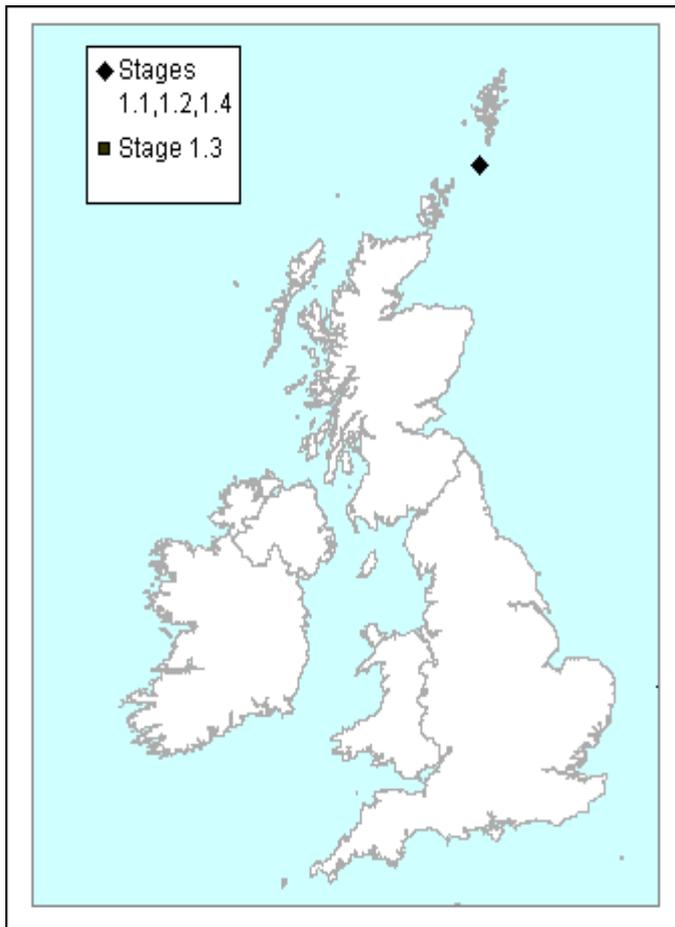


Table 6.99.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Fair Isle	37	100	100	1.1
TOTALS	37	100%	100%	