



# 7

## UK nature conservation advice

JNCC provides advice on policies,  
strategies and initiatives that have  
an impact on nature conservation  
across the UK as a whole

Avian influenza ('bird flu') was a serious area of concern for JNCC during the year. As the highly pathogenic form of the H5N1 influenza subtype moved into western Europe we were able to advise Defra, the devolved administrations and the country agencies on the migratory pathways of wild birds. In this respect our work monitoring waterbird movements over many years in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has proved to be particularly valuable.

JNCC and the country agencies have all played an important role in advising on aspects of avian influenza over the past 12 months. As the reporting year began, the discovery of a dead whooper swan on the coast of Fife raised the level of concern for the conservation of wild birds in the UK, as well as for the poultry industry. More recently, the discovery of the virus at a Norfolk poultry unit resulted in

significant responsive advice being provided to Defra via its newly-established Ornithological Expert Panel. The cases of highly pathogenic H5N1 in Essex (resulting from the trade in wild birds), Fife (from wild bird movements) and Norfolk (via the poultry industry) have demonstrated the multiple routes by which this virus can be moved between countries.

Lessons have been learned from these UK cases and we are working with others to enhance international levels of preparedness and best practice, in order to best respond to future outbreaks.

During the reporting year, another major priority for JNCC was the preparation of a report on the status of the 167 UK habitats and species listed on the annexes of the Habitats Directive. The aim of the Directive is to secure the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species of European importance.

10-km squares with records for harlequin ladybird *Harmonia axyridis* in Great Britain and Ireland

10-km square legend

- 2004
- 2005
- 2006

Note: the most recent dates overlay the earlier dates where squares have records in more than one date class.



## Harlequin ladybird *Harmonia axyridis*

(Left) The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway (see section 12) is now playing an increasing role in monitoring the distribution of non-native species.

The harlequin ladybird was first recorded in Essex in 2004. The species has spread rapidly and has now been recorded across much of southern England and into Wales. It has the potential to affect other species that feed on aphids.

Efforts to track the species have centred on a website [www.harlequin-survey.org](http://www.harlequin-survey.org) that is linked to the Biological Records Centre website and makes use of NBN Gateway technology. It provides recorders with the information they need to make an accurate identification and allows new records to be entered online.

© Mike Majerus



## Whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus*

(Above) The whooper swan is mainly a winter visitor to the UK from Iceland, although a couple of pairs nest in the north. Its winter population and small breeding numbers make it an Amber List species and it is one of the species to which the Agreement on the Conservation of African–Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) applies.

© John Cancalosi/naturepl.com

Government will submit the report on the implementation of the Directive for the period 2000–2006 to the European Commission later in 2007.

Much of the advice we provide on UK nature conservation is developed in close partnership with the country agencies, often through specialist working groups.

During the reporting year, an inter-agency spatial ecology and ecosystem working group was established. It will focus on terrestrial ecological networks and measures to enhance the ability of landscapes to adapt to the effects of climate change. A common approach to the definition of terrestrial ecological networks is being applied in the UK that uses the distribution of existing habitat patches and information about intervening land use to identify areas where species movement may be possible. A UK habitat network map is being developed which will be ready towards the end of 2007.

We also advise Government on the implications for nature conservation of crimes against wildlife. We have co-ordinated (and reviewed) a list of national conservation priorities to assist the development of country and regional priorities, which aim to help law enforcement officers target their activities as effectively as possible. We are represented on the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime Steering Group and the National Wildlife Crime Unit High Level Group, and we ensure that both groups are fully informed of the impact of wildlife crime on species conservation. In this way we contribute to the development of wildlife law enforcement policy.

Distribution map



Range map



## Favourable Conservation Status

(Top left) The UK six-yearly report to the European Commission on habitats and species protected under the EC Habitats Directive requires the current range of each feature to be assessed.

A tool developed by Stuart Ball at JNCC has been used to translate the known distribution of a habitat – in this case Atlantic salt meadows or saltmarsh – shown in the top map at the 10 km square level into a range shown in the lower map as blue polygons. The area of the polygons is totalled up to give a value for surface area of the range.

© JNCC

## Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve (NNR)

(Bottom left) Higher/lower saltmarsh boundary corresponding to Atlantic salt meadow at Gibraltar Point NNR, Lincolnshire.

© Peter Wakely/Natural England