

UK SPA SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP
23 September 2003

Short information paper: SPAs for Ring Ouzels

Background

At its May 2002 meeting, the Group considered a paper on SPAs for Ring Ouzels *Turdus torquatus*. The conclusions were that:

- 1) Ring Ouzel is a regularly occurring migratory species and UK supports part of the nominate *T. t. torquatus* biogeographical population;
- 2) Estimates for the size of this population range from 19,567 to 118,199 breeding pairs, whilst the GB population is 6,157-7,549 pairs (unsure of recent all-Ireland estimate but only 180-360 pairs in the 88-91 Atlas);
- 3) Concern over the breadth of the biogeographical population estimate;
- 4) Suitability of site-based conservation was questioned but it was concluded that including Ring Ouzel as qualifying species on existing large upland SPAs would provide benefit via site conservation objectives.

Biogeographical population estimate

I have contacted ornithologists in Norway (estimate 10,000-100,000 pairs) and Sweden (estimate 3,000-10,000 pairs) to ascertain whether the biogeographical population estimate can be refined. In Norway a territory-mapping survey of 136 plots included 108 plots in habitat suitable for Ring Ouzel. Birds exhibiting territorial behaviour were recorded in eight plots at mean density of 3.9 pairs per sq-km, giving 0.29 pairs per sq-km for the 108 plots in suitable habitat. Given 150,000 sq-km of suitable Ring Ouzel habitat in Norway we obtain an estimate of 45,000 pairs, which the Norwegian ornithologist gave a range from 20,000 to 70,000 pairs (although I think this was based on guesstimation rather than statistical confidence intervals). In Sweden actual census data are available for only four plots (total 26 sq-km) which were not randomly chosen or statistically representative. So the resulting estimate of 3,600-9,200 pairs is little more than guesswork based on subjective impressions of ornithologists with reasonably good experience of the relevant habitats (the Swedish ornithologist's own words).

If we accept these estimates the biogeographical population is 30,167-87,399 pairs. Minimum gives a 1% figure of 300 pairs or the mid-point gives 590 pairs.

However, the most recent published estimate gives a 1% biogeographical threshold of 200 pairs (rounded from minimum of range).

Recommendations

It is unlikely that any UK site will support 1% of the biogeographical population. So any sites selected would be under guideline 1(4) and should be classified/potential SPAs for other features that satisfy stage 2 guidelines.

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