

## A6.101 Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*

### 1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1) Schedule 4	Species of European Conservation Concern	<b>SPEC 2</b> Unfavourable conservation status ( <b>vulnerable</b> ) and concentrated in Europe
Migratory		Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	<b>Table 2</b>
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
<b>GB</b>	1,600	16	1,681 (100% of GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>			
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	2,026,000	20,260	1,681 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Gibbons & Wotton 1996

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeijer & Blair 1997

### 3. Distribution

The global breeding range of the Dartford Warbler is largely restricted to the western part of the Mediterranean region and almost the entire world population breeds in Europe, with more than 75% thought to breed in Spain and large numbers also occurring in southern and western France, southern Italy and Portugal. The species is polytypic with three sub-species described, all of which occur in Europe. *S. u. dartfordiensis* occurs in southern England, western France, north-west Spain and northern Portugal. The nominate *S. u. undata* occurs in Mediterranean France, north-east Spain and the main Mediterranean islands, whilst *S. u. toni* occurs in southern Portugal, central and southern Spain and north-west Africa (Cramp 1992).

Southern England is at the northern limit of the species' world range. Here, the main concentrations occur in Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey, with smaller numbers in south-western England and East Anglia.

In Europe, Dartford Warblers breed in a wide variety of low Mediterranean scrub habitats and Atlantic heathlands. In Britain, the species is almost exclusively found on lowland dry heathland with Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Gorse *Ulex* spp. Large areas of heathland typically hold higher densities of breeding birds than fragmented and isolated habitats, with

up to 10-15 pairs/km<sup>2</sup> present in the best areas. Territories containing Gorse *Ulex* spp. tend to be more productive (Catchpole & Phillips 1992), most likely due to the greater abundance of invertebrate prey and increased shelter during the winter. Birds generally remain on the breeding grounds throughout the year, although there is a partial migration of adults, notably in October. Such movements are more pronounced in years of high productivity (Bibby 1979).

#### **4. Population structure and trends**

The total European population is estimated to be in the range 2,025,456–3,635,791 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

The Dartford Warbler population is generally stable or fluctuating in Europe, with the exception of parts of Spain where a slow progressive decline has continued since the 1970s (Tucker & Heath 1994). Populations may fluctuate markedly. During hard winters, populations can crash by as much as 90% causing widespread extinction. For example, the especially cold winters of 1961/62 and 1962/63 reduced the English population to only 11 known pairs. However, with two or three broods each year and autumn dispersal, breeding numbers can double in just two years. Consequently, the British population has recovered with an expansion of the species' range and an increase in numbers from nearly 600 pairs in the mid-1970s to an estimated minimum of 1,600–1,890 breeding pairs in 1994 (Gibbons & Wotton 1996).

#### **5. Protection measures for population in UK**

##### **SPA suite**

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Dartford Warblers supports, on average, about 1,681 pairs. This amounts to virtually the whole British breeding population. Dartford Warblers do not breed in Northern Ireland. The suite contains less than 0.1% of the international population (England lies on the edge of the European range and numbers in the UK are very small compared to those in Iberia and south-west Europe). The SPA suite contains six sites (Table 6.101.1) where Dartford Warbler has been listed as a qualifying species.

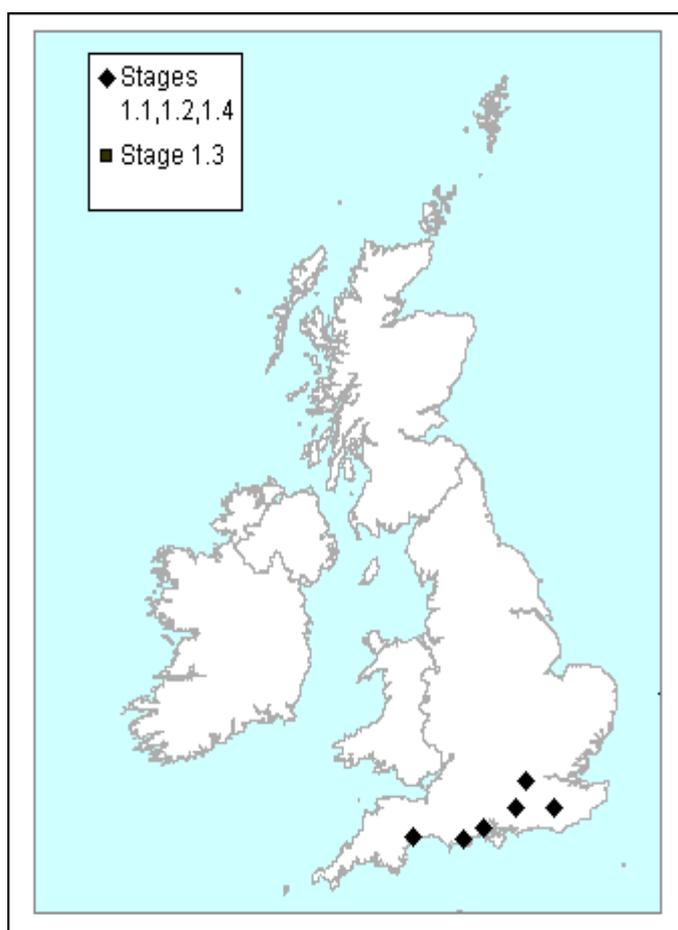
The lowland heathlands in the SPA suite are benefiting from management work funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund in partnership with English Nature, RSPB, local authorities and wildlife trusts. Sympathetic management of heathland SSSIs, including the removal of conifers, and bracken control, is also encouraged by English Nature under its Wildlife Enhancement Scheme.

#### **6. Classification criteria**

All sites in the UK that support more than 1% of the national breeding population of Dartford Warblers were considered under Stage 1.1, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. All sites selected are multi-species SPAs and are distributed in southern England reflecting the distribution of Dartford Warblers in Britain.

Given that the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives comprehensive coverage of the Dartford Warbler population and range in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

### Distribution map for Dartford Warbler SPA suite



**Table 6.101.1 – SPA suite**

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Ashdown Forest	29	<0.1	1.8	1.1
Dorset Heathlands	418	<0.1	26.1	1.1
East Devon Heaths	128	<0.1	8.0	1.1
New Forest	538	<0.1	33.6	1.1
Thames Basin Heaths	445	<0.1	27.8	1.1
Wealden Heaths	123	<0.1	7.7	1.1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,681</b>	<b>&lt;0.1%</b>	<b>c. 100%</b>	