

## A6.11a Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo carbo* (breeding)

### 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	General Protection (UK) Species of Conservation Importance
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Migratory All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	7,000	70	2,067 (29.5% of GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>	4,700	47	249 (5.3% of all-Ireland population)
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	41,200	412	2,316 (5.6% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Lloyd *et al.* 1991

Ireland population source: Gibbons *et al.* 1993

Biogeographic population source: Lloyd *et al.* 1991

### 3. Distribution

The world range of the Cormorant extends discontinuously from north-east America (Labrador and Newfoundland) across Eurasia to Australia and New Zealand, as well as to southern Africa. The distribution is far from continuous, especially in Europe and central Asia.

The species is polytypic with five sub-species described. Of these, two occur in Europe. The nominate sub-species, *P. c. carbo*, occurs on the coasts of the North Atlantic from France, Britain and Ireland, to north-east America, including Iceland and Greenland (Debout *et al.* 1995). *P. c. sinensis* occurs in continental Europe and across Asia, east to Japan and south to Sri Lanka (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Van Eerden & Gregersen 1995; Lindell *et al.* 1995).

There are colonies of *P. c. carbo* on most coasts of Britain and Northern Ireland, with inland sites mostly in southern England (Lloyd *et al.* 1991; Kirby *et al.* 1995; Sellers & Hughes 1997). The situation in Britain has become more complex recently with individuals of the *sinensis* sub-species apparently breeding in south-east England (see discussion in Wernham *et al.* 1999).

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

Cormorants breeding in Britain amount to about 17% of the biogeographic population (total *P. c. carbo*) of around 41,000 pairs (Lloyd *et al.* 1991). Since the first UK census in 1969-70, numbers have increased, particularly inland, but this increase has not occurred uniformly across Britain (Lloyd *et al.* 1991; Kirby *et al.* 1995). Increases have occurred elsewhere in the North Atlantic range of *P. c. carbo* (Debout *et al.* 1995), as well as significant increases in continental European populations of *P. c. sinensis* (Van Eerden & Gregersen 1995; Lindell *et al.* 1995). All these increases are thought to result from relaxation in former persecution and increased provision of food sources such as fish farms and hatcheries. Numbers in western Scotland have, however, decreased, particularly in areas holding salmon farms, suggesting the effects of both licensed killing and illegal persecution (Wernham *et al.* 1999).

Breeding Cormorants can fly long distances to feed. For example, birds nesting on coastal Sheep Island in Northern Ireland regularly fly up to 60 km inland to feed in Lough Neagh and Lough Beg.

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

##### **SPA suite**

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Cormorant supports an average of 2,316 pairs. This amounts to about 30% of the British breeding population, over 5% of the all-Ireland population, and about 5.6% of the international population. This total is contained within seven sites (Table 6.11a.1) for which Cormorant has been listed as a qualifying species.

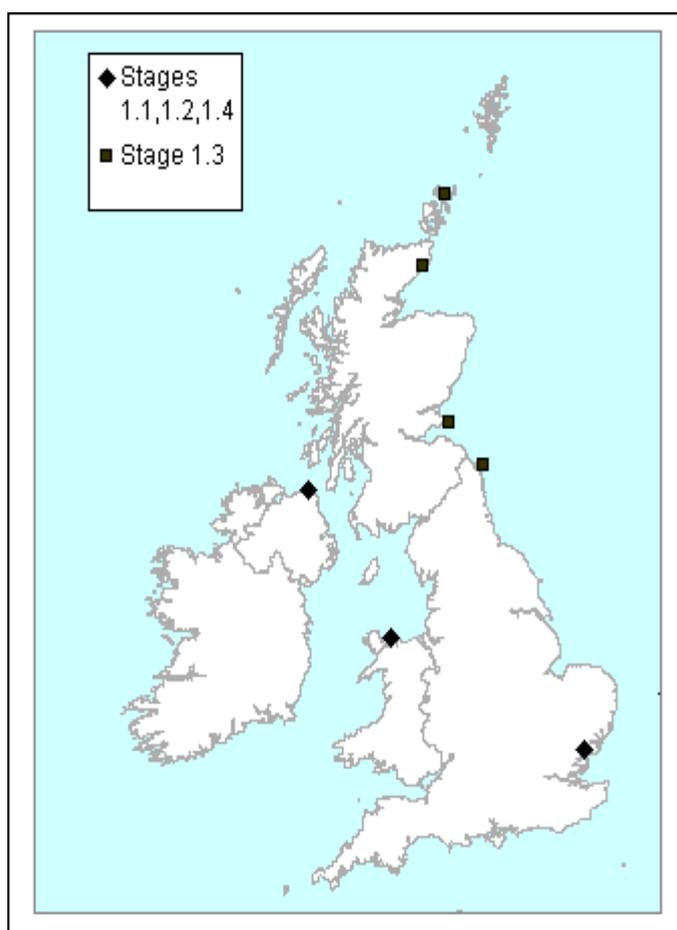
#### **6. Classification criteria**

The two Cormorant colonies in the UK that support more than 1% of the international breeding population (Ynys Seiriol/Puffin Island and Abberton Reservoir) were both considered under Stage 1.2. Both were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Four additional sites (Calf of Eday, East Caithness Cliffs, Farne Islands, and Firth of Forth Islands) were selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), since Cormorants were identified as an important component of a wider breeding seabird assemblage. In order to provide for range coverage in Northern Ireland, Sheep Island was selected under Stage 1.4. Most sites selected are multi-species SPAs, important for a range of other seabirds, although Ynys Seiriol/Puffin Island in Wales, and Sheep Island in Northern Ireland have been selected solely for this species.

The distribution of SPAs covers most of the range of Cormorants in the UK and includes the largest inland colony at Abberton Reservoir. (These birds are considered to be *P.c. carbo* (Sellers 1993) despite their tree-nesting habits more commonly associated with the European race *P.c. sinensis*).

Some UK SPAs for this species have a very long recorded history of occupancy. For example, they are known to have bred on the Farne Islands since at least 1865 (Holloway 1996).

### Distribution map for breeding Cormorant SPA suite



**Table 6.11a.1 – SPA suite**

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Abberton Reservoir	490	1.2	7.0	1.2
Calf of Eday	223	0.5	3.2	1.3
East Caithness Cliffs	144	0.4	2.1	1.3
Farne Islands	194	0.5	2.8	1.3
Firth of Forth Islands	240	0.6	3.4	1.3
Sheep Island	249	0.6	5.3 (Ire)	1.4
Ynys Seiriol/Puffin Island	776	1.9	11.1	1.2
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2,316</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>29.5%</b> <b>5.3% (Ire)</b>	