A6.28a Wigeon *Anas penelope* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✔	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	**General Protection** **Schedule 2(1)** **Schedule 3(3)**	Species of European Conservation Concern	
Migratory	✔	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	**General Protection** **Schedule 1(2)** **Schedule 2(1)**	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	**Table 4**
Wintering	✔	EC Birds Directive 1979	**Annex II/1** **Annex III/2** **Migratory**	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	300	3	80 (27% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	420,000	4,200	80 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Gibbons et al. *1993*
Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The global distribution of the Wigeon extends from Iceland in the west, across Eurasia to the coasts of the Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk, as far south as northern Sakhalin. The species is a boreal breeder, occurring widely between about 50°–71°N throughout the extensive Russian taigas (Roga• eva 1992) where it is the most abundant of the dabbling ducks.

In Europe, Wigeon breed in Iceland, northern Britain, throughout Fennoscandia (including the Baltic States) and eastward through northern Russia (Rose & Scott 1996). Breeding has also been recorded locally in The Netherlands and eastward through Germany (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The species is monotypic, although five biogeographic populations are recognised (Rose & Scott 1994). Of these, two populations occur in Europe. Wigeon breeding in the UK are part of the north-west European population.

In the UK, Wigeon breed sparsely throughout much of eastern England, becoming more widely distributed in the uplands of northern England, central Scotland, the northern Scottish bogs and the Northern Isles (Gibbons *et al*. 1993). Over 75% of the UK population breeds in

Scotland (Batten *et al*. 1990), and the species' range may be limited by water quality (with a preference for neutral or alkaline waters), and availability of suitable nesting sites (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Gibbons *et al*. 1993). Non-breeding Wigeon are recorded regularly during the breeding season on inland waters (Gibbons *et al*. 1993). There have been no regular or recent breeding records from the island of Ireland (Hutchinson 1989; Gibbons *et al.* 1993), although there are occasional records of birds seen in summer.

When breeding, the species prefers open, shallow, mesotrophic fresh waters with ample submerged or floating vegetation, but lacking dense emergent or marginal vegetation. It avoids fast flowing water but may use saline wetlands. Nest placement is in dense cover close to wetlands, such as rank Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, and open-structured woodlands (Cramp & Simmons 1977).

4. Population structure and trends

The European population is estimated at nearly 104,000 pairs, most of which occur in Finland and Sweden (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). However, the biogeographic population of north-west Europe and northern Russia is estimated at 1,250,000 individuals, which equates to 420,000 pairs (Rose & Scott 1997). There is little information on population trends throughout Europe, although there were declines in Iceland and Norway in the 1960s, but an increase in Finland during the same period (Cramp & Simmons 1977). In the UK, Wigeon were first recorded nesting in 1834, in Scotland, with a subsequent increase and spread into northern England.

The current breeding population in the UK is estimated to be at least 300 pairs (Stone *et al*. 1997; Gibbons *et al*. 1993), which is similar to that of the 1970s (Cramp & Simmons 1977) and late 1960s (Yarker & Atkinson-Willes 1971). There have been localised declines in population size, such as at Loch Leven, where there has been a drop from 25–30 pairs around 1970 to an average of nine pairs between 1988–1991. However, the range of the species changed little between 1970 and 1990 (Gibbons *et al*. 1993). Possible factors influencing changes in population size may include acidification of favoured waters, fluctuations in insect foods, and loss of nesting habitat as a result of conifer afforestation (Fox *et al.* 1989; Gibbons *et al*. 1993; Thom 1986).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Wigeon supports an average of about 80 pairs. This amounts to about 27% of the British breeding population. Within an all-Ireland context, there have been no SPAs selected for breeding Wigeon in Northern Ireland. The UK suite contains less than 0.1% of the international population (numbers in the UK population are very small in comparison to the large population in Scandinavia and Russia). This total is contained within two sites (Table 6.28a.1) for which Wigeon has been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

The population of breeding Wigeon is generally dispersed and occurs at low densities in the British uplands. Accordingly, there are no concentrations that would qualify under Stage 1.2 (indeed were the entire British population to be found in one location, this would still amount to less than 1% of the international population). Two sites located within the core of the British distribution were selected under Stage 1.4.

The Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands support a large concentration of breeding Wigeon (14% of the British population – Fox *et al.* 1989). This area has a very long history of occupancy – indeed the first breeding record for the UK was of a nest found on an island in Loch Loyal in 1834 (Selby 1835; Holloway 1996). The River Spey – Insh Marshes supports 12% of the British population and has long been known as an important site for this species. There are no other sites holding comparable concentrations. Both sites are multi-species SPAs with a high degree of naturalness.

Distribution map for breeding Wigeon SPA suite

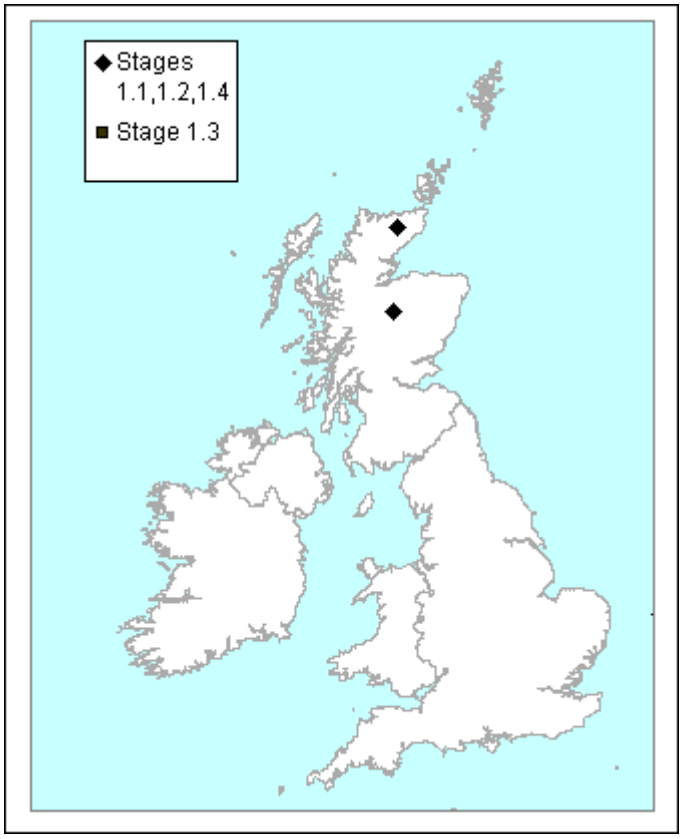

Table 6.28a.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeo-graphical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands	43	<0.1	14.3	1.4
River Spey - Insh Marshes	37	<0.1	12.3	1.4
TOTALS	80	<0.1%	27%	