

A6.32 Pintail *Anas acuta* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(2) Schedule 2(1) Schedule 3(3)	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 3 Unfavourable conservation status (vulnerable) but not concentrated in Europe
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	Rare

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	27,800	280	18,879 (67% of GB total)
Ireland	6,000	60	142 (2% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	60,000	600	19,021 (32% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Kirby 1995a

Ireland population source: Pollitt et al. 2000

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Pintail has a widespread global distribution across North America and north Eurasia, breeding mainly in tundra and taiga zones at 60° to 70°N (Scott & Rose 1996). Three subspecies are recognised: the nominate subspecies is highly migratory, breeding in the areas described above and wintering in temperate and tropical regions of North America, Europe, Africa and Asia. *A. a. eatoni* and *A. a. drygalskii* (often considered a separate species) are restricted to Kerguelen Island and Crozet Island respectively (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

In Europe, as in the UK, Pintail is a rare breeding bird, occurring in a few suitable wetland areas. Most birds occurring in winter migrate from more northern and eastern breeding areas in Fennoscandia and Russia. European distribution in winter is predominantly coastal, and Pintail form large flocks on brackish coastal lagoons, in estuaries and deltas, and on large inland lakes (Scott & Rose 1996). They avoid fast-flowing rivers and deep, oligotrophic waterbodies, however (Berndt & Kauppinen 1997).

Pintail concentrate in large numbers at a small number of sites, much more so than many other non-breeding ducks. Indeed, half the north-west European population is confined to just thirteen sites, along North Sea, Irish Sea and Atlantic coasts (Scott & Rose 1996). Principal sites in the UK are estuaries in north-west England and north Wales, which hold three times the non-breeding numbers occurring in east-central England, the second most important area (Pollitt *et al.* 2000).

Pintail are extremely mobile during the winter, taking advantage of habitats which are only temporarily available through flooding. This mobility causes local changes in distribution and changes to the relative importance of individual sites through the winter (Owen *et al.* 1986). Numbers of birds at individual sites in the UK and the Republic of Ireland also fluctuate markedly between years indicating a low degree of site fidelity (Pollitt *et al.* 2000; Colhoun 2000).

Pintail feed on seeds, tubers and vegetative parts of aquatic plants and sedges, and, in summer, aquatic invertebrates, amphibians and small fish (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). In the UK, they have been found to depend largely on small snails of the genus *Hydrobia* in estuarine habitats, but on inland grazing marshes seeds were by far the most important food (Olney 1965; Owen *et al.* 1986).

4. Population structure and trends

Although there is a considerable amount of overlap on the breeding grounds between all wintering groups, and no discrete populations are identifiable, for practical reasons three biogeographic populations are recognised in Eurasia: a north-west European wintering group (60,000 individuals); a north-east Europe, Black Sea, Mediterranean, west African wintering group (1,200,000); and a south-west Asian and east African wintering group (700,000) (Rose & Scott 1997). A further four populations occur in other regions.

The population wintering in north-west Europe is distributed primarily through Scandinavia and countries bordering the North Sea (Scott & Rose 1996). Great Britain and Ireland are of great importance to this population, with between 27,800 and 32,200 (46–54%) wintering here (Kirby 1995a; Kershaw 1998).

Individual local populations of Pintail tend to fluctuate significantly in number due to the ephemeral nature of their preferred breeding habitat – shallow, open waters close to grassland or other open habitats. These areas tend to dry out easily and are easily drained or otherwise changed. Declines in numbers of breeding Pintails have been recorded from Russia, Finland, Estonia, Denmark, Poland and Ukraine (Berndt & Kaupinnen 1997). Of the three European wintering populations of this species, the north-west European is the smallest, and has shown a pattern of slow decline over the past twenty years (Scott & Rose 1996). Indeed, none of the European populations of Pintail increased over the period 1974–1996 (Delany *et al.* 1999). Recent declines in the north-west European population have been attributed primarily to habitat loss and degradation in both breeding and wintering areas (Scott & Rose 1996).

In the UK, numbers of non-breeding Pintail increased by *c.* 3.5% between 1966 and 1995, but within these years there were four periods where trends in numbers were relatively consistent, the most recent of which was a slight, non-significant decline from 1980–1995 (Kershaw 1998a). Large numbers in some years are the result of influxes from mainland Europe during harsh weather conditions (Ridgill & Fox 1990; Berndt & Kaupinnen 1997; Scott & Rose 1996). Nevertheless, trends in wintering numbers have varied both between regions and between habitats in the UK. Numbers have increased most in east and central England, south-east England, south-west England and south Wales, while they have stabilised in most of the more important regions for the species. Furthermore, numbers have increased most on reservoirs, mineral workings, and rivers, while those on estuaries and

coastal sites have stabilised, suggesting a spread onto less traditional habitat types (Kershaw 1998).

There is evidence for a decline in numbers wintering in the Republic of Ireland since the mid-1990s (Colhoun 2000).

5. Protection measures for population in the UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Pintail supports, on average, 19,021 individuals (calculated using WeBS January site totals for the period 1992/93 to 1996/97 – see section 4.4.1 and Appendix 2 for further explanation). This total amounts to about 67% of the British population, about 2% of the all-Ireland population, and about 32% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 25 sites where Pintail has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.32.1).

Other measures

The UK has contributed to the development of a European Union Management Action Plan for Pintail as part of the Ornithological Committee's initiative to develop such plans for a number of Annex II species with unfavourable conservation status. Although these action plans are advisory rather than legally binding, the UK will be seeking to implement the recommended actions of the plan as specified for the period 1999–2002. As one example of the implementation of recommended actions, JNCC and other organisations are currently developing an Integrated Monitoring Programme related to UK waterbird monitoring. As indicated by the Pintail Action Plan (Operational Objectives 2.4.1 & 2.4.2), this aims to develop a better understanding of the factors influencing Pintail population dynamics through integrating results from separate programmes which currently collect data and information on parameters such as population sizes, distribution, productivity, mortality and dispersal.

6. Classification criteria

All sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the international population were considered under Stage 1.2, and all 17 were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further eight sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Pintail identified as an important component of a non-breeding waterbird assemblage.

The sites are distributed throughout the full range of the population in the UK, from the Cromarty Firth in north-east Scotland, to Strangford Lough in Northern Ireland and sites on the south and east coasts of England. All these sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds. There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Boyd in Atkinson-Willes 1963).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives adequate coverage of the population and range of non-breeding Pintail in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Pintail SPA suite

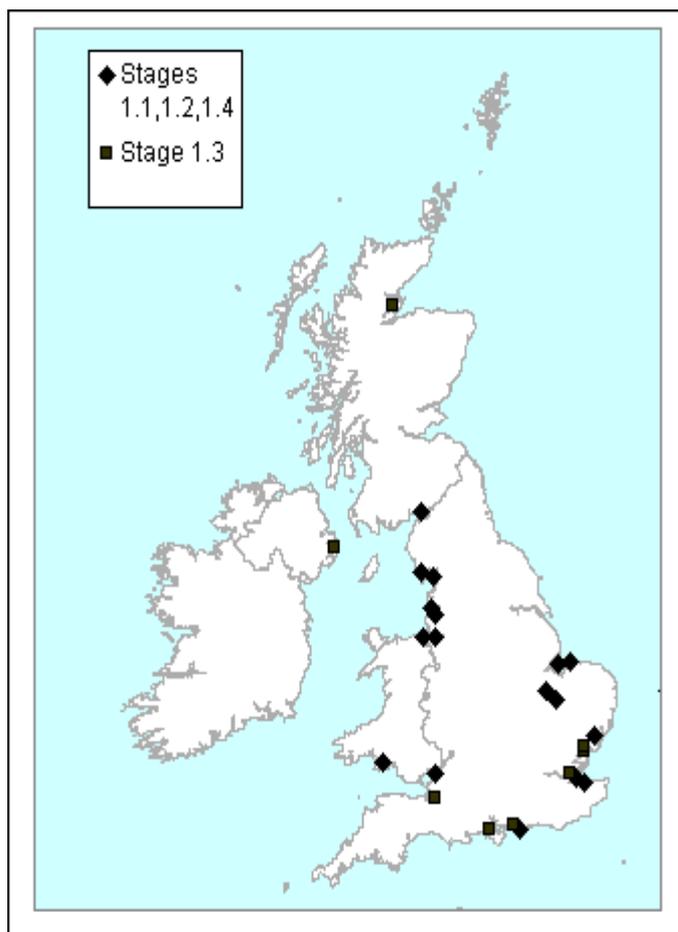


Table 6.32.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Abberton Reservoir	323	0.5	1.2	1.3
Blackwater Estuary	358	0.6	1.3	1.3
Burry Inlet	1,772	3.0	6.4	1.2
Chichester and Langstone Harbours	330	0.6	1.2	1.3
Cromarty Firth	266	0.4	1.0	1.3
Duddon Estuary	1,636	2.7	5.9	1.2
Martin Mere	978	1.6	3.5	1.2
Medway Estuary and Marshes	697	1.2	2.5	1.2
Mersey Estuary	2,744	4.6	9.9	1.2
Morecambe Bay	2,804	4.7	10.1	1.2
Nene Washes	1,435	2.4	5.2	1.2
North Norfolk Coast	1,139	1.9	4.1	1.2
Ouse Washes	1,755	2.9	6.3	1.2
Pagham Harbour	628	1.1	2.3	1.2
Ribble and Alt Estuaries (Phase 2)	3,333	5.6	12.0	1.2

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Severn Estuary	599	1.0	2.2	1.2
Solent and Southampton Water	282	0.5	1.0	1.3
Somerset Levels and Moors	322	0.5	1.2	1.3
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	878	1.5	3.2	1.2
Strangford Lough	209	0.4	3.5 (Ire)	1.3
Thames Estuary and Marshes	282	0.5	1.0	1.3
The Dee Estuary	6,498	10.8	23.2	1.2
The Swale	966	1.6	3.5	1.2
The Wash	923	1.5	3.3	1.2
Upper Solway Flats and Marshes	2,253	3.8	8.1	1.2

TOTALS	19,021 (in January)	31.7%	67.4% 2.4% (Ire)
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