

A6.34 Pochard *Aythya ferina* (non-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 SPEC 4 Favourable conservation status (secure) but 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	43,700	440	8,645 (20% of GB total)
Ireland	40,000	400	23,845 (60% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	350,000	3,500	32,489 (9% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Kirby 1995a

Ireland population source: Pollitt et al. 2000

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The monotypic Pochard is widespread over most of temperate Europe and Asia, breeding from Iceland eastwards through central Asia to south-east Russia (Scott & Rose 1996; del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). It is resident in western and southern Europe, but northern populations are highly migratory, wintering southwards to west and east Africa (Scott & Rose 1996), with the main wintering areas in north-west Europe, the eastern Mediterranean, the Black and Caspian Seas, and north Africa (Fox & Stawarczyk 1997). The north-west European wintering population originates from as far east as 120°E (Scott & Rose 1996). Counts in winter in various parts of the species' range suggest a global population of *c.* 2,000,000 individuals (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

Pochard breeding in the UK are resident, but additional numbers in winter come from Scandinavia, northern Germany, Poland, the Baltic States and Russia east to 70°E (Fox & Stawarczyk 1997; Scott & Rose 1996). They are widespread in the UK in winter, often

forming large flocks on lakes, reservoirs, brackish coastal lagoons, tidal estuaries and inshore coastal waters (Scott & Rose 1996).

Principal wintering sites are widely scattered throughout the UK, though Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland, with over 7% of the north-west European population, holds the most significant numbers. The Ouse Washes, in eastern England is the only other UK site to support internationally important numbers (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). Pochard reach their UK wintering quarters by November but ringing recoveries indicate that some subsequently move to sites further south during the winter.

Pochard prefer waterbodies less than 3 m deep, diving to the bottom to forage (Owen *et al.* 1986). They feed on seeds, roots, grasses, sedges and aquatic plants, as well as invertebrates, amphibians and small fish (Olney 1968; Phillips 1991).

4. Population structure and trends

Discrete populations of Pochard are not generally identifiable, due to considerable overlap in non-breeding distribution, and no subspecies are recognised (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). Five biogeographic populations are recognised (Rose & Scott 1997), of which two occur in Europe: north-west Europe (350,000 individuals), and central Europe/Black Sea/Mediterranean (1,000,000). There is, however, some exchange of birds between central and north-west Europe (Scott & Rose 1996; Rose & Scott 1997). Those wintering in Britain form part of the north-west European population and comprise 12.5% of the biogeographic population (Kirby 1995a).

After a long period of expansion throughout Europe which began in the 1850s (Fox & Stawarczyk 1997), the north-west European population increased sharply from the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, a trend that was echoed in the numbers wintering in the UK during this period (Kershaw 1998b). Although causes for the early range expansion are not clear, increases since the 1960s are believed to be largely due to a greater availability of suitable habitat, particularly through increased mineral extraction, reservoir construction and, in parts of eastern Europe (*e.g.* Poland), fish pond creation (Fox & Stawarczyk 1997). However, over the next two decades, the north-west European population was thought to have declined by around 30% (Scott & Rose 1996). More recent international trend analysis shows that this decline has now levelled out and reversed. Overall trends in the north-west European population have been stable over 23-year (1974–1996) and ten-year (1987–1996) periods (Delany *et al.* 1999). In the UK numbers decreased slightly in the 1970s, but have been generally stable since, with some fluctuations (Kershaw 1998). In comparison, numbers have fluctuated markedly in the Republic of Ireland through the 1990s (Colhoun 2000).

Changes in non-breeding numbers within the UK have neither been consistent between regions nor between habitats (Kershaw 1998). South-east Scotland has shown a significant decline since the late 1970s, whilst in all other regions of importance for Pochard, numbers have generally increased. Closures of sewage outfalls in the Forth of Firth, which reduced food sources (Campbell 1984), are thought to have contributed to the decline in numbers in south-east Scotland during the 1970s (Fox & Salmon 1988). Since 1960, numbers have increased on mineral workings, rivers, freshwater marshes, estuarine and coastal sites, while those on natural waters and reservoirs have fluctuated in line with national trends.

Ringing recoveries indicate that Pochard show low fidelity to UK sites between winters. Co-ordinated counts in the Republic of Ireland also indicate interchange of birds between sites possibly because of between-year changes in food availability and levels of disturbance (Colhoun 2000). Furthermore, the species makes large-scale cold-weather movements

(Ridgill & Fox 1990); there is evidence that large numbers move to and from the UK and the continent during hard weather (Fox & Salmon 1988).

5. Protection measures for population in the UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Pochard supports, on average, 32,489 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 20% of the British population, about 60% of the all-Ireland population, and about 9% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 12 sites where Pochard has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.34.1).

6. Classification criteria

Both sites in the UK supporting more than 1% of the international population were considered under Stage 1.2, and both (Lough Neagh and Lough Beg; and Ouse Washes) were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further ten sites were considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Pochard identified as an important component of the non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites are distributed through most of the range of the population in the UK, from Loch Leven in eastern Scotland, to Lough Neagh and Lough Beg 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 Pochard in the UK, and the species is otherwise widely dispersed, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Pochard SPA suite

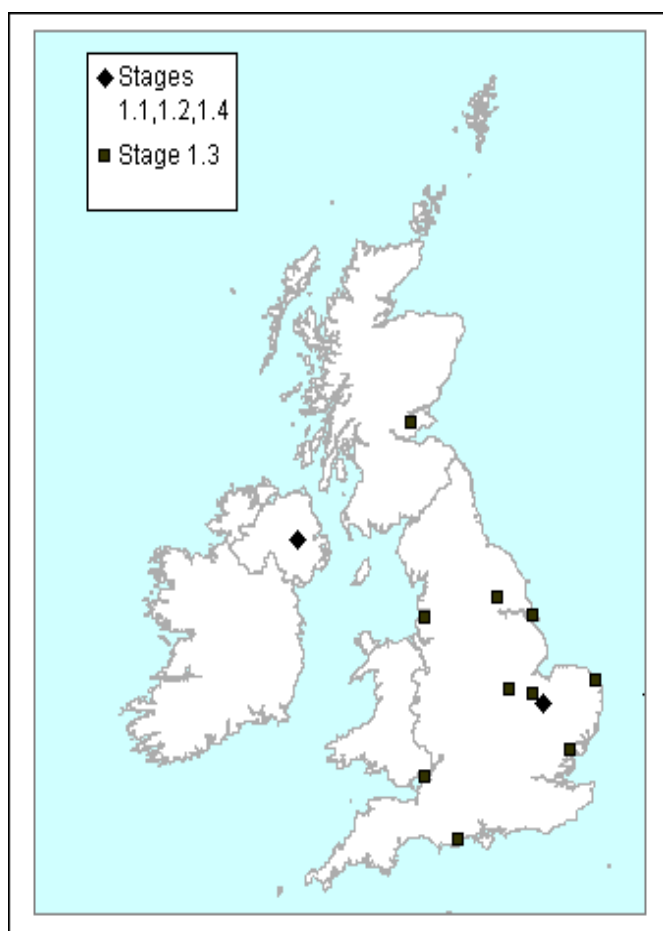


Table 6.34.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Abberton Reservoir	1,901	0.5	4.4	1.3
Broadland	1,230	0.4	2.8	1.3
Humber Flats, Marshes and Coast (Phase 1)	1,009	0.3	2.3	1.3
Loch Leven	1,050	0.3	2.4	1.3
Lough Neagh and Lough Beg	26,341	7.5	65.9 (Ire)	1.2
Lower Derwent Valley	1,628	0.5	3.7	1.3
Martin Mere	516	0.2	1.2	1.3
Nene Washes	1,079	0.3	2.5	1.3
Ouse Washes	3,590	1.0	8.2	1.2
Poole Harbour	691	0.2	1.6	1.3
Rutland Water	1,112	0.3	2.5	1.3
Severn Estuary	1,622	0.5	3.7	1.3
TOTALS	32,489 (in January)	9.3%	19.6% 59.6% (Ire)	