

A6.44 Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status	Conservation status
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Species of European Conservation Concern
		General Protection Schedule 1(1) Schedule 4	SPEC 4 Favourable conservation status (secure) but concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance
		General Protection	Table 4
Wintering		EC Birds Directive 1979	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book
		Annex I Migratory	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	16	1	2 (c. 13% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	41,200	412	2 (<0.1% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The global breeding distribution of the monotypic Honey Buzzard is largely restricted to the Western Palearctic. The species breeds from Iberia in the west, discontinuously across boreal and temperate Europe into central Asia. It is a long-distance migrant and birds move south and east from the breeding areas to overwinter in west, central and southern Africa (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

The Honey Buzzard breeds in most European countries, although it generally has a southerly distribution, being absent from northern Fennoscandia. Across much of its range, its distribution is rather patchy.

In the UK, the Honey Buzzard is one of the most poorly known of raptors (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000; Roberts *et al.* 1999). Fear of illegal persecution and egg collecting leads many birdwatchers to withhold the provision of information on breeding Honey Buzzards, and accordingly population estimates are based on informed guesses. It is nowhere abundant, but thought to be most common in southern counties of England. There are, nonetheless, frequent records from Scotland.

In the UK, Honey Buzzards occur in three broad habitat types: high-quality mixed deciduous forests in the lowlands of southern England, central hill country with mixed farmland/woodland, and upland, even-aged coniferous plantations (Roberts *et al.* 1999). These habitats are also preferred elsewhere in Europe. Beech *Fagus* sp. forests with sandy, light soils have been favoured in the New Forest, traditionally regarded as the species stronghold, largely thought to be due to the association of this habitat with an abundance of social wasps on which the species selectively feeds its young (Roberts *et al.* 1999). However, breeding performance is not adversely affected by the temporary unavailability of wasps, as amphibians, and pigeon and passerine nestlings are taken in inclement weather (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

4. Population structure and trends

The European population is estimated at 41,200–48,677 breeding pairs with a further 70,000–100,000 breeding in Russia east to the Urals (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

In Europe, the species is stable, widespread and relatively abundant, although few long-term studies are available (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). Finland and Germany hold significant populations which have experienced decline (Tucker & Heath 1994).

Historic information on Honey Buzzard breeding numbers in the UK is incomplete. The UK is at the edge of the European breeding range and the species has probably always been a rare, but scattered breeder. Honey Buzzard may have been extinct between 1900 and 1910 due to illegal killing, but has recovered to a population of about 10–30 pairs due to increased protection (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000). Its exact population size and distribution in the UK is unknown, not only because of the inconspicuous nature of the species' behaviour, but also because of a reluctance to publicise details of nest sites, given the threat from egg collectors. There has also been a previous belief that the species was highly sensitive to human disturbance (Roberts *et al.* 1999; Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Recent information (Roberts *et al.* 1999) shows that the Honey Buzzard is not unusually sensitive to disturbance at the nest. Accordingly, the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and supporting organisations co-ordinated an UK census in 2000 (RBBP 1999). It is thought that the population may be as large as 50–60 pairs (Roberts *et al.* 1999).

5. Protection measures for population in the UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Honey Buzzard supports, on average, two pairs. This amounts to about 13% of the British breeding population and less than 0.1% of the international population (the UK lies at the very edge of the range of the species in Europe). The species does not regularly occur in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite total is contained within a single site (Table 6.44.1) where Honey Buzzard has been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

The single site in the UK (New Forest), known to support more than 1% of the national breeding population of Honey Buzzard on a regular basis, was considered under Stage 1.1, and was selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. It is a multi-species SPA of European importance for a number of other breeding and non-breeding birds.

Distribution map for Honey Buzzard SPA suite

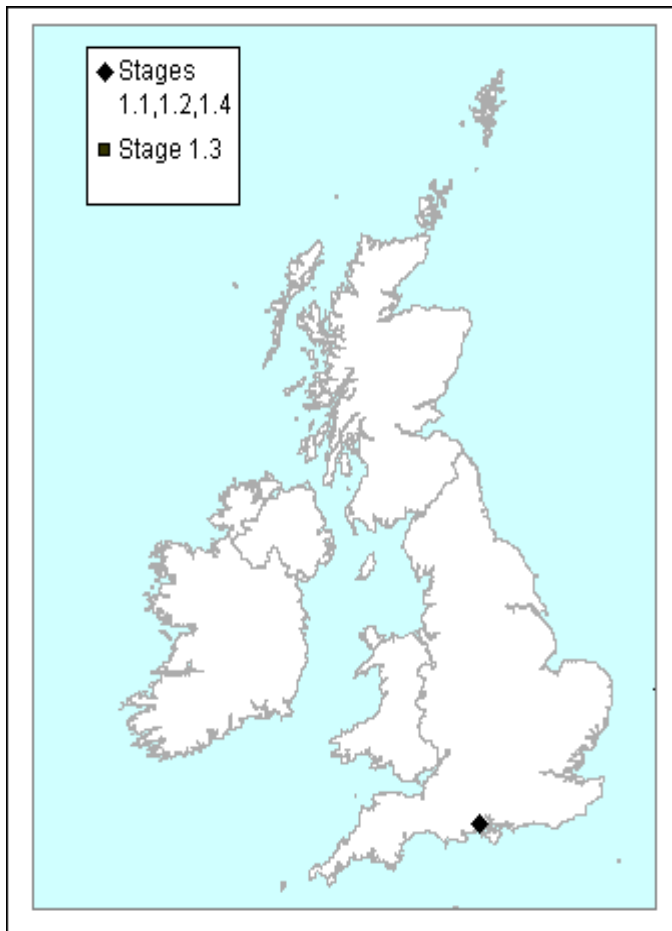


Table 6.44.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
New Forest	2	<0.1	13%	Stage 1.1
TOTALS	2	<0.1%	13%	