

A6.4b Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section A6.4a.

2. Population data

| | Population sizes (individuals) | Selection thresholds | Totals in species' SPA suite |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| GB | 9,800 | 100 | 1,383 (14% of GB total) |
| Ireland | Winter: 3,500 Passage/post-breeding: 3,060 | 50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale) | 1,296 (43% of all-Ireland winter total) 2,440 (80% of all-Ireland passage total) |
| Biogeographic population | 150,000 | 1,500 | 2,679 (2% of biogeographic population) |

GB population source: Kirby 1995a

Ireland population source: Way et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Some Great Crested Grebes move immediately after breeding to large lakes and reservoirs and certain coastal areas to moult. Few ringing data are available, but it is believed that the migration routes are on a broad front, occurring over land as well as along coasts (Cramp 1977). Some of the largest autumn (and winter) concentrations occur in The Netherlands and Switzerland (SOVON 1987; Stone *et al.* 1995; O'Donnel & Fjelds  1997), but the migration pattern has changed markedly with the increase in the European population (Adriaensen *et al.* 1993). In the UK, moulting Great Crested Grebes are widely distributed on inland and sheltered coastal sites, particularly in England and Wales.

In winter, Great Crested Grebes show a marked shift from inland waters to the sea, although on the continent large numbers remain on inland lakes, *e.g.* in Switzerland (Cramp 1977). In normal winters, Britain and Ireland receive birds from continental western Europe. During severe winter weather, birds move through Britain in search of milder conditions either to the west in Ireland, or southwards to France (Lack 1986).

Within the UK, non-breeding Great Crested Grebes show a broadly similar distribution to that in the breeding season, although birds are more numerous and more widely spread (Lack 1986). There is some shift to coastal areas, including shallow inshore waters and estuaries, particularly on sheltered areas of the east coast.

4. Population structure and trends

The breeding population of Great Crested Grebe in the UK is increasing. Consequently, winter numbers are also rising, although these can be significantly reduced as a result of high mortality in severe winters. Maximum counts in Britain have declined fairly steadily from a

peak of 9,580 in 1992–93, but annual indices suggest that numbers have been very stable over this period, at around a third higher than during the 1980s (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). As with the breeding population, this increase is largely attributed to increases in the availability of suitable habitat.

In the post-breeding moult period, Loughs Neagh and Beg in Northern Ireland are of particular importance, holding an average of 2,440 Great Crested Grebes. This amounts to a large proportion of the all-Ireland population in this season. Numbers of non-breeding birds at this site are slightly fewer.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Great Crested Grebe supports, on average, 2,679 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 14% of the British population, about 43% of the all-Ireland population, and about 2% of the international flyway population. The suite comprises 17 sites, distributed throughout the UK, at which Great Crested Grebe has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.4b.1).

6. Classification criteria

The single known site (Lough Neagh and Lough Beg) in the UK that regularly supports more than 1% of the international total of Great Crested Grebes in winter was considered under Stage 1.2. It was selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. A further 16 sites were identified under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3). At each of these sites, Great Crested Grebe is an important component of a wider non-breeding waterbird assemblage, and all were included within the suite. All sites within the suite are multi-species SPAs, of importance for a range of other waterbirds. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites.

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a widely spread suite of sites holding key resorts for non-breeding Great Crested Grebes in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for non-breeding Great Crested Grebe SPA suite

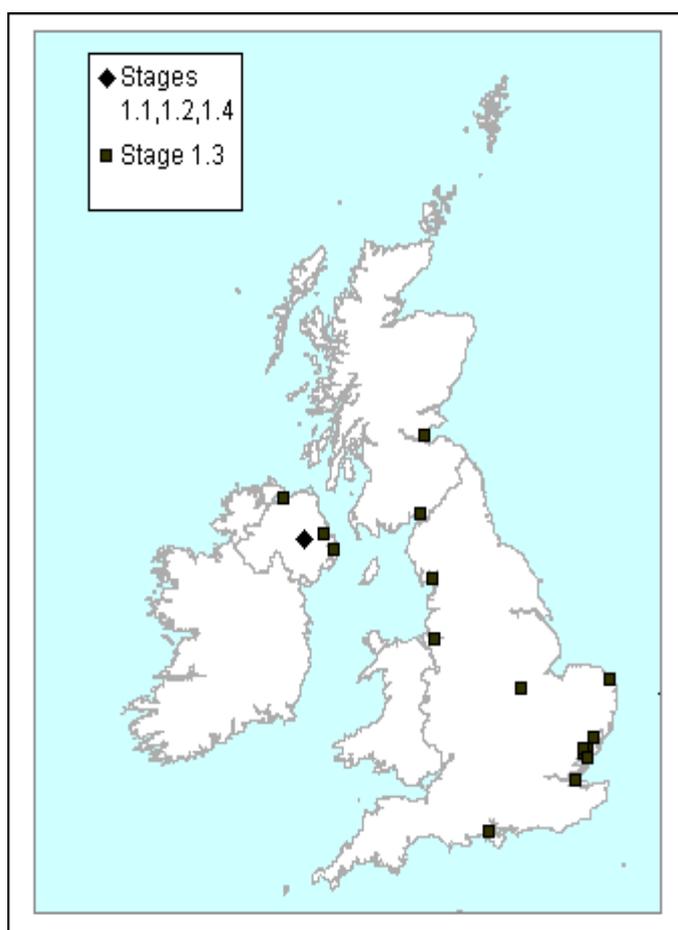


Table 6.4b.1 – SPA suite

All site totals refer to winter populations unless otherwise indicated.

| Site name | Site total | % of biogeographical population | % of national population | Selection stage |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Abberton Reservoir | 132 | 0.1 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Belfast Lough | 1,385 | 0.9 | 39.6 (Ire) | 1.3 |
| Blackwater Estuary | 277 | 0.2 | 2.8 | 1.3 |
| Broadland | 146 | 0.1 | 1.5 | 1.3 |
| Colne Estuary | 205 | 0.1 | 2.1 | 1.3 |
| Dengie | 119 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 1.3 |
| Firth of Forth | 632 | 0.4 | 6.5 | 1.3 |
| Lough Foyle | 220 | 0.2 | 6.3 (Ire) | 1.3 |
| Lough Neagh and Lough Beg (winter) | 1,821 | 1.2 | 52.0 (Ire) | 1.2 |
| <i>Lough Neagh and Lough Beg (post-breeding moult period)</i> | <i>2,440</i> | <i>1.6</i> | <i>79.7 (Ire)</i> | <i>1.2</i> |

| Site name | Site total | % of biogeographical population | % of national population | Selection stage |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|------------------------|
| Medway Estuary and Marshes | 116 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 1.3 |
| Mersey Estuary | 126 | 0.1 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Morecambe Bay | 318 | 0.2 | 3.2 | 1.3 |
| Rutland Water | 762 | 0.5 | 7.8 | 1.3 |
| Solent and Southampton Water | 113 | 0.1 | 1.2 | 1.3 |
| Stour and Orwell Estuaries | 260 | 0.2 | 2.7 | 1.3 |
| Strangford Lough | 90 | 0.1 | 2.6 (Ire) | 1.3 |
| Upper Solway Flats and Marshes | 176 | 0.1 | 1.8 | 1.3 |

| | | | |
|---------------|--------------------|------|----------------------|
| TOTALS | 2,679 (in January) | 1.8% | 13.8% 43.2% (Ire) |
|---------------|--------------------|------|----------------------|