

A6.51 Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* (breeding)

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1) Schedule 4	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 3 Unfavourable conservation status (rare) but not concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex I Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Internationally important

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	1,167	12	103 (9% of GB population)
Ireland	365	4	6 (2% of all-Ireland population)
Biogeographic population	5,663	56	109 (2% of biogeographical population)

GB population source: DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000

Ireland population source: Gibbons et al. 1993

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeijer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Peregrine has a wide global distribution, being absent as a breeder from only a few regions of the world, these being a large part of South America, the desert and equatorial regions of Africa, the Persian Gulf region, south-central Asia, New Zealand, Antarctica, Iceland and the high Arctic (Cramp & Simmons 1980; Ratcliffe 1993). Many races of Peregrine have been described, of which three occur in Europe. The nominate *F. p. peregrinus* occurs widely in the western Palearctic south to the Mediterranean and Ukraine; *F. p. calidus* occurs on Eurasian tundra east to the Lena River; whilst *F. p. brookei* occurs in the southern part of the western Palearctic east to south Crimea. At least 12 further races occur in other parts of the world (Camp & Simmons 1980).

Peregrines occur widely throughout Europe, although they are generally highly dispersed and nest at low densities. As elsewhere in the species' global range, breeding distribution is determined by the availability of suitable nest sites (usually cliffs, or other habitats to which the Peregrine has adapted locally).

In the UK, the Peregrine occurs in all areas where suitable nesting habitat can be found, together with the availability of food. Thus, while absent from much of central and eastern England, the species can be found at low densities in large parts of the remainder of the UK, particularly in coastal and upland areas. Approximately 95% of the Peregrine's potential UK breeding range is now occupied (Newton 1994), although there has also been some limited spread into a few urban areas. Where this has occurred Peregrines have locally started to nest on man-made structures.

4. Population structure and trends

The European population is estimated at 5,633–6,075 pairs. This represents approximately one-fifth of the world population (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997).

Widespread contamination by persistent toxic chemicals, particularly organochlorine pesticides, caused severe declines in the Peregrine population throughout Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ratcliffe 1993; Tucker & Heath 1994). The British population reached its lowest point in 1963 when only *c.* 360 pairs bred (Ratcliffe 1972). Subsequent withdrawal of the usage of these environmental pollutants, and greater species protection, led to a substantial recovery of the population. By 1991, the UK population had reached 1,263 breeding pairs (Crick & Ratcliffe 1995), and the national population is now at its highest known level, especially in southern Scotland, northern England and Wales and Northern Ireland. In the north and west Highlands, the Hebrides and the Northern Isles, the species remains below pre-1940 numbers. Declines in these populations, and in some other areas of Scotland, over the last ten years are probably due to illegal killing, the continued impacts of environmental pollutants, and habitat deterioration through overgrazing (Scottish Raptor Study Groups 1998; DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000).

The recovery in the Peregrine population over the last 30 years is largely attributable to the application of stringent controls on the use of organochlorine pesticides and other persistent toxic chemicals (Ratcliffe 1993).

Despite these measures, the Peregrine is still under threat in some parts of the UK, particularly as a result of conflicts with some game management and pigeon-racing interests. This can result in illegal killing (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000; Holmes *et al.* 2000). Egg collectors, and the illegal supply of wild birds to the falconry trade (RSPB 1999) are also important conservation threats.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Peregrine contains the nesting sites used by, on average, 109 pairs. This amounts to about 8.8% of the British breeding population, and 1.6% of the all-Ireland population. The suite contains about 1.9% of the international population. This total is contained within ten sites (Table 6.51.1) where Peregrine has been listed as a qualifying species.

Other measures

The species' recovery has been enhanced also by the successful implementation of protective legislation, which has ensured greater protection for breeding Peregrine. In some areas of the UK, Peregrine breeding sites are on recognised routes for rock climbers. Potential disturbance at these sites is avoided by the implementation of voluntary climbing restrictions during the Peregrine breeding season.

Several positive measures have been recommended with the aim of resolving existing conflicts and thus reduce illegal activities (DETR/JNCC Raptor Working Group 2000).

6. Classification criteria

The generally low densities and widespread distribution of Peregrines in the breeding season mean that identification of significant numbers of key sites is problematic. Where high-density sites amenable to site-based conservation occur, these have been selected. Thus, six sites throughout the UK (North Pennine Moors, South Pennine Moors, Rathlin Island, Cairngorms, Berwyn, and Elenydd-Mallaen) have been identified under Stage 1.1 as these localities each support 1% or more of the national breeding population. A further four sites (East Caithness Cliffs, Hoy, Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands, and North Caithness Cliffs) which each hold less than 1% of the national population have also been identified under Stage 1.4. Together, the ten sites comprise the UK SPA suite for Peregrine.

All the sites are of high naturalness, are multi-species sites and have a long history of occupancy by Peregrines. The selection of the four sites under stage 1.4 enhances the range coverage of sites for Peregrine through the inclusion of sites in northern Scotland as well as south-central Scotland.

Distribution map for breeding Peregrine SPA suite

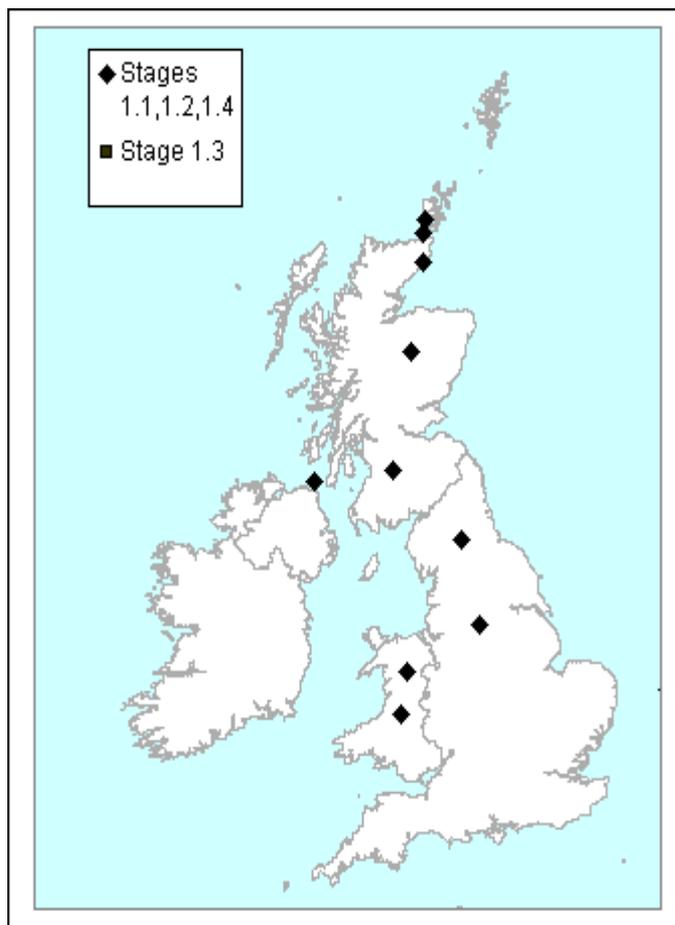


Table 6.51.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Berwyn	18	0.3	1.5	1.1
Cairngorms	12	0.2	1.0	1.1
East Caithness Cliffs	6	0.1	0.5	1.4
Elenydd-Mallaen	15	0.3	1.3	1.1
Hoy	6	0.1	0.5	1.4
Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands	9	0.2	0.8	1.4
North Caithness Cliffs	6	0.1	0.5	1.4
North Pennine Moors	15	0.3	1.3	1.1
Rathlin Island	6	0.1	1.6 (Ire)	1.1
South Pennine Moors	16	0.3	1.4	1.1
TOTALS	109	1.9%	8.8% 1.6% (Ire)	