

A6.5b Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus* (non-breeding)

1. Status in UK

See section 6.5a.

2. Population data

	Population sizes (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	400	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	31 (8% of GB total)
Ireland	30	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	5,000	50	31 (0.6% of biogeographic population)

GB and Ireland population source: Lack 1986

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

Europe's Slavonian Grebes winter inshore, on coasts and estuaries often close to breeding areas. The range includes all western European coasts from northern France to north Norway (except the eastern Baltic and Gulf of Bothnia), the northern Adriatic Sea and northern Black Sea. Some small non-breeding groups occur on inland freshwater lakes in south-east Europe (Cramp & Simmons 1977). Ringing recoveries throughout Europe indicate that birds migrate to more southerly wintering grounds (Ward & Hewitson 1999).

The UK's breeding population probably winters around the coasts of Britain and Ireland, although there is scant evidence to suggest the range of dispersal. The single recovery of a bird ringed in the Scottish Highlands and found on the west coast of Italy suggests that British birds may winter as far south as the Mediterranean (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Thom 1986; Ward & Hewitson 1999). Most of Britain's wintering birds probably occur along the south coast of England, but birds are found around the entire coast concentrating in large estuaries and sheltered sea lochs. A few birds winter on inland freshwater lakes in central and southern England (Lack 1986).

Little is known of the migration behaviour of the species, but birds departing from breeding areas from August to October may gather on inland freshwater lakes to moult prior to dispersal to coastal wintering sites in November (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Thom 1986; Summers & Mavor 1995). Slavonian Grebes use traditional wintering sites and tend to remain at these sites for long periods (Lack 1986). This might indicate rapid dispersal to coastal areas after breeding, and the use of inland passage sites may be localised to particular breeding populations (Cramp & Simmons 1977).

The distribution of passage birds is poorly understood, as is the temporal use of passage sites. However, such sites may be used by birds during autumn passage whilst they moult (Ward & Hewitson 1999). In the UK, autumn passage sites can include breeding lochs, or others close to them, used by local breeding birds (Ward & Hewitson 1999). Birds wintering in the UK from northern European breeding populations possibly remain for a time on coastal waters

after the UK breeding population has already returned to breeding sites in late March (Thom 1986; Ward & Hewitson 1999).

4. Population structure and trends

There are insufficient data to allow a good estimate of the non-breeding total population in Europe, or to gain an idea of population trends. However, the population is thought to be around 15,000 individuals (Lack 1986). Within the Northwest Europe biogeographical region, the wintering total is estimated at 5,000 individuals, and is declining (Rose & Scott 1997). About 400 birds were thought to winter in Britain and Ireland, but there are insufficient data to estimate general population trends, although numbers wintering around south-east England have been increasing since the 1960s (Lack 1986). More recent estimates suggest about 700 wintering around Britain and Ireland (Evans 2000).

Within Europe, numbers in the passage period are the same as those in the winter period (Rose & Scott 1997). The estimated passage total in the UK is 400 individuals, based on wintering numbers (Lack 1986).

Slavonian Grebes are vulnerable to changes in the quality of their inshore non-breeding habitats, and oil pollution has been shown to cause high winter mortality (Thom 1986) and may pose a threat to Slavonian Grebes. There is some evidence to suggest that birds wintering around Britain and Ireland originate from as far away as north-west Russia (Lack 1986), but may include birds mainly from Iceland, Faeroes, and northern Norway (Cramp & Simmons 1977; Ward & Hewitson 1999). Population trends in these countries together with the quality of winter habitats around western Europe, and localised climatic conditions, may have a direct influence on numbers wintering around Britain (Lack 1986).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's terrestrial SPA suite for Slavonian Grebe supports, on average, 31 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 8% of the British population and about 0.6% of the international flyway population. In an all-Ireland context, no SPAs have been selected in Northern Ireland. The terrestrial SPA suite comprises three SPAs at which Slavonian Grebe has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.5b.1).

Two sites (Firth of Forth and the Exe Estuary) are non-breeding areas whilst the remaining site (Loch Ashie) is an important moulting areas and spring gathering area prior to dispersal to breeding sites in north-east Scotland.

6. Classification criteria

The three terrestrial sites (Loch Ashie, Firth of Forth and the Exe Estuary) in the UK that regularly support more than 1% of the national total of Slavonian Grebe in the non-breeding season were considered under Stage 1.1, and both were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Both the estuarine sites within the suite are multi-species SPAs, of importance for a range of other waterbirds, although Loch Ashie has been selected solely because of its importance for Slavonian Grebes.

Distribution map for non-breeding Slavonian Grebe SPA suite

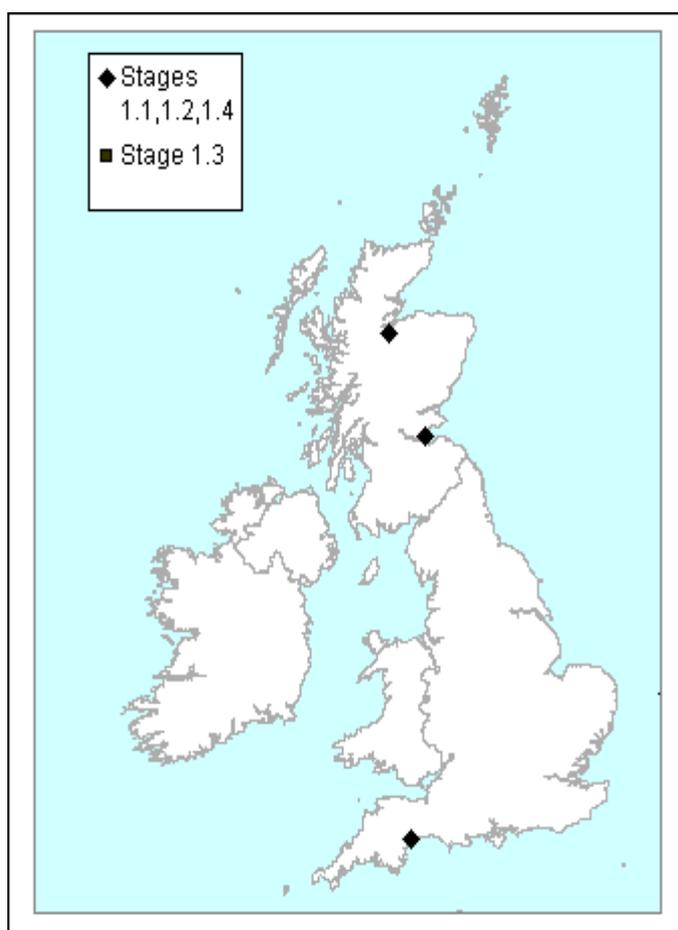


Table 6.5b.1 – SPA suite

All site totals refer to winter populations except for Loch Ashie which represents the spring passage population.

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
<i>Loch Ashie (spring gathering area)</i>	44	0.9	11	1.1
Exe Estuary	20	0.4	5.0	1.1
Firth of Forth	71	1.4	17.8	1.1

TOTALS	31 (in January)	0.6%	7.8%	
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