

A6.7 Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection	Species of European Conservation Concern	SPEC 2 Unfavourable conservation status (localised) and concentrated in Europe
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 4
Wintering		EC Birds Directive 1979	Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	

2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	220,000	2,200	219,898 (100% of GB population)
Ireland	30,000	300	No SPAs selected in Northern Ireland
Biogeographic population	265,100	2,651	219,898 (82.9% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Stone et al. 1997

Ireland population source: Lloyd et al. 1991

Biogeographic population source: Lloyd et al. 1991

3. Distribution

Manx Shearwaters breed at high densities at just a few colonies in the North Atlantic. The UK and Ireland support over 93% of the breeding population of Manx Shearwaters *P. p. puffinus*, with the remainder nesting in eastern North America (very small numbers), Iceland, Faeroes and France.

The taxonomy of the *Puffinus* shearwaters is complex and changing as taxonomic understanding improves. Although several sub-species of *Puffinus puffinus* in Europe have previously been recognised (Cramp & Simmons 1977), the current consensus is to treat the Balearic Shearwater *P. p. mauretanicus* (breeding in the Balearic islands) and the Levantine or Yelkouan Shearwater *P. p. yelkouan* (breeding elsewhere in the Mediterranean) as full species – *P. mauretanicus* and *P. yelkouan* (Bourne et al. 1988; del Hoyo et al. 1992; Hagemeyer & Blair 1997; Snow & Perrins 1998; BOURC 2000). This treatment is followed here.

Within the UK, there are two major areas supporting most of the breeding population: the small isles of the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, and the islands off south-west Wales (Lloyd et

al. 1991). Nesting Manx Shearwaters are especially susceptible to the effects of mammalian predators; nearly all of their breeding islands are predator-free, with the notable special exception of Rum (see below). Manx Shearwaters are at their colonies between March and September and during this time, they occur in inshore waters, especially near breeding colonies. Particular concentrations are found in the Irish Sea, around the Inner Hebrides, and in The Minch (Stone *et al.* 1995). At other times of the year, they are entirely pelagic, undertaking a trans-Atlantic migration to winter in tropical seas off the eastern coasts of South America.

4. Population structure and trends

The world population of *P. puffinus* is about 280,000 pairs with breeding confined entirely within the North Atlantic, though only small numbers breed in North America, Iceland and the Faeroes (18,200). Manx Shearwaters nest at very high densities in underground burrows. In the largest of the British colonies on Rum, Skomer and Skokholm, densities of occupied burrows reach 460/ha (Brooke 1990).

It is extremely difficult to judge how overall numbers of Manx Shearwaters may have changed during this century. It is reasonable to say that no major changes have occurred on the islands in south-west Wales as these have been visited regularly.

Population declines and extinction have been recorded on islands that have been invaded by rats (through accidental introduction or otherwise). For example, the species became absent or extremely rare on the Calf of Man and on Lundy following the arrival of rats.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Manx Shearwater supports an average of 219,898 pairs. This amounts to effectively all of the British breeding population and most (nearly 83%) of the international population. Within an all-Ireland context, there have been no SPAs selected in Northern Ireland. The UK total is contained within four sites (Table 6.7.1) for which Manx Shearwater has been listed as a qualifying species.

6. Classification criteria

Manx Shearwater is highly localised in the UK and all the major breeding colonies have been selected for the SPA network. Three sites (Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm; Rum; and Glannau Aberdaron and Ynys Enlli/Aberdaron Coast and Bardsey Island) were selected under Stage 1.2. Of these, Skomer and Skokholm in Wales, and Rum in Scotland are the two largest breeding colonies in the world. St Kilda was additionally selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), since Manx Shearwaters there were identified as an important component of a wider breeding seabird assemblage. Only a few small breeding colonies in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in Britain were not included in the network.

All the colonies have a very long recorded history of occupancy (Holloway 1996). There are written records of the Rum colony since at least 1716 (Evans & Flower 1967), and for Glannau Aberdaron and Ynys Enlli since at least 1901 (Aplin 1902; Norris 1953). Skomer has been reported as the largest British breeding colony since the nineteenth century (Mathew 1894).

Distribution map for Manx Shearwater SPA suite

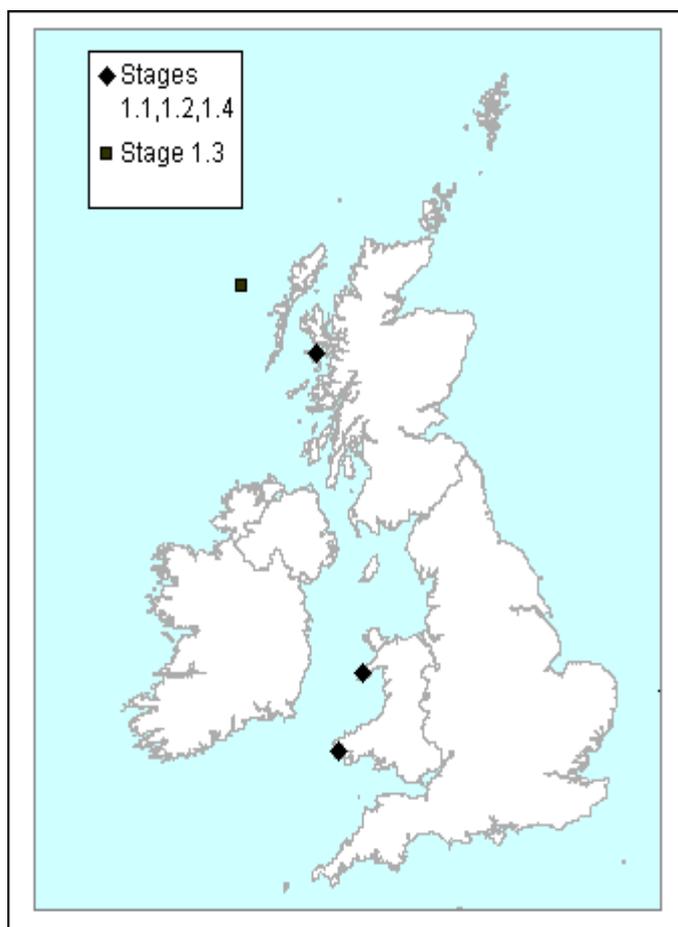


Table 6.7.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Glannau Aberdaron and Ynys Enlli/Aberdaron Coast and Bardsey Island	6,930	2.6	3.2	1.2
Rum	61,000	23.0	27.7	1.2
Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm	150,968	56.9	68.6	1.2
St Kilda	1,000	0.4	0.5	1.3
TOTALS	219,898	82.9%	c. 100%	