

## A6.75 Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (breeding)

### 1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding	✓	Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	Species of European Conservation Concern	
Migratory	✓	Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985	General Protection Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Rare

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	1,440	50 (see section 5.1.2 for rationale)	408 (28% of GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>			
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	57,600	576	408 (0.7% of the biogeographic population)

GB population source: Hancock *et al.* 1997

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

### 3. Distribution

The global breeding distribution of Greenshank is widely spread across the boreal regions of Eurasia. It extends from Scotland and Scandinavia in the west, across Fennoscandia, northern Russia to Kamchatka and the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk. There is an isolated breeding population in northern Ukraine/southern Belarus associated with extensive peatlands in that region. The species is monotypic (Cramp & Simmons 1983). In winter, Greenshank move south where they occur at low densities across much of Africa south of the Sahara, along the shores of the Middle East, across much of India and south-east Asia, and the shores and coastal regions of Australia.

Within Britain, which lies at the extreme west of the breeding range, Greenshanks breed exclusively in the north Scotland and are most common in Sutherland, west Caithness, Wester Ross, west Inverness and the Western Isles (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979; Gibbons *et al.* 1993). Their distribution is closely associated with areas of high rainfall and poorly drained acidic peat soils (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979). Breeding densities are highest where feeding habitats (pool complexes, rivers) occur in close proximity. Greenshank rarely breed in Ireland. Although the British breeding population may represent only a small proportion of the biogeographic population, Greenshanks nesting in Scotland occur at some of the highest breeding densities in Europe (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

Greenshanks are highly site faithful, returning to the same territory each year (Nethersole-Thompson 1951; Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979; Thompson & Thompson 1991).

#### **4. Population structure and trends**

Four biogeographical populations of Redshank have been described (Rose & Scott 1997). Of these, two occur in Europe. The European/West African population breeds in northern Europe (including Britain) and winters in south-west Europe, north-west Africa and West Africa east to the Chad. The population is estimated at between 100,000–1,000,000 individuals. Birds that breed further east in western Siberia belong to the south-west Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa population (between 25,000–1,000,000 individuals). These winter mainly in the Middle East and eastern and southern Africa (Rose & Scott 1997). As Greenshanks have a continuous and wide breeding distribution in Russia, the separation of the two populations is not clear-cut.

Greenshanks breed at low densities over extensive areas, whilst most also spend the winter in inland areas. This makes it difficult to estimate the population size accurately since they do not concentrate at high densities in coastal areas, as do most other waders.

The breeding population in Europe excluding Russia has recently been estimated at 57,613–83,189 (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997). There is limited information regarding changes in the numbers and distribution of Greenshank. Overall, the European breeding population has been stable in recent decades (Tucker and Heath 1994; Rose & Scott 1997; based on Smit & Piersma 1989). There have been some local decreases in parts of European Russia, but the large breeding population in Fennoscandia appears to be relatively stable. The small breeding population in Belarus is reported to be increasing (Nikiforov & Mongin 1998).

During 1988–1991, 1,100–1,600 pairs of Greenshank were estimated to breed in Britain (Gibbons *et al.* 1993). A first national survey of this species in 1995 estimated a breeding population of 1,440 pairs, with 95% confidence limits of 1,100–1,790 (Hancock *et al.* 1997). In Scotland there have been a number of recorded declines owing to changes in breeding habitat, mainly due to afforestation (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979; Snow & Perrins 1998).

In the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland, numbers of Greenshank were estimated to have fallen by 17% due to the afforestation that occurred there after 1945 (Stroud *et al.* 1987). Elsewhere, a small forest-breeding population declined and contracted in range as the breeding habitat dried out and ground vegetation deteriorated owing to successional changes (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979). In an area of north-west Sutherland, numbers declined from the early 1980s as a consequence of damage inflicted by off-road vehicles (Thompson & Thompson 1991). Overall, there is little evidence of change in the Caithness and Sutherland peatlands, with one study showing a non-significant decline of 3% per annum during the period 1979–1994 (Whitfield 1997) and another study indicating stability between 1988 and 1995 (Hancock & Avery 1998). Numbers in the Western Isles of Lewis and Harris were stable during the period 1987–1995 (Whitfield 1997).

#### **5. Protection measures for population in UK**

##### **SPA suite**

In the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Greenshank supports, on average, 408 pairs. This amounts to about 28% of the British breeding population. The suite contains about 0.7%

of the international population. Greenshanks do not regularly breed in Northern Ireland. The SPA suite total is contained within two sites (Table 6.75.1) where breeding Greenshank have been listed as a qualifying species.

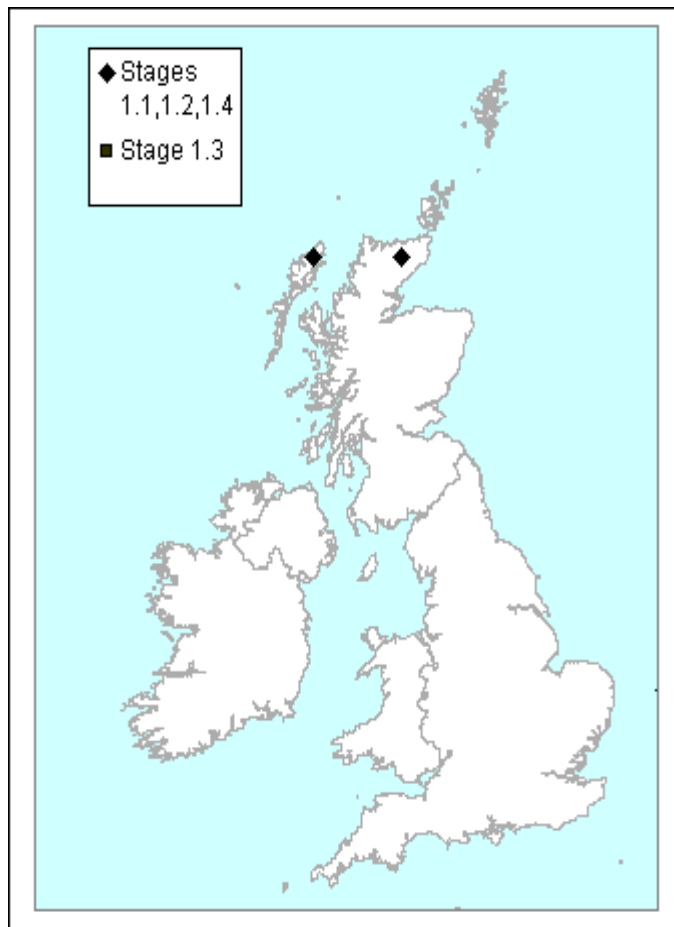
## 6. Classification criteria

No sites in the UK hold more than 1% of the international population in the breeding season. A case for considering SPA selection using Stage 1.4 was made in view of the concentration of the population on a few sites of high nature conservation value, and the role of these areas in maintaining the southern limit to the European Greenshank range. Accordingly, two sites (the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands; and the Lewis Peatlands) known to support large, relatively high density breeding populations were considered under Stage 1.4, and both were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements.

The sites are located in the core of the UK range of this species (Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979; Hancock *et al.* 1997) and both sites in the suite have a high degree of naturalness (Lindsay *et al.* 1988), and are multi-species SPAs of importance for many other breeding birds (Stroud *et al.* 1987, 1988). There is a very long recorded history of occupancy at both these sites (Harvie-Brown & Buckley 1887, 1888; Nethersole-Thompson 1951; Nethersole-Thompson & Nethersole-Thompson 1979; Holloway 1996).

Outwith the SPA suite, breeding Greenshanks have a scattered distribution in the British uplands.

### Distribution map for breeding Greenshank SPA suite



**Table 6.75.1 – SPA suite**

<b>Site name</b>	<b>Site total</b>	<b>% of biogeographical population</b>	<b>% of national population</b>	<b>Selection stage</b>
Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands	256	0.4	17.8	1.4
Lewis Peatlands	152	0.3	10.6	1.4
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>28.3%</b>	