

A6.77 Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

1. Status in UK

Biological status		Legal status		Conservation status	
Breeding		Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	General Protection	Species of European Conservation Concern	
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 (individuals)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	64,400	640	8,606 (13% of GB total)
Ireland	22,500	225	1,594 (7% of all-Ireland total)
Biogeographic population	67,000	700	10,200 (15% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Cayford & Waters 1996

All-Ireland population source: Cranswick et al. 1999

Biogeographic population source: Rose & Scott 1997

3. Distribution

The Turnstone has a circumpolar breeding distribution. Through much of its range, the species is a high-Arctic breeder, occurring in the northernmost parts of Greenland, Russia and Canada. However, in Scandinavia it breeds further south, occurring at low densities along most of the coast of Norway and the inner parts of the Baltic, from Oland northwards (Hagemeyer & Blair 1997). The species is polytypic, with two described sub-species. The nominate *A. i. interpres* breeds from Ellesmere Island in north-eastern Canada, through north and east Greenland, across the whole of northern Eurasia (including Europe) to western Alaska. The race *A. i. morinella* breeds in the north Canadian Arctic (Cramp & Simmons 1983).

In winter, Turnstones are highly migratory, moving south to overwinter around the coasts of north-west Europe, Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian and south-east Asian sub-continent and Australasia. In these areas birds are generally but sparsely distributed along extensive shorelines (Rose & Scott 1997).

The UK wintering total is a component of the Western Palearctic wintering population, which comprises 67,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997). The UK non-breeding distribution

includes the entire coastline of the UK, with concentrations on the coast of north-east England, the estuaries of north-west England, the north Kent coast, the east coast of Scotland, the Outer Hebrides, Orkney, and the east coast of Northern Ireland (Lack 1986). The preferred non-breeding habitat is shores that are rocky, stony, or covered with seaweed (Snow & Perrins 1998).

4. Population structure and trends

Six biogeographical populations of Turnstone have been described (Rose & Scott 1997). Of these, three occur in Europe. The Western Palearctic population breeds in Ellesmere Island, and north and east Greenland, and winters on the coasts of north-west Europe (including Britain and Ireland). It is currently estimated to comprise 67,000 individuals (Rose & Scott 1997). The Western and Southern African population breeds in Scandinavia and north-east Russia (roughly east to Novaya Zemlya) and winters mainly in Western Africa. The population is estimated at about 32,000 individuals. These birds pass along the coasts of north-west Europe in spring and autumn. Birds that breed further east in western Siberia belong to the South-west Asia, Eastern Africa population (between 25,000–100,000 individuals). These winter mainly in the Middle East and eastern Africa (Rose & Scott 1997).

There is generally poor monitoring information on population trends in Europe given the low-density occurrence of non-breeding Turnstones along extensive lengths of rocky coastlines (Delany *et al.* 1999).

The annual population index for non-breeding Turnstones in the UK shows a downward trend, which reached its lowest point since 1982/83 in 1997/98 (Pollitt *et al.* 2000). The index only describes trends on Wetland Bird Survey sites (which tend largely to be estuarine in nature), but a similar pattern prevails for other coastal non-breeding areas. Preliminary analyses of the 1998 Non-estuarine Waterfowl Survey suggest a national decrease of 36% (from 26,123 to 16,623) on coastal sections since 1984/85 (Cranswick *et al.* 1999). The causes of the decline are not apparent.

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

In the non-breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Turnstone supports, on average, 10,200 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 13% of the British population, about 7% of the all-Ireland population, and about 15% of the East Atlantic flyway population. The suite comprises 13 sites at which Turnstone has been listed as a qualifying species (Table 6.77.1).

6. Classification criteria

All 12 sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the international population of Turnstone were considered under Stage 1.2. All were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements (Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore, Morecambe Bay; Northumbria Coast; East Sanday Coast; Firth of Forth; Outer Ards; Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay; Stour and Orwell Estuaries; Belfast Lough; The Wash; Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast); and North Uist Machair and Islands). Strangford Lough was further considered and selected under Stage 1.3 (see section 5.3), with Turnstone identified as an important component of non-breeding waterbird assemblages at these localities.

The sites within the suite are distributed throughout the range of the population in the UK, on east and west coasts, from Sanday in the northern Orkneys, to sites in the Outer and Inner Hebrides, Northern Ireland, to sites on the west and east coasts of England. Most sites are multi-species SPAs, of importance also for a range of other waterbirds, although Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay has been selected solely for Turnstones. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at most of these sites (Prater 1981).

As the selection of sites under Stages 1.2 and 1.3 resulted in a suite which gives comprehensive coverage of the range and moderate coverage of the population of this dispersed wintering species in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for Turnstone SPA suite

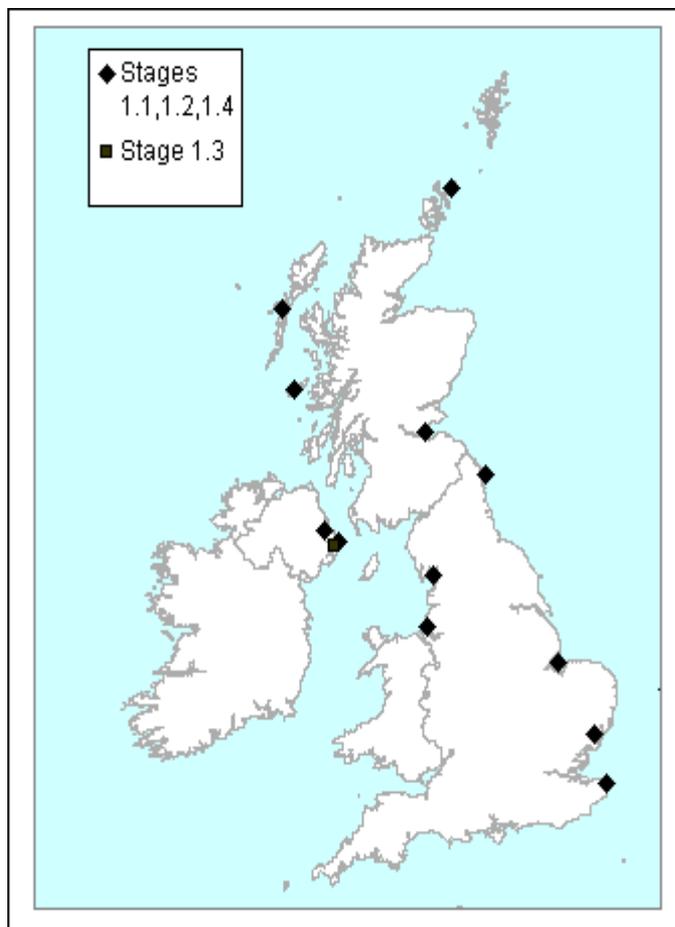


Table 6.77.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Belfast Lough	734	1.1	3.3 (Ire)	1.2
East Sanday Coast	1,400	2.1	2.2	1.2
Firth of Forth	1,286	1.9	2.0	1.2
Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore	1,138	1.6	1.8	1.2
Morecambe Bay	1,583	2.4	2.5	1.2
North Uist Machair and Islands	670	1.0	1.0	1.2
Northumbria Coast	1,456	2.2	2.3	1.2
Outer Ards	1,241	1.9	5.5 (Ire)	1.2
Stour and Orwell Estuaries	836	1.3	1.3	1.2
Strangford Lough	401	0.6	1.8 (Ire)	1.3
Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay	940	1.4	1.5	1.2
The Wash	717	1.1	1.1	1.2
Sleibhtean agus Cladach Thiriodh (Tiree Wetlands and Coast)	700	1.0	1.1	1.2

TOTALS	10,200 (in January)	14.6%	13.4% 7.1% (Ire)
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