

## A6.8 Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* (breeding)

### 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 Schedule 1(1)	(UK) Species of Conservation Importance	Table 4
Wintering	✓	EC Birds Directive 1979	Annex 1 Migratory	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Internationally important

### 2. Population data

	Population sizes (pairs)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
<b>GB</b>	85,000	850	29,356 (35% of GB population)
<b>Ireland</b>			
<b>Biogeographic population</b>	257,000	2,570	29,356 (11% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Lloyd *et al.* 1991

Biogeographic population source: Lloyd *et al.* 1991

### 3. Distribution

The global distribution of Storm Petrels is restricted to the north-east Atlantic. They nest colonially on a small number of islands — from Iceland and Norway in the north, to the Canaries in the south. They also breed in relatively small numbers in the Mediterranean. Largest breeding numbers are found in the Faeroes, Ireland and Britain (Lloyd *et al.* 1991). The species is monotypic, although there have been suggestions that those occurring in the Mediterranean may be a distinct sub-species — *H. p. melitensis* (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

In the UK, colonies are scattered along the full length of the Atlantic seaboard from the north of Shetland to the Isles of Scilly.

Storm Petrels are present at their colonies in the UK from May to September, and occur in surrounding waters. Particular concentrations are found in the South-west Approaches, off the Inner and Outer Hebrides, in The Minch, and in the waters around Orkney and Shetland (Stone *et al.* 1995). Outside the breeding period, they are at sea, probably mostly in the South Atlantic off the coasts of Namibia and South Africa, south to 38°S.

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

Storm Petrels nest in underground burrows, and crevices amongst scree or boulder-slopes. In many UK locations, they also nest in the base of stone walls or in the walls of ‘brochs’ (ancient dry-stone fortifications). The nature of the breeding habitats poses great difficulties when surveying the species; hence very little is known about its population size. All population estimates, with the exception of a few islands subjected to relatively intense study, have a very low degree of accuracy; most being little more than informed guesses. The midpoint of the world population estimate is 257,000 pairs, but numbers may be as high as 380,000 pairs (Lloyd *et al.* 1991).

Owing to study difficulties, it is extremely difficult to judge how overall numbers of Storm Petrels may have changed during this century. Population declines and extinctions have been recorded on islands that have been invaded by rats that were accidentally, or otherwise introduced. However, there are particular methodological and logistical difficulties in assessing and understanding the causes of population changes of this widely-dispersed species given its breeding habitat in difficult terrain on remote islands.

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

##### **SPA suite**

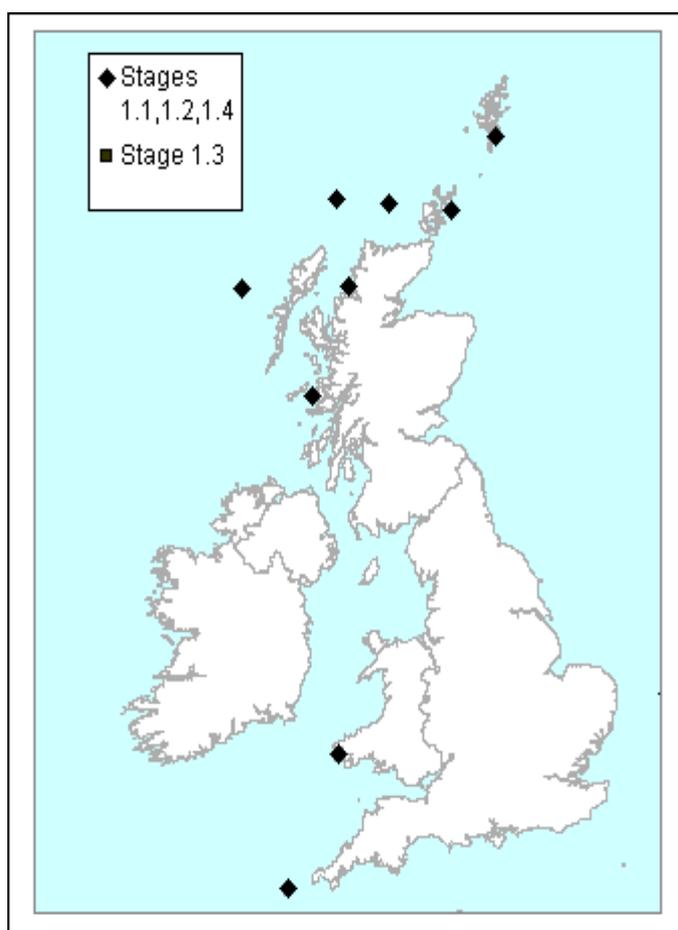
In the breeding season, the UK’s SPA suite for Storm Petrels supports an average of 29,356 pairs. This amounts to 34.5% of the British breeding population and over 11% of the international population. The species does not breed in Northern Ireland. This total is contained within nine sites (Table 6.8.1) for which Storm Petrel has been listed as a qualifying species.

#### **6. Classification criteria**

All sites in the UK that were known to support more than 1% of the national breeding population of Storm Petrel were considered under Stage 1.1, and all these sites were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. The sites selected are spread throughout the British range of the species, from the Isles of Scilly in the south, to Shetland in the north, and including the remote outlying islands of St Kilda, North Rona and Sula Sgeir, and Sule Skerry and Sule Stack. Given that the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives comprehensive coverage of the Storm Petrel population and range in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Many of the SPAs for this species have a very long recorded history of occupancy (Holloway 1996). On the Isles of Scilly, Storm Petrels were known to be breeding in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Holloway 1996), whilst the Treshnish Islands have been occupied since at least 1865 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). They have been recorded at Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm since at least 1894 (Mathew 1894), at Priest Island since the 1930s (Darling 1940), on North Rona and Sula Sgeir since 1885 (Harvie-Brown reported in Benn *et al.* 1989), and on the St Kilda archipelago since at least 1697 (Baxter & Rintoul 1953). Most of these sites are multi-species SPAs, important for a range of other seabirds, although Priest Island has been selected solely for this species.

### Distribution map for Storm Petrel SPA suite



**Table 6.8.1 – SPA suite**

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical population	% of national population	Selection stage
Auskerry	3,600	1.4	4.2	1.1
Isles of Scilly	5,406	2.1	6.4	1.1
Mousa	6,760	2.6	8.0	1.1
North Rona and Sula Sgeir	1,000	0.4	1.2	1.1
Priest Island (Summer Isles)	2,200	0.9	2.6	1.1
Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm	3,500	1.4	4.1	1.1
St Kilda	850	0.3	1.0	1.1
Sule Skerry and Sule Stack	1,000	0.4	1.2	1.1
Treshnish Isles	5,040	2.0	5.9	1.1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>29,356</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	