

A6.97 Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

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 (declining) 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 I	All-Ireland Vertebrate Red Data Book	Endangered

2. Population data

	Population sizes (churring males)	Selection thresholds	Totals in species' SPA suite
GB	3,400	34	1,785 (53% of GB population)
Ireland			
Biogeographic population	224,000	2,240	1,785 (0.8% of biogeographic population)

GB population source: Morris et al. 1994

Biogeographic population source: Hagemeyer & Blair 1997

3. Distribution

The Nightjar's global distribution lies in the Palearctic where it breeds from North Africa and western Europe, widely across temperate regions of Eurasia as far as central Asia and western China (to c. 112°E). It is polytypic with six sub-species described, two of which occur in Europe. The nominate race, *C. e. europaeus* has a northern distribution in central and northern Europe across to northern Asia, whilst *C. e. meridionalis* occurs in southern Europe, North Africa and Asia Minor (Cramp 1985).

Nightjars are highly migratory and birds leave temperate breeding areas to overwinter in Africa, where they are widely distributed south of the Sahara.

Over half of the species' global breeding range lies in Europe, where it occurs in most countries, being absent only from Iceland and northern parts of Scandinavia. In the UK, Ireland and central Europe its distribution tends to be sporadic, reflecting the scattered availability of good breeding habitats (Cramp 1985; Hagemeyer & Blair 1997).

Nightjars breeding in the UK are concentrated in southern and south-eastern England and East Anglia, with much smaller numbers and lower densities occurring in Wales, the Midlands,

north-east England and south-west Scotland. There may be less than 30 pairs throughout the whole of Ireland (Gibbons *et al.* 1993).

Breeding habitats include heathland, often with scattered pine or birch, woodland edges and clearings, young forestry plantations and, particularly in south-east England, coppiced woodland. Forestry plantations are used up to 15–20 years after planting (Bowden & Green 1994). In clear-felled areas of Thetford Forest, nests have been found in a variety of habitats, including extensive, non-vegetated areas and sparse bracken (Burgess *et al.* 1989). Birds forage over a variety of habitats including deciduous or mixed woods, orchards, gardens, riparian habitats and freshwater wetlands, heathland and young plantations (Bowden & Green 1994; Alexander & Cresswell 1990).

4. Population structure and trends

The European population of Nightjar is estimated at between 223,921 and 264,419 pairs (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). The species is declining in both numbers and range, with almost half of national populations having declined by more than 20% since 1970.

The Nightjar has been in decline through much of the UK since about 1930 and more markedly between 1953–1973 (Parslow 1973). It is now absent as a breeding bird from large areas of its former range, including much of Scotland, north-east England, the Midlands, Central Wales and Ireland (Parslow 1973; Holloway 1996). There are currently estimated to be about 3,400 churring males in Britain (Morris *et al.* 1994).

The decline in the UK reflects similar trends elsewhere in Europe and is largely attributed to the loss, fragmentation and degradation of heathland combined with the decline of invertebrate prey as a result of increased pesticide use (Tucker & Heath 1994). An increase in numbers of males in the UK between the national surveys of 1981 (Gribble 1983) and 1992 (Morris *et al.* 1994) was accompanied by a reduction in range. This may be explained by a shift in habitats occupied from traditional heathland sites towards forestry (possibly a reflection of changing availability and suitability). In particular, much suitable habitat became available in commercial restocks and clear-felled areas following the storms of 1987 and 1990/91 in southern and eastern England (Morris *et al.* 1994).

5. Protection measures for population in UK

SPA suite

During the breeding season, the UK's SPA suite for Nightjar supports, on average about 1,785 churring males. This amounts to about 53% of the British breeding population. Nightjars do not regularly breed in Northern Ireland. The suite contains about 0.8% of the international population (Britain lies on the edge of the species' range and numbers in the UK are relatively small compared to those elsewhere in Europe). The SPA suite contains ten sites (Table 6.97.1) where Nightjar has been listed as a qualifying species.

The lowland heathlands in the SPA suite are currently benefiting from management work funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund in partnership with English Nature, RSPB, local authorities and wildlife trusts. Sympathetic management of heathland SSSIs, including the removal of conifers, and bracken control, is also encouraged by English Nature under its Wildlife Enhancement Scheme.

Other Measures

A Biodiversity Action Plan has been published for this species (Biodiversity Steering Group 1998) and is being implemented as part of the UK's national response to the Biodiversity Convention.

6. Classification criteria

All sites in the UK that support more than 1% of the national breeding population of Nightjars were considered under Stage 1.1, and all were selected after consideration of Stage 2 judgements. Most are multi-species SPAs, although Thorne and Hatfield Moors has been selected solely for Nightjars. The sites are concentrated in southern England and East Anglia reflecting the distribution of Nightjars in Britain. There is a long recorded history of occupancy at many of these sites.

Given that the selection of sites under Stage 1.1 resulted in a suite which gives adequate coverage of Nightjar population and range in the UK, it was not considered necessary to select additional sites using Stage 1.4.

Distribution map for breeding Nightjar SPA suite

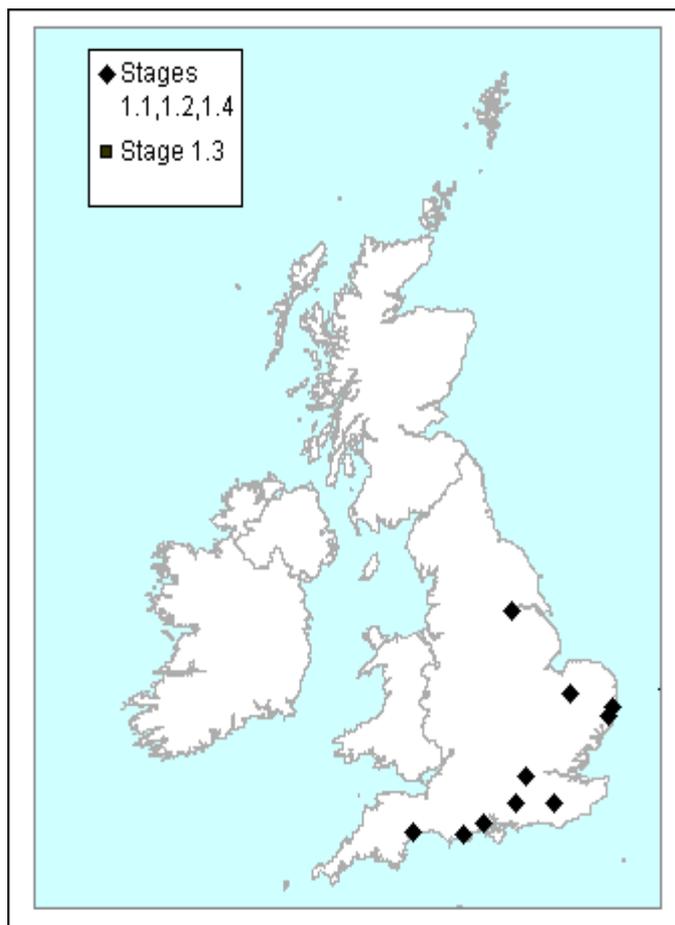


Table 6.97.1 – SPA suite

Site name	Site total	% of biogeographical populations	% of national population	Selection stage
Ashdown Forest	35	<0.1	1.0	1.1
Breckland	415	0.2	12.2	1.1
Dorset Heathlands	386	0.2	11.4	1.1
East Devon Heaths	83	<0.1	2.4	1.1
Minsmere - Walberswick	24	<0.1	0.7	1.1
New Forest	300	0.1	8.8	1.1
Sandlings	109	<0.1	3.2	1.1
Thames Basin Heaths	264	0.1	7.8	1.1
Thorne and Hatfield Moors	66	<0.1	1.9	1.1
Wealden Heaths	103	<0.1	3.0	1.1
TOTALS	1,785	0.8%	52.5%	