

# Black-throated diver: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations

The UK government has committed to identifying a network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in the marine environment by 2015. Natural England is responsible for recommending potential SPAs in English waters to Defra for classification. This and other related information notes have been written to provide further information to coastal and marine stakeholders about the bird species we are seeking to protect through marine SPAs. For more information about the process for establishing marine SPAs see TIN120 *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*.

## Background

The Birds Directive (EC Directive on the conservation of wild birds (2009/147/EC)) requires member states to identify SPAs for:

- rare or vulnerable bird species (as listed in Annex 1 of the Directive); and
- regularly occurring migratory bird species.

The black-throated diver, *Gavia arctica*, is listed under Annex 1 of the Directive. Also known as the Arctic Loon (in the US), it is between 58 and 73 cm long with a wingspan of 110-130 cm<sup>1</sup>.

## Conservation status

- SPEC3 status (unfavourable conservation status in Europe)<sup>2</sup>;
- Listed in Annex 1 of EU Birds Directive (rare and vulnerable species); and
- UK amber-listed bird of conservation concern<sup>3</sup>.



Black-throated diver by Ian Fisher

## Distribution and population

The black-throated diver has a northerly breeding distribution, breeding on open, deep lakes from north-west Scotland to Siberia and West Alaska.

Birds winter in coastal waters, including in the North Sea and the Northern Atlantic.

In the UK black-throated divers breed on lochs in north and west Scotland, where inshore waters, including those of the Moray Firth, support notable numbers in the water.

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In England, this species is only present as a winter visitor, largely in inshore waters, with few further offshore or inland<sup>4</sup>. The wintering population is concentrated in south-west England, particularly Cornwall<sup>5</sup>.

There are no recent estimates for the English wintering population. An estimated 560 individuals are present in UK waters during the winter<sup>4</sup> with 217 breeding pairs in Scotland (2006)<sup>5</sup>. This species does not breed in England.

### Migration/movements

Breeding black-throated divers migrate to saltwater habitats from August, returning to their breeding sites from April<sup>1</sup>. Birds are also seen in small numbers on eastward passage through the English Channel in April and May<sup>6</sup>.

### Foraging

Black-throated divers are streamlined with their feet set far back on their bodies, enabling pursuit diving from the sea surface using their feet for underwater propulsion. They occasionally use their wings underwater as well.

They feed in sheltered coastal waters in winter. Recorded dive depths are between 3 – 6 m, with submergence time of up to 2 minutes (average 45 seconds)<sup>1</sup>. They primarily eat fish and also crustaceans.

### References

<sup>1</sup> The Birds of the Western Palearctic (Snow and Perrins, 1998)

<sup>2</sup> Birds in the European Union: a status assessment (BirdLife International, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Birds of Conservation Concern 3: the population status of birds in the United Kingdom,

Channel Islands and the Isle of Man (Eaton *et al*, British Birds Vol 102, 296-341)

<sup>4</sup> Overwintering Population Estimates of British Waterbirds (Musgrove *et al*, British Birds, Vol 104, 364-397)

<sup>5</sup> Rare Breeding Birds in the UK 2009 (Holling *et al*, British Birds, Vol 104, 485-537)

<sup>6</sup> Birds in England (Brown and Grice, 2005)

### Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing Marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN129: *Proposals for a Special Protection Area between Falmouth Bay & St Austell*

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk).

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