

# Slavonian grebe: 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 SPAs in English waters to Defra for classification. This and other related information notes have been prepared and will be available at meetings and online so that anyone who might be interested in why the SPA is being considered for classification can find out more about the birds that may be protected. 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 Slavonian grebe, *Podiceps auritus*, is listed under Annex I of the Directive. Also known as the horned grebe, it is between 31 and 38 cm long with a wingspan of 46-55 cm<sup>1</sup>.

## Conservation status

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

## Distribution and population

Slavonian grebes have a broad global distribution, and are found across northern parts of Europe, America and Asia. The breeding range is largely within the subarctic zone of North America, Fennoscandia and Russia,

where birds breed on small, shallow, fresh<sup>3</sup>, brackish or slightly alkaline<sup>4</sup> waters.



Slavonian grebe © Pete Walkden Photography

A small number of breeding birds (30 pairs<sup>5</sup>) are also present all year round in northern Scotland.

Slavonian grebes are amongst the most marine of the grebe species outside the breeding season, when they will be found in coastal waters, as well as lakes or reservoirs.

Winter distribution shifts south, including into UK waters. An estimated 1,100 birds are present in the UK over winter<sup>5</sup>. Birds can be found all around the UK coast,

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concentrating in large estuaries and sheltered sea lochs particularly in Scotland, notably at the Inner Firth of Clyde and around Shetland and Orkney<sup>6, 7</sup>.

In England, the main concentrations are found in waters around southern and south eastern counties<sup>8, 9</sup>. The grebes prefer shallower waters and generally occur over sandy sediments<sup>10, 11</sup>.

### Migration/movements

Little is known of the precise migration behaviour and routes of Slavonian grebes<sup>12</sup>. However, the main arrival of wintering birds from further north into English waters takes place between September and November. Numbers peak between December and mid-February and then decline as birds return northwards back to their breeding grounds<sup>9</sup>. It is perhaps most likely that birds wintering in England are from the breeding population in Finland, the Baltic and further east<sup>9, 13</sup>.

### Foraging

Slavonian grebes are streamlined with feet set far back on the body, enabling them to pursue dive from the sea surface using feet for propulsion. They occasionally use their wings underwater as well. They can dabble for food items and can dive for prey in marine waters up to 20 m depth<sup>13</sup>. They primarily catch fish, insects (such as mayflies or damselflies) crustaceans, molluscs and marine worms<sup>3, 4</sup>, with fish and crustaceans being more important components of the diet during winter when the species is at sea<sup>3</sup>. In one study in the Pomeranian Bight, their diet consisted mainly of demersal gobies<sup>11</sup>.

### References

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

<sup>2</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>3</sup> Handbook of the Birds of the World, Vol. 1: Ostrich to Ducks (del Hoyo *et al*, 1992)

<sup>4</sup> The grebes. Oxford University Press (Fjeldså, J. 2004)

<sup>5</sup> Population estimates of Birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. British Birds (Musgrove *et al*, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Waterbirds in the UK 2010/11: The Wetland Bird Survey (Holt *et al*, 2012)

<sup>7</sup> Changes in the wintering population and distribution of Slavonian Grebes in Shetland. British Birds (Harvey & Heubeck 2012)

<sup>8</sup> The Atlas of Wintering Birds in Britain and Ireland (Lack *et al*, 1986)

<sup>9</sup> Birds in England (Brown and Grice 2005)

<sup>10</sup> Birds and wave & tidal stream energy: an ecological review. RSPB Research Report No. 42 (McCluskie *et al*, 2012)

<sup>11</sup> Habitat selection and diet of Slavonian grebes in the southern Baltic Sea (Sonntag *et al*, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> The Migration Atlas: Movements of the Birds in Britain and Ireland (Wernham *et al*, 2002)

<sup>13</sup> Profiles of seabirds and waterbirds of the German North and Baltic Seas (Mendel *et al*, 2008)

### 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; and*
- 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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