

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Breckland

Unitary Authority/County: Norfolk, Suffolk

Component SSSI: Breckland SPA encompasses all or parts of: Barnham Heath Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI); Barnhamcross Common SSSI; Berner's Heath, Icklingham SSSI; Breckland Farmland SSSI; Breckland Forest SSSI; Bridgham and Brettenham Heaths SSSI; Cavenham-Icklingham Heaths SSSI; Cranberry Rough, Hockham SSSI; Cranwich Camp SSSI; Deadman's Grave, Icklingham SSSI; East Wretham Heath SSSI; Eriswell Low Warren SSSI; Field Barn Heaths, Hilborough SSSI; Foxhole Heath, Eriswell SSSI; Gooderstone Warren SSSI; Grimes Graves SSSI; How Hill Track SSSI; Lakenheath Warren SSSI; Little Heath, Barnham SSSI; Old Bodney Camp SSSI; Rex Graham Reserve SSSI; Stanford Training Area SSSI; Thetford Golf Course and Marsh SSSI; Thetford Heaths SSSI; Wangford Warren and Carr SSSI; Weather and Horn Heaths, Eriswell SSSI; Weeting Heath SSSI; and West Stow Heath SSSI.

Site description: The Breckland of Norfolk and Suffolk lies in the heart of East Anglia on largely sandy soils of glacial origin. In the nineteenth century the area was termed a sandy waste, with small patches of arable cultivation that were soon abandoned. The continental climate, with low rainfall and free-draining soils, has led to the development of dry heath and grassland communities. Much of Breckland has been planted with conifers throughout the twentieth century, and in part of the site, arable farming is the predominant land use.

The remnants of dry heath and grassland which have survived these recent changes support heathland breeding birds, where grazing by rabbits and sheep is sufficiently intensive to create short turf and open ground. These breeding birds have also adapted to live in forestry and arable habitats. Woodlark *Lullula arborea* and nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* breed in clear-fell and open heath areas, whilst stone curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* establish nests on open ground provided by arable cultivation in the spring, as well as on Breckland grass-heath.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 39433.66 ha.

Qualifying species: The site qualifies under **article 4.1** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of the following species listed in Annex I in any season:

Annex I species	Count and season	Period	% GB population
Stone curlew <i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	115 pairs – breeding	5 year mean (1994 – 98)	60.1% GB
Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	415 males – breeding	Count as at 1998	12.2% GB
Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	430 pairs – breeding	Count as at 1997	28.7% GB

Sources of bird count data:

- Hayman, P., Riley, G., Austin, M., & Batchelor, P. 1998. *RSPB/English Nature Breckland stone curlew protection report - 1998*. RSPB unpublished report.
- Hayman, P., Riley, G., Austin, M., & Batchelor, P. 1997. *RSPB/English Nature Breckland stone curlew protection report - 1997*. RSPB unpublished report.
- Hayman, P., Riley, G., Austin, M., & Rondel, G. 1996. *RSPB/English Nature Breckland stone curlew protection report - 1996*. RSPB unpublished report.
- Hayman, P. 1995. *RSPB Breckland stone curlew protection report - 1995*. RSPB unpublished report.
- Hayman, P. & Davies, C. 1995. *RSPB Breckland stone curlew protection report - 1994*. RSPB unpublished report.
- Morris, A., Burges, D., Fuller, R.J., Evans, A.D., & Smith, K.W. 1994. The status and distribution of nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus* in Britain in 1992. A report to the BTO. *Bird Study* **41**: 181-191.
- Wotton, S.R. & Gillings, S. 2000. The status of breeding woodlarks *Lullula arborea* in Britain in 1997. *Bird Study* **47**(2): 212-224.

Non-qualifying species of interest: The SPA regularly supports small numbers (less than 1% of the GB population) of wintering hen harrier *Circus cyaneus* and breeding goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, both of which are listed in Annex I to the Birds Directive.


Status of SPA:

Breckland was classified as a Special Protection Area on 21 September 2006.

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK9009201

Date of registration: 21 September 2006

Signed: 

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs