



## UK RUDDY DUCK ERADICATION PROGRAMME

### INFORMATION BULLETIN DETAILING PROGRESS IN THE FIRST TWO YEARS

#### **Summary**

- 3,691 ruddy ducks have been culled nationally since the Eradication Programme began in September 2005. The estimated population at the beginning of the programme was around 4,400 birds.
- 72% of the birds culled nationally have been adults and a further 27% were fledged immature birds.
- Control has been carried out on 70 different sites in 33 different counties of England, Scotland and Wales, with the focus being on those sites holding large wintering flocks and the best breeding sites nationally.

#### **Introduction**

The ruddy duck *Oxyura jamaicensis* is a North American bird introduced to the UK over 50 years ago. A small number escaped from captivity and formed a feral population which numbered around 6,000 by January 2000. Since the early 1990s ruddy ducks, almost certainly originating from the UK, have appeared in Spain where they hybridise with the native white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*. In the long-term hybridisation could lead to the extinction of the white-headed duck, a globally threatened species.

Between 1993 and 2004 the UK Government undertook extensive research to determine the most effective techniques for controlling ruddy ducks. This research confirmed that eradication of the ruddy duck from the UK was feasible, and also necessary to ensure the survival of the white-headed duck in Europe. The eradication programme began in September 2005, and is due to run until August 2010. It is financed by the EU LIFE-Nature Programme and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The Spanish Ministry of the Environment is a partner in the project. It is estimated that at the beginning of the Eradication Programme the UK population was around 4,400 birds.

#### **Progress in Europe**

The UK holds around 95% of all the ruddy ducks in Europe, and the eradication programme is therefore a key part of a wider international conservation effort. A total of 118 ruddy ducks were shot in France in 2006, the highest annual total since control in France began in 1997. This followed a review of the techniques used to control ruddy ducks in France. In Spain, a total of four ruddy ducks (two males and two females) and two ruddy duck x white-headed duck hybrids appeared in 2006, all of which were shot. In Belgium, the only known breeding pair of ruddy ducks in 2007 was also culled.

## **Progress in the UK since September 2005**

Winter shooting (September to March) has been responsible for most of the reduction in the population, with a total of 1,255 birds shot between September 2005 and March 2006 and 1,895 shot between September 2006 and March 2007. Of these, 69% were adult birds and 31% juvenile birds.

Breeding season shooting has accounted for much lower numbers but has played a critical role in preventing breeding and short-term population increases at some key sites. Between April and August 2005, a total of 230 adult birds (37% females and 63% males) and 33 unfledged young were culled. Between April and August 2007 a total of 239 adult birds (41% females and 59% males) and 39 unfledged young were culled.

## **Independent monitoring of ruddy duck numbers**

On 7th December 2006 and 18<sup>th</sup> January 2007, WWT carried out two counts on all the major ruddy duck wintering sites in the UK as well as on other sites used intermittently. A total of 62 sites and 59 sites respectively were counted, covering sites where shooting of ruddy ducks has occurred and also those where it hasn't. The total count was 1,538 birds in December 2006 and 1,239 in January 2007. These figures compare to 3,077 ruddy ducks counted during a less extensive survey in January 2006.

Direct comparisons between 46 key sites counted in both January 2006 and December 2006 showed a reduction of 56% in the eleven months to December 2006. Similar comparisons for 43 sites counted in both January 2006 and January 2007 showed a 59% reduction in the year to January 2007. Although the reductions were greatest on those sites where control has been carried out, there were also signs of important reductions (43% on average) on sites where no shooting took place during the year. It should be noted that since the January 2007 count another 924 adult or fledged juvenile birds have been culled, although some additional young birds will have been added to the population during the 2007 breeding season.

Further general information on the project can be found at [www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/non-native/pdf/ruddy-duck.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/non-native/pdf/ruddy-duck.pdf).

