



## **UK RUDDY DUCK ERADICATION PROGRAMME PROJECT BULLETIN, APRIL 2009 TO JULY 2010**

### **Summary**

- The UK Ruddy Duck population continues to fall, from an estimated 4,400 at the start of the eradication programme to around 200 adults by July 2010.
- The eradication programme is co-funded by the EU LIFE-Nature Unit and Defra, who have agreed to extend it to the end of March 2011. This is being done within the original budget and reflects savings made earlier in the project.
- Only two Ruddy Ducks have been recorded in Spain since January 2009.

### **Background**

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.

Following several years of research into the most effective control methods, the eradication programme began in September 2005. It is financed by the EU LIFE-Nature Programme and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Although it had been due to end in August 2010, this has now been extended to 31 March 2011. The project will still run within its original budget, and the extension has been made possible as a result of savings earlier in the project, and changes in the exchange rate against the Euro. It was estimated at the beginning of the Eradication Programme that the UK population was around 4,400 birds.

### **Progress in the UK since April 2009**

A total of 738 adult and immature Ruddy Ducks were shot on 37 sites between 1 April 2009 and 30 June 2010. As the population has fallen the birds are to be found on fewer sites and the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) continues to target breeding and wintering sites which have not previously been visited. Control took place on 16 sites for the first time during this period.

## Independent monitoring of Ruddy Duck numbers

Since the start of the eradication programme, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) has carried out independent surveys of key Ruddy Duck wintering sites in the UK. As the eradication has progressed and numbers on the principal wintering sites have fallen, more sites have been surveyed to ensure better coverage and accuracy. Two co-ordinated counts were carried out by WWT in Great Britain in December 2009 and January 2010. During the December count 104 sites were visited and 253 Ruddy Ducks were recorded. By January the very cold weather had caused the birds to become even more concentrated on the key wintering sites and 269 birds were recorded on 103 sites. This compares to 687 birds counted in January 2009. It is also possible that the January 2010 figure included some birds arriving from the Netherlands as a result of the very cold weather. Three separate counts were carried out in Northern Ireland in October 2009, January 2010 and March 2010. The peak count was only 18 individuals (March 2010), down from 27 in 2008/2009. Only one of these was a female bird, suggesting that productivity in Northern Ireland will be extremely low in 2010.

Since the January 2010 counts, Fera has culled a further 174 Ruddy Ducks. We are aware that small numbers of birds were to be found on some sites not covered by the surveys, so the current UK population is estimated to be around 200 individuals, excluding birds hatched this summer. The UK population continues to concentrate on “traditional” breeding and wintering sites, so continued control until March 2011 should see a further significant reduction in the population.

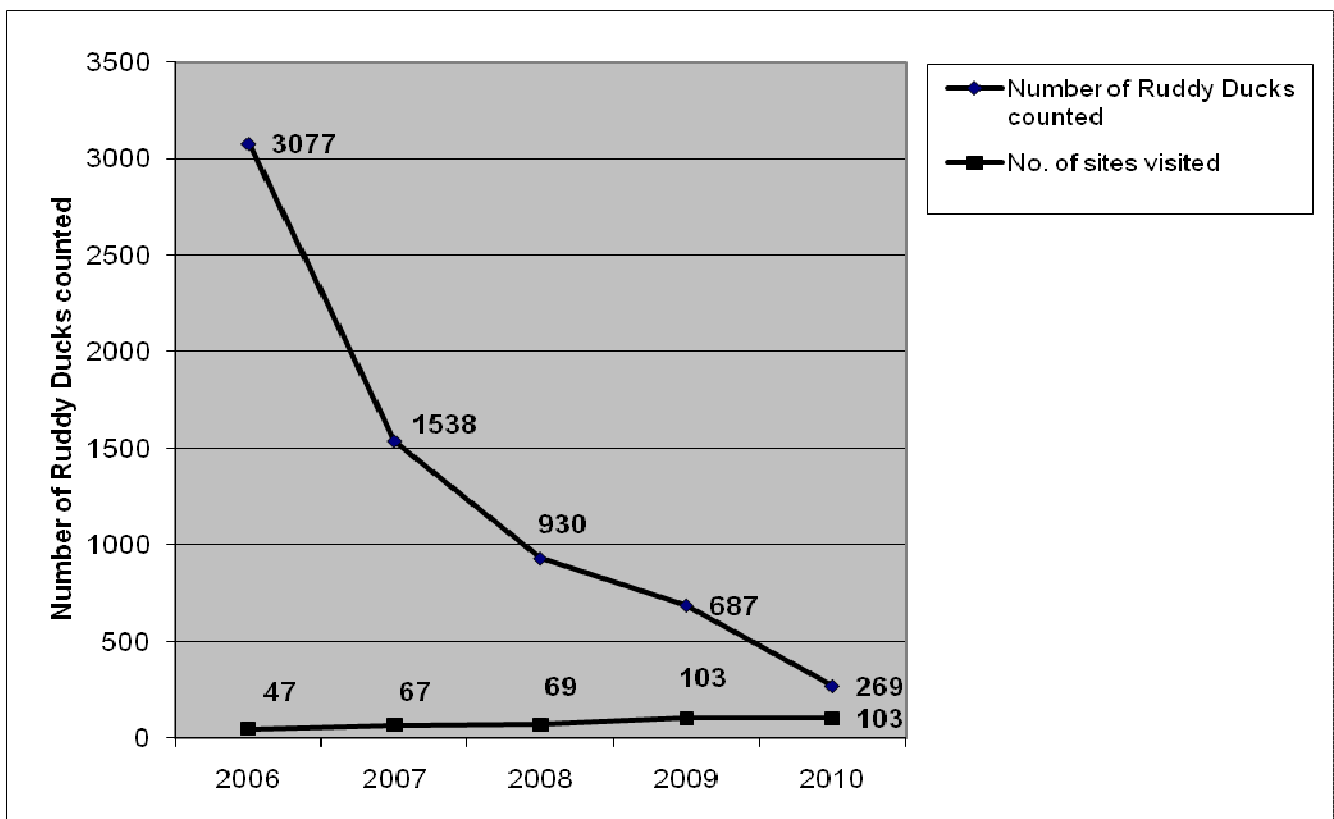


Figure 1 Summary of WWT surveys (January counts, 2006-2010)

## Progress in Europe

A third and final European workshop is planned for Seville in November 2010. Representatives from the three European countries which have self-sustaining populations (France, the Netherlands, and the UK) have been invited, as well as from Belgium (which has a very small population of around a dozen birds) and from Spain. The emphasis of this workshop will be to ensure that other countries take note of the success of the UK eradication programme and begin to implement their own measures to ensure that the risk posed by the Ruddy Duck to the White-headed Duck is removed.

Only two Ruddy Ducks have been recorded in Spain since January 2009, and no hybrids were recorded in the 2009 breeding season.

Further general information on the project can be found [www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)

