



15th MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
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DELINEATION OF BIOGEOGRAPHIC POPULATIONS OF THE RAZORBILL
(*ALCA TORDA*)

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE POPULATION DELINEATIONS

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Name of population(s):

Alca torda torda (Razorbill), E North America, Greenland, E to Baltic & White Seas

Current status on AEWA Table 1:

Category 4 of Column A

What is the issue?

A. torda currently has two recognised subspecies under AEWA – nominate *Alca torda torda* and *A. t. islandica*.

The range of the nominate subspecies (*Alca torda torda*) is defined as E North America (Digges Sound and SE Baffin I S to Gulf of Maine), Greenland and E to Bear I, Norway, Denmark, Baltic Sea region, Murmansk and White Sea by the Handbook of the Birds of the World ([HBW](#)), AEWA's taxonomic reference.

HBW defines the range of the *A. t. islandica* subspecies as Iceland, Faeroes, Britain, Ireland E to Heligoland, and S to Channel Is and NW France (Brittany).

The range of *A. t. islandica* separates the ranges of *A. t. torda* breeding in W Greenland and N America from the ones breeding around Scandinavia and it does not conform with the AEWA guidelines ([AEWA/MOP 3.12](#)) on defining biogeographic populations. Therefore, it is proposed to recognise two populations of the nominate subspecies: an East Atlantic and a West Atlantic one in Table 1 of AEWA.

What is the evidence supporting the proposal?

There is a fairly clear separation in the wintering grounds between birds which winter in Greenland and Labrador to offshore East Newfoundland and South-West to the Gulf of Maine and farther South, and those birds which winter from the Barents and White Seas to Skagerrak, like Baltic breeders ([HBW](#)).

Ringling and tracking data provide no evidence of regular exchanges between the breeding birds of North America & Greenland with the birds breeding in Europe. There are only single birds recovered in Greenland from Russia and Ireland (i.e. from both subspecies), but these records are considered incidental ([Lyngs 2003](#)). There is also no evidence of birds from North America or Greenland migrating to Europe according to the [EURING database](#). Nucleotide divergence estimates indicate that Icelandic birds are slightly more differentiated from West Atlantic

and Baltic birds than birds from these more distant populations at either side of the Atlantic Ocean are from each other and this is consistent with the subspecies level taxonomic treatment (Moum & Arnason 2001). Although, this is consistent with the subspecies level taxonomy of the species, the authors also raise the question whether genetic data reflect historical effects to a greater extent than contemporary conditions and the proposed treatment would be consistent with the biogeographic population concept of AEWA adopted in in Resolution 3.2 and in document AEWA/MOP 3.12 because they are geographically discrete throughout the year.

What are the implications of the proposal including any changes in status on AEWA Table 1?

There is no implication of the split because *A. torda* is a Near-Threatened species and as such both new populations should be listed in Category 4 of Column A.

Figure 1. Proposed delineation of the biogeographic populations of *A. torda*.

