

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Annual Status Summary

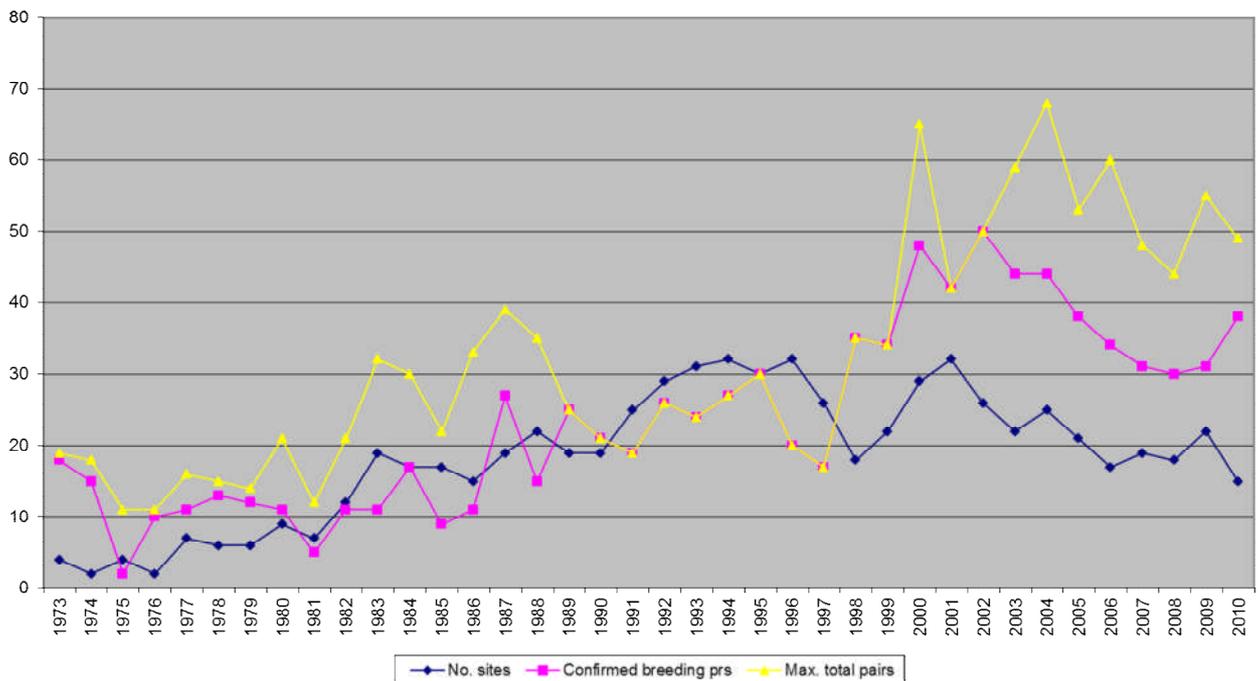
Breeds every year at up to 32 sites with 2-50 confirmed breeding pairs each year.

Introduction

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* is a rare breeding species in Britain which favours shallow, eutrophic pools, preferable those which are undisturbed. The species first bred in 1904, and the number of breeding birds remained low for much of the twentieth century. RBBP data were analysed for a paper by Martin & Smith (2007) which provided a detailed regional summary of the ups and downs of the species in the UK during the period 1973-2004. During that time, the population increased, reflecting a wider expansion across northwest Europe, and the centre of gravity of the British population has shifted from southern Scotland to northern England; however, productivity remains generally low, and up to 40% of the population have bred at a single site. Since 2003, the number of pairs confirmed breeding each year has declined annually, with a parallel reduction in the number of breeding sites.

Trends

Black-necked Grebe 1973-2010



Survey and Recording Methods

(from Gilbert *et al.* 1998)

Status

- Amber listed
- Non-SPEC
- Schedule 1 of WCA 1981

National monitoring

- Regular sites monitored annually (RSPB/NE)
- RBBP
- WeBS

Population and distribution

First recorded nesting in the UK in 1904, the Black-necked Grebe has remained a rare breeding bird. Records are sparse and well-distributed in central Scotland and England but there are only a few regular breeding sites. The European population fluctuates from year to year but since 1980 has tended to increase, at least in the northern and western edges of the species range (*88-91 Atlas*). There are estimated to be 23-48 pairs breeding in the UK (*Population Estimates*), although in some years this figure is likely to be an under-estimate.

Ecology

Black-necked Grebes are found in lowland eutrophic meres, ponds, lochs and reservoirs with extensive emergent vegetation. Their nests are very well hidden in dense reeds or sedges. Clutches of 3-5 eggs are laid during late April to July; there are occasionally two broods and most young fledge by early August (*Red Data Book*). It can be very difficult to tell a first brood from a second brood without frequent visits.

Breeding season survey – population

Information required

- Number of breeding pairs
- Maximum number of individual birds
- Date of each visit

Number and timing of visits

- Twice weekly, from mid-May to end of June

Weather constraints

- Avoid very wet and windy conditions

Sites/areas to visit

- Any potentially suitable site plus any sites which have had breeding Black-necked Grebes in the past. Check all potential sites each year. NB potential sites can include areas with little open water.

Equipment

- Telescope
- Schedule 1 licence

Safety reminders

- No specific reminders (see general guidelines)

Disturbance

- All breeding site information must be kept strictly confidential and minimal information must be taken on survey visits. This species is prone to disturbance so keep out of sight when making observations.

Methods

- Choose vantage points from which the water body can be observed without disturbing the birds. During each visit, record the total number of Black-necked Grebes seen and also the number of pairs. It will take several visits to establish how many pairs are present: most birds (including non-breeders) will participate in courtship displays initially but birds which have formed a pair will move around together for most of the season.
- Report the maximum number of birds on any one visit and the estimated number of breeding pairs. Also report the date of each visit.
- Assess whether the pair(s) are to be classed as confirmed/probable/possible breeding, according to standard Atlas criteria [later to be refined and documented under Species Recording Guidelines on this website.

Breeding season survey – productivity

Information required

- Number of fledged young per pair

Number and timing of visits

- As for the population survey, together with frequent visits to follow the fate of chicks up to mid-August.

Time of day

- Any time.

Weather constraints, Equipment, Safety reminders

- As for the population survey (above).

Sites/areas to visit

- All sites where adults have been seen.

Disturbance

- It is particularly important not to disturb adults with young. It is possible to get all of the information necessary by observing the area from a distance, sometimes from a vantage point overlooking the water.

Methods

- On each visit, scan all of the water and shores to locate any young present. Even if the adults are located and there are no young with them, the whole of the water surface and shores should be scanned. The fledging period is about eight weeks (*BWP*); chicks near fledging are more than two-thirds adult size.
- Chicks can be very difficult to spot, especially along complex shorelines with emergent vegetation. Adults can appear to have failed even when chicks are around, so it is worth making a visit as late as August to check whether or not young are present. Chicks should be sized by comparing the water-line length of the chick with that of a nearby adult. Make frequent visits to record the presence and absence of well-grown chicks, and assume that those of adult size which disappear have fledged. Report the total number of fledged young and the number of fledged young per breeding pair.

Bibliography/ Main References

Gilbert G, Gibbons, D.W. & Evans, J. 1998.

Bird Monitoring Methods. A manual of techniques for key UK species.
RSPB.

Martin B. & Smith, J. 2007.

A survey of breeding Black-necked Grebes in the UK: 1973-2004.
British Birds 100: 368-378