



Black-necked grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Status

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

National monitoring

Regular sites monitored annually (RSPB/EN).
Rare Breeding Birds Panel.
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 underestimate.

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 Birds*). 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 the end of June.

Time of day

Any time.

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 the general guidelines in the *Introduction*.

Disturbance

All breeding site information must be kept strictly confidential and minimal information should 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 waterbody can be observed without disturbing the birds. During each visit, record the total number of black-necked grebe 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 adults seen on any one visit and the estimated number of breeding pairs. Also report the date of each visit.

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 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. Note the number of adults and the number and size of the chicks 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.