



# Slavonian grebe

## *Podiceps auritus*

### Status

Amber listed: BR  
Non-SPEC  
Schedule 1 of WCA 1981  
Annex I of EC Wild Birds Directive

### National monitoring

Annual breeding survey at known sites (RSPB).  
National surveys: 1992, 2003.  
Rare Breeding Birds Panel.  
WeBS.

### Population and distribution

Slavonian grebes started to colonise Scotland in 1908 (Crooke et al 1992). In the UK, their breeding stronghold is in the Scottish Highlands, Inverness-shire in particular (88–91 Atlas). At about 60 pairs, the population is small, and still regarded as vulnerable (88–91 Atlas).

### Ecology

In Scotland, this species occurs on mesotrophic lochs where they nest in emergent vegetation, particularly bottle sedge *Carex rostrata* (Crooke et al 1992), although birds have been known to occupy more productive lochs and nest in loch-side bushes or overhanging branches (88–91 Atlas). More than one territory may occur on larger or more productive lochs. Eggs are laid mid-May to early August, mainly mid-May to June; clutches are generally of 4–5 eggs, and second broods are rare (Red Data Birds). The fledging period is about eight weeks (BWP).

## Breeding season survey – population

This method is based on instructions for the national breeding surveys (Crooke et al 1992).

#### Information required

- number of pairs
- number of single birds.

#### Number and timing of visits

Monitoring sites (sites where Slavonian grebes have bred and are monitored on an annual basis) should be visited during 20–31 May. If breeding is confirmed (a pair with eggs or young), no further visits are required. If you locate a pair without eggs or young or a single bird, visit before 10 June to confirm occupancy. At all unconfirmed sites make at least two subsequent visits before July, to confirm or refute occupancy.

Other potential sites should be visited twice, once in late May and once in July. If you confirm breeding on the first visit (adults with eggs or young), you do not need to make further visits.

**Time of day**

Any time of the day.

**Weather constraints**

No specific constraints.

**Sites/areas to visit**

Mesotrophic lochs with areas of suitable nesting vegetation.

**Equipment**

- 1:25,000 OS map of the area
- A4 photocopied maps for use in the field
- Schedule 1 licence.

**Safety reminders**

Always inform someone where you are working and when you expect to return. Take a compass and always carry a survival bag, waterproofs, whistle, extra clothing, food and a first-aid kit in remote areas. Take extra care when working close to water, and if any boat trips are necessary make sure that at least two people are present and that you wear life-jackets.

**Disturbance**

Do not visit active nests. Observers are not required to search all shorelines on foot and you should make every effort to collect complete data without disturbance to sitting birds. Egg-collectors are a serious threat to this species.

**Methods**

Scan the loch from a suitable distance (>100 m) to avoid disturbance. Check all shores and all water thoroughly, especially sedge beds and areas of emergent vegetation. Watch from suitable vantage points, carrying out a complete circuit of the shoreline if appropriate. Note that grebes can be difficult to detect, particularly when concealed in emergent vegetation, and you should spend a minimum of two hours at each suspected territory.

Breeding is confirmed if:

- a bird with eggs or young is seen
- one or two birds are present on more than one occasion at sites with suitable nesting habitat.

If breeding is confirmed, you do not need to make further visits unless there is a need to assess breeding success (see below).

Record the numbers of pairs and single birds. Describe the birds' behaviour if there is any doubt about their breeding status. Mark their location and movements on the field map and cross-refer these locations to any description or notes made.

Record other additional information including: the state of the water surface (choppy, moderate or calm); the percentage of the water surface and the shoreline that has been checked; visibility (poor, moderate or good); and whether there were any obvious signs of predators or human disturbance.

## Breeding season survey – productivity

### Information required

- the number of viable young (ie about two-thirds grown) per pair.

### Number and timing of visits

One visit between mid-July and mid-August, exact date depending on breeding stage observed during population survey (see above). Subsequent visit(s) may be necessary if small chick(s) are still present.

### Time of day, Weather constraints, Sites/areas to visit, Equipment, Safety reminders

As for the population survey (see above).

### Disturbance

It is particularly important not to disturb adults with young. It is possible to get all the necessary information by observing the area from a distance, sometimes from a small hill overlooking the loch.

### Methods

Scan the whole water surface and shoreline to locate any young present, even if the adults are located and there are no young with them. Very small chicks are sometimes found hauled out by the nest-site on a bank or on an island, otherwise chicks will often be located very close to shore in the shallower calmer waters. This can make the chicks very difficult to spot, especially on complex shorelines with emergent vegetation.

Record the date, the number of adults present and the number and size of the chicks on a recording form and mark their location on a field map. Size the chicks by comparing their water-line length with that of a nearby adult. If the situation is unclear, then it may help to describe the behaviour of the birds during the observation period. Make a further visit if the young are less than two-thirds grown.

Record additional information as for the population survey (see above).

### Reference

Crooke, C, Dennis, R, Harvey, M and Summers, R (1992) Population size and breeding success of Slavonian grebes in Scotland. In *Britain's Birds in 1990–91: the conservation and monitoring review*. BTO, Thetford.