UK RUDDY DUCK ERADICATION PROGRAMME
SECOND PROJECT INFORMATION BULLETIN – APRIL 2007

Summary

● 1,894 ruddy ducks were culled between September 2006 and March 2007.
● Over 70% of the birds culled nationally were adults.
● Control was carried out on 32 sites in 20 different counties of England, Scotland and Wales.
● Independent counts by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) suggest a reduction in the national population of between 55% and 60% between January 2006 and January 2007.

Introduction

The ruddy duck 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 in most cases, have appeared in Spain where they hybridise with the native white-headed duck. In the long-term this could lead to the extinction of this globally threatened species.

Between 1993 and 2004 the UK Government undertook extensive research to determine the most effective techniques for controlling ruddy ducks. This research confirmed that eradication of the ruddy duck from the UK was feasible, and also necessary to ensure the survival of the white-headed duck in Europe. The eradication programme began on 1 September 2005, and is due to run until August 2010. It is jointly financed by the EU LIFE-Nature Programme and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The Spanish Ministry of the Environment is a partner in the project. It is estimated that at the beginning of the Eradication Programme the UK population was around 4,400 birds. A total of 1,500 ruddy ducks were killed during the first 12 months of the Eradication Programme (i.e. up to the end of August 2006).

Progress since September 2006

During the second winter of the project (September 2006 to March 2007), a total of 1,894 ruddy ducks were culled on 32 different wintering sites in England, Scotland, and Wales, giving a total of 3,394 ruddy ducks culled since the Eradication Programme began. The proportion of immature birds shot varied greatly from region to region, but was lower nationally in winter 2006/2007 than in winter 2005/2006 (29% compared to 33%). This suggests that ruddy ducks in the UK had a relatively poor breeding season in 2006 overall, and the shooting over the last winter should therefore have had a proportionally greater impact on the population.
Non-target birds

A total of seven non-target birds were killed during this period – four coots *Fulica atra*, two pochard *Aythya ferina*, and one little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. This equates to a non-target rate of 0.4%.

Independent monitoring of ruddy duck numbers

In December 2006 and January 2007, WWT carried out two counts on all the major ruddy duck wintering sites in the UK as well as on other sites used intermittently. A total of 62 sites and 59 sites respectively were counted, covering both those where shooting of ruddy ducks has occurred and also those where it hasn’t. The total count was 1,538 birds in December 2006 and 1,239 in January 2007. These figures compare to 3,077 ruddy ducks counted during a somewhat less extensive survey in January 2006. It should be noted that since the January 2007 count another 670 ruddy ducks have been culled, thus reducing the population still further.

Direct comparisons between 46 key sites counted in both January 2006 and December 2006 show a reduction of 56% in the eleven months to December 2006. Similar comparisons for 43 sites counted in both January 2006 and January 2007 show a 59% reduction in the year to January 2007. Although the reductions are greatest on those sites where control has been carried out, there are also signs of important reductions (43% on average) on sites where no shooting took place during the year.

Progress in Europe

The UK holds around 95% of all the ruddy ducks in Europe, and the Eradication Programme is therefore a key part of a wider international conservation effort. A total of 118 ruddy ducks were shot in France in 2006, the highest annual total since control in France began in 1997. This followed a review of the techniques used to control ruddy ducks in France. A total of four ruddy ducks (two males and two females) and two ruddy duck x white-headed duck hybrids were shot in Spain in 2006.

CSL had hoped to host an international workshop on the problem of ruddy ducks in Europe in March 2007, but this has now been postponed until September 2007. This will be an opportunity for representatives from over ten European countries to exchange information on control methods, the biology of ruddy ducks, and other matters. In the interim, CSL is to attend a meeting of the ORNIS committee, which assists the European Commission in the implementation of the Birds Directive. This will be an additional opportunity to disseminate information on progress in the UK to representatives of other European governments.

CSL would like to thank all the landowners and site managers who have allowed access to their sites over the winter. Their co-operation and support is very much appreciated.

If you are the owner or manager of a water body that holds either breeding or wintering ruddy ducks, and want to know more about how CSL undertake control, please contact Iain Henderson on 01904 462146 or at i.henderson@csl.gov.uk.
