

## **SWT Policy on Ruddy Duck**

### **Policy Summary**

Scottish Wildlife Trust supports the targeted eradication of the Ruddy Duck across the UK to contribute to the conservation of the White-Headed Duck.

### **Policy Statement**

- Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that the current ruddy duck cull proposals should have a review period built in or be considered as an eradication programme, rather than simply as an on-going operation.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that the funding for the cull should be new money rather than diverting existing conservation spend from the statutory agencies.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that appropriate eradication measures for ruddy duck populations should be taken throughout other countries in Europe and that white-headed duck conservation measures should be undertaken in Spain.
- Control measures must be in accordance with the principles set out in Scottish Wildlife Trust's policy on *Killing Wild Animals*.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that an independent assessment of the funds and effort for the cull is needed annually, rather than this being undertaken by the Central Science Laboratory themselves.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that voluntary access to sites will not be sufficient to ensure consistency and effectiveness of control, and that Government should require land-owning organisations to permit access.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust would like to see this eradication programme as part of a strategic effort to take action for invasive species that are threatening UK and global biodiversity.

### **Context**

#### ***The Ruddy Duck (Oxyura jamaicensis)***

The Ruddy Duck is native to North America where it is abundant. It became naturalised in the UK in the late 1950s, due to escapes from waterfowl collections. Since that time the UK population of ruddy duck has increased sharply, and we have by far the largest population of ruddy ducks in Europe. The species did not occur in continental Europe before the British breeding population became established, but sightings in Europe are now increasing.

In 2003 Ruddy Ducks were found at an estimated 88 sites in Scotland, compared to 764 sites in England, 33 in Wales and 17 in Northern Ireland.

### **Conservation of the White-Headed Duck**

Presence of the Ruddy Duck in Europe has presented grave problems for the conservation of the native White-Headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), a globally threatened species and one of the most endangered birds in Europe.

The White-Headed Duck has a small population in Spain, with the rest in Turkey and further east. Its numbers have declined due to habitat destruction and hunting; some successful conservation effort in Spain has led to an estimated current population of 2000 birds.

However, the white-headed duck is now threatened by inter-breeding with ruddy ducks moving from the UK into Europe. Hybrid offspring survive well and are fertile; conservationists are concerned that this hybridisation could lead to the global extinction of the white-headed duck.

An argument has therefore developed for control, and ultimately eradication of, the Ruddy Duck in Europe in order to conserve the White-Headed Duck. It is an extremely sensitive issue that provokes strong views.

### **Ruddy Duck Control**

Ruddy duck control (shooting) has already been carried out in Spain, France and Morocco. However, without control of ruddy duck in the UK, these efforts are unlikely to be effective in the long term.

The UK Government created the White-headed Duck Task Force in 1998. The Task Force comprised 12 organisations including DETR, the Scottish Office, Scottish Natural Heritage, English Nature, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB. The Task Force recommended that regional ruddy duck control trials should take place commencing in Spring 1999. The UK Government initiated these trials and they ran for three years.

DEFRA published the report of the work of the UK Ruddy Duck Control Trial in late 2001. The report concluded that reducing the ruddy duck population to less than 175 individuals is feasible, and could be achieved in up to six years if access is available to the principal wintering sites. It also concludes that voluntary access to sites would be granted in approximately 50% of cases. The cost of the control programme would be between broadly £3.5m and £5.5m.

Research by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (funded by UK Government) has indicated that shooting is the only known way of effectively controlling ruddy ducks. Trapping birds and treating eggs are both ineffective on their own. The research trials showed no death or injury to other wildlife.

### **SWT strengths and priorities for action**

#### **Wildlife Reserves**

Ruddy Duck are known to be present on a number of SWT reserves.

SWT will support the work of DEFRA and the Scottish Executive in the ruddy duck control programme at these sites according to SWT policy, but will not always carry out the control measures itself.

## **Links to other SWT policies**

This policy should be read in conjunction with the SWT policies on *Killing Wild Animals and Introductions, Re-Introductions and Translocations of Species*.

## **References**

**DEFRA (2002)** *UK Ruddy Duck Control Trial Final Report*. HMSO.

**RSPB Scotland (2002)** *The White-headed Duck and the Ruddy Duck*. RSPB Scotland policy and position.

## **Date of approval of policy by Council**

24/9/03