Duck adapting to climate change twice as well in EU protected areas

Monday 26 January, 2015

Related Sectors:

Charities & non-profits :: Farming & Animals ::

Scan Me:

The smew - a rare but striking winter visitor to the UK - is doing twice as well within areas protected by EU wildlife laws as they spread northeast across Europe in response to climate change, according to a new study.

Scientists studied data from wetlands throughout Europe and found nearly a third of smew now spend winter in north-eastern Europe, compared to just 6% two decades ago.

In that region, numbers of smew within Special Protection Areas designated by the EU Birds Directive have grown twice as fast as those on unprotected sites.

However, the study found that in Latvia and Sweden, the protected area network supports fewer than one in five smew and in Finland that proportion drops to just one in fifty.

WWT's Head of Species Monitoring, Richard Hearn, said:

"The EU's network of protected areas is obviously helping smew adapt to climate change, but in this newly occupied region there aren't enough of them and that could constrict the population as they spread north.
"Most Special Protection Areas were designated around 20 years ago using the data that we had then. Things have changed dramatically in the natural world since then and we need to respond to help ensure that smew and other waterbirds remain well protected."

The National Organiser of the Wetland Bird Survey, Chas Holt of the British Trust for Ornithology, said:
"The UK data that contributed to this study were collected by the dedicated volunteers of the UK's Wetland Bird Survey. The published results are an excellent example of how collaboration across a species' range can generate outputs that are of direct relevance to conservation."

The authors emphasise that protected areas still need to be maintained at the southern end of the birds' range, in western Europe, so that they have somewhere to retreat during particularly harsh winters, such as during December 2010.

In the UK, a small population of typically less than 200 Smew can be found in winter at favoured gravel pits and reservoirs in lowland England. This UK population has approximately halved since the late 1990s.
These results are based on data from the International Waterbird Census, coordinated by Wetlands International, from 16 countries since 1990 and the findings were published in the scientific journal "Diversity and Distributions".

ENDS

Press contact: mark.simpson@wwt.org.uk<mailto:mark.simpson@wwt.org.uk> 01453 891138 / 07825 890590

Paul.stancliffe@bto.org<mailto:Paul.stancliffe@bto.org> 01842 750050

Editors' notes:
Notes to Editors

1. The full publication is available at:

1. Smew (Mergellus albellus) are a small black and white diving duck which breed in northern areas of Scandinavia and across northern Eurasia. Within the EU they breed only within Sweden and Finland. In the non-breeding season they migrate south and west to overwinter in freshwater wetlands and shallow coastal areas.

1. The protected areas studied are Special Protection Areas (SPAs) legally designated by EU Member States under Article 4 of the EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. Each Member State has an obligation to designate "the most suitable" areas for species listed under Annex I of the Directive (such as Smew). Within SPAs, Member States have legal obligation to manage habitats to maintain the favourable status of the species for which they have been designated. This includes the control of development and other factors which may have negative impacts on the relevant species.

1. Special Protection Areas form part of the EU's Natura 2000 network - a European network. As at December 2013, there were 27,308 Natura 2000 sites which include 5,491 SPAs. Further information is at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

1. The International Waterbird Census (IWC) has run since 1967 and today covers over 25,000 sites in more than 100 countries. In each country national coordinators work with a network of professional and amateur counters to provide waterbird counts to the IWC. In total, more than 15,000 people submit their data annually, making this one of the largest global monitoring schemes largely based on citizen science. Further information is available athttp://www.wetlands.org/OurWork/Biodiversity/Monitoringwaterbirdpopulations/tabid/773/Default.aspx

1. The study was funded by KONE Foundation, the Danish Nature Agency and the Academy of Finland.

Company Contact:

Wildfowl & Wetland Trust

E. lara.wilson@wwt.org.uk
W. https://www.wwt.org.uk/

View Online

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wwt.pressat.co.uk