



UK Ruddy Duck Eradication Programme

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Ruddy Ducks in the UK

- Introduced from North America in 1940s.
- UK feral population resulted from escapes and releases, and they first bred in the wild in 1960.
- Rapid spread from 1975 onwards, including into neighbouring countries.
- UK population estimated at 6,000 in January 2000.



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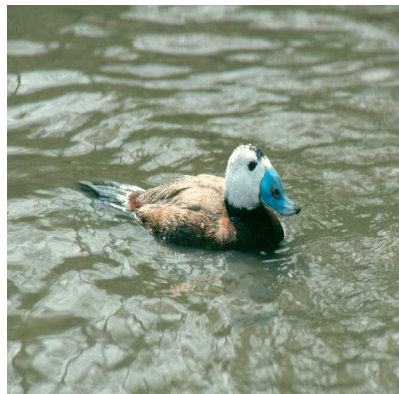
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Why act?



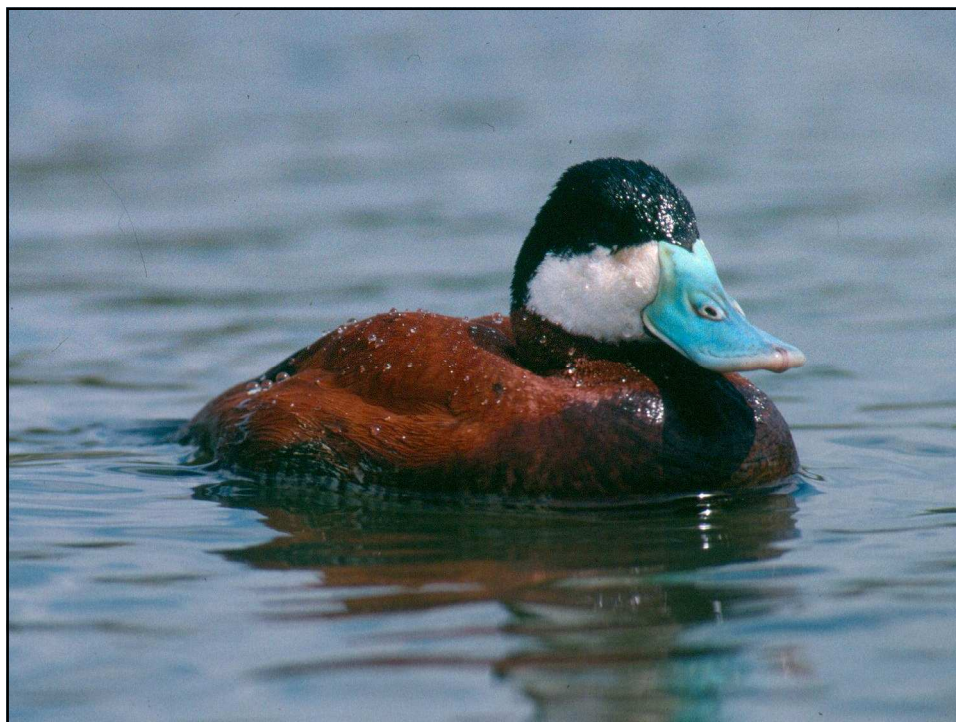
- Ruddy Ducks known to hybridise with native White-headed Duck.
- White-headed Duck is globally threatened.
- European breeding grounds restricted to Spain, where it is heavily protected.
- Greatest threat now posed by hybridisation with Ruddy Duck.



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Habits of Ruddy Ducks in the UK



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- Breed on lowland waters throughout the UK and nests in emergent vegetation.
- Typically 1-5 pairs per breeding site.
- Congregated in large numbers (typically 50-500 per flock) on traditional wintering sites, mainly in the Midlands and southern England.
- Wintering sites typically large inland waters such as reservoirs and large gravel pits.



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Ringing information



- Total of 34 recoveries of ringed Ruddy Ducks from approx. 390 ringed since 1978.
- Oldest recovery at least 11 years old.
- Average distance between ringing and recovery sites – approx. 65 km.
- Only six birds had travelled more than 100 km.



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- By 2000, Ruddy Ducks had colonised most suitable areas of the UK.
- Breeding had been confirmed in Northern Ireland, Orkney Islands, much of lowland Scotland and Wales, and most counties in England.



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Control in the UK



- Small-scale research by WWT into control methods, 1993 to 1995 - 134 birds culled.
- Regional control trials and additional work on major wintering sites 1999 to 2005 carried out by agencies of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) – 5,065 birds culled.
- Eradication Programme (2005 to 2013), also carried out by Defra agency. Over 7,300 culled to date.



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Support of NGOs



- Work supported by RSPB/Birdlife, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and county Wildlife Trusts.
- Support of these organisations critical in persuading general public that eradication of Ruddy Ducks in the UK was necessary to protect the White-headed Duck.



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Strategy

- To target major wintering flocks - around 80% of the UK population is found on 25 key sites used in midwinter.
- To target key breeding sites and areas which seem to account for a high proportion of breeding success.



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Control methods

- Shooting has proved to be the most effective method – both rifles and shotguns.
- Egg oiling is feasible and effective on certain sites but is very labour intensive.
- Breeding season trapping feasible but labour intensive and success rate very variable.
- Winter trapping tested unsuccessfully.



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Winter tactics (1)

- Shotguns from boats required for most winter work because of size of waters.
- Also use of guns at appropriate spots on bank e.g. close to reedbeds or along the edges of bays.
- Ruddy Ducks very unwilling to leave sites, even under heavy pressure.
- One or two boats on a water will push birds to edge, where they can be shot from the bank.



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Winter tactics (2)

- Visits no more than once every 10-14 days to prevent birds becoming habituated.
- Use of spotters to locate birds at low numbers.
- Break in middle of shot to allow remaining birds to regroup – reinforces flight response.



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Breeding season tactics

- Wider use of sound-moderated rifles – calibre determined by nature of site.
- Shorter but more frequent visits.
- **Most shooting April to June, before ducklings hatch.**
- **Specific targeting of adult females.**
- Use of male display call to attract both sexes.



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Breeding season disturbance

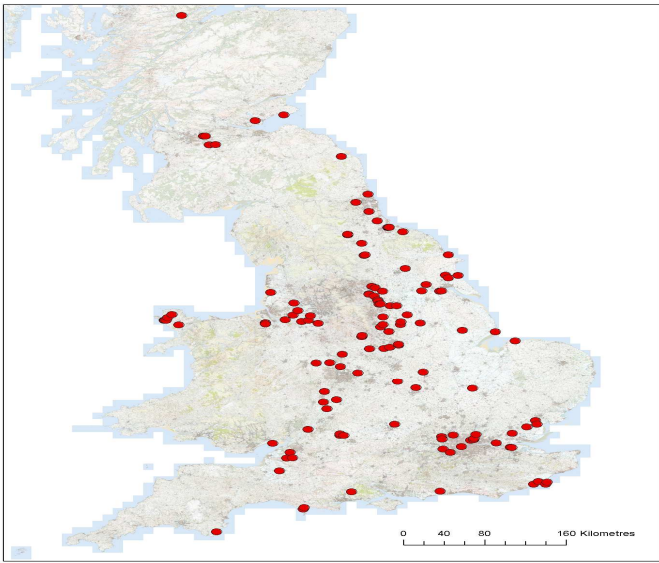
- Degree of disturbance depends on intensity and length.
- Use quieter weapons wherever possible (e.g. high-powered air rifles or small calibre rimfire rifles).
- Limit disturbance to less than one hour wherever possible.




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Shooting locations
2005 to 2012







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July 2013




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- Estimated UK population around 50 birds.
- Several distinct regional populations with 2-6 birds each in most cases.
- UK Government recognises the importance of full eradication, and control is expected to continue in 2014/15.
- Eradication of Ruddy Ducks throughout Europe is the only long-term solution.







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Positive elements

- Much information available on numbers and distribution from the Wetland Birds Survey and elsewhere.
- Ruddy Ducks highly visible compared to many other species, especially during winter.
- Very large proportion of UK population on small number of “traditional” sites in middle of winter.
- Good knowledge of the most effective methods of controlling Ruddy Ducks after eight years of research.



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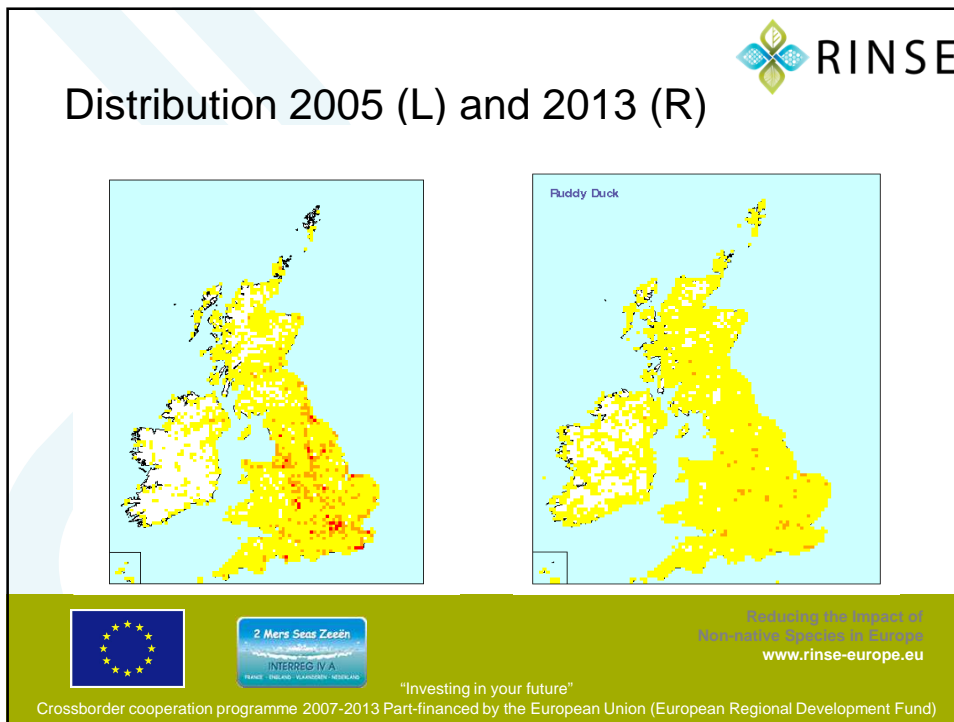
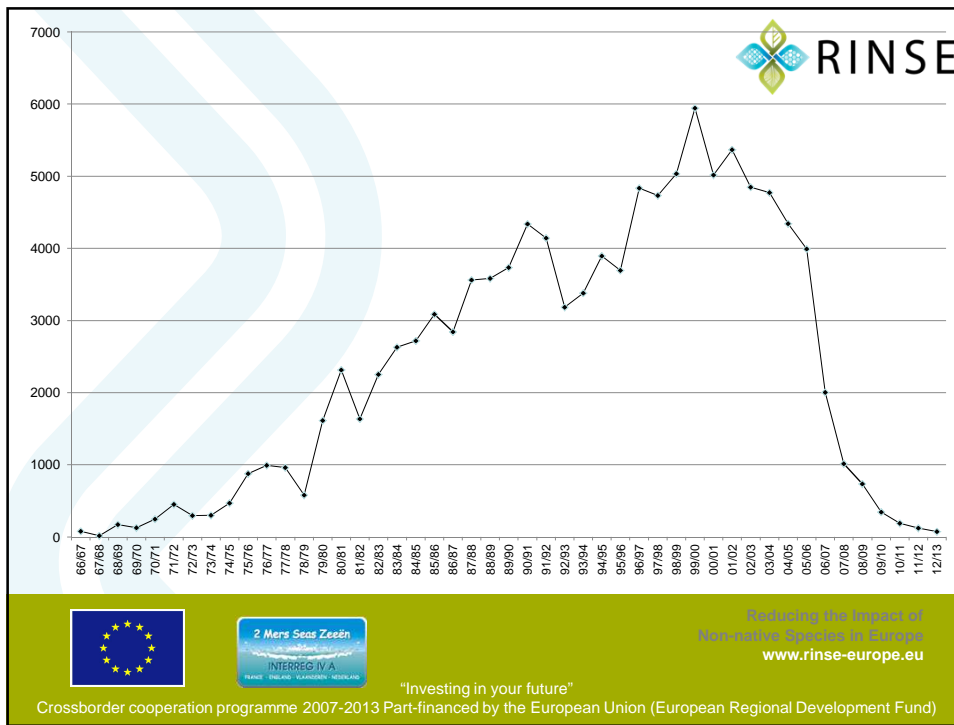
Difficulties of note

- Access to all sites is only ***with the agreement of the site owner or tenant.***
- Hostility from some birdwatchers and local nature reserve staff.
- Significant restrictions on shooting at many sites, e.g. not in fishing season, not when large numbers of other waterfowl present.

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Progress in Europe




- Standing Committee of Bern Convention expects eradication across Europe by 2015.
- Only UK, France, Netherlands and Belgium have self-sustaining populations.
- Very few birds in Belgium, slow (but steady?) progress in France, but no action to date in Netherlands.






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Remaining challenges



Challenges	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To locate and remove few remaining birds, especially females. • To secure funding until work completed. • To ensure eradication is completed across Europe. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make use of network of nature reserve wardens etc., encourage reporting by members of the public, internet searches. • Ensure year-on-year progress towards targets. • Engage with partners to share technical advice, legal framework provided by Bern Convention.

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Defra

EU LIFE-Nature Programme

Spanish Ministry of Environment



SECRETARIA GENERAL PARA EL TERRITORIO Y LA BIODIVERSIDAD

MINISTERIO DE MEDIO AMBIENTE

DIRECCION GENERAL PARA LA BIODIVERSIDAD



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