



# **Species Action Plan**

## **'Red-necked phalarope'**



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**Living Shetland Biodiversity Action Plan**  
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# Species Action Plan

## Red-Necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

### Species profile

UK B/D status

Priority species

UK lead partners

RSPB

Shetland status

Locally rare, Local Priority Species

Relevant HAP's

AgriBAP, ungrazed areas, freshwater, Waders (Grouped), Fetlar Community Biodiversity Action plan

Statutory Protection

The Red-necked phalarope is specially protected under Birds of Conservation Concern Red species, Annex I under the EU Birds Directive and Schedule I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is included in Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive, and is listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention. It is also protected under the 1998 Priority Species List published in the UK Biodiversity Group Tranche 2 Action Plans Volume 1.

### Current Status

#### **UK status**

The red-necked phalarope is a nationally rare species with fewer than 50 breeding males recorded at a small number of sites (mires with areas of open water and emergent vegetation), all within Scotland. It has been lost this century from the Inner Hebrides, Orkney and mainland Scotland.

#### **Local status**

In Shetland, the population has fluctuated between six and 41 breeding pairs and was 25 pairs in 2003. This represents 50% of the UK population, although on average, Shetland represents 70 – 90% of the UK population.

They have a circumpolar breeding distribution, including Iceland, Faroes, Northern Scotland, Siberia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.

Migration of red-necked phalaropes is unknown, but they are thought to winter at sea off the Arabian peninsular.

Records of individual birds have been found away from breeding sites, but these may refer to passage migrants or are possibly connected to the Shetland breeding population.

### Culture and Folklore

On Fetlar, the red-necked phalarope is known as the "peerie deuk" due to its habit of swimming on small pools.

### Ecology & Management

The Red-Necked Phalarope, otherwise known as Peerie Deuk in Shetland is a small, colourful arctic wading bird. It breeds on shallow waters surrounded by vegetated cover. The female leaves the male to incubate the eggs and to rear the young.

Visually, it is very distinctive, and moves about on the water's surface with sharp bobbing and spinning movements, plucking off insects and their larvae. Unusually, the female is brighter than the male and initiates the pair-bonding.

The majority of the Shetland population of red-necked phalaropes is on the island of Fetlar, but phalaropes have been known to breed at other sites outwith Fetlar.

It appears in late May, and leaves usually around early August.

The preferred habitat for red-necked phalaropes is upland mires with open water. The open water is used for take-off and landing and for display, and the surrounding vegetation is used for feeding. The mires are used for nesting. Vegetation in the mires favoured by the phalaropes includes bogbean and sedges and this provides cover and invertebrates as a food source. The bird winters at sea.

Red-necked phalaropes breeding patterns are either semi-colonial or in single pairs.

The RSPB has conducted 10 years of research into their breeding biology and habitat requirements in Fetlar.

### **Current Factors causing loss or decline**

Red-necked phalaropes are known to be vulnerable to a number of threats that can adversely affect their numbers, these include –

**Succession of vegetation** - within breeding mires resulting in loss of open water. Cessation of grazing may also have contributed to this.

**Changes in water levels** and drainage of pool systems.

**Eutrophication** of pool systems through agricultural improvement is implicated in the Republic of Ireland. Similar changes may have affected some Scottish sites.

**Predation** by Arctic Skuas may have contributed in a minor way to the decline in the Shetland red-necked phalarope population.

### **Current Action.**

Most of the Shetland breeding sites for red-necked phalaropes are protected within SSSIs and SPA's.

About 85% of the British red-necked phalarope population breeds on sites managed by the RSPB; these are being actively managed to maintain suitable pool systems and emergent vegetation.

Management agreements over further mires in Shetland, potentially suitable for red-necked phalaropes, are presently being negotiated by the RSPB.

Research into phalarope habitat requirements has been conducted by RSPB in the early 1980s and has been ongoing since 1993. The results of the studies are now being implemented.

### **Action Plan Objectives, Targets and Actions**

**In the short term, maintain the red-necked phalarope as a breeding species in the UK, with at least 35-40 breeding males at 10 sites, mainly in Shetland.**

**By 2010, increase the Shetland breeding population to 50 breeding males at 16 sites.**

Ensure that changes in agricultural systems within breeding areas do not cause deterioration in nesting habitat, water levels or water quality. (ACTION: RSPB, Scottish Water, SAC, SEPA, SNH, SOAEFD)

Ensure that prescriptions for Shetland ESAs and RSS produce good wetland habitat for breeding red-necked phalaropes in the traditional range. (ACTION: RSPB, Scottish Water, SAC, SNH, SOAEFD)

Ensure that any regular breeding sites are appropriately protected by statutory mechanisms or voluntary agreements. (ACTION: SNH, SOAEFD)

Review the management of sites for red-necked phalaropes, and ensure appropriate grazing and management of vegetation succession. (ACTION: RSPB, SAC, SNH, SOAEFD)

Continue to negotiate management agreements over existing and potentially suitable breeding sites for phalaropes in the traditional range. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

Ensure that existing water management and drainage at breeding sites are appropriate, and that changes do not adversely affect any existing or potential breeding sites. (ACTION: SAC, SEPA, SNH, SOAEFD)

Establish enclosures around phalarope nesting pools to prevent trampling during the nesting season. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH, SOAEFD)

Ensure that disturbance to red-necked phalaropes from birdwatchers is minimised. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

Protect the species from egg collection.

Ensure landowners and managers are aware of the presence, legal status and conservation requirements of this species, and promote appropriate habitat management. (ACTION: RSPB, SAC, SNH, SOAEFD)

Undertake annual monitoring of phalarope numbers and productivity, and provide information to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

In conjunction with NGOs, review results of their large-scale experimental management; disseminate and implement findings accordingly. (ACTION: SNH).

Undertake regular vegetation monitoring at existing and potential breeding sites to ensure that suitable breeding habitat is maintained. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

Retain viewing facilities over a breeding site on Mires of Funzie, Fetlar. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

Provide information to highlight the decline and importance of the species. (ACTION: RSPB, SNH)

## **References**

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