

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

STATUS

**Annex I of the Birds Directive (EEC1979),
UK Steering Group Report middle list,
National Red List (RSPB 1996),
Appendix II of the Bern Convention.**



WHAT IS THE NIGHTJAR?

The nightjar is typically a bird of lowland heathlands and open areas within mature woodland, although this century it has become increasingly adapted to using clear felled areas within commercial forestry plantations. It is nocturnal though mainly active at dawn and dusk. Nightjars are more often heard than seen; it is well camouflaged during the day in low vegetation, but its distinctive churring song can be heard from up to two kilometres away on still nights. Nightjars are summer visitors to Europe, spending the winter in sub-Saharan Africa; they arrive in the UK in early May and have migrated south by October.

WHERE IS IT FOUND IN THE UK?

The nightjar is mainly found in southern England but there are scattered populations as far north as central Scotland.

WHY IS THE NIGHTJAR OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

This bird has been declining in numbers and range for much of this century, dropping by 50% nationally between surveys carried out in 1968-1972 and 1988-1991. Nightjars have also disappeared from much of their former range, with a 51% reduction in the numbers of 10km grid squares occupied by nightjars between the two survey periods. Over the last ten years there have been some signs of recovery, both in terms of population numbers and the range occupied by nightjars. It is thought that an increase in forestry clear-fells, as a result of major storms and forest management, has assisted in recent increases, with over 50% of the total population found in this habitat during the 1992 survey.

THE NIGHTJAR IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE THE POPULATIONS OF THE NIGHTJAR?

The bird is rather a scarce summer visitor to the Durham area, being unrecorded as a breeding species between 1985 and 1988. Nightjars currently have a rather tenuous foothold as a breeding species in the area; the species has bred regularly at Hamsterley Forest since the late 1980s, with the population varying between a handful of birds and a maximum of 21 churring (i.e. singing) males in 1996.

The number of churring males is often used as a measure of the population size of nightjars; in practice the number of birds actually breeding is somewhat less than the number of churring males actually indicates, as some

males will sing without attempting to breed and can be mobile over a distance of 2 km or more. The Nightjar's present and historic restriction to just one area in the County makes it vulnerable.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE NIGHTJAR IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Local populations are regularly monitored by the Durham Dales Ringing Group.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The nightjar has been recorded mainly in coniferous woodland areas and heathland in Durham. Hamsterley Forest is the most regularly occupied site but there may still be small outlying populations at other sites.

THE NIGHTJAR IS AT RISK FROM:

Loss of suitable breeding habitat – the nightjar population is restricted by the availability of suitable heathland and clearings in conifer plantation, most especially in just one general location. The area of lowland heathland in Durham has declined throughout the century and the presence or absence of clearings in forestry is dependent on the age of the plantation and state of the harvesting cycle.

Inappropriate management of habitat – heathland is only suitable for nesting nightjars when there are areas of bare ground without dense stands of heather, bracken or scrub. Management of open areas of plantation during the breeding season increases the likelihood of breeding failure.

Availability of feeding habitat – nightjars require suitable feeding grounds, including insect-rich, unimproved meadows, ponds and other wetlands, within easy flying distance of the breeding grounds. There is a strong suggestion that areas protected from the wind by shelter belts of trees or natural land forms are favoured for feeding.

Disturbance – recreational disturbance can depress breeding success but is likely to be of only limited impact because of the difficult nature of the terrain.

NIGHTJARS BENEFIT FROM:

Management of breeding sites – preferred breeding sites consists of areas of bare ground, 3-5m², amongst dry heather, young forestry plantation or clearings of more than 1.5ha. These areas of bare ground can be artificially

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created. Shelter from wind is also sought.

Maintenance of a suitable mosaic of habitats – suitable feeding sites need to be within 3km of the nesting site. Nightjars preferentially choose sites where there is a mosaic of insect-rich habitats including heathland, unimproved meadows and pastures, mature hedgerows and deciduous woodlands.

Scrub control – to reduce encroachment on breeding sites.

Heather management programme – including a suitable burning cycle.

Plantation management – nightjars prefer sites with a diversity of different aged trees. The presence of open space throughout the production cycle is important and may include wide rides and unplanted areas alongside streams.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE NIGHTJAR:

<i>Coniferous plantation</i>	*
<i>Lowland heathland</i>	**
<i>Broad-leaved woodland</i>	

OTHER SPECIES ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE NIGHTJAR:

<i>Adder and Slow worm</i>	**
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N.B ** indicates action plan produced in 1998
* indicates action plan produced in 2000

THE NIGHTJAR AND THE LAW:

The nightjar is listed on Annex I of the EC Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Bern Convention. Nightjars are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NIGHTJAR IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
Target 1 <i>Maintain the current range and population of nightjars in the Durham area.</i>	ONGOING
Target 2 <i>Increase the population of nightjars in the Durham area by establishing breeding populations of nightjars at other Forestry Commission sites including Chopwell, the Stang and Black Banks; as part of the national target to achieve a population of at least 3400 churring males.</i>	With at least one new population by 2005 ONGOING
Target 3 <i>More accurately monitor the status of the nightjar in the Durham area.</i>	2005

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NIGHTJAR ACTIONS			
ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Ensure that Woodland Grant Scheme funding is not awarded to planting on heathland or other known nightjar sites.	ONGOING	FC, DBAP, DBC	1
<u>SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION</u>			
2. Establish new nightjar habitat in target coniferous woodlands using appropriate management techniques	2005 & ONGOING	FC, DBAP, FofCW	2
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
3. Consider designation of nightjar breeding-sites as County Wildlife Sites.	2004	DWT, LAs,	1
4. Incorporate habitat management prescriptions for nightjar in Forestry Commission sites, particularly at Chopwell, the Stang and Black Banks.	2004	FC, DBAP, DBC, RSPB	1, 2
5. Incorporate prescriptions for nightjars into the management of heathlands.	2004	EN, DBAP, DBC, RSPB	1, 2
6. Seek to defer management operations within restock areas of plantations until after mid August.	ONGOING	FC	1, 2
7. Seek to provide suitable feeding habitat within 3km of known and potential nightjar sites.	2009	DBC, RSPB, MAFF, DBAP	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
8. Develop a monitoring programme at all known nightjar sites.	2004	DBC, DDRG, RSPB	3
9. Develop a survey programme of potential sites.	2009	DBC, DDRG, RSPB	3
10. Contribute to the national nightjar surveys, these occur at ten yearly intervals, the next will be in 2003.	2003	DBC, DDRG, RSPB, BTO	3
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
11. Advise relevant landowners and managers of the presence of nightjars.	2004	DBAP, RSPB, DBC	1
12. Produce guidance note on management for nightjars and available grant schemes.	2004	FC, DBAP, DBC, RSPB, MAFF	1, 2
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
13. Use nightjars as a flagship species to highlight conservation issues of lowland heathland and coniferous plantations.	ONGOING	FC, DBAP, DBC, RSPB, EN	1, 2