



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

Control of Ruddy Ducks in the UK

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Ruddy Ducks in the UK

- Four males and three females brought from North America in 1940s.
- First bred in the wild in 1960.
- Productivity in UK lower than in North America – possibly due to inbreeding.



Eradication strategy

- To use shooting as the principal method of control, based on research between 1999 and 2003.
- To use a small team of full-time specialist staff
- To target major wintering flocks - around 80% of the UK population was found on 25 key sites used in midwinter.
- To target key breeding sites and areas which seemed to account for a high proportion of breeding success.

Winter tactics

- Shooting from boats for large flocks, rifle shooting from bank for small numbers.
- 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.



Breeding season tactics

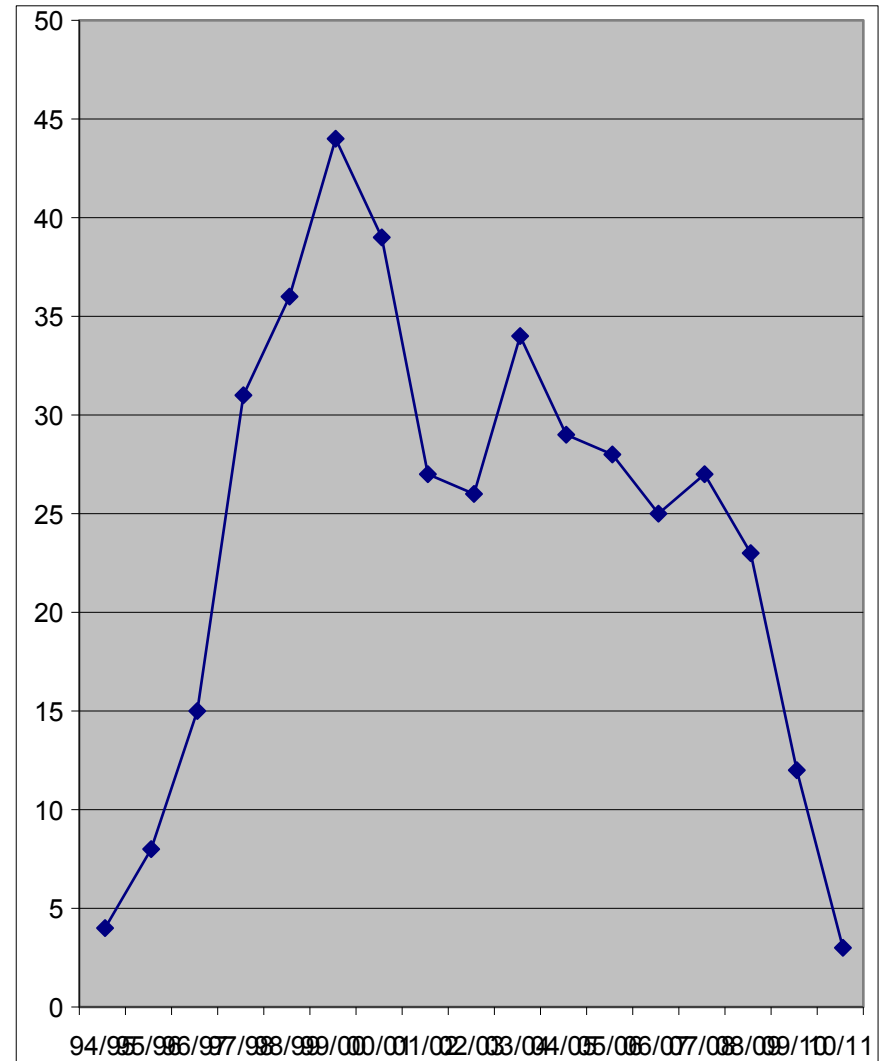
- Wider use of sound-moderated rifles – calibre determined by nature of site.
- Shorter but more frequent visits.
- Most shooting April to June, before ducklings hatch.
- Specific targeting of adult females.
- Use of male display call to attract both sexes.

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.

Difficulties of note

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



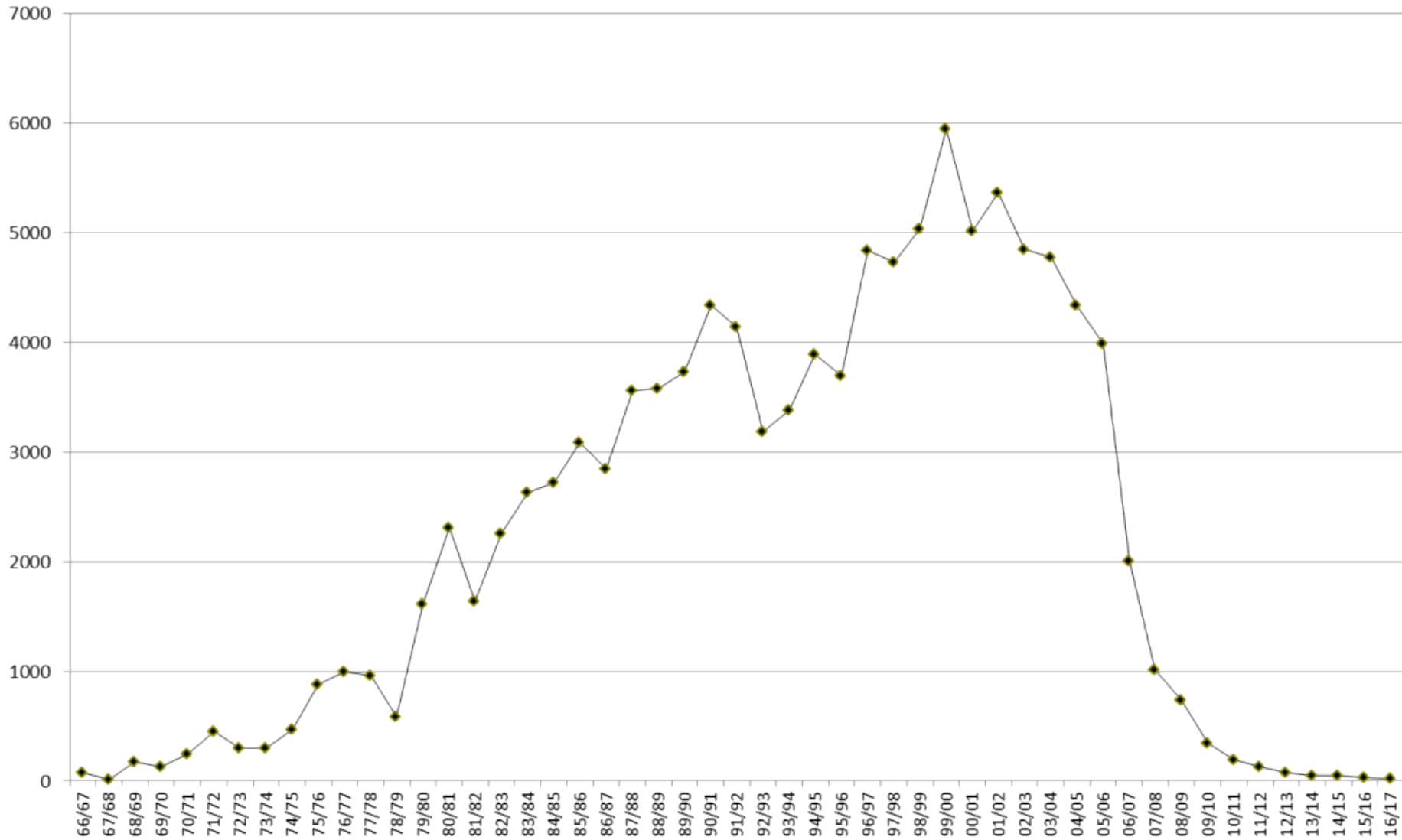
Ringling returns

- Total of 35 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

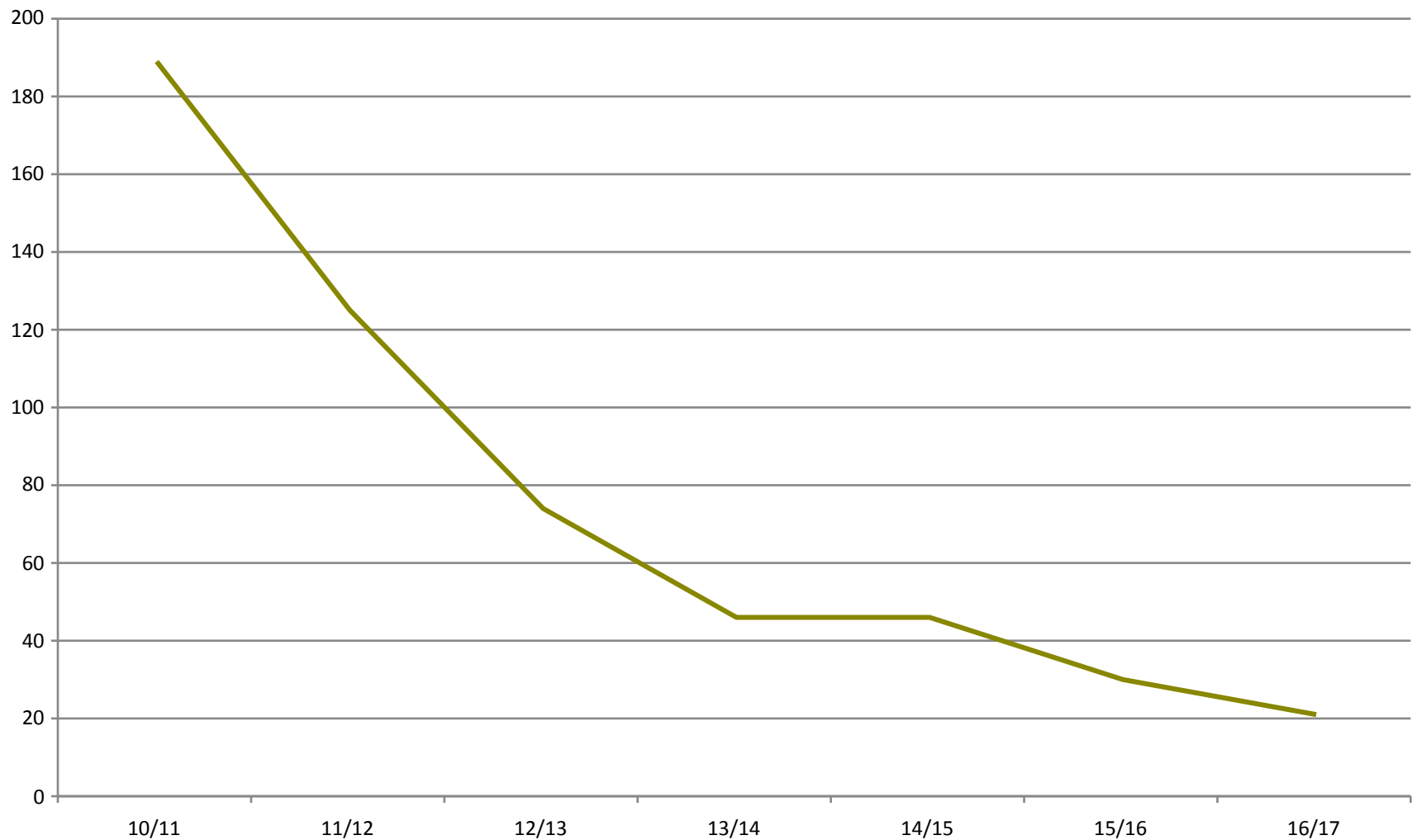
Movement

- Ringing information suggests most birds have a restricted range.
- However ringing and circumstantial evidence suggests that some birds can move very long distances, e.g. appearance of birds in Iceland in late spring, and records from Ireland.
- Some unusual sightings in 2014/15 in UK suggest that there may be movement from mainland Europe to UK, and vice-versa.

UK population trend



UK population trend since 2010/11



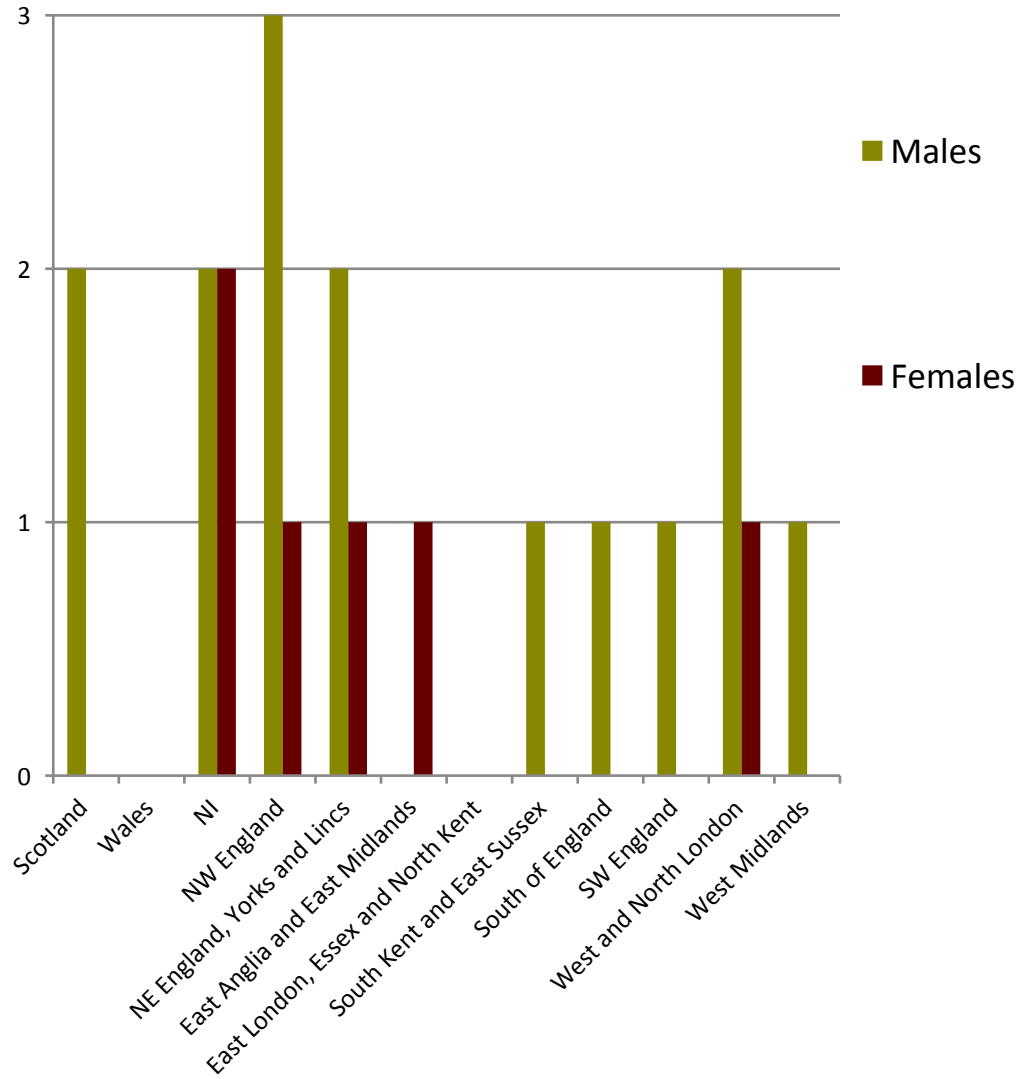
Current situation

- Estimated UK population around 20 birds.
- Several distinct regional populations with 1-4 birds each.
- No confirmed breeding in 2016 but one brood suspected.
- Eradication of Ruddy Ducks throughout Europe is the only long-term solution.





Current distribution



Future plans and strategy

- Emphasis on reporting via local contacts and monitoring of internet.
- Eradicate regional breeding populations by removing all females (or by removing all males) and/or by preventing recruitment of juveniles.
- Reach agreement on funding required to maintain capability to ensure that eradication is completed.



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