

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Guidance notes for providing supporting information for fish-eating bird licence applications

Introduction

It is understood that fish eating birds can cause serious damage to fisheries. For a licence application to be assessed it is vital that adequate information is provided to inform a licensing decision.

To support your licence application it is important to provide good quality information on fish-eating bird count data and, satisfactory alternatives considered and implemented.

Licence applications covering riverine systems should, where possible, be at the catchment scale, ideally coordinated by the relevant District Salmon Fishery Board.

Counting Methods

Bird counts can be labour intensive but are important in establishing reliable estimates of fish-eating bird numbers. Repeat counts/counts at times of year when predation is thought to have the most significant impact are particularly helpful. Likewise where resources are limiting, particularly on rivers, it is important to focus count areas on pinch points where fish are vulnerable.

To ensure counts are representative they should ideally be conducted as soon after sunrise as possible when birds are feeding and most conspicuous.

There are various different count methods that can be employed, individually or in combination, which are summarised below with suggested template recording forms in Annex A (stillwater area, and river point counts) and Annex B (Simultaneous or consecutive walked river counts) at the end of this document.

Simultaneous Counts – Rivers (or large bodies of water that cannot be counted from a single point) are divided into sections which are traversed by a surveyor. Different individual surveyors start counting from the beginning (up-river) to the end of their section at the same time. If birds are disturbed and fly away during the count of a section the time and direction of movement should be recorded to avoid double counting.

Consecutive Counts – As above, however, requires fewer surveyors as sections may be surveyed consecutively. Surveys can be carried out either by a single surveyor working downstream or, by multiple surveyors working downstream within their allocated sections. A variant of this is to count rivers by canoe moving downstream through several consecutive sections. The direction in which disturbed birds fly should be noted so that double counting can be avoided

Vantage Point Counts - Typically on many stillwater fisheries the entire area of the pond, reservoir or loch, or most of it, can be seen from a vantage point or a number of vantage points. Where stretches of river are difficult to negotiate by foot or by boat, or the area of standing water can be suitably covered from a few locations, then counts could be conducted from these vantage points close to the water with the use of suitably powerful telescope/binoculars. Recorders should note all birds present as well as the time/direction of flight for any birds that leave or enter their defined survey area during the count.

If carrying out regular vantage point counts, for instance at stocked stillwater fisheries, then keeping a record of daily (or as frequently as possible) counts of the maximum number of birds seen on each count, and submitting these, is preferable.

Whichever bird count method is used, data must be presented in such a way that it is clear how the data has been collected and what area has been covered (explaining gaps in coverage). Ideally counts should be coordinated so an entire water body or river system is counted at the same time with all count data submitted at one time. If making repeat applications it is helpful to maintain the same methods and survey areas from year to year to make comparison easy.

Where bird count data is ambiguous a precautionary approach to licensing will be necessarily be taken.

Satisfactory Alternatives

Licences to shoot piscivorous birds are granted to aid with non-lethal scaring and not as a cull. Licences can only be issued when it has been determined that there is no other satisfactory solution to preventing serious damage to fish stocks occurring.

As such applicants must detail all non-lethal methods that have been, or are being used to deter birds from the site. This should include the various methods tried, the dates and length of time when they were used and where they were used (noting that scaring effort should be concentrated in areas and at times where predation is at its highest e.g., at natural or manmade pinch points, early in the morning or, as 'smolt shepherding' during the smolt run). For each method tried a justification as to why it has proved insufficient in stopping serious damage must be given.

It is recognised that not all bird scaring/proofing measures will be suitable for every site. However there are a large number of different methods available and it should be the case that several are possible and have been tried at any given site.

Physical barriers	e.g. netting or use of monofilaments over ponds
Audio Scarers	e.g. gas guns, starter pistols, rockets etc.
Visual Scarers	e.g. reflective tape, scare crows, kites and laser pointers
Active human scaring	e.g. human disturbance, making noises, throwing things

(NB: to maximise effectiveness and reduce habituation multiple different audio-visual scarers should be used both singly and to reinforce each other and their use varied both spatially and temporally)

As well as direct scaring, satisfactory alternatives that should be considered are habitat enhancement to reduce risks of predation e.g., removal of manmade structures such as weirs or, allowing aquatic vegetation growth to allow areas for fish to hide.

Please note that as any licences issued to shoot fish-eating birds are designed to aid non-lethal scaring it is unlikely a licence will be able to be issued if a programme of non-lethal scaring has not been instigated.

Extra Information

For first time applicants background information on the fishery (e.g. how long it has been in operation, catch and release policies, membership structure etc.) would be of help.

Stocked fisheries – for stocked fisheries information on the stocking regime is also important in establishing whether or not there is a satisfactory alternative. For such fisheries; species, sizes, numbers and dates of stocking events should all be provided.

Catch data over several years may be useful in illustrating changes, these should ideally be accompanied by some measure of fishing effort such as 'rod days' or 'days fished' or numbers of permits sold.

If physically damaged and scarred fish are a problem then keeping a record of the proportion of fish caught affected would be of value.

When submitting your application you may also provide extra information that will be of use such as maps highlighting areas of concern/for potential control or, photos from bird counts.

ANNEX A: BIRD COUNT RECORDING FORM: Area and vantage point counts

Name of river and name/location of count section:

Six-figure grid reference:	MONTH/YEAR/.....	Count method used:
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Date	Time of count (AM preferred)	Species and number counted			Notes
		Goosander	R B Merganser	Cormorant	
1					
2					
3					
4					
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Notes may include observations regarding weather conditions or prior disturbance that might have influenced bird numbers or direction of flight (e.g. up/down river) for birds that fly away.

