



Animal &
Plant Health
Agency

Eradication of Ruddy Ducks in the UK to protect the White-headed Duck

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Ruddy Ducks *Oxyura jamaicensis* in the UK

- Four males and three females brought from North America in 1940s.
- Several escapes from captivity and at least one deliberate release between 1954 and 1961.
- First bred in the wild in 1960.



- “To be sure the Ruddy Duck is decorative and apparently harmless but no one can know what insidious effect it may have on the ecological web”

Sir Peter Scott, 1977

Risk of hybridisation with White-headed Duck

- First hybrid recorded in wild (UK): 1980
- First concerns about risk to White-headed Ducks raised: mid-1980s
- First Ruddy Ducks shot in Spain: 1989
- First hybrids in Spain: 1991
- Initial research into control in UK: 1993-1995
- Regional control trials in UK: 1999-2005
- Start of UK eradication programme: 2005

Initial strategy

- To use shooting as the principal method of control, based on research between 1999 and 2003.
- 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.

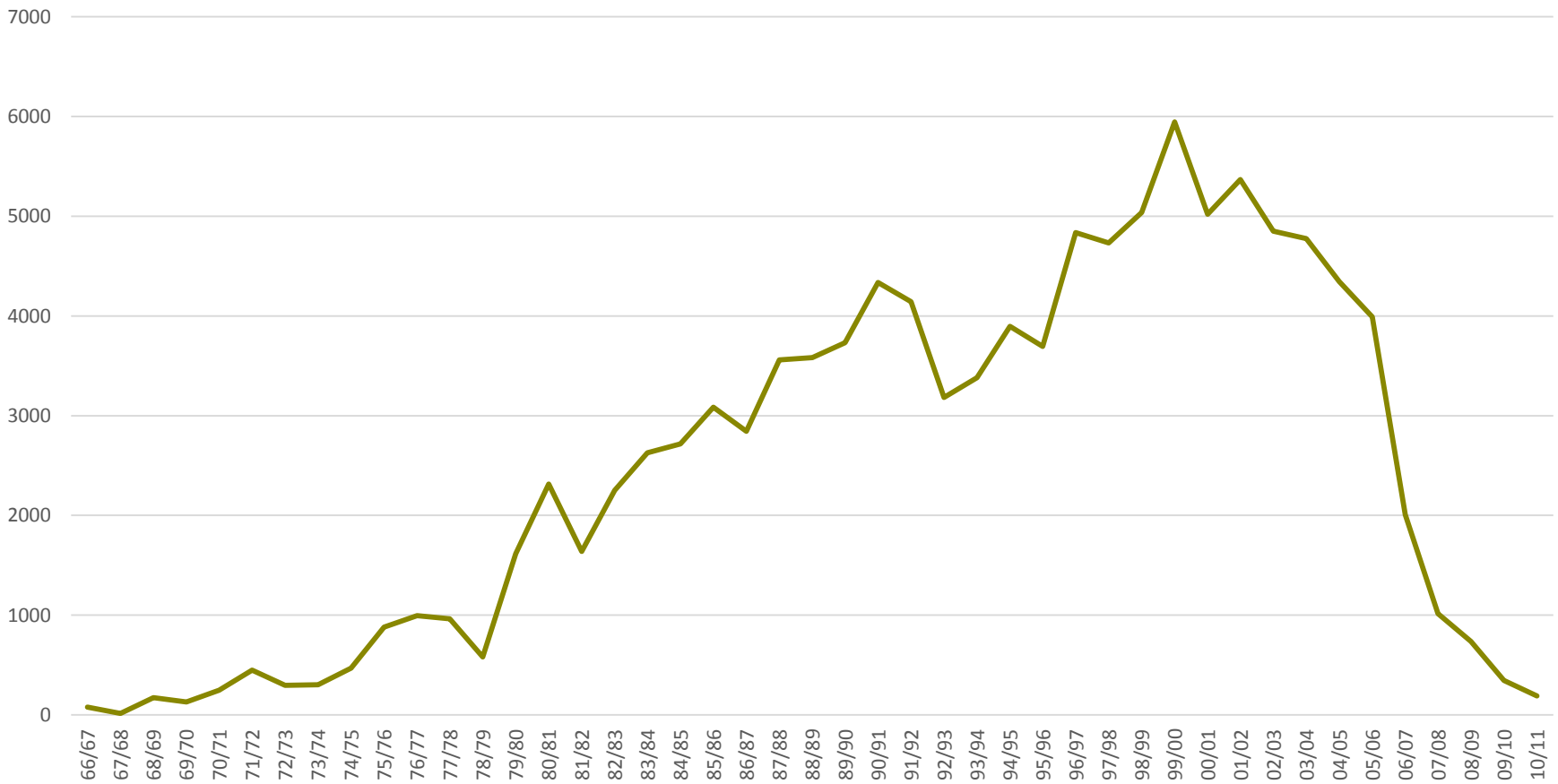
Learning from experience - winter shooting

- 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.



Project aims (1)

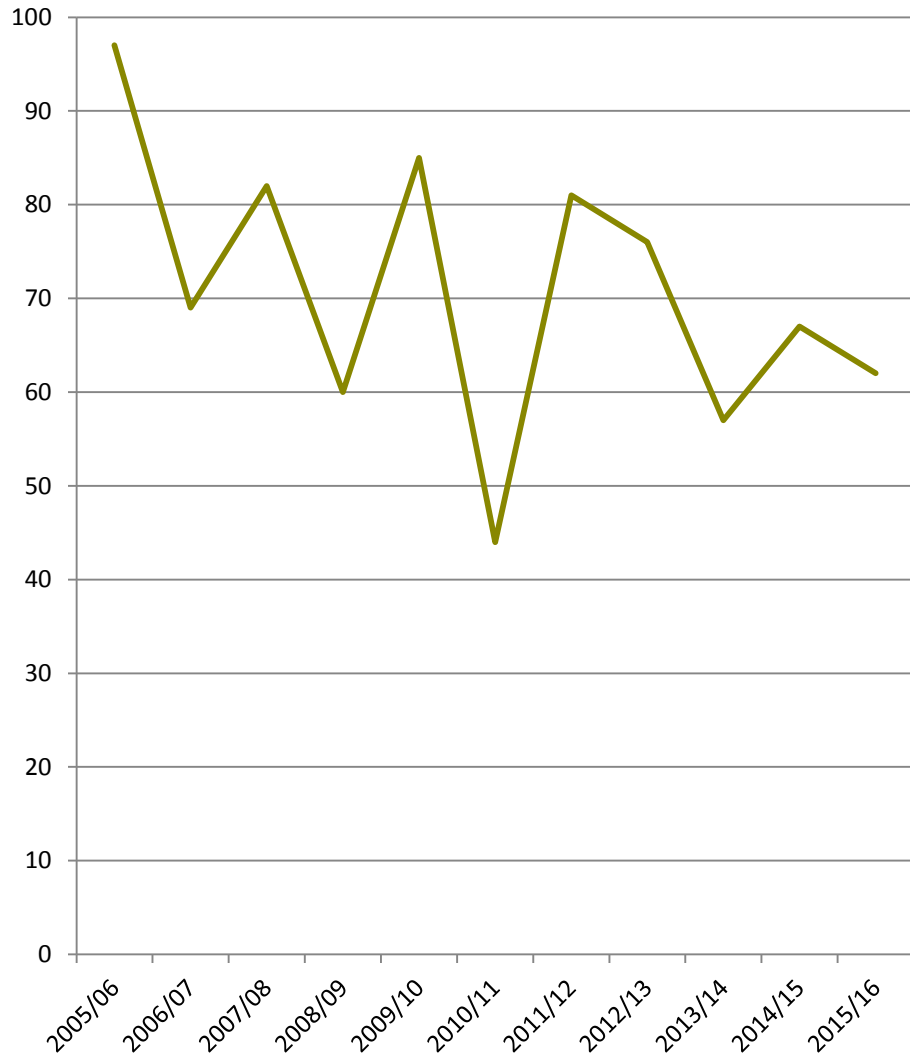
- Eradication of Ruddy Ducks from the UK



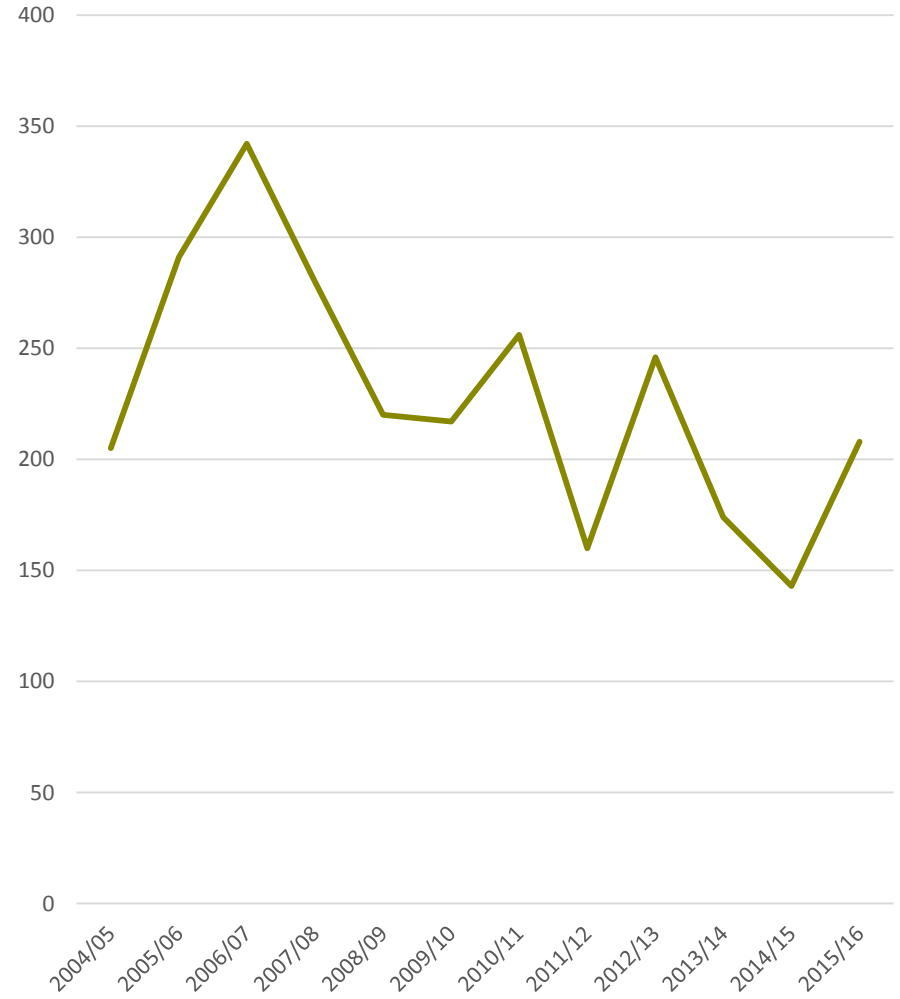
Project aims (2)

- “To promote and disseminate information on control methods and progress with other European control teams and policy makers leading to more effective control of Ruddy Ducks across Europe”.
- Three countries of particular concern in 2005 – France, the Netherlands, and Ireland.

Peak winter count, Netherlands



Peak winter count, France



What helped us at the beginning?

- 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.
- Good knowledge of the most effective methods of controlling Ruddy Ducks after eight years of research.

Dealing with public opinion

- Support of RSPB, WWT, and many local Wildlife Trusts was key to persuading “neutrals” that the eradication was necessary.
- Firm support from UK Government and the ability to react quickly to any negative publicity.

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.

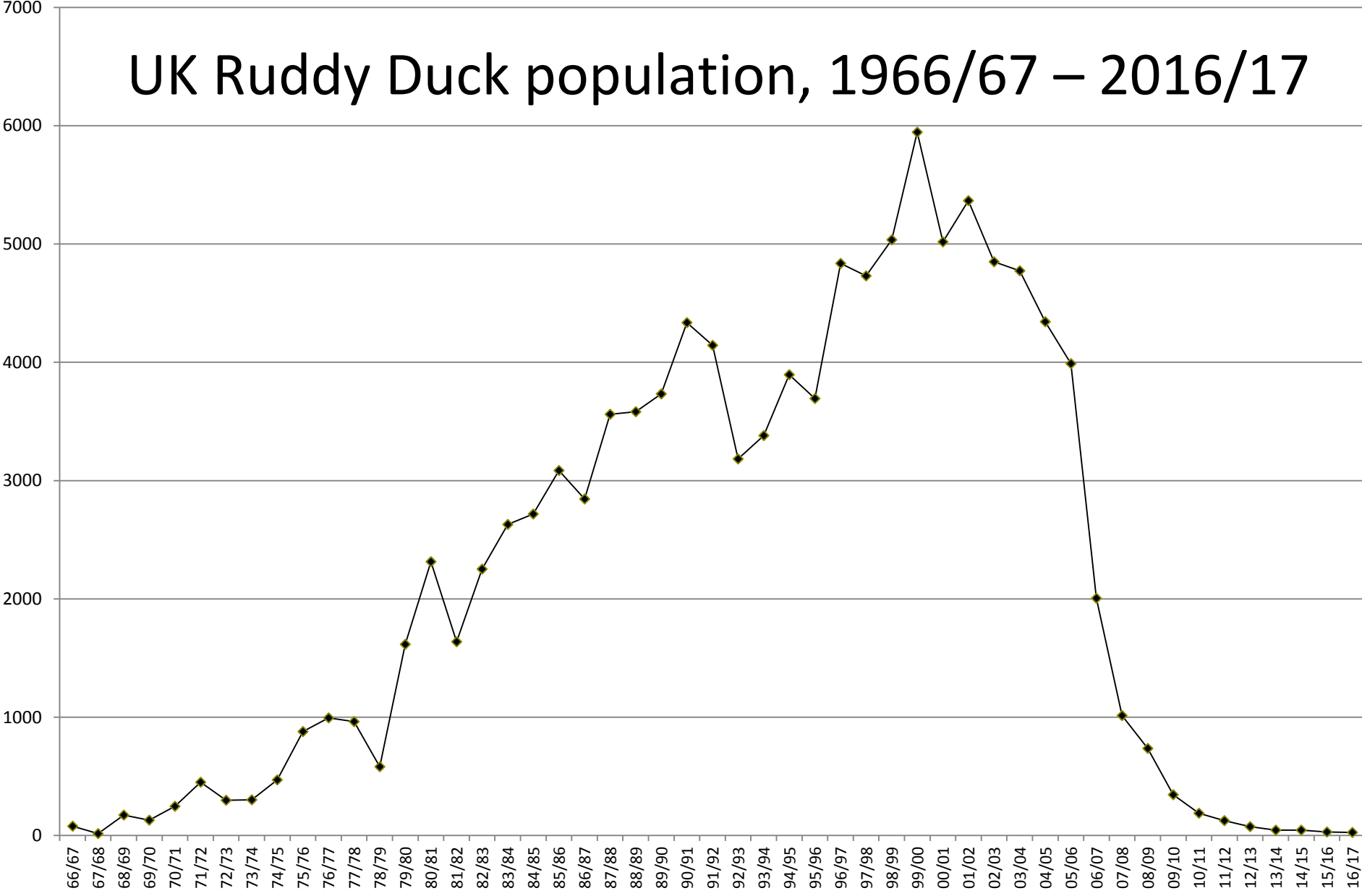
EU Regulation 1143/2014 on IAS

How does action on Ruddy Duck compare?

- Prevention **x**
- Early detection **✓**
- Rapid eradication **x**

- Management NA

UK Ruddy Duck population, 1966/67 – 2016/17



Current situation

- Estimated UK population around 20 birds.
- Several distinct regional populations with 1-5 birds each.
- UK Government recognises the importance of full eradication.
- Eradication of Ruddy Ducks throughout Europe is the only long-term solution.



Advice/lessons learned

- Research control methods beforehand and be sure they are effective.
- Use full-time specialist staff.
- Understand the IAS – its habits and how it reacts to control.
- Where controversial, ensure support or neutrality from influential NGOs.
- Be prepared to robustly defend actions where challenged by animal rights groups.

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