

THE STATUS OF THE FERRUGINOUS DUCK IN SLOVAKIA

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Introduction

The Ferruginous Duck population in Slovakia has declined significantly over the past decade, bringing the species to the brink of extinction. The main threat is intensive fishpond management, which led to the loss of the species from the Czech Republic.

Methods

Data on breeding, migrating and wintering Ferruginous Duck were collected between 1995 and 1999 for the Atlas of Birds of Slovakia. Additional data were available from a national survey of Ferruginous Duck in 1996 and 1997 (Pacenovský, *unpubl. data*) and from Danko (1988) and Hudec *et al.* (1994).

Results

In Central Europe, including Slovakia, the breeding distribution of the Ferruginous Duck expanded during the 19th century, but it has contracted markedly during the 20th century with the western limit shifting to the east (Hudec *et al.*, 1994). In the 1950s, the Ferruginous Duck was the most common breeding diving duck in Slovakia. However, no historical population estimates are available. Since the 1970s, most breeding records have occurred in eastern Slovakia. The Ferruginous Duck's population decline in Slovakia has been accompanied by an increase in numbers of breeding Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*. During the 1980s, 250-500 pairs of Pochard and Tufted Duck bred in Slovakia, compared to 20-40 pairs of Ferruginous Duck. Numbers of Ferruginous Duck have subsequently declined - to 5-15 pairs during the 1990s and to only 3-10 pairs in 2002.

Breeding areas and potential breeding areas are situated in four regions of Slovakia: the Danube lowlands, the Slovak karst lowlands (Slovenski kras), the Kosice Basin, and the east Slovakian lowlands (Fig. 1). In the Danube

lowlands, Ferruginous Ducks used to breed at Gabčíkovo and Cicov on the Danube River. The building of the Danube dam and barrage system at Gabčíkovo destroyed the site at Gabčíkovo. At Cicov the oxbow lake there still seems suitable, but no Ferruginous Duck now breed there. In the 1990s, one pair bred on the canal at Puste Ul'any fishponds. On Veľké Blahovo and on the Bohel'ov Fishponds the species is a possible breeder and regular migrant. At Listové Jazero, 2-3 pairs bred in 1990s (Stollmann, *in litt.*) and suitable habitat remains at Zitavský Luh where Ferruginous Ducks have been recorded on migration. In 2002, there were two breeding season records - of one and three birds from Veľké Blahovo and Bohel'ov Fishponds, respectively (Lengyel, *pers. obs.*). Ferruginous Ducks may also breed on slow flowing canals in the Danube lowlands.

Some 1-3 pairs of Ferruginous Duck were reported breeding on the plateaus of the Slovak karst (Slovenski Kras) during the 1990s - at Brzotín and Hrhov Fishponds (Pacenovský, *pers. obs.*; Uhrin, *pers. obs.*). Unfortunately, the fishpond manager at Hrhov Fishponds has recently tried to increase the area available for fish production by reducing the extent of reedbed at the site. In 1999 and 2000, aerial spraying of Roundup reduced the surface area of reedbed from 90ha to 10ha. An international campaign, supported by 400 people from throughout the world via the Proact e-mail network, was started to stop this habitat destruction. However, a future management agreement with the fishpond owners is still needed to ensure the Ferruginous Duck's future at this site.

In the Kosice Basin, Ferruginous Ducks only breed irregularly - the last successful breeding was in 1997 when two pairs bred on fishponds at Perln-Ch'rm. In 2002, only one bird was observed at this site in August (Chrasc, *pers. obs.*).

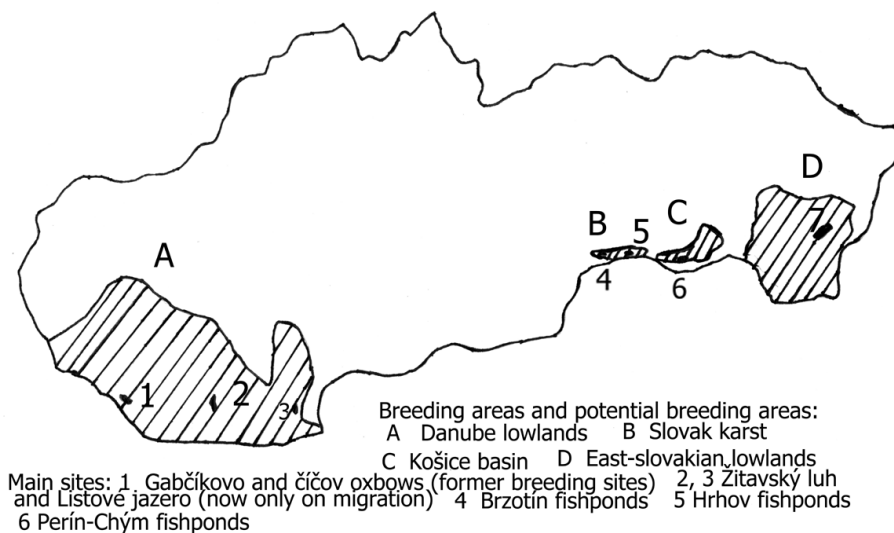


Fig. 1: Distribution of Ferruginous Duck in Slovakia.

In the east Slovakian lowlands, 1-3 pairs of Ferruginous Duck breed at SennÉ Fishponds. Two birds were seen here on 30 April 2002, three males and one female on 15 May and one pair on 4 June near to a Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* colony (Danko, pers. obs.). The Ferruginous Duck may also breed along the Latorica and Bodrog Rivers and in the surrounding marshes. However, water level fluctuations are high here and the marshes dry out in dry summers. In the dry year of 2002, no Ferruginous Ducks were seen during the breeding season at the east Slovakian marshes.

The wintering population in Slovakia is estimated at 5-15 birds, all of which occur on rivers and water bodies in the Danube lowlands. During migration, the species can be found in small numbers throughout the country, including on water reservoirs in northern and north-eastern Slovakia. The largest known migrating

flock of 18 birds was observed on 17 September 1982 (Spalek in Danko, 1988).

Conclusions

The reasons for the rapid decline and/or fluctuating numbers of Ferruginous Duck in Slovakia over the past 10-15 years include channelling of the River Danube), intensification of fishpond management (e.g. Hrhov and Senne Fishponds), low annual precipitation causing wetlands to dry out, especially in the east Slovakian lowlands, and competition with other *Aythya* species. The species is legally protected in Slovakia, although misidentification may still lead to birds being shot by hunters. A national action plan for the species is needed. Conservation requirements include restoration of wetlands, preparation of management plans for private fishponds, and protection of the species from illegal hunting on its staging and wintering areas in southern Europe.

References

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