

**HISTORICAL DIGEST****Background**

Since the introduction of hedgehogs to the Uists in the 1970s, six years of research and conservation management has been carried out. In this report, the key landmarks, results and references are summarised.

Year Landmark

- 1974 • The introduction of hedgehogs to the Uist. Four individuals brought to Daliburgh in the South.
- 1981 • First documented account of hedgehogs on the Uists (Morton, 1982).
- 1983 • A baseline survey carried out by NCC/ Wader Study Group found at least 17,000 pairs of waders, including about 25% of the total UK breeding populations of both dunlin and ringed plover (Fuller et al 1986).
- 1985 • Start of a three year study by Durham University investigating habitat selection and breeding biology of waders in the South Uist (Jackson 1988).
- 1993 • Further documented account of hedgehogs on the Uists (Angus 1993).
- 1995 • First study to look at the impact of hedgehogs on ground nesting birds on South Uist. Study found that hedgehogs were common throughout South Uist and Benbecula machairs and definitely predated some wader eggs (SNH unpublished report, 1995).
- 1995 • Repeat of 1983 wader survey by RSPB revealed that numbers of dunlin, ringed plover, snipe and redshank had declined severely in South Uist and Benbecula (Whyte & O'Brien 1995).
- 1996 • Five-year programme of research started by RSPB to investigate population ecology of hedgehogs and breeding success of waders. The research showed that breeding success was significantly lower compared to the 1980s principally due to high levels of egg predation by hedgehogs. Key findings on Uist hedgehog ecology and life history summarised (Jackson & Green, 2000; Jackson 2001; Jackson 2002; Jackson et al 2002).
- 1997 • Detailed study of hedgehog ecology started. Population estimated at 5,000 adults producing 10,000 young
- 1997 • Between 1997 and 2000, two sites (*North Uist & Machair Islands* and *South Uist Machair and Lochs*) classified as Special Protection Areas (under the EC Birds Directive) because of their importance for nesting waders. The two SPA sites cover a total area of over 10 000 ha.
- 1998 • Experimental use of fencing to safeguard waders tested for first time. Two large enclosure plots were set-up using hedgehog-proof fencing. Hedgehogs were removed from the plots. Wader hatching success more than doubled in the plots. This was localised, however, and offers only a short-term solution (Jackson 2001).
- 2000 • Uist Wader Project launched. The Project is funded and managed by a partnership of Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Executive and RSPB Scotland. Project aims to: 1) Prevent further spread of hedgehogs to North Uist and protect wader 'hot-spots'; 2) Trial methods to determine the best ways to locate and catch hedgehogs; 3) Investigate ways of reducing the hedgehog population.
- 2000 • Repeat wader survey revealed the full extent of the wader declines since the 1980s. In areas with hedgehogs, numbers of breeding snipe, dunlin and ringed plover declined by 60%, redshank by 40% and lapwing by 30%. In North Uist, however, where hedgehogs remain very rare or absent, the estimated numbers of lapwing and redshank increased. Although dunlin declined by 30% in North Uist, this was half as severe as the decline noted in the areas where hedgehogs were present (Jackson et al 2002).
- 2001 • Special barrier fences erected in strategic locations in North Uist in an attempt to slow down the northwards spread of hedgehogs.
- 2001 • A desk-based study to investigate the feasibility of translocating hedgehogs from the Uist to mainland carried out by independent consultants. The study outlined how a trial might be organised. Potential release sites and criteria to judge the success were identified. Estimated cost of a pilot project was in region of £70-£100,000. The Report concluded that small scale translocation was possible in theory but that there were significant welfare concerns (Reeve & Bristow 2001).
- 2002 • Animal welfare and conservation considerations associated with reducing Uist hedgehog population have been investigated by UWP and an independent animal welfare experts. The review concluded that translocation is likely to lead to at least one in four of all captured animals dying. There are also serious welfare implications for pregnant animals, offspring and indigenous mainland hedgehogs (UWP & UFAW, 2002).
- 2002 • Final season of field work by UWP due to be completed in September 2002. Work will include a repeat of trapping trials and testing some novel methods. Ongoing discussions with experts over animal welfare issues and how best to reduce Uist hedgehog population.



Key references associated with Uist waders and Uist hedgehogs

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