



MarLIN

Marine Information Network

Information on the species and habitats around the coasts and sea of the British Isles

Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)

MarLIN – Marine Life Information Network
Marine Evidence-based Sensitivity Assessment (MarESA) Review

Natalie Sweet

2008-10-13

A report from:

The Marine Life Information Network, Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom.

Please note. This MarESA report is a dated version of the online review. Please refer to the website for the most up-to-date version [<https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/2213>]. All terms and the MarESA methodology are outlined on the website (<https://www.marlin.ac.uk>)

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Melanitta nigra (male and two females).
 Photographer: Rob Jutsum
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See online review for
 distribution map

Distribution data supplied by the Ocean
 Biogeographic Information System (OBIS). To
 interrogate UK data visit the NBN Atlas.

Researched by	Natalie Sweet	Refereed by	Admin
Authority	(Linnaeus, 1758)		
Other common names	-	Synonyms	-

Summary

Description

A bulky seaduck with a total body length of 44 to 54 cm. The tail is long and pointed and the bill fairly small. In the male, the entire body plumage, tail and legs are black (the only totally black duck) with a yellow-orange patch on an otherwise black bill. Females are uniformly dark brown with the exception of the side of the head and nape which is a pale dusky brown, with a blackish bill. In late summer, females may display pale, bleached feathers on the back. Juveniles resemble adult females but with a paler light brown belly.

Recorded distribution in Britain and Ireland

The only breeding pairs in the UK occur in Scotland. The UK wintering population can be seen around most of the UK coast, with significant populations in Carmarthen and Cardigan Bays, along the Moray Firth and along the Norfolk coast.

Global distribution

Recorded around the British Isles, along the northern coasts of France and The Netherlands up into the North Sea. Also recorded in the Baltic Sea as well as the west and east coasts of America and Canada towards Newfoundland and British Columbia.

Habitat

Common scoters breed mainly near lakes and rivers in boreal forests and close to tundra waters but also on a few freshwater lakes and blanket bogs in Scotland. Exclusively marine outside of breeding season. These migratory birds are winter visitors to British coasts.

↓ Depth range

-

🔍 Identifying features

- In males the entire plumage is glossy black.
- Females are a dark brown with nape and sides of head paler dusky brown.
- Fairly small bill with yellow-orange patch in males.
- Long pointed tail.

🏛️ Additional information

Common scoters feed on sandy seabeds and offshore shallows, and dive to obtain their food. Their diet consists of small fish and invertebrates including sand eels, mussels and sand dwelling bivalves. They have important moulting and wintering localities in the UK, with 25,000-30,000 distributed in inshore waters. Please note that distribution maps are compiled using records for both breeding and wintering populations. For more specific distribution and abundance records please refer to maps compiled by The British Trust for Ornithology, available at <http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/previous/index.htm>

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