

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway

Annual Surveillance of Summer Shelduck Populations



Report for 2014



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Summary

The Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway hold nationally important numbers of shelducks during the winter months. In addition there is a small summer population which had been the subject of annual summer boat surveys carried out between 1991 and 2013. The summer boat surveys were repeated in 2014 as part of a co-ordinated programme of environmental surveillance in the estuary system. The aims, objectives and methods used, together with the data obtained are described in this report.

The results indicate that in terms of the numbers of broods of ducklings seen on the water, 2014 was an improvement on 2013 which (along with 2012) was the poorest year for breeding shelducks in the estuary since the current sequence of annual surveys began in 1991. As in previous years, predation is thought to have been a major factor affecting the number and size of broods recorded in 2014. Disturbance may also have been a contributory factor, although there is little hard evidence on which an assessment of the importance of this as a factor affecting the population can be based.

Since the mid-1990 s there has been a steady decline in the numbers of shelduck over wintering in the UK. This decline has been mirrored by the data for shelduck from the WeBS counts: the local and national declines are probably linked to an increasing tendency for birds to “short-stop” in mainland Europe in response to the recent run of mild winters. The decline in the over wintering population has led to fewer birds remaining within the estuary system to breed.

Data collected for other wetland birds once again underlined the importance of the estuary system during the autumn migration period, especially for species such as curlew.

The report concludes with a recommendation for the continuation of the annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations in the estuary system as part of the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group’s annual work programme.