



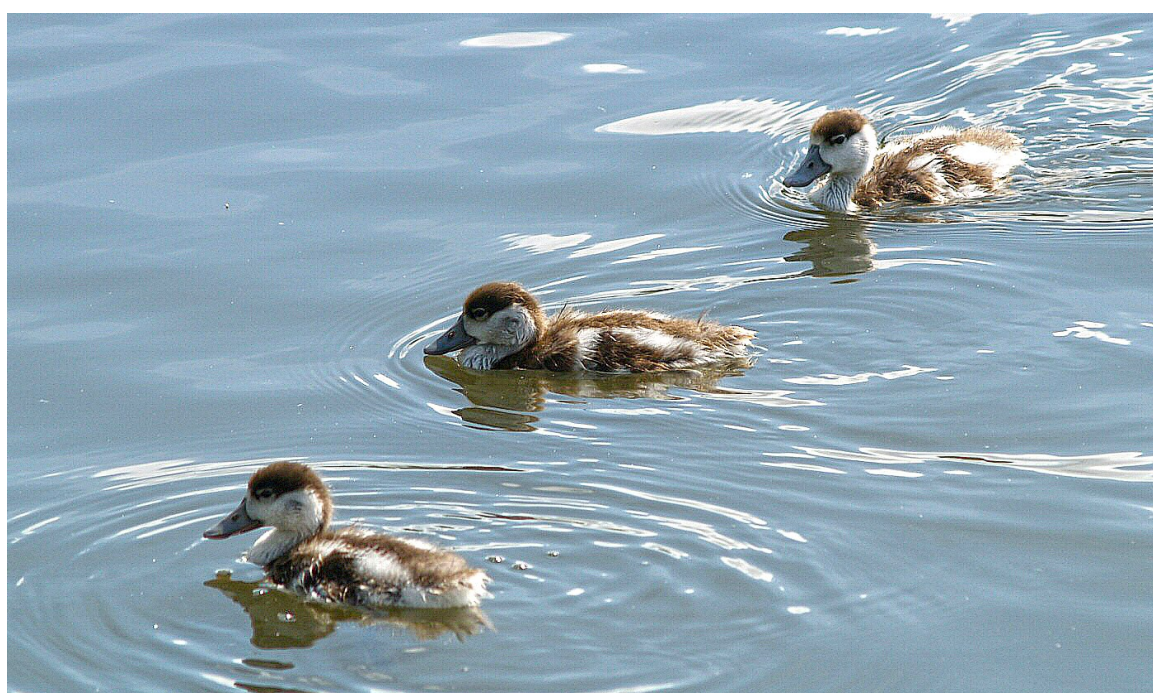
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MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY  
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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**Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway  
Annual surveillance of summer shelduck  
population 2015**

**J E Hodges**



**Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway**  
**Annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations**  
**Report for 2015**

**Report to the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group**

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**Ecologist**

**September 2015**

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# **Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway Annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations 2015**

## **Summary**

The Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway hold regionally important numbers of shelducks during the winter months. In addition there is a small summer population that has been the subject of annual boat surveys carried out between 1991 and 2014. The summer shelduck survey was repeated in 2015 as part of a co-ordinated programme of environmental surveillance work 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, 2015 was a slightly better season than 2014 which in turn was a significant improvement on the two preceding seasons of 2013 and 2012, the poorest years for breeding shelducks in the estuary system since the current sequence of annual surveys began in 1991. As in previous years, predation (by avian and/or mammalian predators) is thought to have been a major factor affecting the number and size of broods recorded in 2015. The relatively cold wet weather in May and June and disturbance may also have been contributory factors although there is little evidence on which an assessment of the importance of the latter as a factor affecting breeding success and survival of ducklings to fledging can be based.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a steady decline in the numbers of shelduck overwintering in the UK. This national decline has been mirrored by a decline in the number of shelducks over-wintering in the estuary system that continued in the 2014/15 winter. 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 trend for mild winters across western Europe. The decline in the over-wintering population has led to fewer birds remaining in 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 although the incomplete coverage achieved through the land-based counts that were carried out in place of the boat survey in July resulted in many fewer birds, *e.g.* curlew and redshank, being recorded than in previous years.

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.