



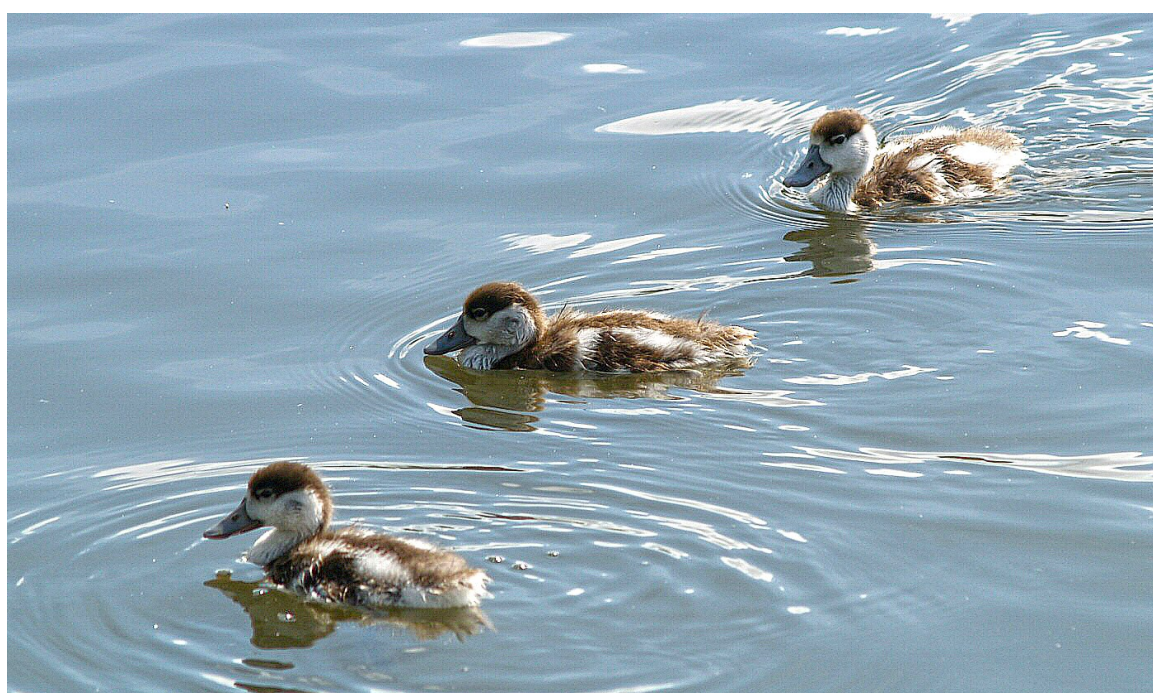
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MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY  
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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**Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway  
Annual surveillance of summer shelduck  
population 2016**

**J E Hodges**



**Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway  
Annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations-2016**

**Report to the Port of Milford Haven  
on behalf of  
Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group**

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Ecologist**

**November 2016**

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# **Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway: annual surveillance of shelduck populations 2016**

## **Executive summary**

The Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway hold regionally important numbers of shelducks during the winter months. There is also a small summer population that has been the subject of annual boat surveys carried out between 1991 and 2015. The summer shelduck survey was repeated in 2016 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 the number of broods of ducklings seen on the water in 2016 was one less than in 2015 and the same as that recorded in 2014. In terms of productivity, 2016 represented an improvement on the previous six seasons although the long-term downward trend in the number and size of broods was continued. As in previous years, predation (by avian and/or mammalian predators) is thought to have played a major factor affecting the number and size of broods recorded in 2016. Adverse weather conditions during 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 young to fledging can be based. Other factors such as thick deposits of green algae on mud flats at low tide may have had localised effects on the quality of foraging habitat, hence on fitness and survival of adult and young shelducks.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a downward trend in the numbers of shelduck over-wintering in the UK. This national trend has been mirrored by a decline in the numbers of shelducks over-wintering in the estuary system which continued in the 2015/16 winter. These downward trends are likely to be linked to factors such as an increasing tendency for birds to “short-stop” in mainland Europe in response to the recent trend towards mild winters across western Europe, and possibly to changes in the annual moult grounds. As a consequence of the decline in the numbers of shelducks choosing to over-winter in the estuary system, fewer are remaining 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.