

# MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY AND CLEDDAU ESTUARY

## WETLAND BIRD SURVEY 1998 - 1999



A report to

**MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING STEERING GROUP**

**Milford Haven Waterway and Cleddau Estuary**

**Wetland Bird Survey**

**1998-99**

**Report prepared for the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Monitoring Steering Group**

**by Annie Poole**

**on behalf of the Wildlife Trust West Wales  
and the Pembrokeshire Ornithological Research Committee.**

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# WILDFOWL AND WADER COUNTS 1998-99

## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

The Milford Haven Waterway and Cleddau Estuary hold large numbers of waterfowl (wildfowl and waders) during the winter months. Numbers of Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Dunlin, and Curlew reach levels of "national importance" in most years.

Monthly counts of waterfowl are carried out throughout the autumn and winter (September to March) as part of the national Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Since the winter of 1993-94 these counts have also been incorporated into a rolling programme of research and survey initiated by the MHWEMSG.

### 2. Methods

The estuary is divided into fifteen sectors and is counted by a team of observers. Counts normally take place within two hours either side of high tide when most species are assembled in high tide roosts. Sectors are counted by a combination of walking the shore and counting from fixed points depending on accessibility. Almost complete coverage of all sites was achieved between September 1998 and February 1999. Not all sites were counted in March 1999.

### 3. Results

Forty-nine species of waterfowl were recorded (excluding gulls), including ten species of duck and twenty-one of waders. Divers, grebes, herons, cormorants and geese were also represented, together with mute swan, water rail and moorhen. Unusual species included red-necked and Slavonian grebes, and coot.

During the peak period winter between November 1998 and February 1999, mean monthly totals of 5080 wildfowl and 7890 waders were present. The peak monthly count for wildfowl was 7184 in December, and for waders was 10,787 in January. Dunlin was the most numerous wader species, with their second highest peak count since co-ordinated recording began in 1982.

Nationally Important species:	Little Grebe (max. 56 in December), Shelduck (max. 921 in January), Wigeon (max. 4009 in December), Teal (max. 2138 in December) and Dunlin (max 5973 in January) Curlew (max. 1448 in December),
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### 4. Discussion

The mean midwinter monthly totals of waders and wildfowl were slightly lower than in the previous three seasons. Dunlin, curlew and wigeon numbers showed slight increases over 1997-98, whilst shelduck, and teal numbers showed a decrease. Numbers of both wigeon and teal dropped dramatically between December and January, as is usual. Less common species, such as shoveler, were present in only very small numbers this season. Cormorants and red-breasted merganser peaked at slightly higher numbers than in 1997-98, though the overall trend is still downwards. Numbers of little egrets was also slightly below the previous season, and although they were again present in one of the heronries, breeding was not proved in 1998. The migration count of curlew (2,400 in August) was the second highest recorded, though the midwinter counts were similar to previous years. Redshank continued their long-term decline.

Annie Poole

WeBS coordinator for Pembrokeshire  
Pembrokeshire Ornithological Research Committee, Wildlife Trust West Wales. 17 May 1998