

**Milford Haven Waterway
and Cleddau Estuary
Wetland Bird Survey
1999-2000**

Report prepared for the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance 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 1999-2000

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 MHWESG.

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. Coverage was incomplete during the 1999-2000 season, with, unfortunately, some of the major sectors not being counted in some months.

3. Results

Forty-nine species of waterfowl were recorded (excluding gulls), including twelve species of duck and twenty-two of waders. Divers, grebes, herons, cormorants and geese were also represented, together with mute swan, water rail and moorhen. Unusual species included Slavonian grebe, Common Scoter and Smew.

During the peak period winter between November 1999 and February 2000, mean monthly totals of 5716 wildfowl and 7880 waders were present. The peak monthly count for wildfowl was 8145 in December, and for waders was 10,779 also in January. Dunlin was again the most numerous wader species, though with fewer birds recorded than in recent years.

Nationally Important species:	Little Grebe (max. 69 in November), Shelduck (max. 709 in December), Wigeon (max. 4078 in November), Teal (max. 2438 in December) Dunlin (max 4930 in December) Curlew (max. 1401 in December),
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4. Discussion

The mean midwinter monthly totals of waders and wildfowl were similar to the 1998-99 season, despite the lack of counts at some major sites especially in January and February. Little grebe, Wigeon and teal numbers showed slight increases over 1998-99, whilst shelduck and dunlin numbers showed a decrease. Both these species normally show a peak count in January or February, and the decrease is almost certainly due to the counts missed on Pembroke River and Angle Bay which are the main sites for these species. Less common species, such as shoveler, were present in only very small numbers this season. Redshank numbers seem to have stabilised at a level below the long term average. Canada Goose numbers were the highest ever recorded with 760 on the Western Cleddau in October 1999.

Annie Poole

WeBS coordinator for Pembrokeshire
Pembrokeshire Ornithological Research Committee, Wildlife Trust West Wales. 21 November 2000