MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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Milford Haven Waterway

and Cleddau Estuary

Wetland Bird Survey

2000-2001

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 2000-2001

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 almost complete in 2000-2001. No count was undertaken in March due to Foot and Mouth Disease restrictions.

3. Results

Forty-five 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 Slavonian grebe and red-throated diver.

During the peak period winter between November 2000 and February 2001, mean monthly totals of 5498 wildfowl and 5666 waders were present. The peak monthly count for wildfowl was 6933 in December, and for waders was 6388 in January. Dunlin was again the most numerous wader species, though with far fewer birds recorded than in recent years.

Nationally Important species:	Little Grebe (max. 66 in November), Shelduck (max. 655 in February), Wigeon (max. 3611 in November), Teal (max. 2427 in January) Dunlin (max 2699 in February) Curlew (max. 1167 in December),

The combined peak counts for all species (including gulls) in between November and February was 21,545, thus maintaining the estuary at the level of International Importance for its overall bird populations..

4. Discussion

The mean midwinter monthly totals of waders and wildfowl were lower than in recent years. All of the nationally important species showed a decline when compared with the 1999-2000 season. Shelduck and dunlin numbers showed a considerable decrease. Less common species, such as pintail, shoveler and tufted, were present in only very small numbers this season. Redshank numbers increased for the second consecutive year to reach their highest level since 1993-94. Canada Goose numbers were the highest ever recorded with 1080 present in December 2000.

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