



MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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Milford Haven Waterway
and Cleddau Estuary
Wetland Bird Survey
2002-03

Report prepared for the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group

by Annie Poole

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

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WILDFOWL AND WADER COUNTS 2002-03

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 during the 2002-03 season, with, unfortunately, some of the major sectors not being counted in September.

3. Results

Fifty-three species of waterfowl were recorded (excluding gulls), including eight species of duck and twenty-four of waders. Divers, grebes, herons, cormorants and geese were also represented, together with mute swan, water rail and moorhen. Unusual species included Slavonian and Red-necked grebes, and great northern and red-throated divers.

During the peak period winter between November 2002 and February 2003, mean monthly totals of 4931 wildfowl and 7426 waders were present. The peak monthly count for wildfowl was 6374 in December, and for waders was 9381 in February. Dunlin was again the most numerous wader species, with more birds recorded than in the previous three years.

Nationally Important species:	Little Grebe (max. 37 in January and February), Shelduck (max. 655 in February), Wigeon (max. 3871 in December), Teal (max. 1691 in December) Dunlin (max 5417 in February) Curlew (max. 1022 in November),
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4. Discussion

The mean midwinter monthly totals of waders and wildfowl were slightly lower than in the 2001-02 season. Little grebe numbers were particularly low - the lowest since 1994-95. Most wildfowl species were present in lower numbers than in recent years. Wader numbers were considerably boosted by an influx of Dunlin in February, and Oystercatchers continued to increase. Less common species, such as shoveler, red-breasted merganser and divers were present in larger numbers. Canada Goose numbers fell for the second consecutive year, but as they often feed away from the estuary, it is difficult to say yet if this is a definite trend.

Annie Poole

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