



MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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Milford Haven Waterway
and Cleddau Estuary
Wetland Bird Survey
2003-04

Report prepared for the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group

by Annie Haycock

on behalf of the Wildlife Trust South and West Wales
and the Pembrokeshire WeBS team.

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WILDFOWL AND WADER COUNTS 2003-04

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 have reached levels of "national importance" in recent 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 2003-04 season.

3. Results

Fifty-four species of waterfowl were recorded (including gulls), with 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 snow goose (probably feral), American wigeon, and goosander. There was also an influx of over 100 Brent Geese in February.

During the peak winter period between November 2003 and February 2004, mean monthly totals of 6477 wildfowl and 7396 waders were present. The peak monthly count for wildfowl was 9763 in December, and for waders was 8973 in February.

Nationally Important species:	Wigeon (max. 6045 in December), Teal (max. 2129 in December)
Species now below the level of National Importance	Little Grebe (max. 55 in November), Shelduck (max. 700 in January) Dunlin (max 3234 in February) Curlew (max. 727 in November),

4. Discussion

The mean midwinter monthly totals of waders were higher, and wildfowl were slightly lower than in the 2002-03 season. Little grebe numbers appear to have recovered from the low in 2002-03. Most wildfowl species were present in higher numbers than last winter. Wigeon was the most numerous waterfowl species, with over 50% more than in recent years. Dunlin was again the most numerous wader species, although numbers were again low (c/w 2000-01 & 2001-02). Oystercatchers declined considerably after four consecutive increases. The peak count of curlew fell for the fifth consecutive season.

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