LINDISFARNE
Northumberland

Internationally important: Pink-footed Goose, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Bar-tailed Godwit

Nationally important: Shelduck, Greylag Goose, Wigeon, Eider, Common Scoter, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Curlew, Redshank

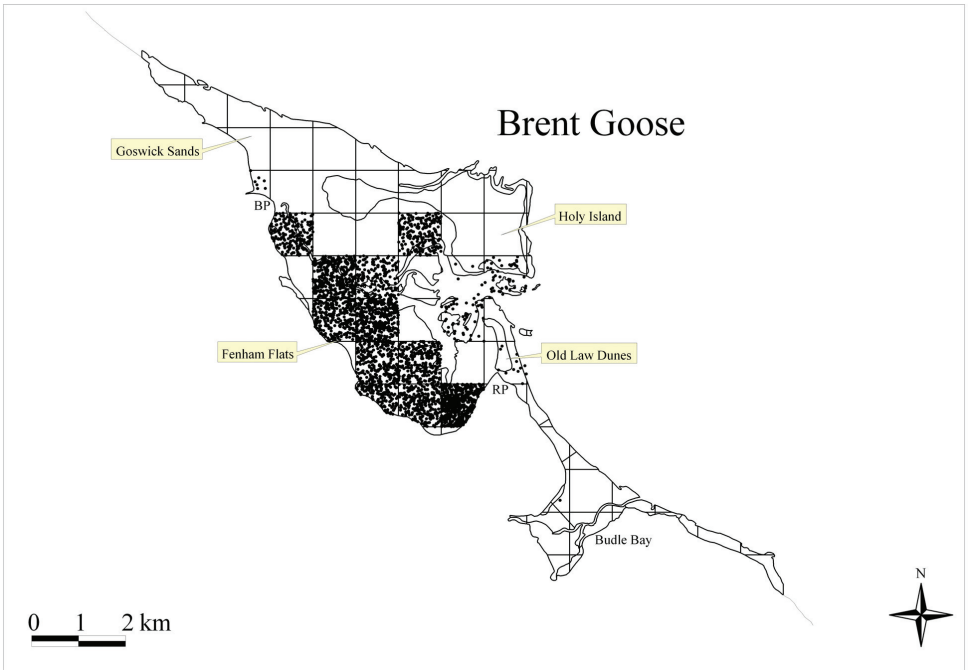
Site description

Lindisfarne, along with Budle Bay, forms one of the largest intertidal areas in north-east England. This estuary, as one of only two barrier beach systems within the UK, is an unusual structure. Lindisfarne is one of the most important estuary systems in the UK, with three species present in internationally important numbers and a further ten species reaching levels of national importance. Within the British Isles, the Svalbard population of Light-bellied Brent Goose only winters on Lindisfarne. The majority of the site is sandy, although there are increasing amounts of silt in parts of Budle Bay and Fenham Flats. Several freshwater creeks traverse the flats at low tide. There are several areas of saltmarsh between Goswick to Fenham, especially around the causeway to Holy Island and along the south-western shore of Budle Bay. Extensive sand dunes occur on several parts of the site, with dune slacks, dune heath and dune pasture also represented. The eastern shoreline of Holy Island is mainly rocky, with a few patches of shingle.

Bird distribution 2001/02

The following account is based on a single December count, undertaken as a part of the Northumberland Bird Atlas project. The count of 14 Greylags was considerably lower than the 176 birds noted the previous year. A small flock of Barnacle Geese frequented the flats off Beal Point, whilst up to 65 Dark-bellied Brent Geese were confined to the grass sward on the eastern side of Holy Island and the northern end of Holy Island Sands. Conversely, the majority of the Light-bellied Brent Geese occurred on the Fenham Flats between Ross Point and Fenham, off Beal Point and on Holy Island Sands. This distribution was similar to that of winter 2000/01, apart from a small number that also frequented the southern tip of Lindisfarne. The count of 3,159 Light-bellied Brents exceeded the 1,937 of the previous year. Similarly, Shelduck numbers showed an increase over the previous year, with the greatest concentrations in the western and southern parts of Budle Bay and on the Fenham Flats. Budle Bay was the most important area for Wigeon. Both Teal and Mallard showed a similar overall distribution to that of Wigeon. However, greater numbers of Teal occurred on Holy Island than either of the other two species. Pintail numbers were close to reaching the threshold of national importance and they were located on Fenham Flats off Fenham Mill. Generally, Eider were concentrated around the south-eastern corner and within the channels running across Fenham Flats. The count of 1,521 Eider was around 300 birds less than the previous December. The mouth of Budle Bay was an important area for Long-tailed Duck and Common Scoter. A few of the former species were also found off Ross Point and around Holy Island. Other areas used by small groups of Common Scoter included the channel west of Old Law Dunes, off Goswick Sands and around Holy Island. More than 800 Common Scoter were counted, which was substantially higher than the two previous winters.

The greatest densities of Oystercatcher were found along the shore around the eastern half of Holy Island and off Guile Point. The small numbers of Ringed Plover present were confined to Budle Bay and the north-east corner of Holy Island. Golden Plover (1,800 birds) and Lapwing (1,700 individuals) were both distributed mainly within Budle Bay, on Fenham Flats and on the southern part of Holy Island. Additionally, dense concentrations of Lapwing frequented Goswick Sands. Conversely, Grey Plover were more restricted, favouring Fenham Flats and Budle Bay. Grey Plover are potentially missed by Low Tide counts, feeding in deep creeks and gullies. This may explain why the recent Core Count numbers are higher than the 572 recorded at low tide. The 2,260 Knot recorded also frequented Budle Bay and Fenham Flats. Sanderling numbers exceeded the level of national importance during the count, with the birds concentrated in Budle Bay and around Ross Point/Old Law Dunes. Virtually all the Dunlin utilised the silty substrates of Fenham Flats and Budle Bay. Both Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew were widely distributed, although the former avoided Goswick Sands and much of Holy Island Sands. The count of 1,769 Bar-tailed Godwit was well below recent internationally important Core Count totals.



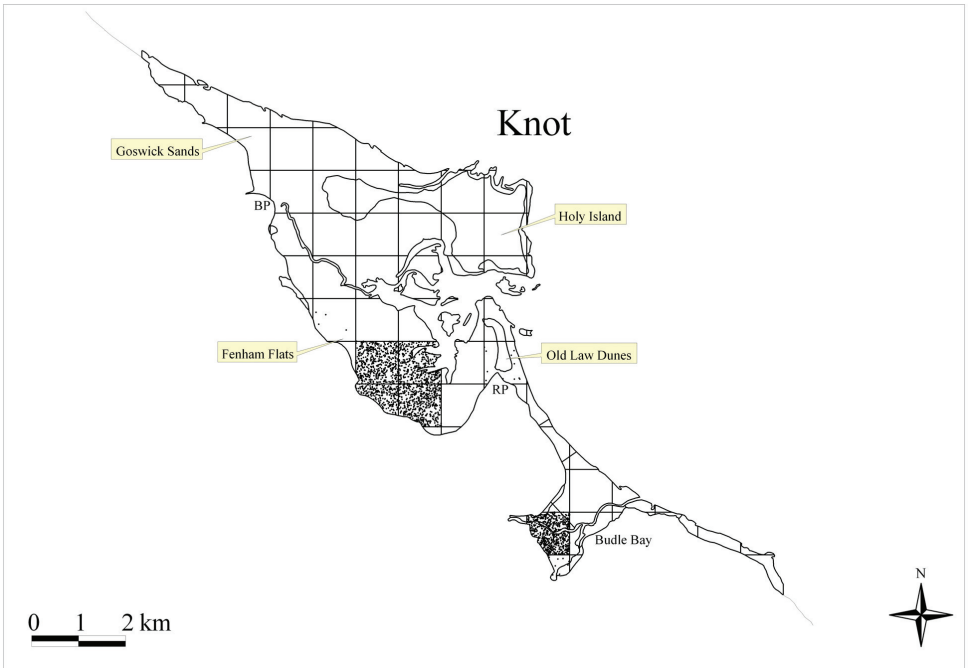


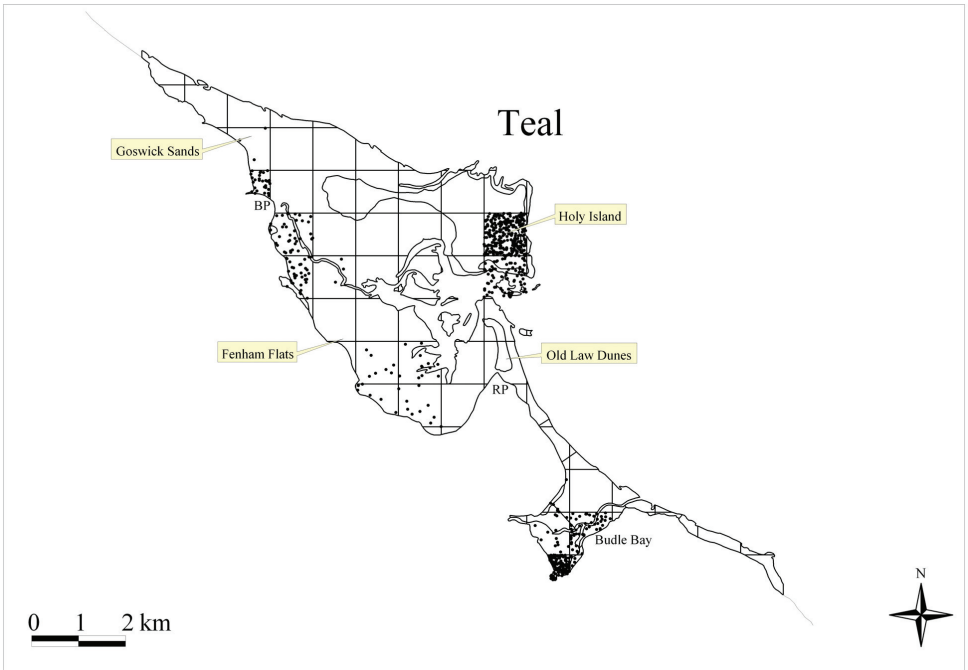
Figure 104. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Light-bellied Brent Goose and Knot at Lindisfarne, winter 2001/02. (BP=Beal Point , RP=Ross Point)

More than 1,800 Curlew were recorded, exceeding the recent peak Core Count totals. Redshank were widely distributed and, as in previous years, the greatest concentrations occurred on Holy Island Sands. Small numbers of Turnstone favoured Budle Bay, the flats adjacent to Ross Point and some coastline around Holy Island.

Bird distribution 2002/03

Counts were undertaken in December and February as part of the ongoing Northumberland Bird Atlas project. Slavonian Grebes were recorded in good numbers in December, when 23 individuals were noted. In February, over 280 Pink-footed Geese were located in Budle Bay and Fenham Flats and around 450 Greylag Geese were present in Budle Bay. The majority of the Light-bellied Brent Geese were widely scattered, mostly on Fenham Sands and in the south-west corner of Budle Bay. Small numbers of Dark-bellied Brent Geese were recorded around the western end of Lindisfarne. Both Shelduck and Wigeon occurred on Fenham Flats and in Budle Bay, with the latter site holding most of the Wigeon. Teal peaked in December, when 870 were present and they mostly frequented the south-eastern corner of Budle Bay and close to the south-eastern corner of Lindisfarne. Smaller numbers of Teal were also recorded on Fenham Flats and Goswick Sands. Mallard and up to 220 Pintail favoured Fenham Flats with the former additionally occurring in the eastern part of Budle Bay. Eider numbers continued their downward trend of the last few years, peaking at 1,368 birds in February. The greatest concentrations were noted in the harbour off the southern end of Lindisfarne and in the channel along the north side of the island. Long-tailed Duck also frequented the same channel, with a few in Burrow's Hole and at the mouth of Budle Bay. Common Scoter were present in good numbers, peaking at 450 in February. The mouth of Budle Bay and Goswick Sands were the two most important areas for this species. Small numbers of Goldeneye frequented the channels along the north side of Holy Island, whilst most of the Red-breasted Merganser were found around the Harbour area.

Oystercatcher were mostly distributed off the south-western shore of Holy Island, around Guile Point and Budle Bay. Low numbers of Ringed Plover were confined to Budle Bay and parts of the northern and southern shoreline of Holy Island. The distribution of Golden Plover and Lapwing was broadly similar, with the greatest densities recorded in Budle Bay, Fenham Flats and the southern half of Holy Island. Peak numbers of Golden Plover occurred in December (3,100 birds), whilst the two Lapwing counts were virtually identical. Grey Plover were distributed more widely, although in lower numbers than the previous winter, with Holy Island Sands holding the greatest densities. Knot exceeded the threshold of national importance when more than 3,800 birds were noted in February, when they were recorded in the greatest densities on Holy Island and Fenham Sands. Sanderling peaked in February when 283 individuals were present. They were mainly located on Goswick Sands, north of Beal Point, with lesser numbers along the north east coast of Holy Island and scattered within Budle Baylthough Dunlin were widely distributed, the majority frequented Holy Island Sands and Fenham Flats. Whilst both Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew were also found throughout, the majority of the former were concentrated on the sands along the southern shores of Holy Island and most of the latter were recorded from fields at the southern end of Holy Island. Apart from the central mudflats between Holy Island Sands and Fenham Flats, Redshank were widely distributed. Small numbers of Turnstone were present at Ross Point and along the southern shore of Holy Island.



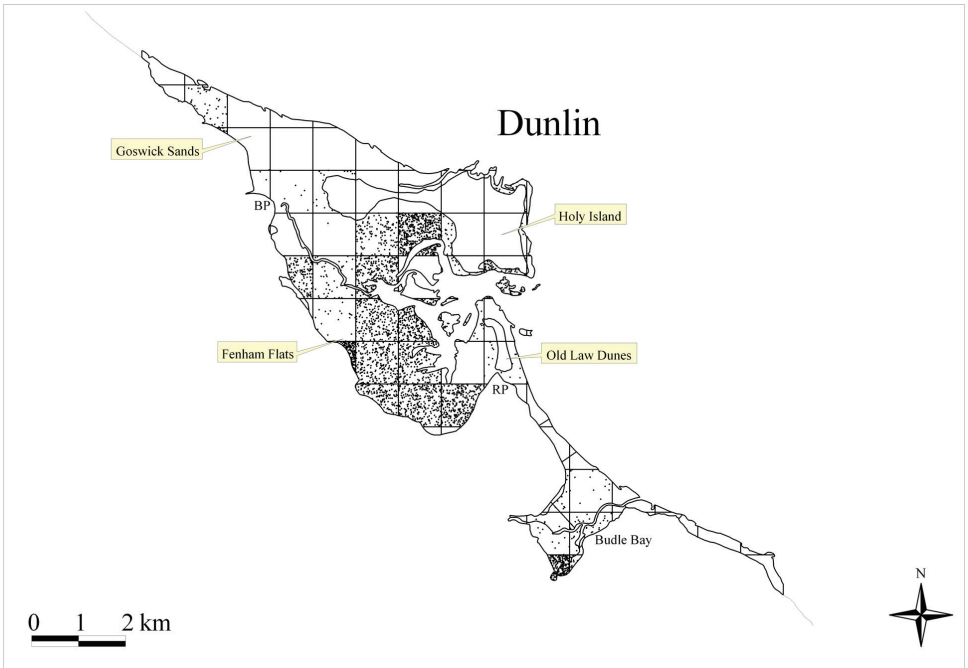


Figure 105. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Teal and Dunlin at Lindisfarne, winter 2002/03. (BP=Beal Point , RP=Ross Point)

ORWELL ESTUARY
Suffolk

Internationally important: Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank

Nationally important: Gadwall, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Grey Plover

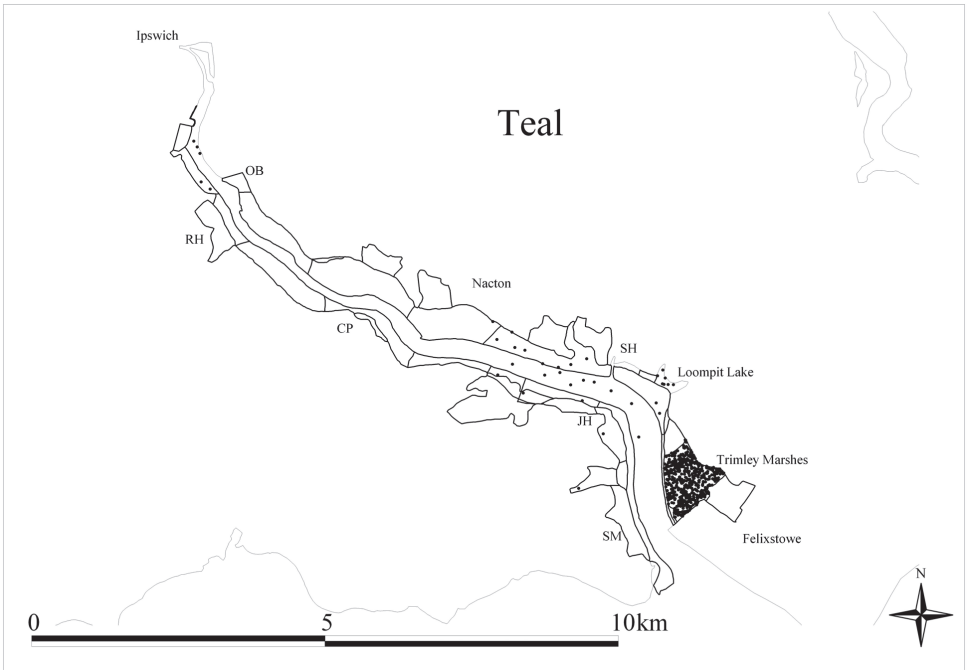
Site description

The Orwell Estuary extends from Ipswich to the Port of Felixstowe where it meets the Stour Estuary. Much of the intertidal substrate is fairly muddy, although it becomes sandier towards the mouth. In the past, the main conservation issues concerned dockland expansion schemes and marina developments. Dockland expansion at Felixstowe, since around 1964, has claimed all of the outer reaches of the Orwell's northern shore. Trimley Marshes nature reserve, established in 1989 and managed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, was established as legal mitigation for the loss of important intertidal habitat occurring as a result of dockland developments. Although the reserve does not replace the lost estuarine habitat, it does provide a roost and safe refuge site for several thousand waterbirds during the winter period. Other problems confronting the Orwell are pollution and disturbance from sailing and other leisure activities (Beecroft 1990, Buck 1997, Pritchard *et al* 1992, MWright pers comm).

Bird distribution 2001/02

Great Crested Grebes were recorded throughout and were generally distributed along most of the river. The feral Greylag population peaked at more than 600 birds in January, with the majority concentrated on the Trimley and Shotley Marshes, along with Loompit Lake. The distribution of Canada and Dark-bellied Brent Goose was very similar to that of Greylag, with the birds favouring the southern part of the estuary. The flats off Stratton Hall were used more often by Dark-bellied Brent Geese than during the previous winter. Shelduck peaked at 754 birds in January when they were generally distributed throughout, albeit in lower concentrations towards the mouth. The greatest densities of Wigeon were found off Jill's Hole and on Trimley Marshes. Wigeon counts have shown a gradual increase over recent years, culminating in a peak count of nearly 2,600 birds in February. Trimley Marshes and Loompit Lake were important areas for Gadwall, Mallard, Pintail and Shoveler. The peak count of 160 Gadwall, counted in December, represented the second highest ever Low Tide count. Pintail exceeded the threshold of national importance in November, when 473 birds were counted. However, this was a temporary occurrence as Pintail counts decreased over the rest of the winter. Trimley Marshes were particularly important for Teal, holding the majority of the Orwell population. Pochard, Tufted Duck and Ruddy Duck were concentrated on Loompit Lake and Trimley Marshes, whilst Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser were more generally scattered along the river channel.

Oystercatcher counts peaked at 1,679 in February, which was the highest ever Low Tide count for this species. The majority were found between Orwell Bridge and Stratton Hall on the northern shore and Redgate Hard and Cathouse Point on the southern shore. Ringed and Grey Plover were scattered throughout, whilst Golden Plover were concentrated on the flats off Nacton. During much of the winter, Golden Plover were largely absent. However, in December, there was a short-lived influx when 558 birds were recorded. The densest concentrations of Lapwing were found off Redgate Hard in the upper reaches, with lesser concentrations on the flats in the lower third, including Trimley Marshes. Unusually, Knot were unrecorded during November. An influx of 1,601 individuals occurred in December, before a marked decline ensued for the remainder of the winter. Dunlin abundance on the Orwell has shown quite marked fluctuations over recent years, with the overall trend being one of decline. It is possible that ongoing capital dredging operations may be implicated. There was an increase in the Black-tailed Godwit counts, which peaked at 260 birds in December. This compares with a maximum count of only 73 godwit during winter 2000/01. The godwits frequented the upper half of the Orwell and Trimley Marshes. Record numbers of Curlew were recorded in February, when 1,045 birds were present. This count may have been inflated by early passage birds beginning to head back to breeding grounds. Although widely distributed, most Curlew occurred on the flats within the upper half of the estuary. Redshank peaked at 2,279 individuals in January, higher than the Core Count five-year mean peak. They were distributed throughout, with the greatest concentrations between the Orwell Bridge and Stratton Hall.



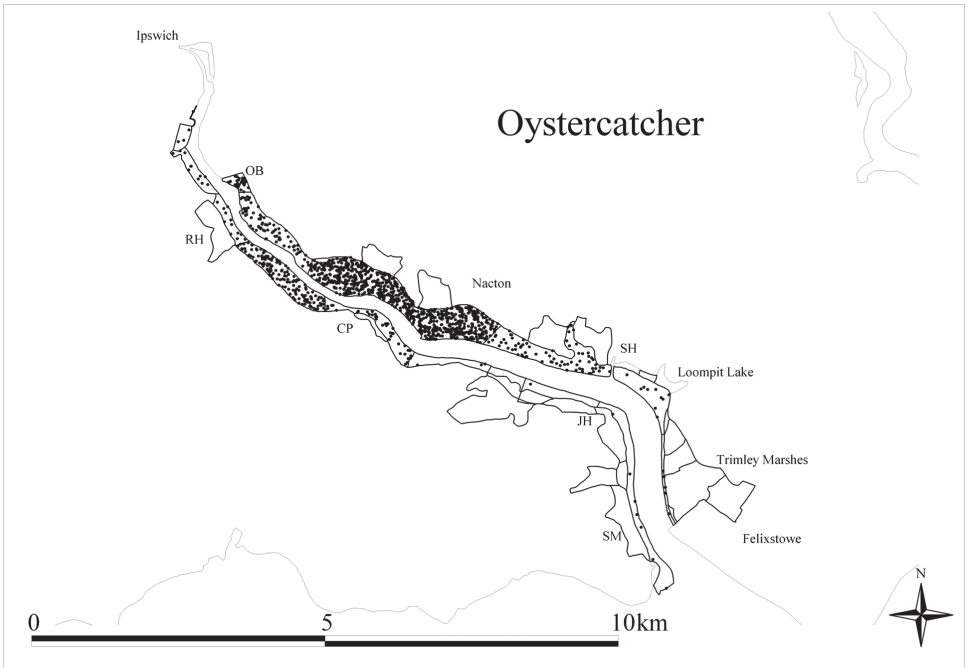


Figure 106. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Teal and Oystercatcher at Orwell Estuary, winter 2001/02. (CP=Cathouse Point, JH=Jill's Hole, OB=Orwell Bridge, RH=Redgate Hard, SH=Stratton Hall, SM=Shotley Marshes)

Turnstone counts remained remarkably constant throughout the winter, ranging between 120 and 131 individuals. There was a decline in numbers from the previous winter peak of 170 birds, although the long-term trend for Turnstone numbers on the Orwell is increasing.

Of the five species of gull recorded, Black-headed were the most abundant, with more 3,000 counted during December. Although distributed throughout, the greatest concentrations were to be found in the upper parts of the Orwell, around and beyond the bridge. Common Gull were the next most abundant, peaking at 336 in December and then Herring Gull. Both Lesser and Greater Black-backed Gulls were only noted in low numbers.

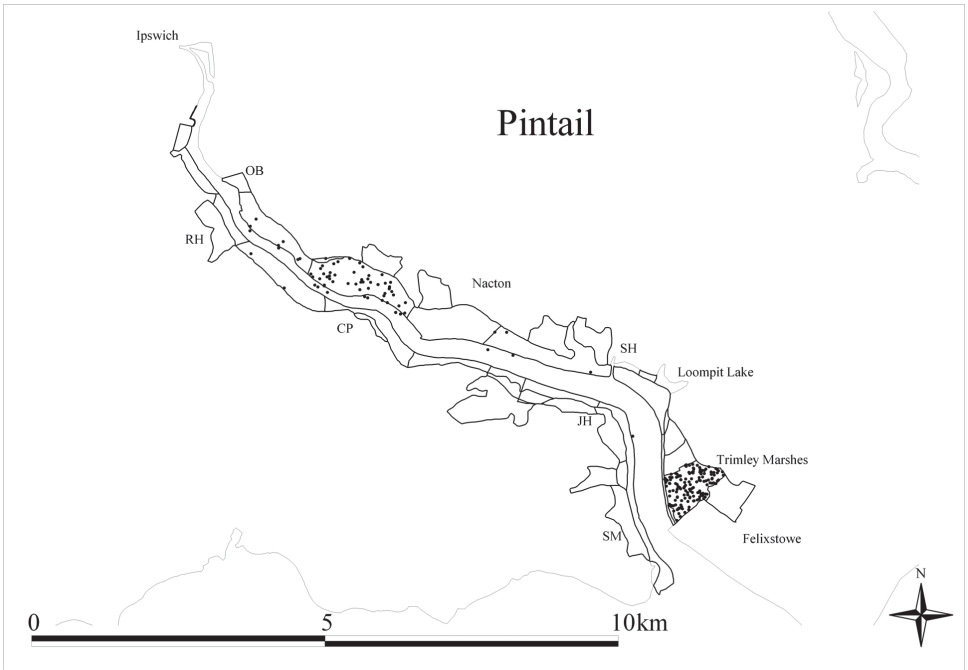
Bird distribution 2002/03

Generally, Little Grebe frequented the upper zones, whilst Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant were more widely scattered along the entire river. Up to six Little Egret were present during the middle part of the winter, mostly towards the mouth of the river. Most Mute Swan were either found at Trimley Marshes or on the Orwell on the outskirts of Ipswich. The peak count of 587 Greylag Geese was similar to the peak count of 600 birds made the previous winter. Most of the Canada Geese were also seen at Trimley. Dark-bellied Brent Geese, however, were located at Trimley Marshes, Shotley Marshes and the flats off Stratton Hall on the western side of the Orwell. More than 1,500 individuals of this sub-species were present in January. Unusually, 22 European White-fronted Geese occurred on Trimley Marshes in February. As noted during previous winters, although widely distributed within the estuary, Shelduck were more concentrated within the inner half of the Orwell. Wigeon numbers continued their recent increase and exceeded the threshold of national importance in January, with the densest congregations on Trimley Marshes, which also held most Teal. The peak count of 465 Gadwall, located almost exclusively on Loompit Lake, exceeded the threshold of national importance and was higher than recent Core Counts. Mallard also occurred in high densities on Loompit Lake as well as the inner zones. Pintail counts were lower than the previous winter, peaking at 372 birds in December. They were concentrated on Trimley Marshes. Shoveler numbers approached the level of national importance, with Loompit Lake and Trimley Marshes again the most frequented areas; a distribution pattern mirrored for both Pochard and Tufted Duck. Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser were thinly scattered along the main channel, along with the odd Ruddy Duck, with most of the latter seen at Trimley Marshes.

The Low Tide peak count of Oystercatcher continued to increase, with more than 1,800 noted in December. As in previous years, the majority were found between the Orwell Bridge and Stratton Hall on the northern shore and Redgate Hard and Cathouse Point on the southern shore. Ringed Plover were evenly scattered along the shoreline of the estuary, whilst low numbers of Golden Plover were confined to Trimley Marshes. Most Grey Plover occurred along the northern shore of the estuary, whilst Lapwing were concentrated off Redgate Hard, with smaller concentrations in the marshes around the outer zones. Unlike the previous season, Knot were recorded throughout the winter period and peaked at over 3,100 individuals in January, substantially higher than winter 2001/02. A January peak of over 5,500 Dunlin was the highest count recorded for several years. Predictably, most Snipe were located in the marshes around the mouth of the estuary. Black-tailed Godwit continued their recent increase. Over 400 were present in December, considerably higher than the peak of 260 individuals noted the previous winter. Most of the Godwit were in the upper reaches of the estuary, particularly on the Black Ooze Flats. In contrast to previous winters, very few Black-tailed Godwit were recorded from Trimley Marshes. Curlew and Redshank were both present in lower numbers than the previous winter. However, counts of both species, especially Redshank, have shown considerable fluctuations during the last few years. Turnstone counts continued their recent upward trend and, in particular, showed a substantial increase over those from the previous winter, reaching a peak of 210 individuals in December.

Six species of gull were recorded, with Black-headed the most abundant. Two Mediterranean Gulls were noted in December.

The Orwell Estuary was counted by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust under contract to the Harwich Haven Authority. These data are generously made available to the Wetland Bird Survey.



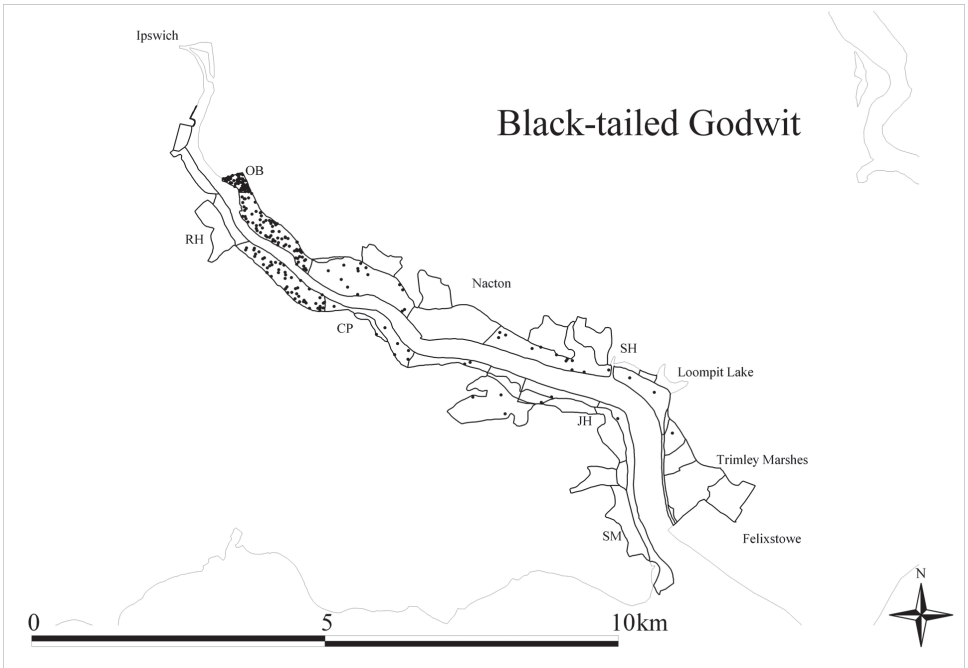


Figure 107. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Pintail and Black-tailed Godwit at Orwell Estuary, winter 2002/03. (CP=Cathouse Point, JH=Jill's Hole, OB=Orwell Bridge, RH=Redgate Hard, SH=Stratton Hall, SM=Shotley Marshes)