

## CHICHESTER HARBOUR

### West Sussex

**Internationally important:** Little Grebe, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank

**Nationally important:** Shelduck, Red-breasted Merganser, Grey Plover

#### *Site description*

Chichester Harbour is situated between Chichester and Havant, linked to Langstone Harbour to the west by a channel along the north side of Hayling Island. There are four major arms: Chichester Channel, Bosham Channel, Thorney Channel and Emsworth Channel. The estuary was originally formed by land sinking along four small river valleys. These run into a wider area near the mouth of the estuary and there is also a fairly wide opening to the eastern Solent. The river channels are muddy, whereas the intertidal areas south of Thorney Island are much sandier and support extensive areas of eelgrass and algae. The estuary is extremely popular with water-sports enthusiasts and although the majority of the shoreline is undeveloped with restricted access, those areas with public access are heavily used. Pressure for the construction of further marinas and slipways is always present. Wildfowling occurs along with commercial dredging of oysters, hand gathering of cockles and winkles and bait-digging (Buck 1997, Pritchard *et al* 1992, Davidson 1997, A de Potier pers comm).

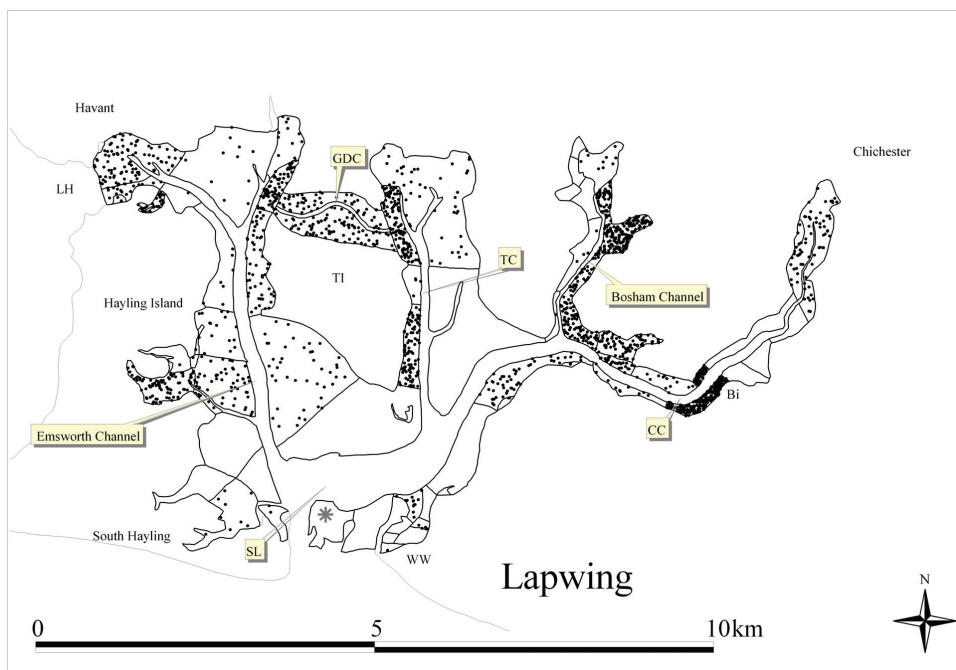
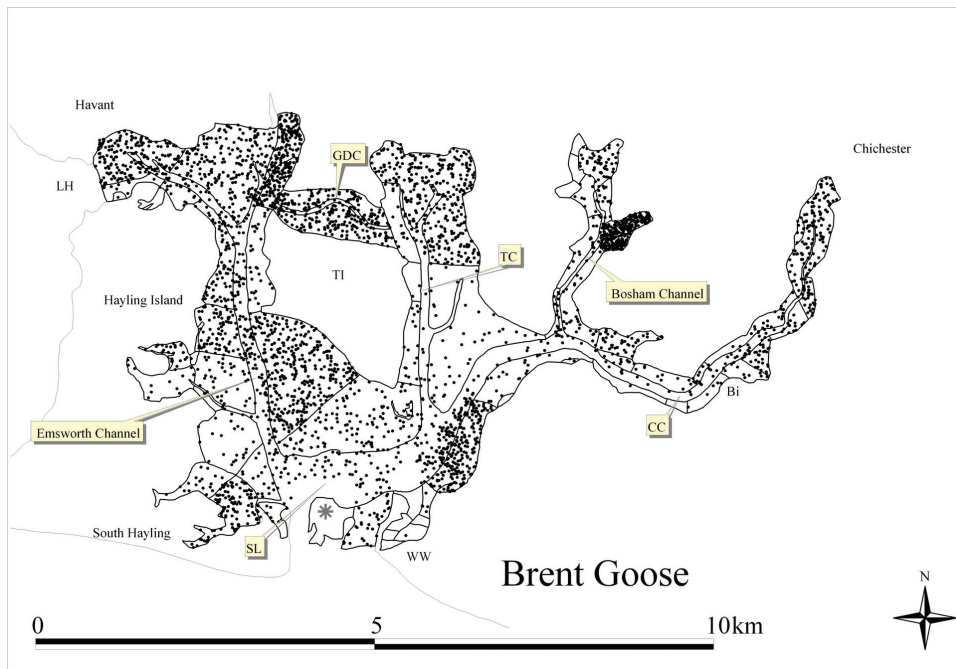
#### *Bird distribution 2001/02*

Numbers of Little Grebe peaked in November and generally frequented the upper reaches of the main channels, particularly the Great Deep Channel across Thorney Island. Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant were widely distributed in the channels, including Stocker's Lake towards the mouth. Large numbers of Little Egret were widely scattered and thus relatively difficult to count during Low Tide counts. Mute Swans favoured the northern part of the Harbour, particularly Bosham Channel and the River Ems at Emsworth, whilst most of the Canada Geese frequented the Great Deep Channel on Thorney Island. Dark-bellied Brent Geese peaked at 5,695 individuals in January and were distributed throughout the estuary. Shelduck were also widely scattered within the harbour with a January peak of 1,036. Wigeon and Teal were found at the end of the creeks and channels and in particular, along the Great Deep Channel, where up to 54 Gadwall were also seen. The greatest densities of Mallard were around

Emsworth and Langstone. Pintail were more generally distributed in the northern half of the Harbour, especially along Chichester Channel and the Great Deep Channel. Small numbers of Pochard and Tufted Duck frequented the Great Deep Channel, whilst Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser were located in the main Emsworth, Thorney and Chichester channels, as well as Stocker's Lake in the case of the latter species. In December, a peak of 118 Red-breasted Merganser was counted.

Oystercatcher were generally distributed throughout, whilst up to 21 Avocets frequented the upper part of Thorney Channel. Most Golden Plover occurred within the western half of the harbour, particularly on the saltings off Hayling Island, West Wittering and the southern end of Thorney Island. The distributions of Ringed and Grey Plover were more scattered, with the former present in low numbers, particularly around South Hayling, and the latter in nationally important numbers over most of the harbour. The peak count of Grey Plover (590) was well below recent Core Counts, which recorded totals in excess of 2,000 birds. Lapwing were also widely distributed, occurring along all the channels, although in the greatest densities off Birdham and Bosham. Lapwing numbers were relatively low in November and subsequently increased in December to nearly 3,000 birds, with counts fluctuating thereafter. The highest densities of Knot were found on the mudflats at either end of the Great Deep Channel, with a scattering elsewhere. Small numbers of Sanderling were confined to the sandier substrate off the southern end of Thorney Island. Dunlin occurred throughout, with the densest congregations at the head of the Thorney and Emsworth Channels and off South Hayling Island. Black-tailed Godwit were located on the muddier substrate in the upper reaches of the main channels, whilst Bar-tailed Godwit were found on the sandier areas towards the mouth of the harbour. Both Curlew and Redshank were widely scattered.

Of the five species of gull present, Black-headed was the most abundant. All of the gulls preferred the upper reaches of the main estuary channels.



**Figure 81.** WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Dark-bellied Brent Goose and Lapwing at Chichester Harbour, winter 2001/02. (Bi=Birdham, CC=Chichester Channel, GDC=Great Deep Channel, LH=Langstone Harbour, SL=Stocker's Lake, TC=Thorney Channel, TI=Thorney Island, WW=West Wittering)

## DEE ESTUARY & NORTH WIRRAL SHORE

Merseyside, Cheshire, Clwyd

**Internationally important:** Cormorant, Shelduck, Pintail, Teal, Oystercatcher, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Turnstone

**Nationally important:** Bewick's Swan, Common Scoter, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Curlew

### *Site description*

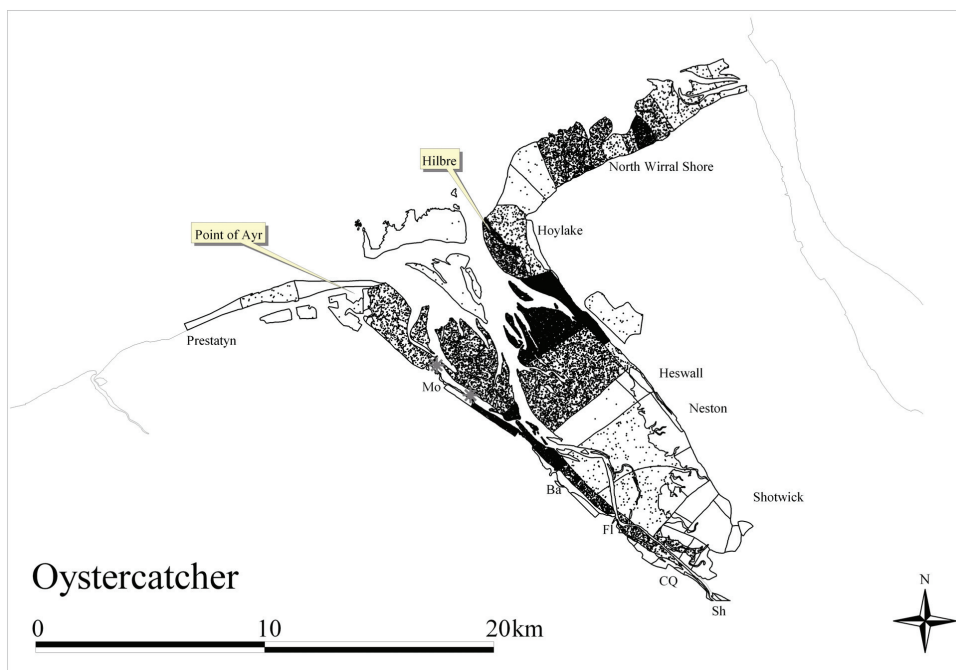
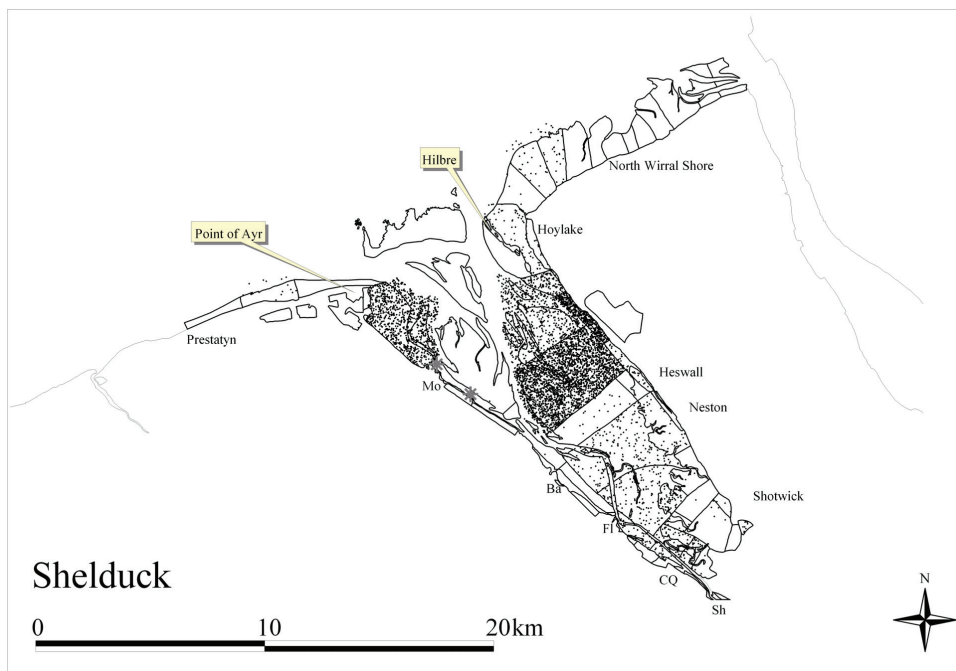
The Dee is a large estuary situated between The Wirral and the North Wales coast and is characterized by extensive sand flats, mudflats and saltmarsh. The main channel of the Dee runs close to the Welsh shore for much of its length where the mudflats are less wide. On either side of the estuary mouth there are long expanses of sandy beaches and sand dunes. A line of cliffs stretches between Hoylake and Hesswall along the eastern side of the Dee. At the northern end, close to the eastern shore at Hilbre, there are a series of small rocky islands. The Dee is heavily industrialised, particularly along the Welsh shore. There are steel and paper mills at Shotton, a gas-fired power station and former coal mine at Point of Ayr, docks at Mostyn and several chemical works concentrated along the inner estuary shores. Recreational disturbance is widespread, especially from sailing, windsurfing and jet-skiing. A recent increase in kite-surfing has led to roost disturbance in some areas. Around the estuary mouth, the sands are used for vehicular sports and horse-riding. Other activities include: leisure beach use, cockling, bait-digging, shrimp trawling and some fish-netting. Wildfowling also occurs over some of the marshes (Buck 1993, Musgrove *et al* 2003).

### *Bird distribution 2001/02*

Cormorant were generally only located along the shore off Prestatyn and up to 18 Little Egret frequented the saltmarsh of the inner zones. Mute and Bewick's Swan were also found amongst the inner saltmarshes. Over 1,500 Canada Geese were present in the fields around Shotwick and off Connah's Quay during December. Small numbers of Light-bellied Brent Geese occurred and an unusual 32 were identified in February. The highest densities of Shelduck occurred in the middle zones and on Mostyn Bank on the Welsh side. Wigeon were mostly confined to the inner part of the Dee while Teal and Mallard frequented the saltmarsh between Heswall and Neston, with fewer around Connah's Quay and Point of Ayr. Teal peaked at 6,887 in November, which exceeded recent peak Core Counts. Pintail numbers were

also highest in November, mainly distributed along the Welsh shoreline from Connah's Quay to Mostyn Quay, along with smaller numbers on Mostyn Bank. There is known to be some interchange between the Dee and the adjacent Mersey Estuary, which may account for fluctuations in Pintail counts during the winter. The channels towards the mouth hosted up to 21 Scaup in December. Common Scoter flocked off Prestatyn in November and December, where 4,000 were present in November.

Peak numbers of nearly 32,000 Oystercatcher were recorded in January, widely distributed, particularly in the outer zones, in the saltmarsh around Flint and the North Wirral shore. Ringed Plover were scattered along the North Wirral shore and the flats off Hoylake and Mostyn. Grey Plover distribution was very similar but was also recorded on the central flats between Bagillt and Neston. Most Lapwing were found around the Point of Ayr, along with the saltmarsh and fields at the head of the Dee, with another small congregation along the North Wirral shore. A count of 35,000 Knot recorded in January was considerably higher than recent Core Count peaks. In November, Sanderling counts peaked at 462, distributed west of Hoylake, along the North Wirral coast. Small numbers of Purple Sandpiper frequented the extreme western end of the Wirral shore and on Hilbre, whilst Dunlin were more evenly distributed. The saltmarshes of the south-eastern section hosted Snipe and Jack Snipe, with peaks of 334 and 22 individuals respectively. Peak numbers of both Black-tailed (4,624 in November) and Bar-tailed Godwit (around 12,000 in January) exceeded recent Core Counts, when virtually all were located on the flats at the western end of the North Wirral shore. The godwits appeared to use the shore for feeding, but roosted away from the Dee. Curlew and Redshank were both widely distributed within the estuary and along the Wirral shore, with the latter species exceeding 8,500 individuals in November. Turnstone frequented the western end of the Wirral coast and the shore off Hoylake. Of the five species of gull present, Common Gull occurred in the highest numbers.



**Figure 82.** WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Shelduck and Oystercatcher at Dee Estuary & North Wirral Shore, winter 2001/02. (Ba=Bagillt, CQ= Connah's Quay, Fl=Flint, Mo=Mostyn, Sh=Shotton)

## DENGIE FLATS

Essex

**Internationally important:** Grey Plover, Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit

**Nationally important:** Red-throated Diver, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Dunlin

### *Site description*

Dengie Flats lie between the Blackwater and Crouch-Roach Estuaries. The Flats are comprised of an extensive area of tidal mudflat with saltmarsh towards the eastern end of the Dengie peninsula. Evidence suggests that there is considerable interchange of the waterbirds between these adjacent estuaries. The mudflats support extensive growth of *Enteromorpha* alga along with populations of molluscs, marine worms and crustaceans. Unusually, for an open-coast situation, the mudflats grade into saltmarsh and the transition zone is characterised by mud-mounds with shell-lined gullies between them. The saltmarsh vegetation is relatively intact, despite being exposed to wave action, and a series of drainage channels bisect this habitat. Opposite Bradwell, at the northern end of the site, there is a small sand and shingle spit, the front of which has been severely eroded during recent years. Agricultural operations have claimed most of the historic grazing marshes, which are now located behind the sea wall. Although a relatively remote site, there is some recreational activity; for example: water sports, beach recreation, bait-digging and wildfowling. Bradwell Nuclear Power Station, at the extreme north-west corner, represents the only major industrial development adjacent to the site (Buck 1997, Musgrove *et al* 2003).

### *Bird distribution 2001/02*

Up to 18 Little Egret frequented the saltmarsh around the Grange outfall. Shelduck were widely distributed over most of the flats with the exception of the northernmost mudflats. Teal counts peaked in December (878) and large numbers were concentrated on the saltmarsh and mudflats between the Howe and Grange outfalls. Smaller groups of Teal were also seen on the small area of saltmarsh at Holliwell Point. Mallard frequented the southern half of the area, however, Shoveler were confined to the saltmarsh just north of the Howe outfall.

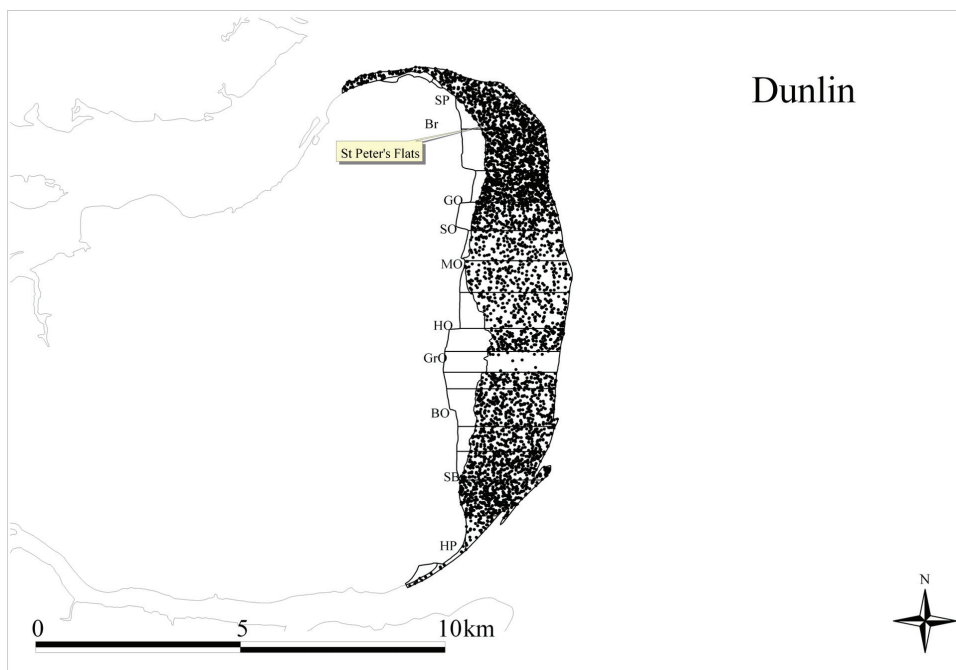
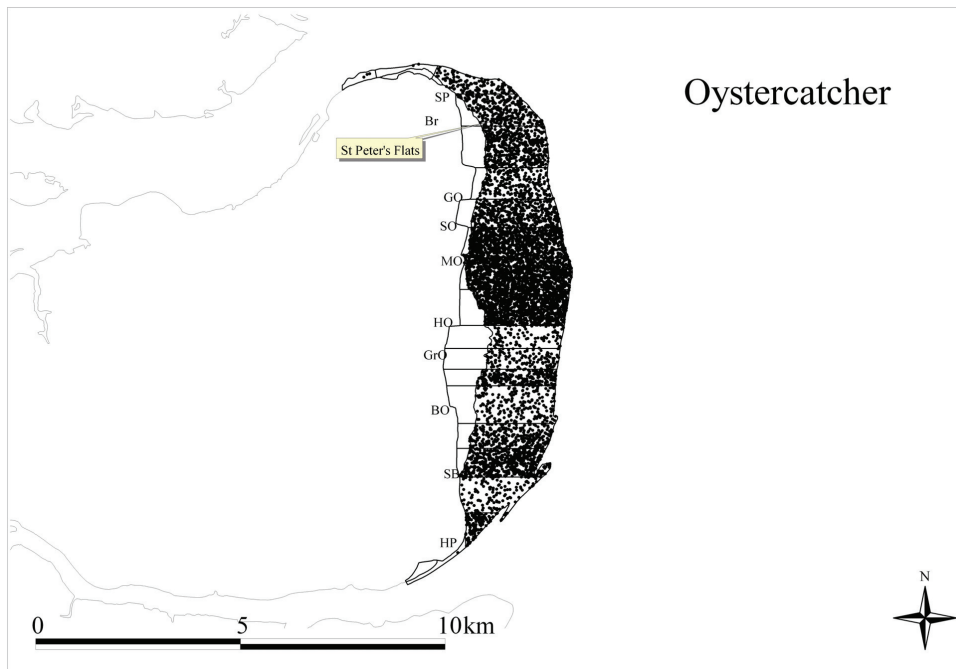
Dark-bellied Brent Geese numbers peaked at 627 in December, decreasing to only 100 in February. The highest densities of this species were located between the Glebe and Sandbeach outfalls. Counts were considerably lower than those recorded by Core Counts,

suggesting that many of the birds recorded at roost move elsewhere to feed. For instance, some flocks may move inland to agricultural habitat, in order to exploit winter crop resources.

In December, over 6,000 Oystercatcher occurred and in January, the total was over 7,000. Numbers, however, were much lower either side of these two months. The December and January counts represented a large increase over the previous Low Tide peak counts of between 2,000 and 3,000 birds. Oystercatchers were distributed over most of the mudflats, apart from those in the extreme north and south of the area. In contrast, Ringed Plover were confined to the mudflats off Sales Point in the north and Shell Bank towards the south. Golden Plover numbers peaked at 910 birds in January and large concentrations occurred on the central Dengie Flats. Smaller groups were also located on the saltmarsh adjacent to the Howe outfall, on St Peter's flats in the north and off Shell Bank in the south. The peak count of 1,170 Grey Plover was considerably lower than the 2001/02 peak Core Count figure of 3,640. Lapwing used the mudflats and saltmarsh between the Marshhouse and Bridgewick outfalls. The southern half of the area was the most important for Knot. Although Knot numbers exceeded the threshold of international importance, counts were considerably lower than the peak Core Count five-year mean. Similarly, Dunlin numbers were well below recent Core Counts. They were distributed relatively evenly throughout the area. The small group of Black-tailed Godwit recorded in November were confined to the flats opposite the Howe outfall; this site no longer holds nationally important numbers of this species. Bar-tailed Godwit, however, generally frequented the northern half of the flats. Both Curlew and Redshank were fairly evenly distributed throughout the area of the flats. The peak count of 103 Turnstone was made in January, when they were located on the northernmost and southernmost mudflats.

Gull counts were generally low, with Black-headed Gull the most abundant of the five species recorded, peaking at 340 individuals in December.





**Figure 83.** WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Oystercatcher and Dunlin at Dengie Flats, winter 2001/02. (BO=Bridgewick Outfall, Br=Bradwell, GO=Glebe Outfall, GrO=Grange Outfall, HO=Howe Outfall, HP=Holliwell Point, MO=Marshhouse Outfall, SB=Shell Bank, SO=Sandbeach Outfall, SP=Sales Point)