

SOLWAY FIRTH

Cumbria, Dumfries & Galloway

Internationally important: Whooper Swan, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, Shelduck, Pintail, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank

Nationally important: Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Scaup, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Sanderling

Site description

The Solway Firth, as considered by WeBS, comprises the coastline between Mersehead Sands on the Scottish coast to Workington in Cumbria, but only the northern side of the firth was counted during 2001/02. The principal inputs to the estuary are from the rivers Esk, Eden, Nith and Annan. The majority of the substrate is sandy in character and there are several isolated rocky scars, principally at the mouth of Moricambe Bay. The estuary is dynamic in nature, with mobile subtidal sand banks and intertidal sand flats. Large areas of saltmarsh are found along the south side of Moricambe, between Glasson and Burgh and along the Caerlaverock shoreline. However, Rockcliffe Marsh, the most extensive of the saltmarshes, was not covered by the survey. Most of the estuary is surrounded by low-lying farmland and there is little industry in the area. The main issues concerning waterbird conservation on the Solway concern exploitation of natural resources, such as the presence of shellfisheries (Davidson 1996a, C Hartley pers comm)

Bird distribution 2001/02

Great Crested Grebe and Cormorant counts peaked in the first half of the winter, with subsequent rapid declines by February. Barnacle Geese peaked at 4,872 birds in January when the majority were found around Glencaple and Caerlaverock. Shelduck were widely distributed between Overton and Torduff Point. Wigeon and Teal were concentrated along the River Nith creek from Glencaple northwards, although both species were also found scattered along the northern coastline between Powfoot and Gretna. Mallard were widely distributed, with the greatest concentrations off Craigneuk Point in the west and Powfoot in the east. Pintail were concentrated in discrete areas, namely along the River Nith off Overton, around the channel off Torduff Point and around Powfoot. More than 1,700 Pintail were noted in November, which represented the maximum count. Nationally important numbers of Scaup mainly

aggregated offshore between Carsethorn and Southernness, with lesser numbers off Powfoot. Goldeneye were scattered along the channels of the River Nith and Esk, with their numbers gradually increasing during the course of the winter. Small numbers of both Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander were widely scattered along the channels.

Oystercatchers were ubiquitous in their distribution, with over 27,000 recorded in December, followed by a sharp decline in January. The majority of Ringed Plover were found in the outer part of the estuary, whilst Grey Plover frequented the mudflats off Caerlaverock. Golden Plover peaked in November, when 1,752 were present, concentrated between Powfoot and Torduff Point and off Overton, with lesser numbers adjacent to Southernness Point. Lapwing distribution was similar to that of Golden Plover, although Southernness was avoided. January was the only month in which appreciable numbers of Lapwing were recorded, when they were concentrated to the south of Carsethorn. Substantially fewer Knot were present than in previous years, although it is possible that the majority of the 'missing' birds were on mudflats along the southern side of the Solway, which was not counted. Numbers of Purple Sandpiper and Turnstone were lower than the previous winter and, as in previous years, Southernness was the most important area. The peak count of Dunlin was similar to that of winter 2000/01, and birds were generally distributed throughout, with the densest concentrations off Caerlaverock. Bar-tailed Godwit were virtually absent after November, with the bulk of the birds frequenting parts of the estuary not covered during winter 2001/02. Curlew and Redshank both exceeded the threshold of international importance, with the greatest numbers between the mouth of the River Annan and Torduff Point, and also around the River Nith.

Black-headed Gull was the most abundant of the four species of gull recorded, with Herring Gull the next most abundant. Small numbers of Common and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were also present.

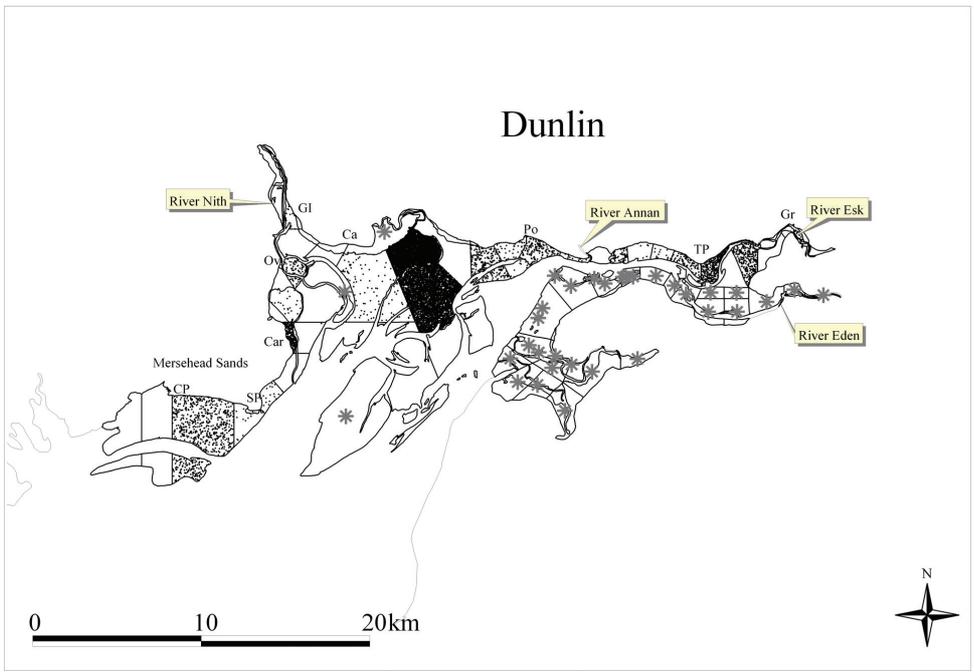
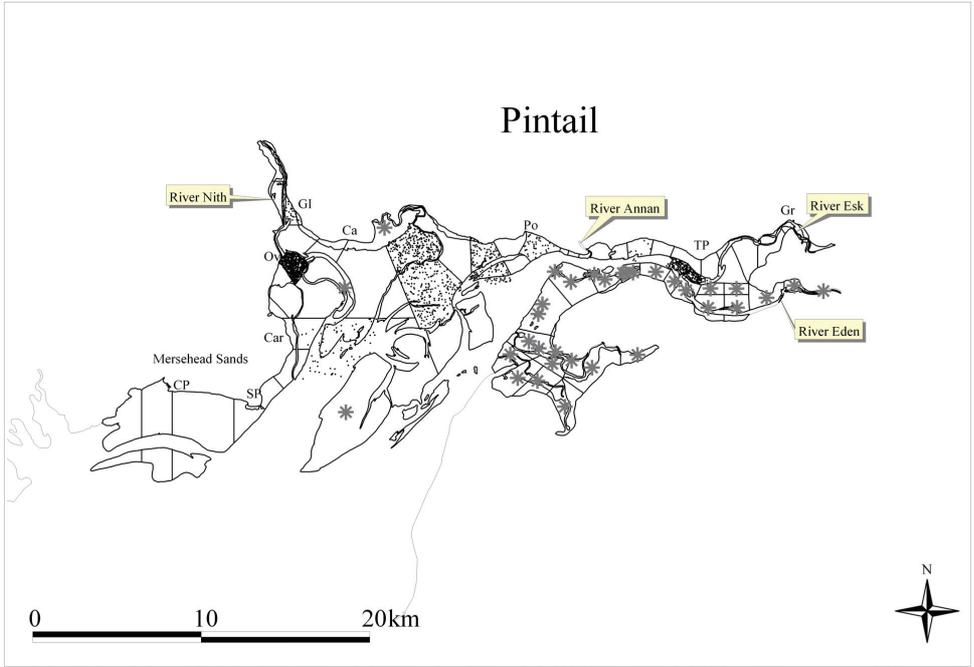


Figure 88. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Pintail and Dunlin at Solway Firth, winter 2001/02. (Ca=Caerlaverock, Car=Carsethorn, CP=Craigneuk Point, GI=Glencaple, Gr=Gretna, Ov=Overton, Po=Powfoot, SP=Seafield Point, TP=Torduff Point)

SWALE ESTUARY

Kent

Internationally important: Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank

Nationally important: Little Grebe, European White-fronted Goose, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Teal, Oystercatcher, Avocet, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin

Site description

The Swale Estuary separates the Isle of Sheppey from the Kent mainland and adjoins the Medway Estuary to the west. At low tide there are extensive inter-tidal flats, with a relatively narrow water channel. The inner zones are muddy and the sediments become increasingly sandy towards the mouth. Most of the site is surrounded by saltmarsh, with the most substantial expanses along the northern shore. There is a sand and shingle spit at Shell Ness, behind which is a mixture of saltmarsh grading into grassland. Industrial activity is limited and includes port and harbour facilities, a paper mill at Kemsley and boat building facilities at Conyer Creek. Most leisure activities are centred on sailing and other water sports and there are three marinas within the estuary. Much of the area is subject to active wildfowling (Buck 1997, Musgrove *et al* 2003).

Bird distribution 2001/02

Little Grebe peaked at 64 birds in January and were mostly concentrated in the main channel off Kemsley within the inner zone, with a few towards Kingsferry Bridge. Most Great Crested Grebe were found on the sea off Leysdown. The maximum count of 311 birds in February was much higher than usual and breached the threshold of national importance on this occasion. Up to 19 Little Egret were scattered throughout the saltmarsh and creeks. From December onwards, counts of Dark-bellied Brent Geese increased reaching a maximum in February. They were mainly recorded on the flats between Warden Point and Shell Ness and off the Isle of Harty - different to the previous pattern recorded during 1992/93, when virtually all of the birds occurred within the estuary itself. Shelduck were widely distributed throughout. Wigeon and Teal occurrence was similar, with concentrations south of the Isle of Harty, and off Conyer Creek and Elmley Marshes. Pintail and Shoveler were mostly located off Elmley Island at the inner end of the Swale. Pochard and Goldeneye were confined to the main channel at the confluence of Milton Creek, with the largest count of the former recorded in

February. Low numbers of Red-breasted Merganser were widely scattered.

Oystercatcher frequented the coastal stretches of the Swale between Warden Point and Shell Ness on the northern side and on the flats off Seasalter on the southern side. Counts fluctuated from a peak of over 6,000 in December (higher than recent Core Counts) to 350 recorded in January. The peak count of 118 Avocet in December reflected the recent decline of this species on the Swale, occurring mainly off Spitend, Elmley Island. Ringed Plover were generally located in the inner zones and on the outer coastal flats, whilst Golden Plover were widely distributed within the estuary, particularly along the southern shoreline and off Seasalter. The greatest numbers of Grey Plover and Lapwing were found off Harty Ferry in the north and on the flats off Nagden Marshes on the southern side of the channel. Virtually no Lapwing occurred outside the estuary, whilst Grey Plover also used the coastal flats. The distribution of Knot was also mainly coastal, although there was an additional group off Elmley Marshes. Sporadically occurring Sanderling were generally confined to the mudflats at Shell Ness. Dunlin peaked at over 9,000 individuals in December, the greatest concentrations recorded in the inner half and on the flats off Seasalter. Snipe were scattered within the estuary, although the majority were recorded from the inner sections. Most Black-tailed Godwit also occurred in the inner half of the Swale, particularly off Elmley Island, whereas the majority of the Bar-tailed Godwit utilised the coastal flats around Leysdown and Seasalter. Curlew were found throughout the area and their numbers fluctuated, with the highest count made in February. The distribution of Redshank was similar to that of Curlew, although greater concentrations occurred within the creeks. The peak count of 1,777 Redshank was higher than recent Core Counts. Most Turnstone were found on the coastal mudflats, with small numbers also present off Elmley Island.

Of the five species of gull present, Black-headed were the most abundant, followed by Herring and Common Gulls.

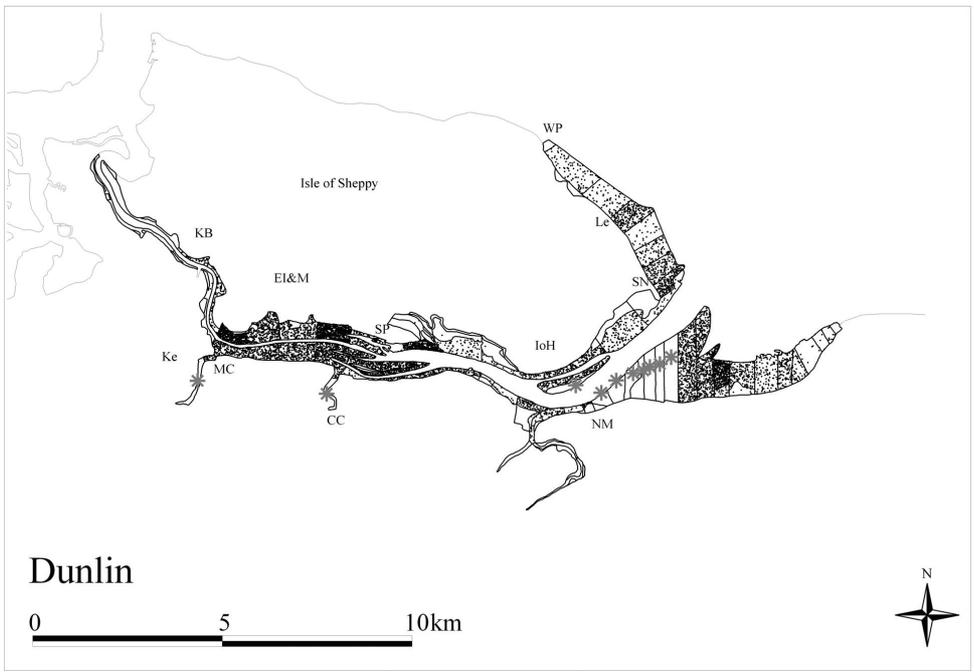
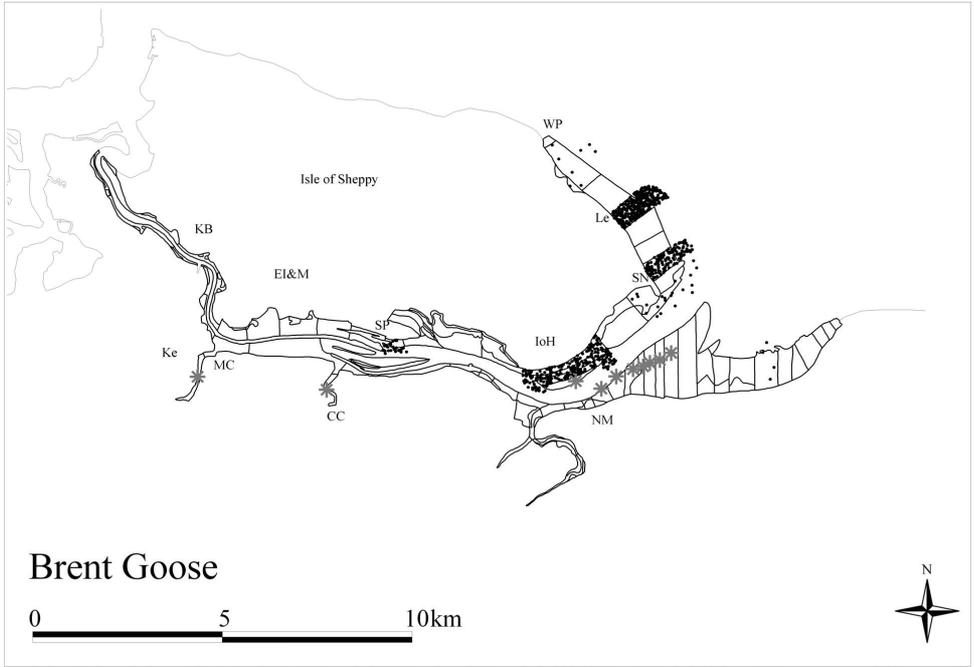


Figure 89. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Dark-bellied Brent Goose and Dunlin at the Swale Estuary, winter 2001/02. (CC=Conyer Creek, EI&M=Elmley Island & Marshes, IoH=Isle of Harty, KB=Kingsferry Bridge, Ke=Kemsley, Le=Leysdown, MC=Milton Creek, NM=Nagden Marshes, SN=Shell Ness, Sp=Spitend, WP=Warden Point)

WIGTOWN BAY

Dumfries & Galloway

Internationally important: Pink-footed Goose

Nationally important: Whooper Swan

Site description

Wigtown Bay is the estuary of the River Cree and is one of the largest estuaries in south-west Scotland. The River Bladnoch along with Palnure and Moneypool Burns also flow into the Bay. At low tide, the site is composed of extensive intertidal flats of mud and sand, rich in invertebrates. Much of the western shore, particularly the north-west, is fringed by saltmarsh. On the eastern shore there is a long ridge of sand and shingle. Wigtown Bay is one of the few estuaries along this part of the Scottish coastline to support large numbers of wintering waterfowl. Most activities around the site involve natural resource exploitation, such as fishing, bait-digging and wildfowling. Leisure activities are not intensive.

Bird distribution 2001/02

It should be noted that no Low Tide counts were made in December 2001. Pink-footed Geese were recorded on the estuary during the second half of the winter, with numbers increasing to a peak of 1143 during February. However, it is likely that the estuary is more important as a nocturnal roosting area, rather than a diurnal feeding area. The majority of the geese were found on the south west part of Baldoon Sands. Shelduck were widely distributed within the Bay, particularly on Baldoon Sands and associated saltings and Kirkbride Bank on the eastern shore. Numbers fluctuated during the winter and the peak count of 384 was recorded in February. Wigeon and Pintail showed a similar distribution; both species were concentrated within the south western corner of Baldoon Sands (adjacent to the Lady Burn) and near the River Bladnoch on Wigtown Sands. Some Wigeon also fed within the saltmarsh immediately to the south of the Bladnoch. Just over 1,000 Wigeon were noted in November, although numbers declined rapidly to a mere 35 by February. Pintail numbers also peaked at 59 in November, before a mid-winter decline to 15 in December. This was followed by a small increase to 39 individuals in February. Small numbers of Mallard (up to 53), Shoveler (up to 20) and Red-breasted Merganser frequented Kirkbride Bank, the Rivers Cree and Bladnoch and the East Channel respectively.

Although Oystercatcher were widely distributed, the Baldoon Flats off Orchardton in the south western quarter, Kirkbride Bank on the eastern shore and along the northern part of the River Cree held the greatest concentrations. The highest numbers were recorded in January, when just over 1,700 individuals were present. Small numbers of Ringed Plover and around 30 Golden Plover were noted in November only, when both frequented the same area of Baldoon Sands adjacent to the disused Baldoon Airfield. Lapwing peaked at 190 in January. They frequented the saltmarsh to the north of Wigtown and the south west corner of Baldoon Sands. The distribution of Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit was centred on Kirkbride Bank in the east (a sector including areas comprising Kirkbride Fisheries), and the area around Innerwell in the west, with additional Knot found at Baldoon Sands. Numbers were generally low, with a peak of 130 in January for the former and 53 in November for the latter. Dunlin were present in greater abundance, with over 3,300 birds in November. The densest concentrations were seen around the outer flats of Baldoon Sands. Several species of wader showed a similar pattern of decline over the winter, with the maximum counts in the first part of the winter and very low numbers or absence by February. The peak count of 728 Curlew occurred in February. This was slightly higher than the peak Core Count of 2001/02, but substantially lower than the peak Core Counts made during the winters of 2000/01 and 1999/00. Their distribution was generally scattered, although larger concentrations were located around Wigtown. It is possible that individuals feeding within the saltmarsh were missed, which would underestimate the Low Tide count. In contrast to several other wader species, Curlew numbers steadily increased through the winter. Redshank numbers declined from the November peak of 96 to a single bird in February, with most birds recorded around the channels of the Cree and Bladnoch in the northern half of the Bay.

Of the five species of gull present, Common Gull was the most abundant, with over 300 individuals in November and February.

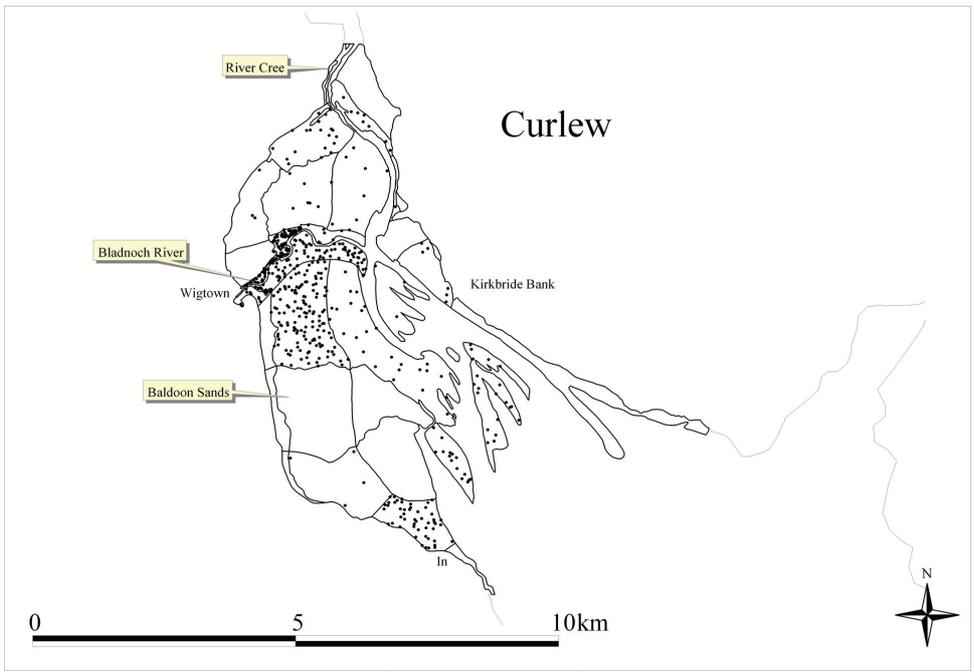
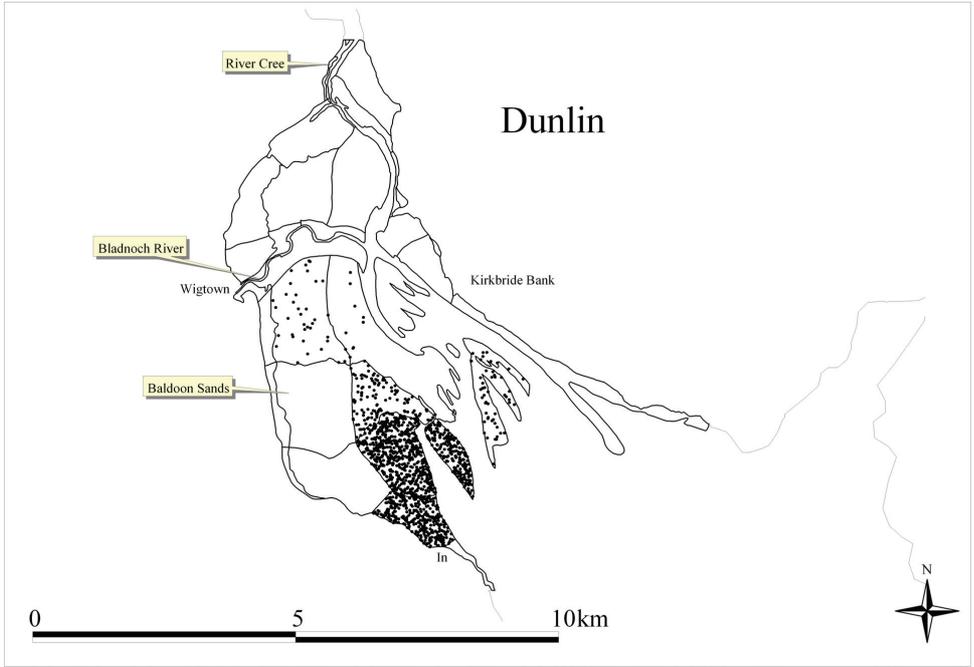


Figure 90. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Dunlin and Curlew at Wigtown Bay, winter 2001/02. (In=Innerwell)