

PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR

Hampshire

Internationally important: None

Nationally important: Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-tailed Godwit

Site description

This large harbour in the Solent lies between Portsmouth to the east and Gosport and Fareham to the west. The main freshwater inflow is Wallington River to the north-west. This becomes Fareham Lake, which restricts the freshwater input to the Harbour. The connection to the sea is via the Solent, which is only 200 metres wide at the narrowest point. Saltmarsh is a relatively limited habitat around the shores of the estuary. However, eelgrass and algal growth on the mudflats is more extensive. The shores of the harbour are heavily industrialized, including port and housing developments, along with major naval docks and installations. There are additional impacts on the estuary via land-claim for refuse disposal (Prater 1981, Pritchard *et al* 1992, Davidson 1996b).

Bird distribution 2002/03

Little Grebe counts remained relatively constant (29 to 33) occurring mostly on the River Wallington off Foxbury Point and also within the mouth of the harbour. Conversely, Great Crested Grebe were rarely recorded in the outer part of the harbour, mostly preferring the channels within the middle and inner sections. Cormorant counts remained stable for much of the winter; after the November peak of 57 individuals, between 21 and 24 birds were recorded for the remainder of the winter. Up to 39 Little Egret were widely scattered on the saltings. The majority of Mute Swan and Canada Geese were found around the entrance to the harbour, with peak counts for both species recorded in November. Dark-bellied Brent Geese were generally distributed throughout, although the area around Portchester hosted higher densities. Shelduck were widely distributed and counts were generally higher than those undertaken during winter 1997/98. Wigeon frequented the Wallington River channel and associated flats in the north-western corner. Teal peaked at 112 birds in February and their distribution was very similar to that of Wigeon. Mallard were widely distributed in low densities, although they were not generally recorded in the central part of the Harbour. Both Goldeneye and Red-breasted Merganser were confined to the main channels

within the Harbour, with up to 77 of the latter recorded in February.

Oystercatcher numbers peaked during the middle of the winter and the greatest densities were found on the flats between Cam's Hall and Portchester. Higher numbers of Ringed Plover were recorded during 2002/03 than the previous Low Tide survey. The peak count also occurred mid-winter, when 79 were noted in December. Generally, these plover frequented the mudflats along the eastern side of the harbour. Golden Plover were only recorded in reasonable numbers in November, when they frequented the flats adjacent to Foxbury Point. In contrast, Grey Plover were present throughout the winter and were widely distributed. Lapwing were mostly concentrated within two main areas of the Harbour; the inlet between Horsea and Portsea Islands and the mudflats adjacent to the river channel to the north-west. Numbers peaked in December at over 480 individuals. In December, over 8,100 Dunlin were counted, which exceeded the threshold of national importance on this occasion. This site has previously been nationally important for Dunlin; however, decreasing Core Counts have led to a downgrading of Portsmouth Harbour's status for this species. Knot were virtually absent, continuing the downward trend seen during the 1987/88 winter (Cranswick *et al* 1999). Conversely, Black-tailed Godwit counts continued their upward trend. They were generally located in the inner and upper zones. Bar-tailed Godwit were only recorded in November. Curlew were widely distributed and peaked at 420 individuals in December. They were one of the few species of wader to use the flats in the middle of the harbour. Redshank were mostly found on the peripheral mudflats along the northern and eastern edges of the estuary. Peak numbers were higher than those of the previous WeBS Low Tide counts. Small numbers of Greenshank were present throughout the winter, preferring the eastern flats. December was also the peak month for Turnstone, with most of the birds confined to the flats to the west of Portchester.

Seven species of gull were recorded of which Black-headed and Common Gull were the most abundant (over 15,300 and 700 in December respectively).

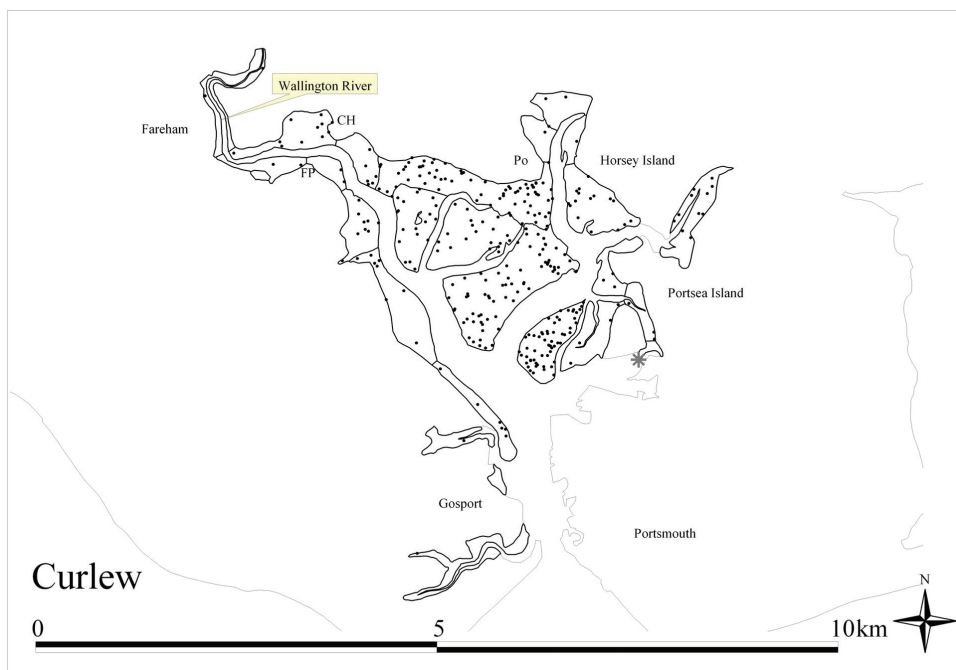
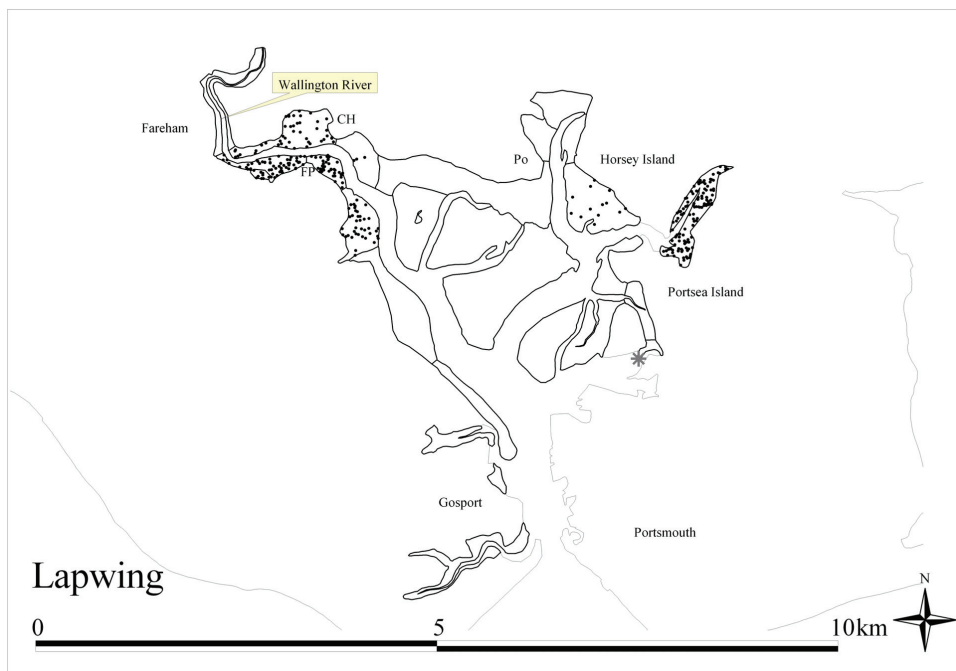


Figure 95. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Lapwing and Curlew at Portsmouth Harbour, winter 2002/03. (CH=Cam's Hall, FP=Foxbury Point, Po=Portchester)

SEVERN ESTUARY

Gloucestershire, Avon, Somerset, Gwent, East Glamorgan

Internationally important: Shelduck, Teal, Pintail, Dunlin, Redshank

Nationally important: Bewick's Swan, European White-fronted Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard, Curlew

Site description

The River Severn is the longest in Britain and drains a large area of Wales and the Midlands. The huge tidal range (the second largest in the world) means that much of the intertidal sediment is mobile. The estuarine mudflats in Cardiff Bay were lost when the Cardiff Bay Barrage became operational during winter 1999/00. As compensation for the loss of intertidal habitat, a series of freshwater lagoons were created on Goldcliff Marsh. Stert Flats and Berrow Flats comprise extensive mudflats within the larger area of Bridgwater Bay. Industrial development is widespread, particularly around Avonmouth, where there are major port facilities and chemical works. There are also port facilities at Barry, Cardiff and Newport. The estuary suffers from pollution, with the discharge of heavy metals a particular problem. The upper reaches of the estuary are more rural in character. The level of low tide coverage achieved was very high because the islands and sandbars in the middle of the estuary were counted by boat (Davidson 1996c, N Clark pers comm).

Bird distribution 2002/03

Cormorant were mostly located within the inner zones apart from groups on the Holms and in Cardiff Bay. Little Egret peaked at 31 individuals in February, with the majority of records from either Goldcliff or Stert. More than 100 Grey Heron were noted in November, mostly within the inner half the estuary and around Stert Flats. Many of the Mute Swan were also found along the River Parrett at Stert, whilst Bewick's Swans were, as usual, confined to the inner areas around Slimbridge. European White-fronted Geese were only recorded during January, when 990 were around Slimbridge. The greatest concentrations of Shelduck were seen from Sand Bay to the River Axe, along with the Stert Flats on the southern side and between Rhymney and Peterstone on the northern side. Peak counts of 3,500 birds were recorded in February. Both Wigeon and Teal were concentrated along the upper shores, especially around Goldcliff and Stert. Nationally important numbers of Gadwall were found at Goldcliff and

Avonmouth. Mallard were widely distributed along the northern shore, although along the southern shore they were generally seen east of Avonmouth. Pintail counts were much lower than recent Core Counts and they frequented the flats off Slimbridge and the shoreline between Rhymney and Peterstone. Shoveler also favoured the coast between Rhymney and Peterstone and the peak count of 368 occurred in November. Pochard, Tufted Duck and Goldeneye mostly occurred between Newport and Goldcliff.

Oystercatcher were widely distributed, whereas small numbers of Avocet were confined to the River Parrett near Stert. The highest Golden Plover count was recorded at the start of the winter, declining thereafter. Golden Plover frequented the upper sections and the marshes around the River Parrett in the south. Over 550 Grey Plover in January exceeded the threshold of national importance, however, numbers were much lower during the other months. Lapwing showed a peak of over 12,000 birds in December, after which time numbers declined. They were generally located around the River Parrett at Stert and in the upper reaches, north of the second crossing. Stert Flats were the most important area for Knot, whilst Sanderling were concentrated on the Berrow Flats. Dunlin peaked at over 41,000 birds in February, considerably higher than recent Core Counts, and they were distributed throughout most of the area. The main areas for Snipe were Stert Point and around Newport. The highest count of Bar-tailed Godwit was recorded in November, whilst the peak count of Black-tailed Godwit occurred in February. Curlew exceeded the threshold of international importance in November and February and they were generally located on Stert Flats and the inner Severn from Oldbury northwards. The southern shoreline between Avonmouth and Severn Beach and Goldcliff on the north shore were the two most important areas for Turnstone, which peaked in December.

Of the seven species of gull recorded, Black-headed was by far the most abundant followed by Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull.

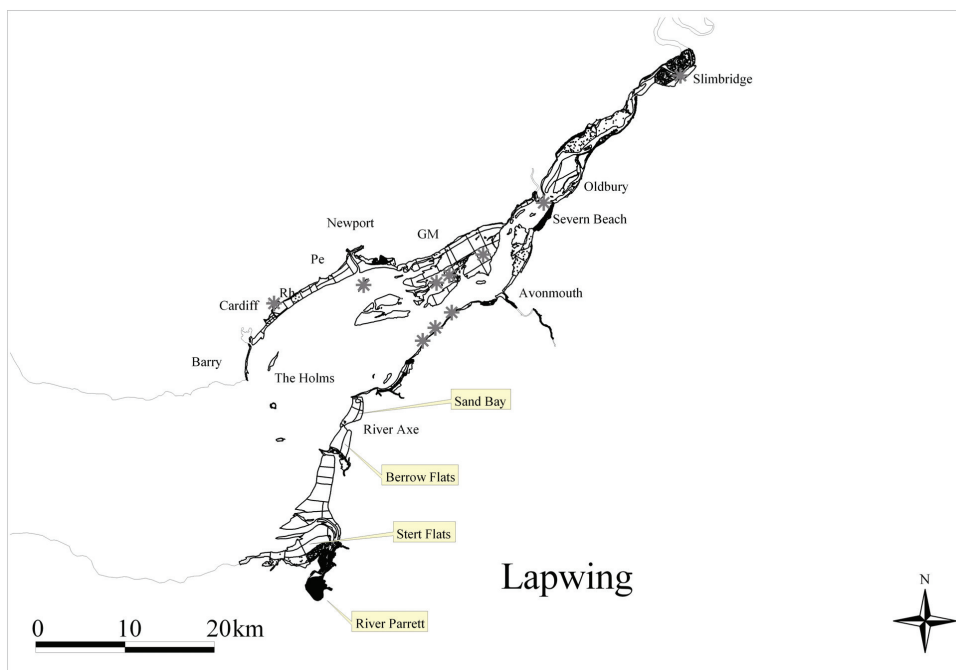
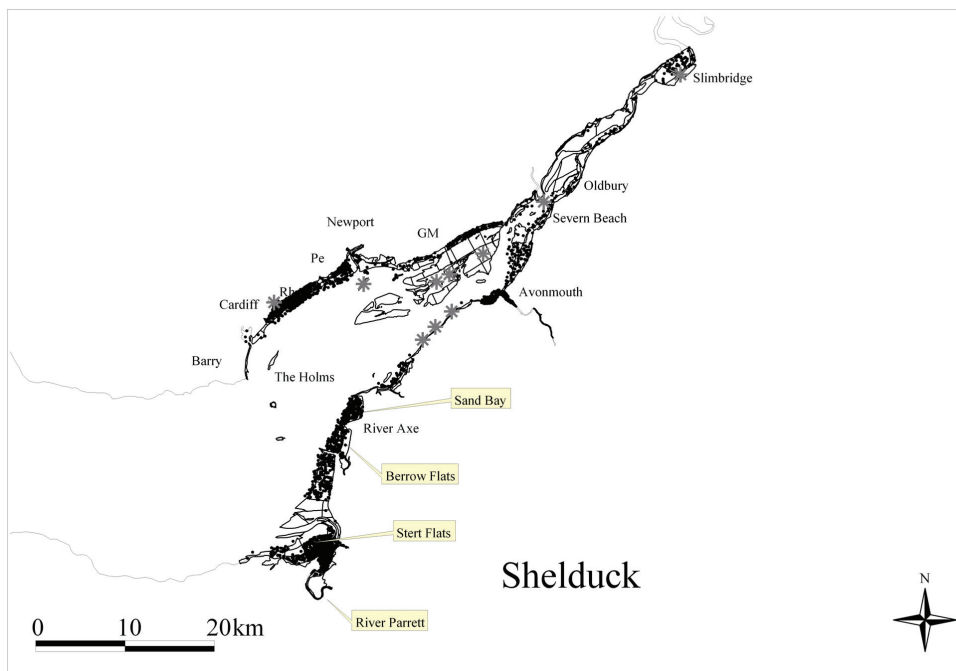


Figure 96. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Shelduck and Lapwing at Severn Estuary, winter 2002/03. (GM=Goldcliff Marsh, Pe=Peterstone, Rh=Rhymney)

TAMAR COMPLEX

Devon, Cornwall

Internationally important: None

Nationally important: Little Egret, Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit

Site description

The Tamar Complex is the name given to the group of river estuaries (with the exception of the Plym) that reach the sea through Plymouth Sound. The Complex was formed by the drowned river valleys of the Tamar, Lynher, and Tavy, which collectively drain a large area of Cornwall and Devon. The complex is characterised by a high diversity of habitats, including sand banks and sandy mud, rocky reef and well developed salt meadow. To the south of Torpoint, there is an extensive area of intertidal flats known as St. John's Lake, which is also included in the site. The east shore of the lower zones is adjacent to Plymouth. Most of the western and northern areas are, however, relatively rural, apart from around Torpoint and Saltash. Small patches of saltmarsh occur throughout, including around the upper reaches of the rivers, whilst stretches of rocky reef are also found unusually far inland. Industrial activity is centred on Plymouth, with extensive dockyards and the naval base. There is fish netting throughout, whilst cockling and mussel collecting are undertaken on the Tamar. Wildfowling occurs at St John's Lake and in parts of the Tamar and Lynher. Leisure activities include sailing and boating; there are various moorings and marinas in the complex, with several proposals for new marinas in the future. There is a leisure barrage at Millbrooke (Buck 1997, Musgrove *et al* 2003).

Bird distribution 2002/03

Little Grebe peaked at 26 individuals in December, whilst up to six Black-necked Grebe frequented the lower reaches of the Complex. A peak of 120 Little Egret occurred in November, widely distributed along the three rivers. The highest number of Grey Heron was also recorded in November, when more than 50 were present. Mute Swan were mostly distributed along the Tamar, Hamoaze and St Johns Lake, whilst Canada Geese were mainly found in the upper reaches. Shelduck generally avoided the middle sections, preferring peripheral areas such as St John's Lake and the middle mudflats of the River Lynher. Wigeon were concentrated along the River Lynher, the flats of and around Kingsmill Lake and the lower

reaches of the Tavy, although in generally low numbers of less than 350 birds. Conversely, the greatest concentration of Teal was recorded from the upper reaches of the Tamar, particularly around Halton Quay. Smaller numbers also occurred around Kingsmill Lake, along the middle reaches of the Lynher and in St John's Lake. More than 300 Mallard were present during November and they were widely distributed, apart from the Hamoaze. A few Red-breasted Merganser were mainly recorded from the lower reaches of the Tavy and Tamar

Oystercatcher were mostly located around St John's Lake, with additional small numbers scattered along the three rivers. The peak count of Avocet (317 birds in January) was greater than the Core Count peak for the same winter. Grey Plover counts steadily increased to 147 individuals in February, most of which were located in St John's Lake, with a few also in the upper reaches of the Tamar. A few Ringed Plover also frequented St John's Lake, whilst the majority of Lapwing were found in the upper reaches of the Tamar, in the vicinity of Halton Quay. St John's Lake was the most important area for Dunlin, with a scattering of birds further up the Tamar and on the central mudflats of the River Lynher. A peak count of over 1,700 Dunlin was recorded in December (greater than the peak Core Count figure). Of the two species of godwit present, Black-tailed was marginally the more abundant. All of the Bar-tailed Godwit were found in St John's Lake, whilst the Black-tailed Godwit frequented the mudflats north of the Tamar Bridge. Both Curlew and Redshank were widely distributed, with the highest numbers of the former present in January and the latter in December. Up to 8 Spotted Redshank and 31 Greenshank over-wintered within the Complex. Small totals of Turnstone were recorded from both St John's Lake and the outer reaches of the River Tavy.

Black-headed Gull was the commonest of the six species recorded, with Herring and Common Gull the next most abundant respectively. Lesser and Greater Black-backed were also present, along with up to 10 Mediterranean Gulls in February.

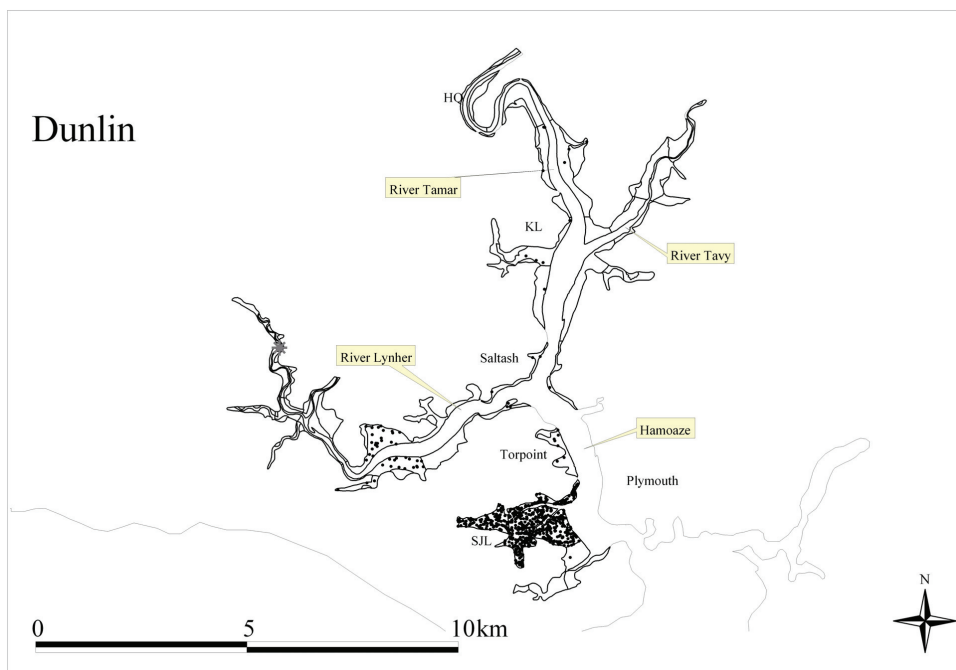
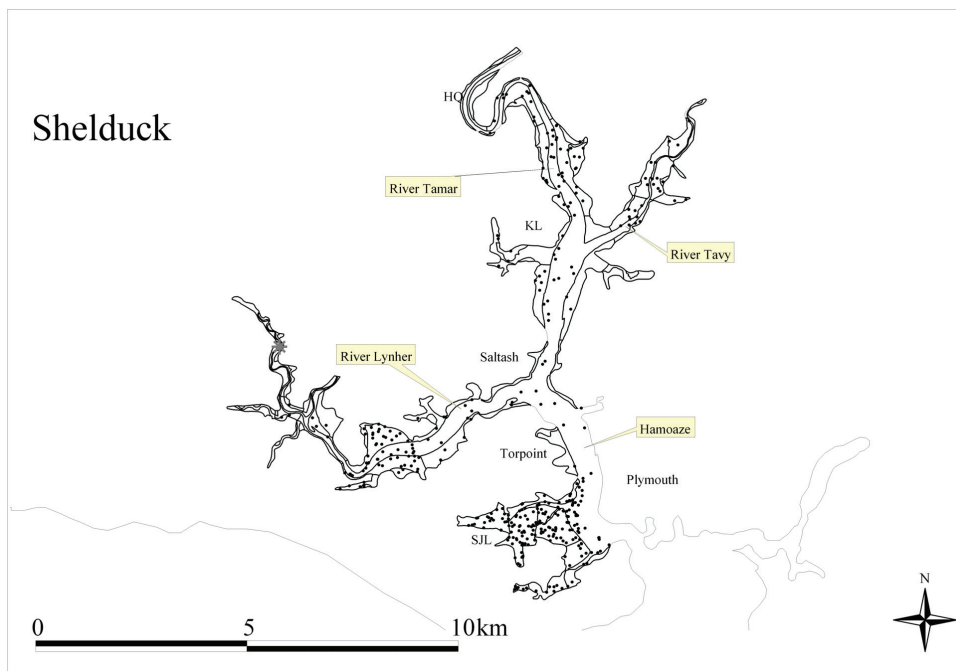


Figure 97. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Shelduck and Dunlin at Tamar Complex, winter 2002/03. (HQ=Halton Quay, KL=Kingsmill Lake, SJL=St. John's Lake)