

BREYDON WATER

Internationally important: Pink-footed Goose, Wigeon, Shoveler, Golden Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank

Nationally important: Bewick's Swan, European White-fronted Goose, Teal, Pintail, Avocet, Ruff

Site description

Breydon Water is a bar-built estuary separated from the North Sea by the spit of land on which Great Yarmouth sits. The estuary forms the lower reaches of the Yare and Waveney rivers, which drain much of central East Anglia. The rivers are tidal for many miles inland but only the estuary area from the confluence of the rivers is considered here. At high tide, Breydon Water forms a large lake but as the tide recedes, the only water that remains forms a narrow channel, well marked by buoys for the numerous leisure cruisers. There are small areas of saltmarsh, principally at the eastern end. To the north of the estuary stretches the huge expanse of the Halvergate Levels, Breydon Marshes and Berney Marshes. These form an extensive area of grazing marsh that has been subject to varying degrees of drainage in recent years. The main high tide roosts occur at the RSPB reserve at Berney Marshes (only accessible by boat, train or a very long walk) and in the eastern saltmarsh. The main conservation issues in the area involve boating, shooting and grazing marsh management. The river channel leading out through Great Yarmouth to the sea is highly industrialized.

Bird distribution

Shelduck were confined mainly to the eastern half of the estuary, with a scattering of records in the west and at Burgh Flats in the south. Greylag Geese favoured the southern end of the estuary with all sightings at Burgh Flats. Three Little Egrets were seen in December, along with five Mute Swans. Grey Heron and Pink-footed Goose were also recorded.

Wigeon numbered 6,150 in January, but this had dropped by a third a month later. The birds favoured most of the mudflats to the north of the Yare, with the exception of the easternmost section. Some birds also fed on the Burgh Flats at the southern end (Figure 58). Teal and Pintail were concentrated in the eastern half of the estuary with the majority of these north of the Yare. Teal numbers reached a peak in

January, whilst the highest numbers of Pintail were in February. Mallard and Shoveler were more evenly distributed over the whole estuary, with Mallard occurring in denser patches at the Yarmouth end. Mallard numbers were similar to Core Counts; however, the count of 50 Shoveler was much lower than the Core Count of 322, suggesting many Shovelers make use of Berney Marshes.

Black-tailed Godwits favoured the mudflats in the southeast corner, the Burgh Flats and the area north of the river adjacent to Acle Marshes, with numbers again over the threshold for international importance. Avocet is another species that is wintering in increasing numbers - the peak count of 230 individuals in February a record Low Tide Count - with birds recorded on Burgh Flats and the flats north of the Yare adjacent to the Lockgates windmill at Acle Marshes (Figure 58). Ringed Plover numbers reached a maximum of 20 in February, and could in future increase in line with peak Core Counts that have been slowly increasing in the last five years, though high tide counts of this species are boosted by displacement by the tide (and human disturbance) from the beaches at Great Yarmouth. Lapwings were widely distributed within the estuary, both north and south of the river. The greatest numbers occurred at Burgh Flats with a peak of 13,429 in December. The peak Core Count for Lapwing in 2003/04 was greater at 15,890, but this is a decline of almost 25% since 1999/2000. Golden Plover numbers fluctuated over the winter, with birds distributed mostly in the eastern half of the estuary. Counts varied due to the species using non-tidal marshes and fields. Knot were widely distributed, favouring the flats in the eastern half of the estuary mainly north of the river. Curlew and Redshank occurred across the whole estuary, both north and south of the river, with Curlew peaking at 836 in January. Redshank density was greatest south of the river, at the eastern end of the estuary, and 1,630 recorded in February was higher than the Core Count

figures. Greatest concentrations of Dunlin were found on the intertidal flats in the eastern half of the estuary and at Burgh Flats, but they were completely absent from other areas. Peak

Turnstone numbers of 14 in February were modest but above Core Count figures. Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Spotted Redshank were also recorded sporadically.

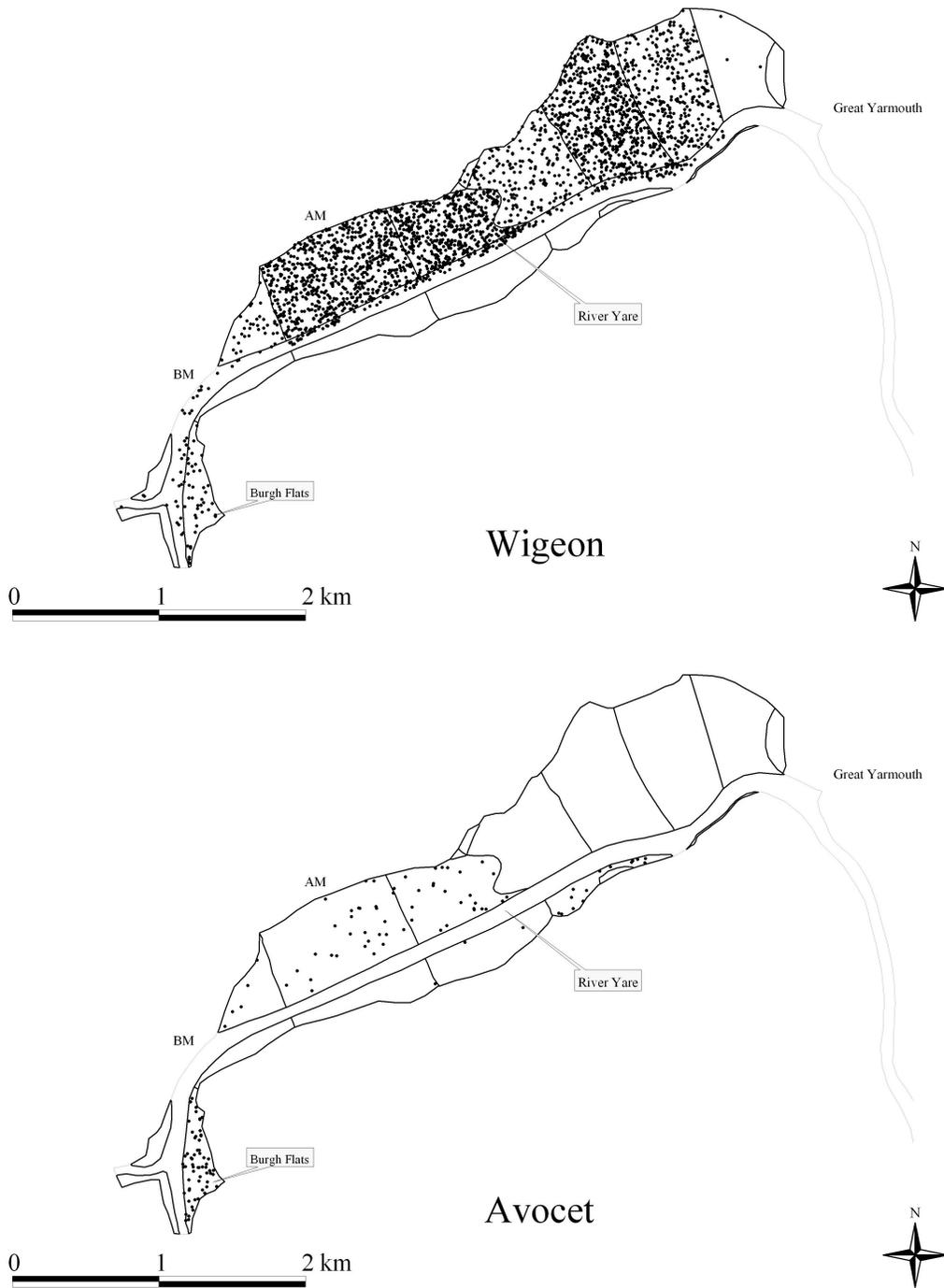


Figure 58. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Wigeon and Avocet at Breydon Water, winter 2003/04 (AM=Acle Marshes, BM=Berney Marshes).