

HUMBER ESTUARY

Internationally important:	Pink-footed Goose, Shelduck, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Redshank
Nationally important:	Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Teal, Shoveler, Goldeneye, Oystercatcher, Avocet, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Ruff, Turnstone, Curlew

Site description

The Humber Estuary is one of the largest estuaries in the UK, stretching for approximately 70 km from Goole to Spurn Point, and is protected as an SPA and Ramsar site. It forms the confluence of the rivers Ouse and Trent, which collectively drain a large part of central and northern England. The estuary encompasses a great diversity of habitats, including non-tidal islands, saltmarsh, grazing marsh, intertidal mud and sand flats, reed bed, shingle bar and dunes. A managed realignment scheme is underway at Paull Holme Strays, with more schemes planned. A third of the estuary is exposed at low tide, with the second highest tidal range in Britain (7.2 m). The Humber is markedly industrialised in places, and the five main ports (including Kingston-Upon-Hull and Grimsby) handle an estimated 80 m tonnes of cargo each year. Arable farming is particularly well established around the estuary. Use of the Humber is therefore extensive and varied, with activity including substantial industrial operations, large-scale fisheries, agriculture, tourism and other recreational pursuits such as wildfowling, sailing, walking and birdwatching.

Bird distribution

Cormorants and Grey Herons were widespread in small numbers, with the only large gatherings adjacent to Read's Island. The jetty at New Holland held the majority of Mute Swans, the birds feeding on spilt grain from docking operations. The largest flock of 4,000 Pink-footed Geese was found at Read's Island in November, with 800 more at Whitton Ness. Canada, (presumed re-established) Barnacle and Greylag Geese were mostly found on the inner estuary. Dark-bellied Brent Geese were present in nationally important numbers and were concentrated on a section of the southern shore between Humberston and Mablethorpe. The highest density was typically at Grainthorpe Haven, with lesser numbers in Spurn Bight. Two Light-bellied Brents were amongst them in February. Shelduck occurred throughout the estuary with major concentrations at Pyewipe, Little Humber, Whitton Ness and Broomfleet.

Wigeon were distributed over the whole

estuary, but the greatest densities were found in the Blacktoft / Broomfleet area and at Read's Island. Gadwall were found only in noteworthy numbers at Blacktoft Sands, where 44 were counted in December. Low Tide Counts of Teal peaked in January with Blacktoft, Broomfleet, Read's Island and Saltfleet all harbouring high concentrations of this widespread species. Mallards were present in all areas of the estuary, extending well upriver into both rivers Trent and Ouse (Figure 62). Pintails were found only in three areas, at Spurn Bight, Goxhill Haven and at Read's Island. North Killingholme Pits were the favoured haunt of Shoveler in December, this same site also hosting a single Smew in February. Small numbers of both Pochard and Tufted Duck were found at Goxhill Haven in January, though both of these species are recorded in far greater numbers on Core Counts. A low tide count of 54 Goldeneye in January at the New Holland jetty was a notable record compared to recent winters. Three Goosanders were present in the Trent near Keadby for most of the winter. Other species noted included Red-throated Diver, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Bittern, Little Egret, Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Bean Goose, Moorhen and Coot.

Oystercatcher favoured the outer estuary on both shores with Spurn Bight, Grainthorpe Haven and the flats off Cleethorpes having the highest densities. Bar-tailed Godwits also favoured the outer areas, and peaked in January. The highest densities occurred at Cleethorpes, Pyewipe, Stone Creek, and Spurn Bight. Sanderlings were on the south shore from Grimsby southwards, with smaller numbers at Spurn, Stone Creek and Goxhill Haven. Grey Plover numbers were high this winter, the majority counted between Paull and Spurn. Snipe were found mostly at Blacktoft and at Saltfleet. Numbers of Turnstone reported were higher than those recorded on Core Counts with a peak of 723 in December, the highest densities found between Goxhill and New Holland. Ringed Plover favoured the traditionally preferred Pyewipe area, although they were found widely in smaller numbers. Curlews were typically evenly distributed throughout the estuary. Dunlins occurred in

large numbers on the outer estuary; although Salt End to Spurn held the highest densities, they were also common further upstream as far as Broomfleet. The pattern for Black-tailed Godwit remained the same as in previous years, with most foraging at low water in the Pyewipe area. Lapwing continued to increase, with high numbers of birds in the whole estuary. Numbers peaked at 36,609 in December though only 2,800 were noted in February. The largest numbers of Knot for over five years were observed in November,

with over 50,000 present in the outer estuary, mainly between Paull and Spurn on the north shore and Grimsby to Saltfleet on the south shore. Golden Plovers were also present in record numbers over the entire estuary (Figure 62) with 47,700 recorded in December. This site held more Golden Plovers than any other in the UK in the winter of 2003/04. Small numbers of scarcer waders were also recorded, counters recording diverse species such as Avocet, Ruff, Jack Snipe, Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank and Green and Common Sandpipers.

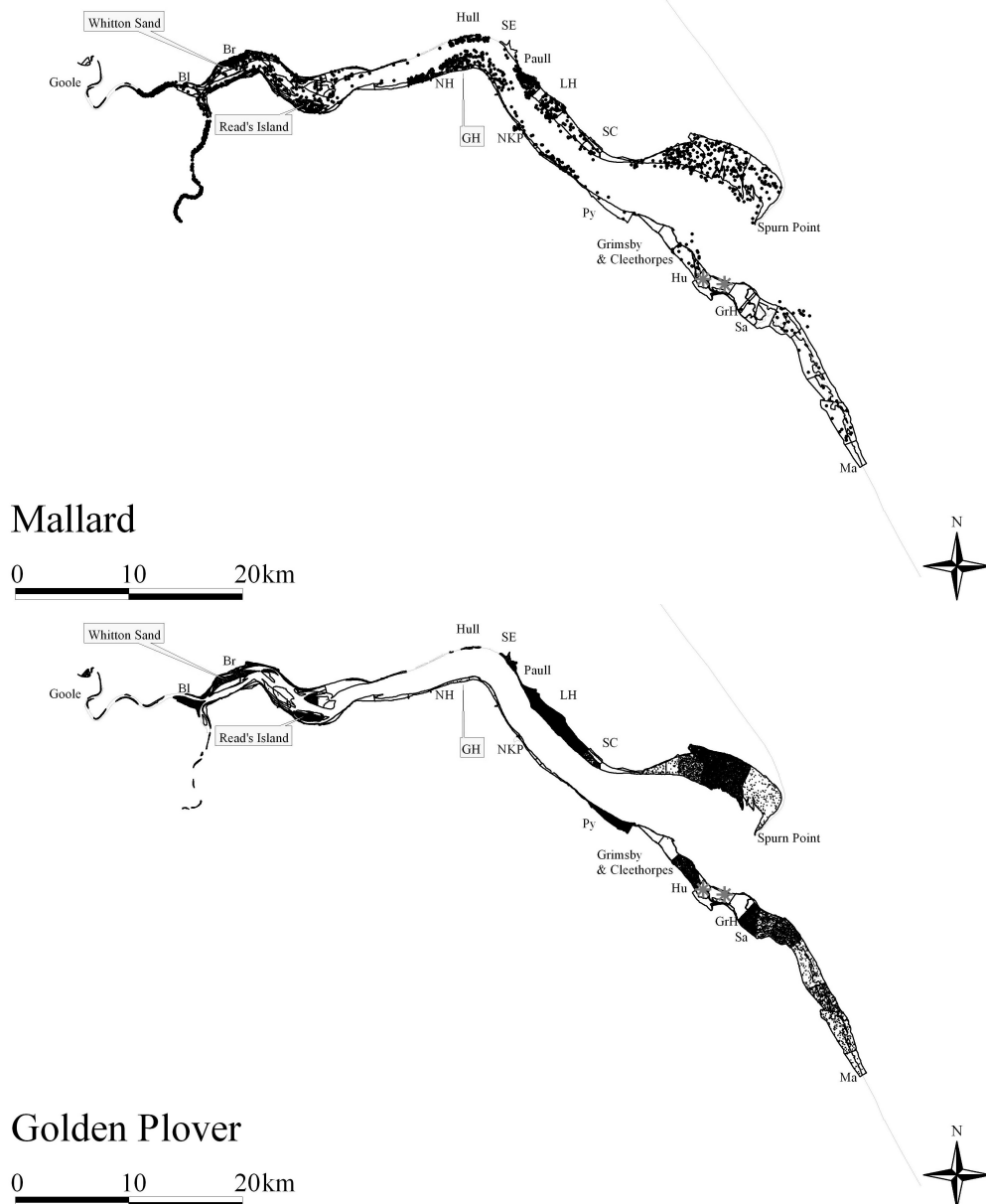


Figure 62. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Mallard and Golden Plover at the Humber Estuary, winter 2003/04 (BL=Blacktoft, Br=Broomfleet, GH=Goxhill Haven, GrH=Grainthorpe Haven, Hu=Humberston, LH= Little Humber, Ma=Mablethorpe, NH= New Holland, NKP=North Killingholme Pits, Py=Pyewipe, Sa=Saltfleet, SC=Stone Creek, SE=Salt End).