

LINDISFARNE

Internationally important: Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Bar-tailed Godwit

Nationally important: Whooper Swan, Shelduck, Wigeon, Eider, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Curlew, Redshank

Site description

Lindisfarne forms one of the largest intertidal areas in northeast England. This site, as one of only two barrier beach systems within the UK, has an unusual structure. The majority of the site is sandy, although there are increasing amounts of silt in parts of Budle Bay and Fenham Flats. Several freshwater creeks traverse the flats at low tide. Saltmarsh exists between Goswick and Fenham, especially around the causeway to Holy Island, and along the southwestern shore of Budle Bay. Extensive sand dunes occur on several parts of the site, with dune slacks, dune heath and dune pasture also represented. The eastern shoreline of Holy Island is mainly rocky, with a few patches of shingle. There is a small harbour on Holy Island but no other industry is present. Recreational activities are generally water-based and occur mainly in Budle Bay, though beach recreation is widespread over the entire area, as are walking and birdwatching. Some grazing and hand-gathering of mussels occurs, as does wildfowling, but this is strictly licensed. Wildlife conservation is in force, with the area protected by SPA and Ramsar status, and in 1997 a waterbird refuge was set up on the southern Fenham Flats.

Bird distribution

It should be noted that only a single count was made during the winter, in November 2003, as part of the ongoing Northumberland Atlas project (hence the 1 km grid squares used as count sections).

Cormorant and Shag occurred in similar numbers to one another, on or adjacent to Holy Island. Small numbers of Mute Swan were found on Holy Island and in Budle Bay, whilst a flock of seven Barnacle Geese associated with the Pink-footed Geese on Fenham Flats. Greylag Goose numbers reached 307 (a record Low Tide Count), the majority of which were on Ross Black Sands. Lindisfarne, the only regular British wintering site for the Svalbard population of Light-bellied Brent Goose, supported 2,930 birds in November,

distributed over the flats from Beal Point to Ross Point and across to Holy Island (Figure 64). Some of the densest concentrations occurred on parts of Fenham Flats, whilst Budle Bay was avoided completely. Shelduck favoured Fenham Flats and the western end of Budle Bay, these areas being amongst the least sandy and offering the best feeding habitat. Other species recorded included Red-throated Diver, Great Crested and Slavonian Grebes and Grey Heron.

Budle Bay held the densest flocks of Wigeon, although the refuge area at the southern end of Fenham Flats also supported some. The latter site was also favoured by a flock of 99 Pintail. Teal were concentrated north of Beal Point and in Budle Bay, with a wider distribution in the southeast part of Fenham Flats and Holy Island. Mallard were distributed across the area with the only major gathering in the south east of Budle Bay. The lough on Holy Island had the only Shoveler, Moorhen and Coot recorded. Eider numbers off the north and south ends of Holy Island were somewhat lower than Core Count peaks, possibly as birds moved offshore with the tide. Just over 100 Common Scoters were recorded, the lowest Low Tide Count for five years, with most birds occurring at Ross Point. Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander were noted in small numbers.

Oystercatchers were widely distributed, the greatest concentrations being on the northern and southern shorelines of Holy Island. Holy Island also had the highest numbers of Ringed Plover. Golden Plover flocks favoured Fenham Flats and Budle Bay as well as Holy Island. Grey Plover were distributed over the Fenham Flats mainly in the refuge area, with a few recorded around Holy Island and in Budle Bay. Concentrations of Lapwing were in Budle Bay and off Goswick, and birds were widespread across Fenham Flats and Holy Island. Knot favoured Budle Bay, and Dunlin tended to feed at Fenham Flats. The majority of the few Sanderling recorded were at Emmanuel Head to the north of Holy Island. Bar-tailed Godwit

had a wide distribution across most areas, but with concentrations in Budle Bay and the north shore of Holy Island. Curlew showed a generally similar distribution to the former species, but in greater numbers, with large gatherings across Holy Island and at Goswick and Ross Black Sands (Figure 64). Redshank

was the most widely distributed of all those species noted; the highest density was in the southern part of Budle Bay. Small numbers of Turnstone were found around the shores of Holy Island, whilst two Jack Snipe and three Snipe were also recorded in November.

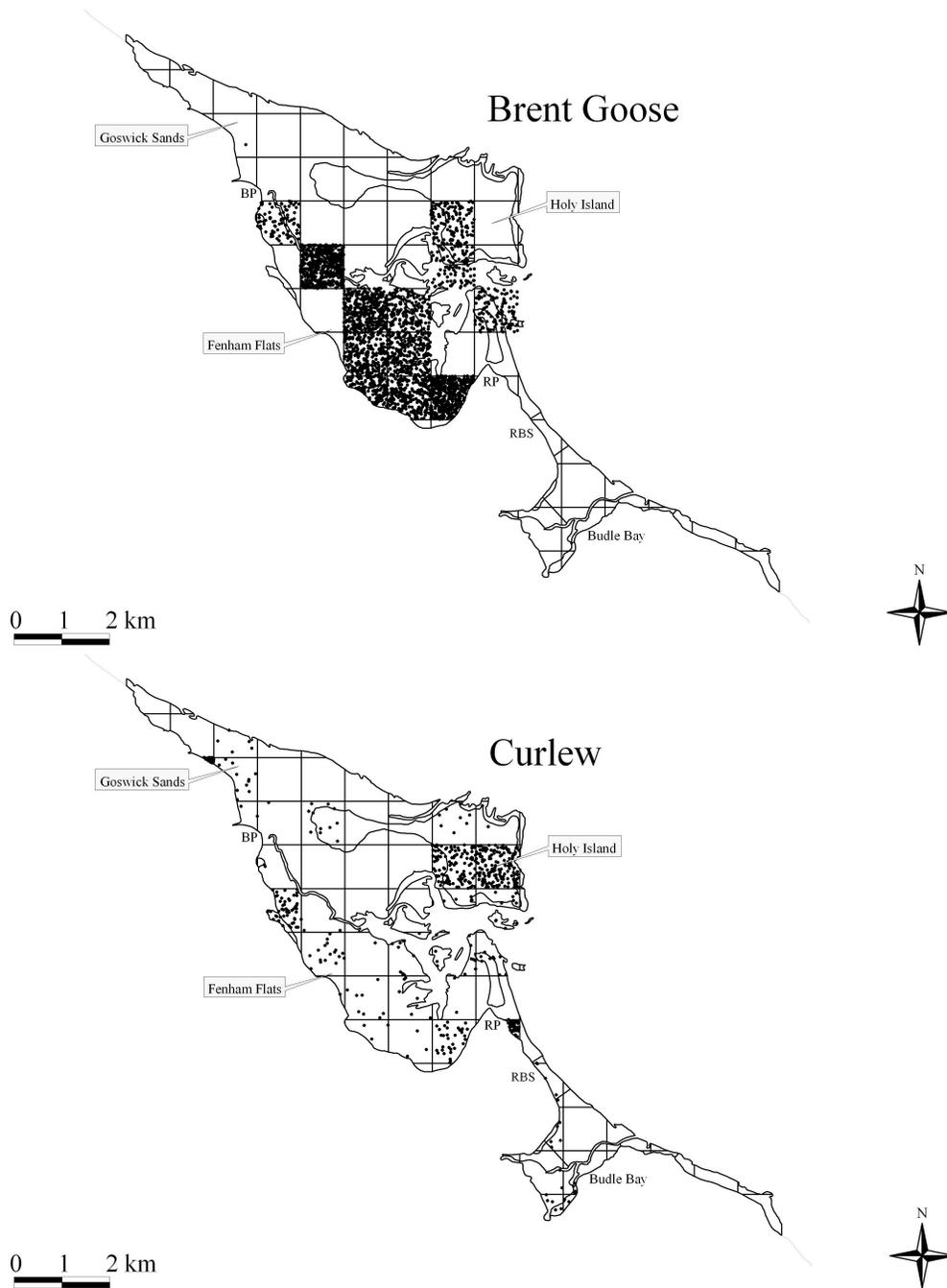


Figure 64. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Light-bellied Brent Goose and Curlew at Lindisfarne, winter 2003/04 (BP=Beal Point, RBS=Ross Black Sands, RP=Ross Point).