

## SWANSEA BAY

**Internationally important:** None  
**Nationally important:** Oystercatcher, Sanderling

### *Site description*

Swansea Bay was a new site for WeBS Low Tide Counts, encompassing the intertidal habitat between The Mumbles and Baglan Bay, incorporating the Tawe and Nedd (Neath) estuaries, with additional sections in the east at Margam Sands. The site is surrounded on all sides by urban developments, principally Swansea and Port Talbot. Swansea Bay and the Tawe have undergone industrialisation and dock construction, leading to a loss of intertidal habitat. The largest portion of flats lies within the bay itself and is a mixture of mud and sand, becoming sand and shingle towards the Mumbles. Behind the flats between Black Pill and Brynmill is a narrow band of sand dunes dominated by dune grassland. The Nedd Estuary is a narrow channel flanked on both sides by mudflats that become sandier towards the mouth; saltmarsh is concentrated at Neath and Crymlyn Burrows. The sand dunes at Crymlyn are the remnants of the once extensive system that fringed the whole bay. Recreational pressures are widespread and varied, including sailing, bathing, walking, windsurfing, water- and jet-skiing. Domestic landfill, an oil refinery and an underground oil pipeline are potentially of conservation concern, and spillages from the pipeline have occurred. However, SSSIs are designated at Crymlyn and Swansea Bay.

### *Bird distribution*

Oystercatcher is one of the key species at Swansea Bay. This winter the peak low tide count was in November and totalled 2,857 birds. Counts for the site also exceeded 2,000 in December, but declined to just over 1,000 in February. Low Tide peak counts were slightly in excess of Core Counts, and it may be that areas that are not surveyed as roost sites, such as that around Swansea Docks, may support some birds that later feed within the bay. The majority of Oystercatchers were concentrated in the west of the bay around The Mumbles, exploiting the expansive intertidal flats (Figure 68). An additional concentration was recorded in the area adjacent to the Guildhall, with further aggregations at the mouth of the

Nedd and a few individuals at Margam Sands.

Ringed Plovers were evenly distributed at three locations around the bay - The Mumbles, the mouth of the Nedd and off Margam Burrows. Sanderling numbers built up from only seven birds in November to a peak of 135, which was recorded in both December and February. The site holds nationally important numbers of Sanderling, with a peak Core Count of 200 in November of the same winter. At low tide, the majority of Sanderlings were feeding in sectors relatively near to the mouths of the rivers Tawe and Nedd, as well as further round the bay at Margam Sands (Figure 68). The sectors near the Nedd outflow are bordered by industrial development and docks, and it is possible that the intertidal areas are relatively undisturbed by recreation, profiting foraging Sanderling. Dunlin favoured some of the same sectors as Sanderling near the mouth of the Nedd, but by far the greatest concentrations were found in the far west at The Mumbles. Dunlin numbers were greatest in November and February, peaks recorded at 870 and 1,093 respectively. This suggests that Swansea Bay may serve as a feeding site during times of Dunlin movement, supported by lower counts of 455 and 161 in December and January. Alternatively there may be local movements between Swansea Bay and other sites in the Bristol Channel. Curlews were thinly distributed around the bay, with denser concentrations in the muddy lower reaches of the Nedd, north of Baglan Bay. The small numbers of Redshank and Turnstone observed, however, were restricted to The Mumbles. Counts of both species peaked in November. Additional sporadic and small counts of Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover were recorded throughout the winter.

Gulls were prevalent at Swansea Bay, with Black-headed Gull in particular found in relatively high concentrations on all sectors counted. Numbers peaked at 3,647 in December, a substantial count. Also notable was the peak count of Herring Gull, which reached over 2,800 in December, and the peak count of 718 Common Gulls in the same month. Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls

were also present, but the real reward for diligent gull counting came in the shape of two sightings of Mediterranean Gull and one Ring-billed Gull.

Waterbirds other than waders and gulls

were relatively scarce during Low Tide Counts at Swansea Bay, with low numbers of Great Crested Grebes, Cormorants, Grey Herons and Shelduck noted around the site.

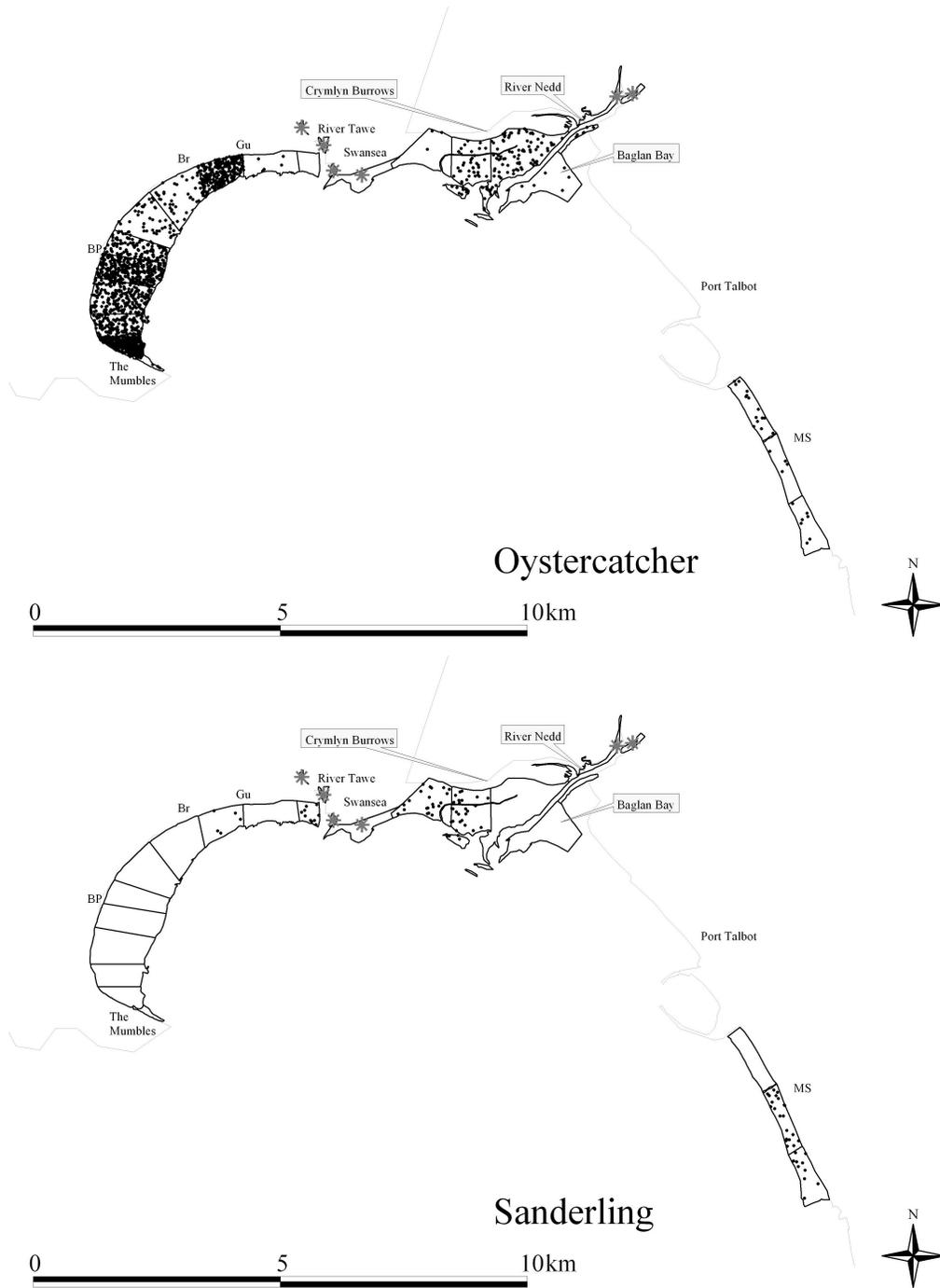


Figure 68. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Oystercatcher and Sanderling in Swansea Bay, winter 2003/04 (BP=Black Pill, Br=Brynmill, Gu=Guildhall, MS=Margam Sands).