



Taw-Torridge Estuary Wetland Bird Survey



Report to Taw Torridge Estuary Forum
meeting on 28 April 2025

WeBS counts

Co-ordinated estuary-wide counts of all waterbirds - including ducks, geese, waders and gulls - were carried out on or around Sundays 5 January, 16 February, 16 March and 13 April. Apart from April when no counter was available for the Fremington to Isley Marsh (Home Farm Marsh) sector, we achieved full coverage of all 13 sectors. Following the methodology for this survey, counts were carried out at, or around, high water.

Waders

Oystercatcher numbers were highest in February when a count of 2281 was recorded, which probably represents the wintering population on the estuary. As to be expected as birds depart for their breeding grounds, numbers dropped through the period, but over 1000 were still present in April. With an early morning high tide, these were mainly on the Crow Point roost, where they are usually disturbed once public access opens at 8am. Counts of Curlew, another species for which the estuary is important, peaked at 338 in February but only 35 remained in April as they too departed to breed. Redshank numbers reached a maximum of 403 on the February count and between 10 and 14 Greenshank were present throughout. The maximum Golden Plover was 1150 in January and they had departed by March. A total of 13 Whimbrel in April was indicative of spring passage.

Wildfowl

Canada Goose numbers peaked at 807 birds in January but subsequently declined. Brent Geese increased from January to March with a maximum of 427, but had mostly departed by the April count date. Wigeon numbers did not exceed the 530 counted in December and Pintail numbers declined sharply over the period.

Gulls and Terns

Black-headed Gull numbers varied but did not exceed 1000 and reduced to under 200 by April. Herring Gull numbers increased through the period from 336 to 797 as the local breeding population re-occupied breeding sites on the roof of Appledore shipyard roof and Pottington Industrial Estate. Two Sandwich Tern were a welcome addition to the April count.

Unusual species

A Slavonian Grebe was still in the estuary, off Fremington Quay, in January, when single Glossy Ibis, Spoonbill and Green Sandpiper were also included in the counts. Unusual wildfowl were evident in February, with single Lesser Scaup, Green-winged Teal and two White-fronted Geese present. The single Spotted Redshank remained at Fremington Pill until March, when a Great White Egret was also present. Less common in winter nowadays, a Eider was at the Skern in March. Normally very



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secretive, six Water Rail were detected across three sectors in March. Cattle Egrets are now much more frequent with 12 present in February.

Disturbance reports

WeBS counters often make note of bird disturbance from land- and water-based leisure activities. As usual, a few dog and human incidents were reported.

No further communication has been received from Liz Bailey, a Marine Officer with Natural England, regarding potential camouflaging of the fencing around the former power station site at Yelland.

No disturbance reports were submitted through the website.

Chris Dee – 22 April 2025