



MILFORD HAVEN WATERWAY
ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEILLANCE GROUP

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Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway Annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations 2018

J E Hodges

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**Report to the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance
Group**

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October 2018

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COVER IMAGE: Adult shelduck with chicks © Blaise Bullimore

Recommended citation: Hodges, J. E. 2018. *Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway: annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations 2018*. Report to the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group

Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway: annual surveillance of summer shelduck populations 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Daugleddau Estuary and Milford Haven Waterway hold regionally important numbers of shelducks during the winter months. There is also a small summer population that has been the subject of annual surveillance carried out between 1991 and 2017. The summer shelduck survey was repeated in 2018 as part of a co-ordinated programme of environmental surveillance work in the estuary system. The aims, objectives and methods used to carry out the survey, together with the data obtained are described in this report.

The results indicate that in terms of the number of broods seen in the estuary system (11), the 2018 breeding season was a significant improvement on that of 2017. This suggests that the modest recovery in the numbers of broods observed between 2014 and 2016 (which followed a steady decline over several years) may have been resumed in 2018. The average brood size seen in 2018 (5.5) was however, the smallest recorded since 2014, and was considerably lower than in 2017 (8.9). This may indicate a resumption of a gradual decline in average brood size (a measure of productivity) following a recovery over the previous three breeding seasons.

As in previous years, predation (by avian and/or mammalian predators) is likely to have been a significant factor affecting the number and size of broods recorded in the estuary system in 2018. Adverse weather conditions (e.g. heavy rain accompanied by low temperatures) in May and June can impact on the survival of eggs to hatching and/or recently hatched ducklings. However poor weather conditions are not likely to have been a significant factor affecting the number of ducklings making it onto the water or their survival once on the water in 2018. Disturbance (on land and/or on the water) may have affected breeding success and subsequent survival of ducklings, although there is little evidence to suggest that this was the case in 2018. Other factors e.g. the presence of thick “mattresses” of green macro-algae (linked to elevated levels of nutrients in the estuary system) on mudflats at low tide and the re-distribution of sediments and contaminants as a result of anthropogenic activities may have had localised effects on access to and/or the quality of foraging habitat, hence on the fitness and survival of adult and young shelducks.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been a downward trend in the numbers of shelducks over-wintering in the UK. This national trend has been mirrored by a decline in the numbers of shelducks electing to over-winter in the estuary system. It is likely to be linked to factors such as the increasing tendency for birds to “short-stop” in mainland Europe in response to the recent trend in mild winters across Northeastern and Western Europe, and possibly to changes in the annual moult grounds. A consequence of the long-term downward trend in the numbers over-wintering in the

estuary system has been that fewer birds have remained to breed. The WeBS data for the 2017/18 winter suggest however that, although the numbers of shelducks present in the estuary system was lower than the long-term average in most months, the long-term decline in the over-wintering population in the estuary system may be levelling off. The higher numbers of shelducks present at the end of the 2017/18 winter may explain the higher numbers of non-breeding shelducks recorded in June 2018 and result in higher numbers remaining to breed than in recent years.

Data collected for other wetland birds once again underlined the importance of the estuary system during migration, especially for species such as curlew.

The report concludes with a recommendation for the continuation of the annual surveillance of the summer shelduck population in the estuary system as part of the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group's annual work programme. Potential lines of enquiry into the continued decline in the size of broods in particular (which is most likely to be linked to local environmental conditions) are suggested. It is also suggested that actions to address the high nutrient status of the waters of the estuary system be identified and implemented.

CRYNODEB GWEITHREDOL

Mae Aber a Dyfrffordd Daugleddau yn cynnwys niferoedd rhanbarthol bwysig o hwyaid yr eithin yn ystod misoedd y gaeaf. Mae yno hefyd boblogaeth haf fechan sydd wedi bod yn destun gwyliadwriaeth flynyddol rhwng 1991 a 2017. Cynhaliwyd arolwg o'r hwyaid haf drachefn yn 2018, fel rhan o raglen gydgysylltiedig o waith gwyliadwriaethol amgylcheddol o fewn y system aberol. Disgrifir nodau ac amcanion yr arolwg hwnnw yn yr adroddiad hwn, ynghyd â'r dulliau a ddefnyddiwyd i'w gyflawni.

Mae'r canlyniadau, yn nhermau niferoedd y nytheidiau a welwyd yn y system aberol (11), yn dynodi y bu tymor nythu 2018 yn arwyddocaol well na thymor 2017. Mae hyn yn awgrymu bod y cynnydd gweddol, y sylwyd arno rhwng 2014 a 2016 (a oedd yn dilyn lleihad cyson dros nifer o flynyddoedd), wedi ailgychwyn yn 2018. Fodd bynnag, maint cyfartalog y nytheidiau a welwyd yn 2018 (5.5) oedd y isaf a gofnodwyd er 2014, ac yr oedd yn sylweddol is na'r cyfartaledd yn 2017 (8.9). Gall hyn ddynodi ailgychwyn y lleihad graddol yn y maint nythaid cyfartalog (sy'n fesur o'r cynhyrchiant), yn dilyn yr adferiad a welwyd dros y tri thymor nythu blaenorol.

Fel yn y blynyddoedd blaenorol, mae'n debygol bod ysglyfaethu (gan adar a/neu famaliaid ysglyfaethus) yn ffactor arwyddocaol yn nifer a maint y nytheidiau a gofnodwyd yn y system aberol yn 2018. Gall amodau tywydd anffafriol (megis glaw trwm ar y cyd a thymereddau isel) ym Mai a Mehefin effeithio ar oroesiad yr wyau hyd at ddeor a/neu ar gywion sydd newydd ddeor. Fodd bynnag, nid yw amodau tywydd gwael yn debygol o fod yn ffactor arwyddocaol sydd wedi effeithio ar nifer y cywion sy'n llwyddo i gyrraedd y dŵr, nac ar eu goroesiad ar ôl cyrraedd y dŵr yn 2018. Gall ymyrraeth (ar y tir a/neu ar y dŵr) fod wedi effeithio ar lwyddiant y nythu ac ar oroesiad dilynol y cywion, ond prin yw'r dystiolaeth bod hynny wedi digwydd yn 2018. Gall ffactorau eraill, megis presenoldeb 'matresi' trwchus o facro-algâu gwyrdd (a gysylltir â'r lefelau uwch o faethynnau yn y system aberol) ar y gwastadeddau llaid pan fo'r llanw'n isel, a hefyd ail-ddosbarthiad gwaddodion a halogyddion o ganlyniad i weithgareddau anthropogenig, fod wedi effeithio mewn mannau ar ansawdd a hygyrchedd y cynefin porthianna, a thrwy hynny effeithio ar ffitrwydd a goroesiad yr hwyaid ifainc a'r oedolion.

Er canol y 1990au, mae'r niferoedd o hwyaid yr eithin a fu'n trosaeafu yn y Deyrnas Unedig wedi tueddu i ostwng. Adlewyrchwyd y duedd genedlaethol honno gan ostyngiad cyfatebol yn y niferoedd o hwyaid yr eithin a ddewisodd drosaeafu yn y system aberol. Mae hyn yn debygol o fod yn gysylltiedig â ffactorau fel tuedd gynyddol yr adar i dreulio "arhosiad byr" ar y cyfandir oherwydd tynerwch y gaeafau diweddar yng ngogledd-ddwyrain a gorllewin Ewrop, ac efallai newidiadau yn y tiroedd bwrw plu blynyddol. Un o ganlyniadau'r lleihad hirdymor yn y niferoedd sy'n trosaeafu yn y system aberol, yw fod niferoedd llai o adar wedi aros i nythu. Fodd bynnag, mae data'r Arolwg Adar Gwlyptir ar gyfer gaeaf 2017/18 yn awgrymu, er y bu'r niferoedd o hwyaid yr eithin a oedd yn bresennol yn y system aberol yn is na'r

cyfartaledd hirdymor yn ystod y rhan fwyaf o'r misoedd, y gall y gostyngiad hirdymor yn y niferoedd sy'n trosaeafu yn y system aberol fod yn gwastatáu bellach. Dichon mai'r niferoedd uwch o'r hwyaid a oedd yn bresennol ar ddiwedd gaeaf 2017/18 sy'n esbonio'r niferoedd uwch o hwyaid nad oeddent yn nythu a gofnodwyd ym Mehefin 2018, ac o ganlyniad y bydd niferoedd uwch nag yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf yn aros yma i nythu.

Roedd y data a gasglwyd am adar gwlyptir eraill unwaith eto'n tanlinellu pwysigrwydd y system aberol yn ystod ymfudo, yn enwedig i rywogaethau fel y gylfinir.

Mae'r adroddiad y terfynu gydag argymhelliad i barhau'r wyliadwriaeth flynyddol o'r boblogaeth haf o hwyaid yr eithin yn y system aberol, fel rhan o raglen waith flynyddol Grŵp Goruchwyllo Amgylcheddol Dyfrffordd Aberdaugleddau. Awgrymir trywyddau penodol ar gyfer ymholi ymhellach i'r lleihad sy'n parhau ym maint y nytheidiau (sy'n fwyaf tebygol o fod yn gysylltiedig ag amodau amgylcheddol lleol). Awgrymir hefyd y dylid canfod a chyflawni dull o roi sylw i statws maethynnol uchel y dyfroedd yn y system aberol.