4.18 HAMFORD WATER

LTC site code:	BH
Centre grid:	TM2325
JNCC estuarine review site:	110
Habitat zonation:	367 ha intertidal, 106 ha subtidal, 58 ha nontidal
Statutory status:	Hamford Water SPA (UK9009131), Hamford Water Ramsar (7UK063)
Winter waterbird interest:	Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Pintail, Avocet, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Sanderling, Dunlin, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Waterbird assemblage

SITE DESCRIPTION

Hamford Water is a large, shallow, estuarine basin with an extremely diverse mix of habitat types. The whole site is a mosaic of dissected saltmarshes, islands, channels and mudflats backed by a range of brackish, fresh and reed-fringed marshes. Many of the islands are former saltmarshes embanked and converted to wet grassland, but some have reverted to saltmarsh after sea walls were breached around the end of the 19th century; saltmarsh comprises one third of the whole site. The mouth of the main channel into Pennyhole Bay is flanked on either side by dune-topped shingle spits. The principal cause of disturbance to waterfowl at Hamford Water is military helicopter training, whilst there is an explosives works on the north shore, along with other more usual potential sources of disturbance such as walkers, boats, aircraft and wildfowling. Much of the surrounding marshland has been converted to arable farmland. As with other sites along this stretch of coast, saltmarsh erosion from rising sea-levels is also a concern (J. Novorol pers. comm.).

COVERAGE AND INTERPRETATION

Hamford Water was included in the scheme in the winters of 1992–93 and 1997–98, counts being submitted for all months. Coverage was patchy, however. Figure 4.18.1 shows the positions of the nine sections counted for the survey during the two winters, clearly only representing a small part of the site. The northern two sections at Dugmore Sands were covered during both winters, the southern four at the Wade were only counted during 1992–93 and the western three only in

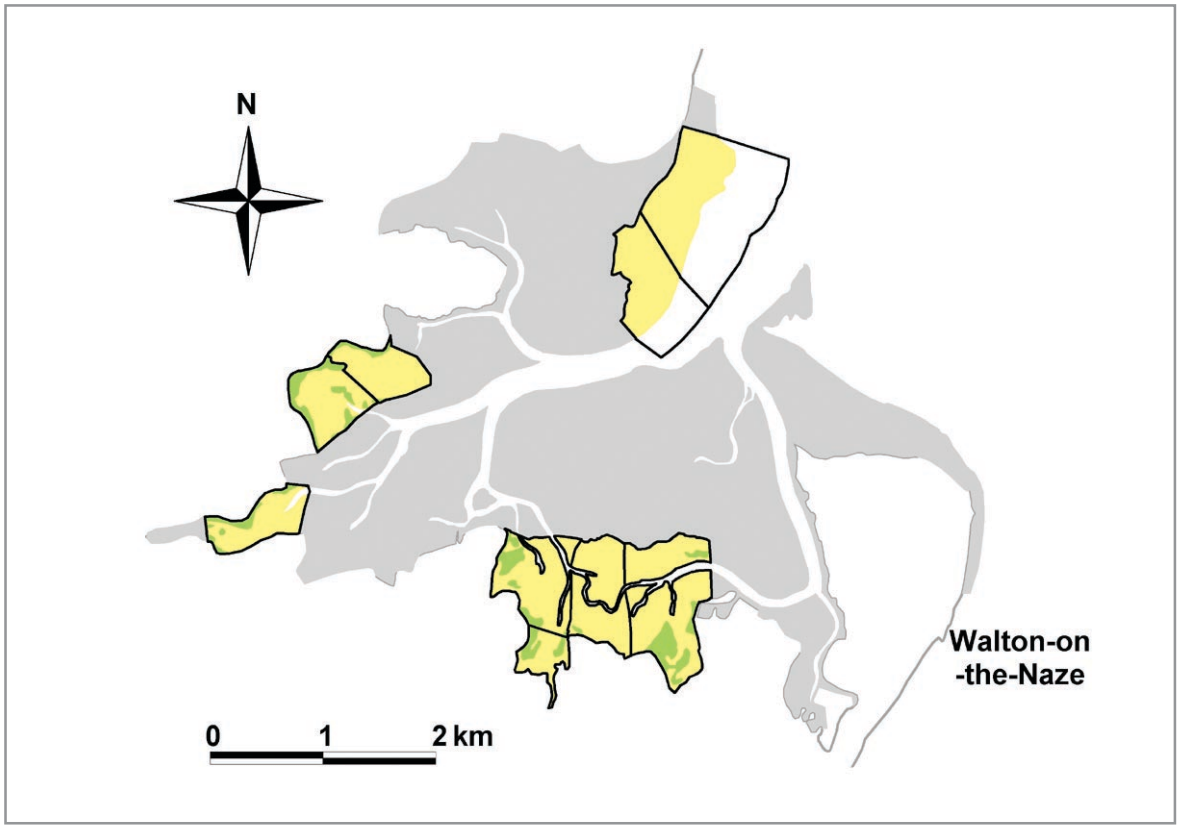


Figure 4.18.1: **LTC sections at Hamford Water, winters 1992–93 and 1997–98**

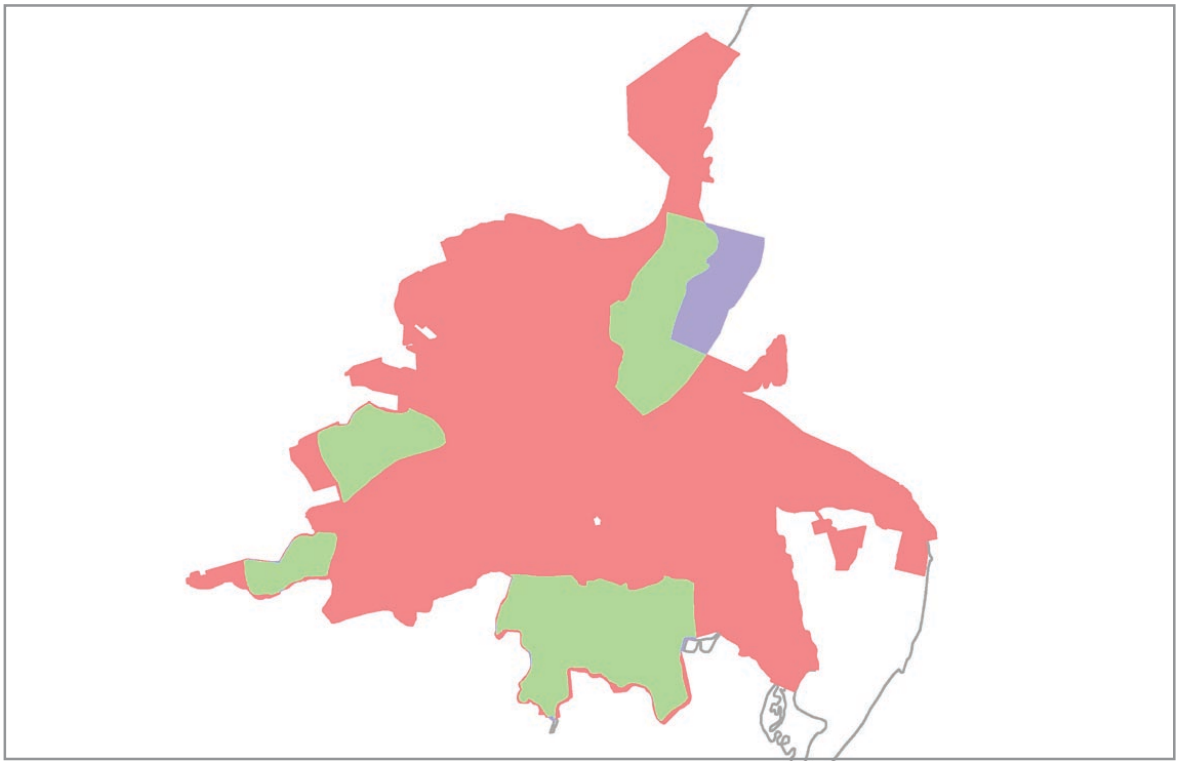


Figure 4.18.2: LTC and SPA boundaries, with overlap, at Hamford Water

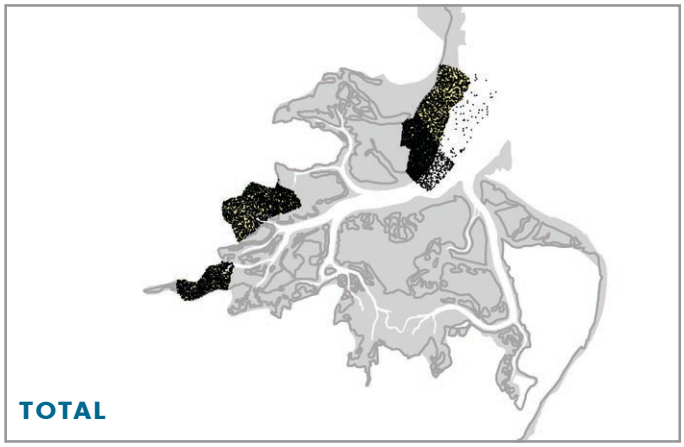
1997–98. The low level of coverage was due mostly to the nature of the site which has very extensive areas of saltmarshes and creeks, making viewing very difficult.

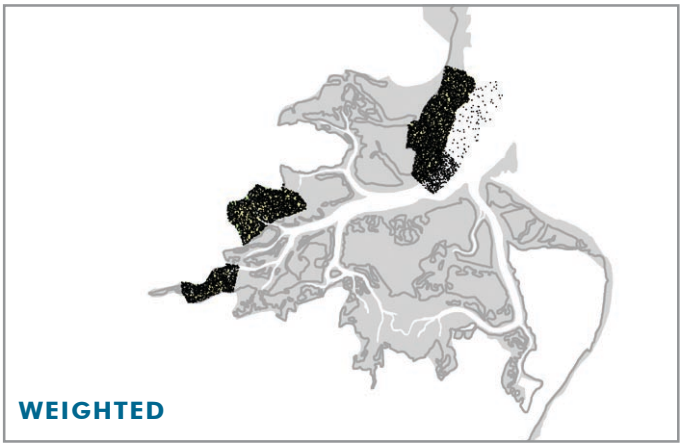
Figure 4.18.2 shows that the SPA area was only partially covered during the LTCs. Large areas of the estuary remain unsurveyed which doubtless hold many birds. Therefore, the counts to date do not adequately describe the bird usage of the SPA. The boundaries of the Ramsar site are entirely coincident with those of the SPA.

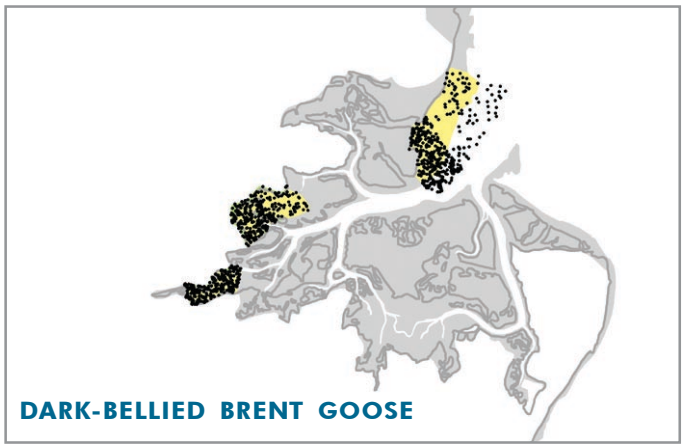
The relationship of the numbers of birds roosting at Hamford with the numbers feeding is complicated by a complex pattern of movements between here and other nearby sites. Many Dunlin, Knot and Grey Plovers leave roosts at Hamford to feed on the Stour and Orwell to the north. A sizeable proportion of Hamford Water's Brent Geese make extensive use of Holland Marshes to the south-west, with Wigeon and Teal also moving there when it floods. Other Wigeon leave Hamford at dawn or as the tide ebbs to fly north to the Stour, whilst other wildfowl such as Mallard, Shoveler, Teal, Greylag Geese and Canada Geese fly north-east to roost at Trimley Marshes on the Orwell (J. Novorol pers. comm.).

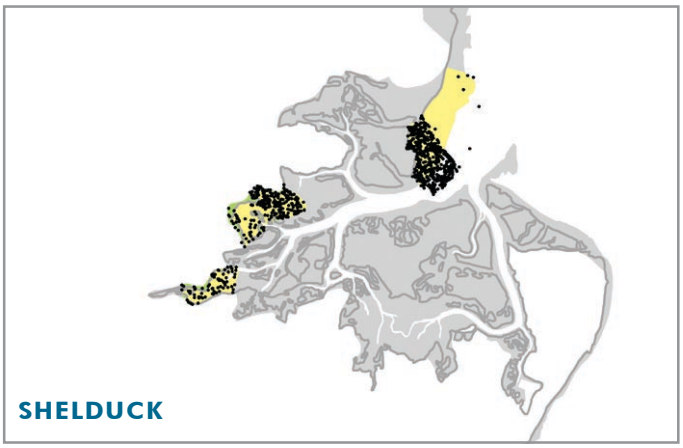
WATERBIRD DISTRIBUTION

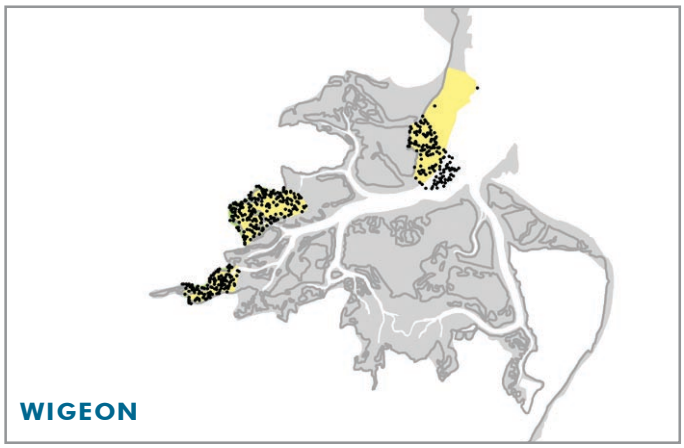
Low tide distribution maps from the winter of 1997–98 are presented for all of the 18 species of principal interest listed above. Additional maps of total birds and total birds weighted by 1% threshold value are also presented (Figure 4.18.3). The totals map shows that the southern part of Dugmore Sands held the highest concentration of birds during 1997–98 of those areas surveyed, but the weighted total map removes the emphasis on this section; the high bird density here was largely driven by Lapwing. Given the limited area covered, however, there is little to be said about the distributions of individual species. Although many species were relatively widespread on those sections covered, some (such as Teal, for example) showed distinct preferences for certain areas of the estuary.

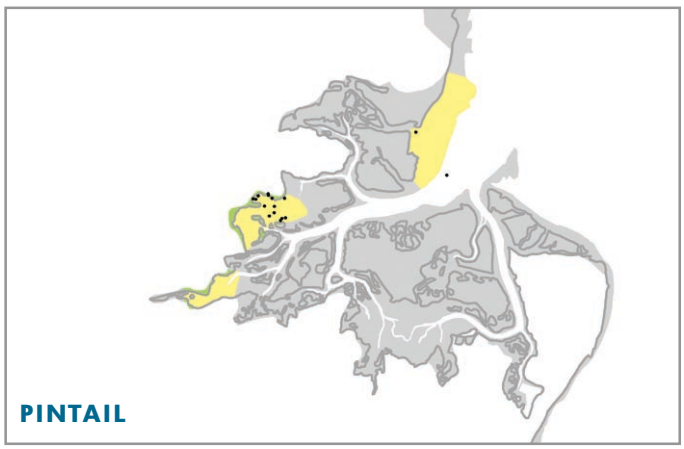












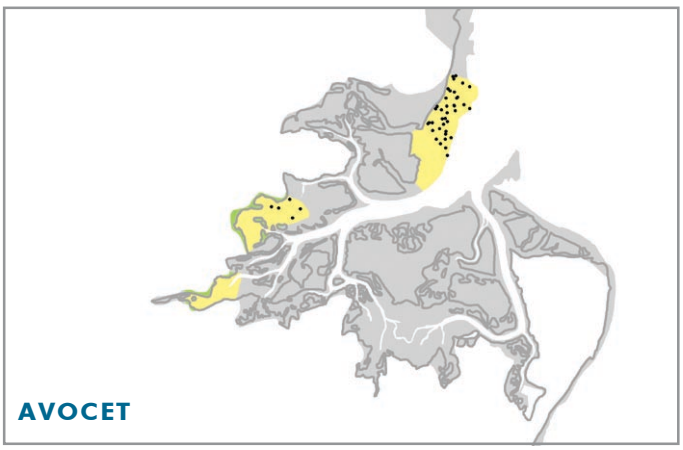
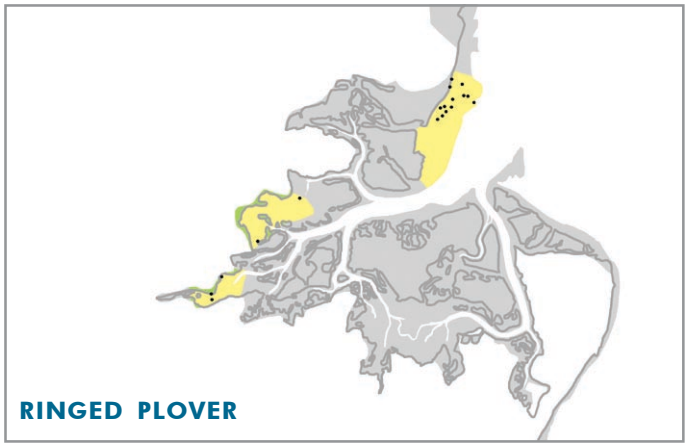
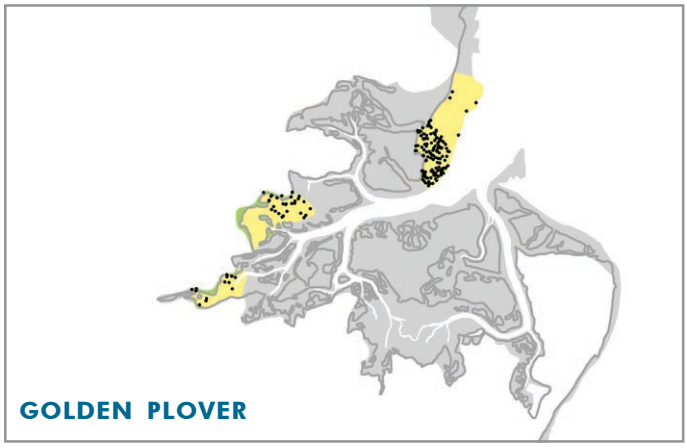
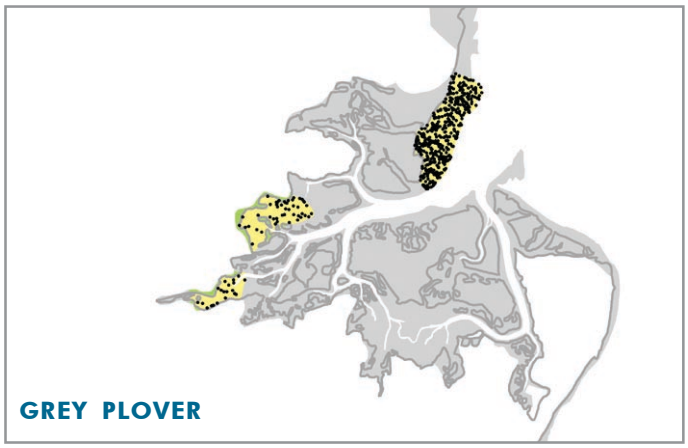
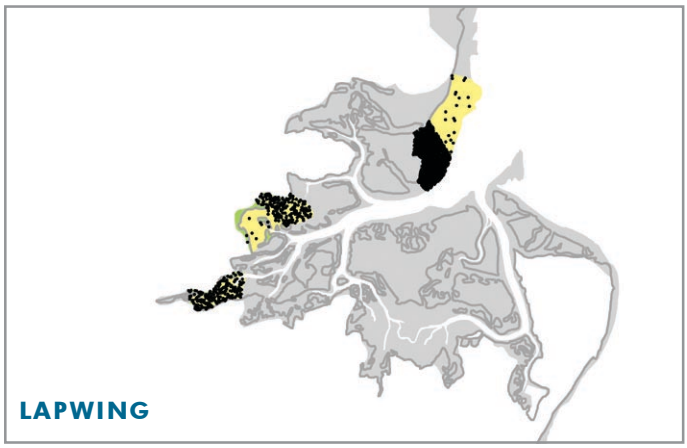


Figure 4.18.3 (i): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at Hamford Water, winter 1997-98









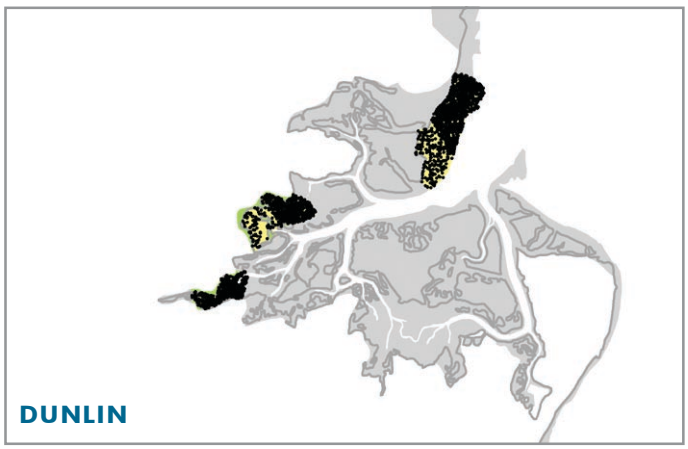


Figure 4.18.3 (ii): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at Hamford Water, winter 1997-98

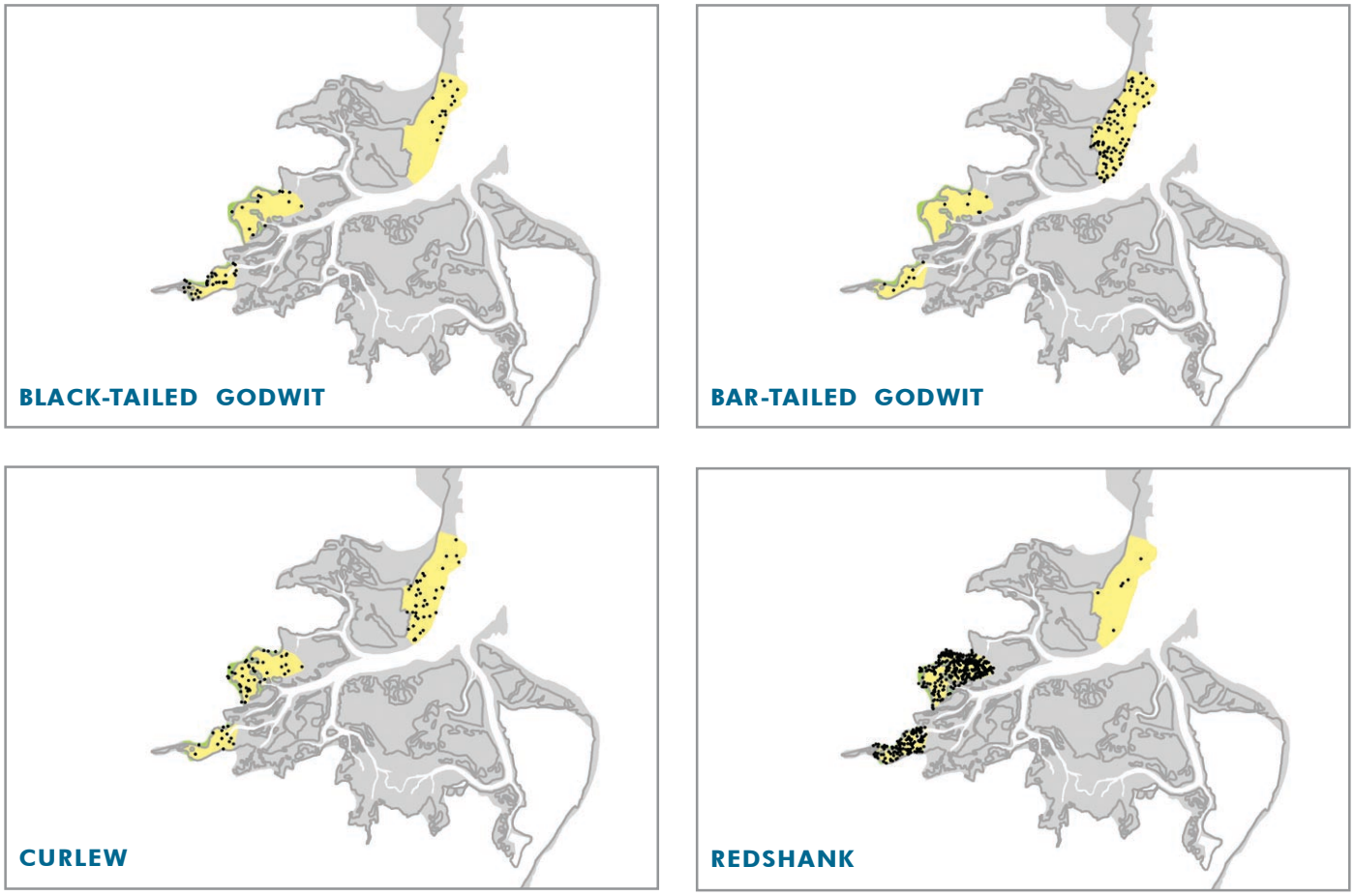


Figure 4.18.3 (iii): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at Hamford Water, winter 1997-98

4.19 COLNE ESTUARY

LTC site code:	DC
Centre grid:	TM0617
JNCC estuarine review site:	111
Habitat zonation:	560 ha intertidal, 249 ha subtidal, 415 ha nontidal
Statutory status:	Colne Estuary SPA (UK9009243), Blackwater Estuary SPA (UK9009245), Colne Estuary Ramsar (7UK079), Blackwater Estuary Ramsar (7UK087)
Winter waterbird interest:	Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Pintail, Shoveler, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Avocet, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank, Waterfowl assemblage

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Colne Estuary, as considered for the LTCs, consists of the main river channel, Brightlingsea Creek, Alresford Creek, Pyefleet Channel and Strood Channel (north of Mersea Island) as well as some of the Geedon Saltings area. The site is adjacent to the Blackwater Estuary to the west. The main channels are mostly muddy at low tide; sandier sediments around the mouth of the site and along the south side of Mersea Island were mostly uncounted. There is also a substantial amount of saltmarsh present, although this is eroding rapidly in places, especially around Mersea Island. Leisure is the dominant human use of the site, especially water-based sports, although there are some small industrial sites. There is a relatively high human population around the estuary, leading to development pressures on parts of the site (A. Thompson pers. comm.).

COVERAGE AND INTERPRETATION

The Colne Estuary was counted for the scheme during 1994–95 (the same winter as the adjoining Blackwater Estuary), counts being received for all four months. Figure 4.19.1 shows the positions of the 12 sections counted for the survey.

Figure 4.19.2 shows how all of the areas counted for the LTCs are included within SPA designations (except for the main water channels), mostly within the Colne Estuary SPA although the Strood Channel in the west is part of the Blackwater SPA. However, there are significant areas of the Colne Estuary SPA which have not yet been included within the scheme. The most important of these are the Colne Point/Ray Creek area, Mersea Flats, St Osyth Creek, Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve, large areas of saltmarsh in the north-west of the site and an area of grazing marsh west

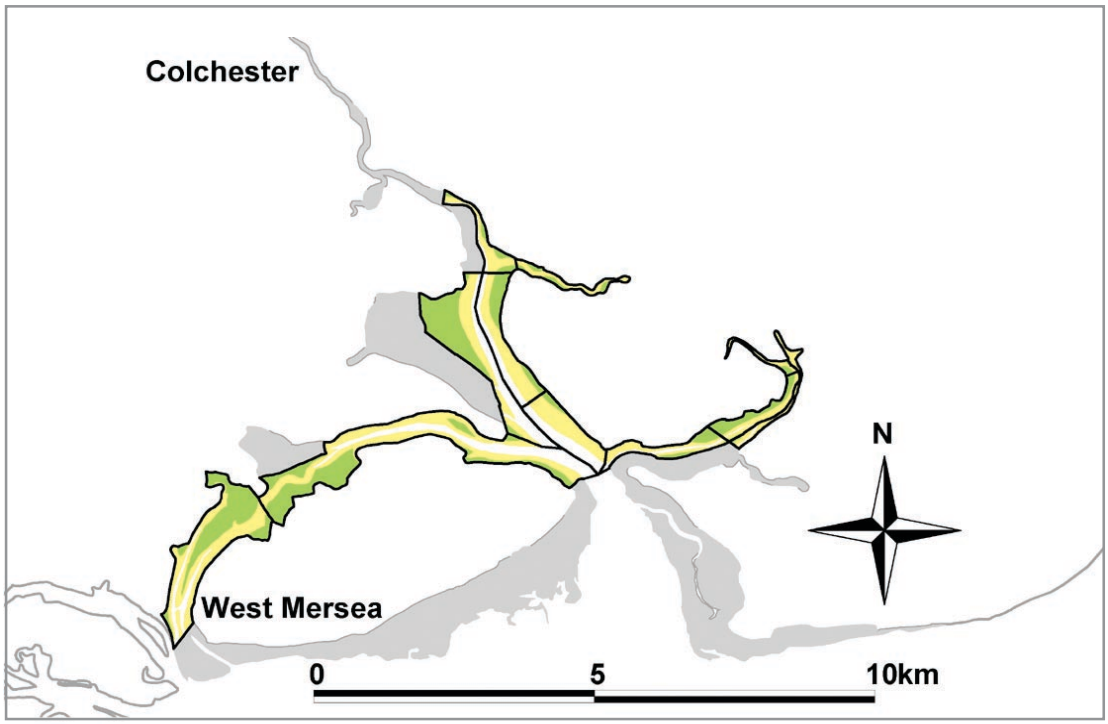


Figure 4.19.1: **LTC sections at the Colne Estuary, winter 1994–95**

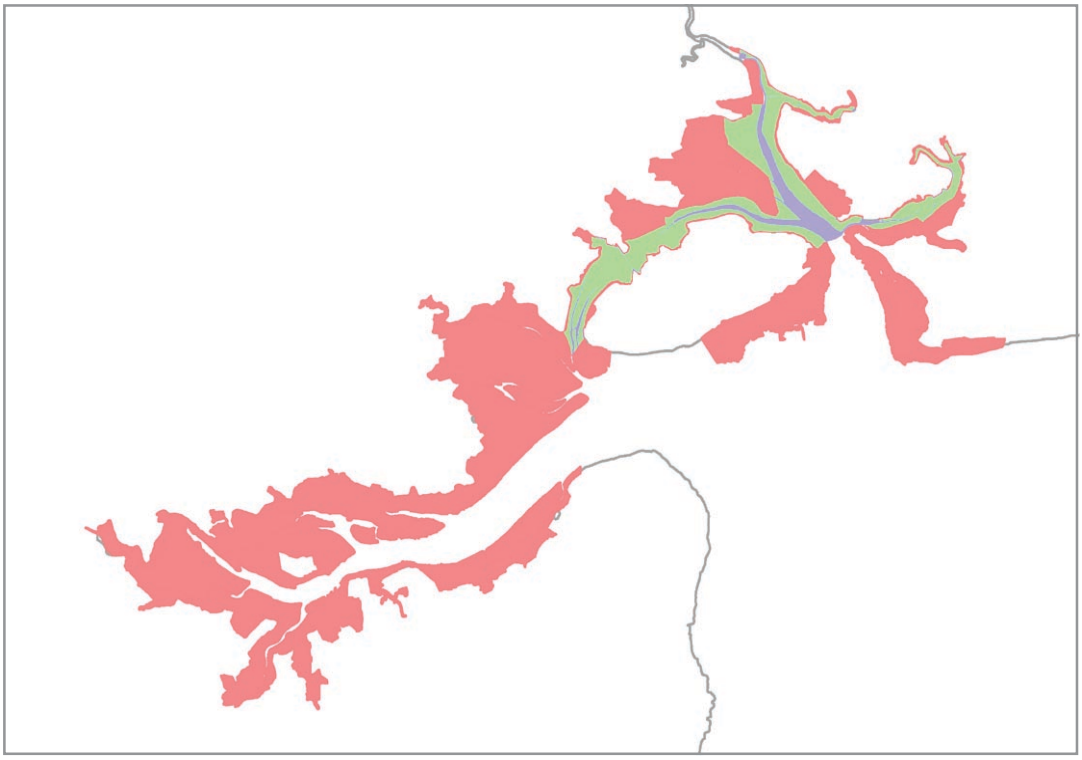


Figure 4.19.2: LTC and SPA boundaries, with overlap, at the Colne Estuary

of Brightlingsea. Notably, however, the upstream limits of both SPA and LTC boundaries are roughly the same, despite the intertidal habitat extending north several more miles into Colchester. The boundaries of the Ramsar sites are entirely coincident with those of the SPAs.

Movements of birds between the Colne and Blackwater Estuaries (and perhaps also Dengie Sands) are likely to occur on a daily basis. Additionally, Abberton Reservoir is situated only a few miles west of the Colne and frequent interchange of some species (including Cormorant, Wigeon and Teal) is known to occur (A. Thompson pers. comm.).

WATERBIRD DISTRIBUTION

Low tide distribution maps from the winter of 1994–95 are presented for 17 of the 20 species of principal interest listed above. For clarity, smaller dots are used to display the distributions of Lapwing and Dunlin. Additional maps of total birds and total birds weighted by 1% threshold value are also presented (Figure 4.19.3). Of the remaining species, no Shoveler or Pintail and only small numbers of Ruff were recorded, these species mostly frequenting adjacent nontidal habitats.

The totals map and, to a greater extent, the weighted totals map highlight the lower reaches of the river Colne. Many species were found in high densities in this area, especially the west shore south of Fingringhoe Wick, including Brent Goose, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin and Avocet, the latter species being found here exclusively during the survey but the other species occurring more widely. Redshank, Curlew and Wigeon were very widespread but the species displaying the most even spread was Shelduck. However, as with most other species apart from Redshank, few Shelduck were found at Alresford Creek. Ringed Plovers were restricted to the channel north of Mersea Island within the area surveyed (although more presumably occur at low tide at Mersea Flats and Colne Point). Both Black-tailed Godwits and Teal were largely localised to Brightlingsea Creek and the area south of Fingringhoe Wick. Small numbers of Great Crested Grebes, Cormorants, Red-breasted Mergansers and Goldeneyes were found throughout, with a small concentration of the latter species at the western end of Mersea Island in Strood Channel.

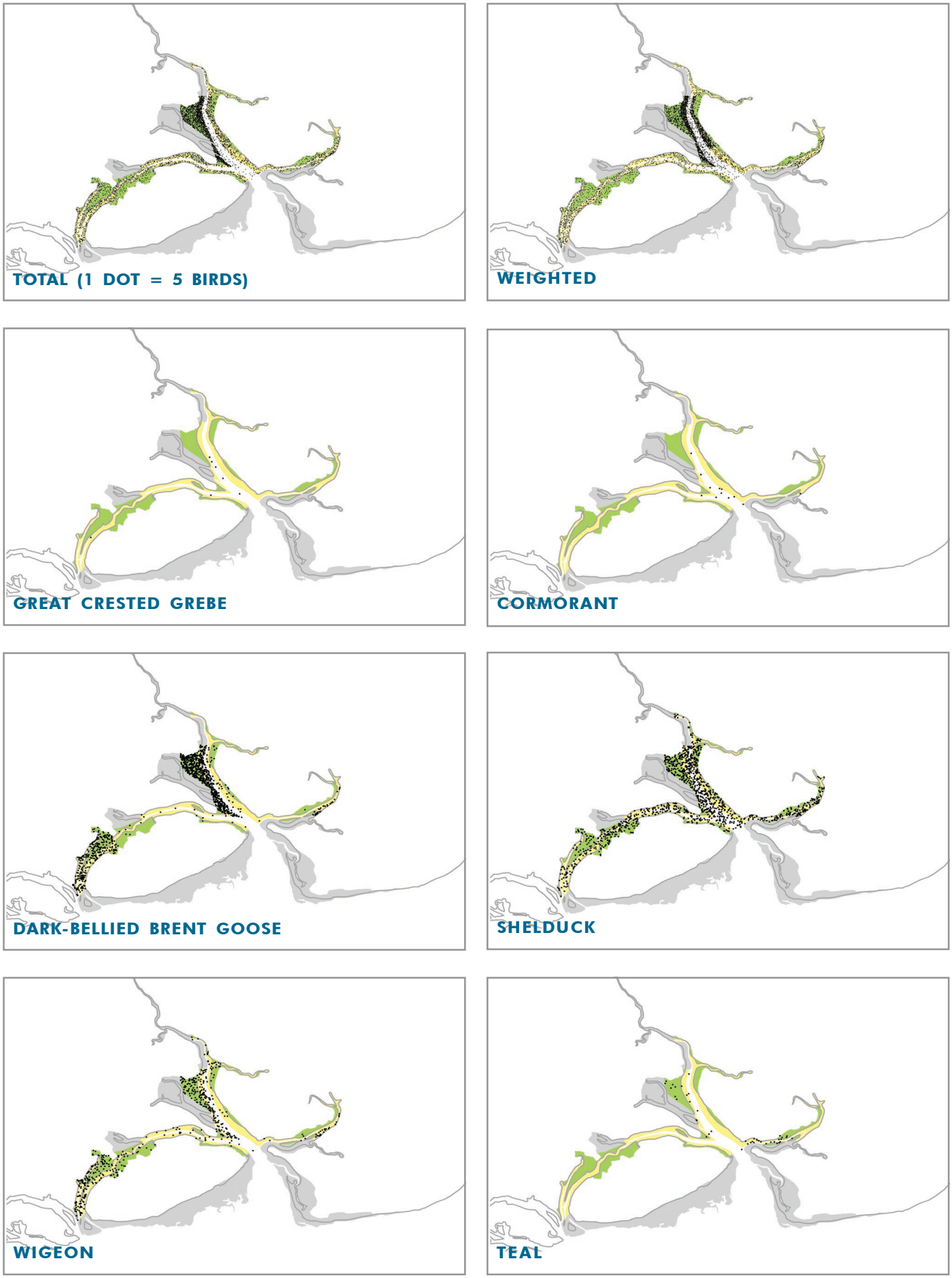
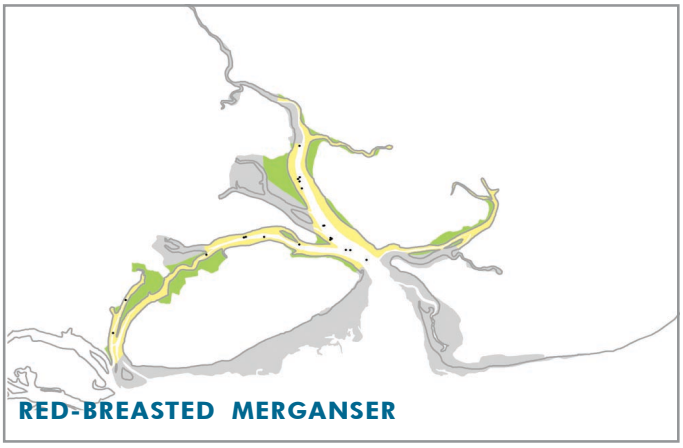
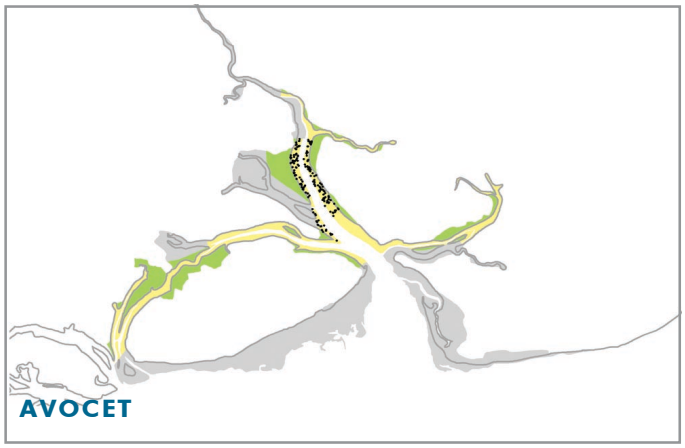
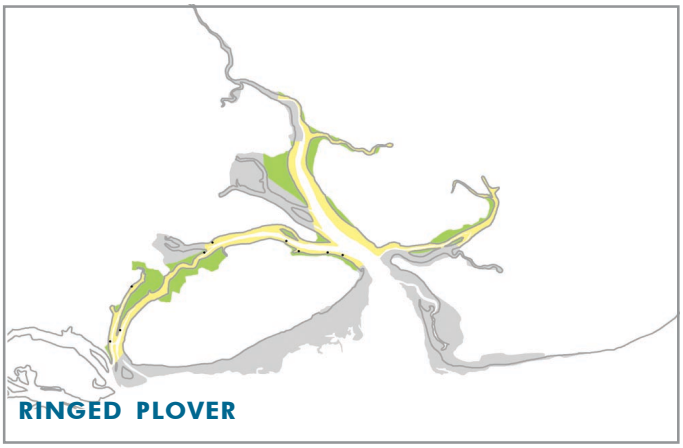
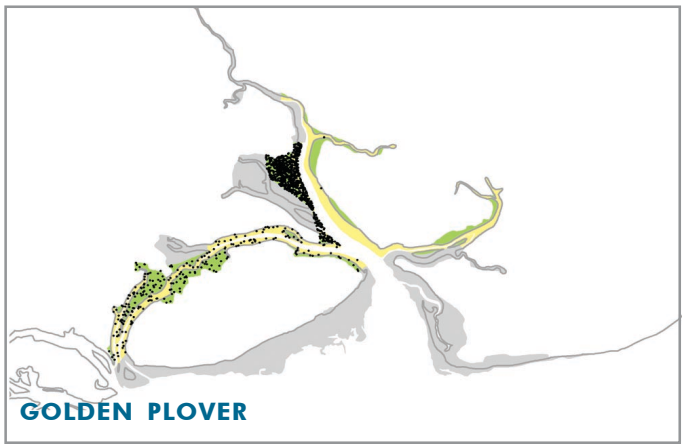


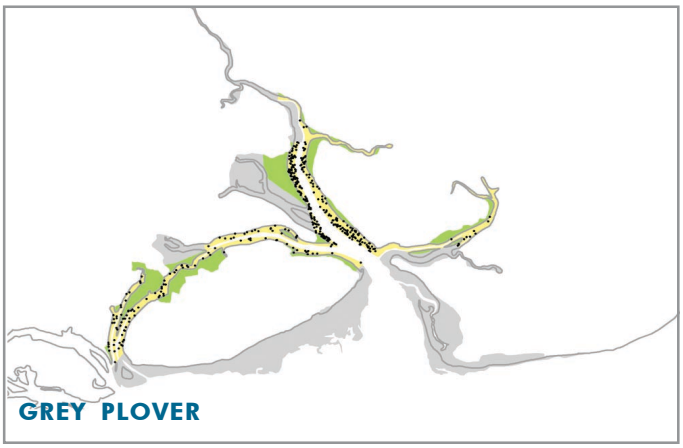
Figure 4.19.3 (i): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at the Colne Estuary, winter 1994-95











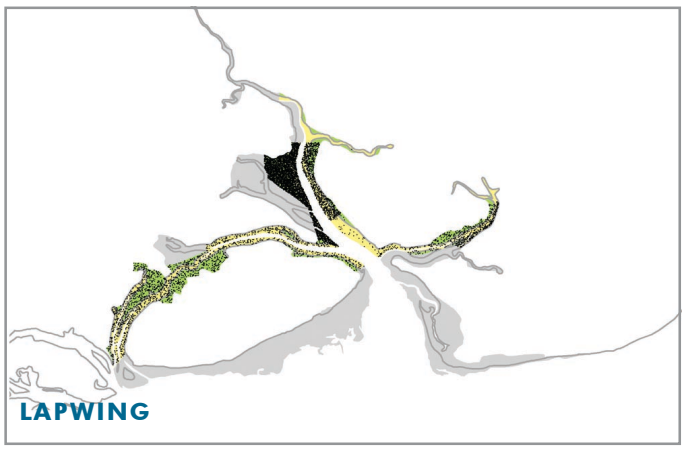


Figure 4.19.3 (ii): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at the Colne Estuary, winter 1994-95

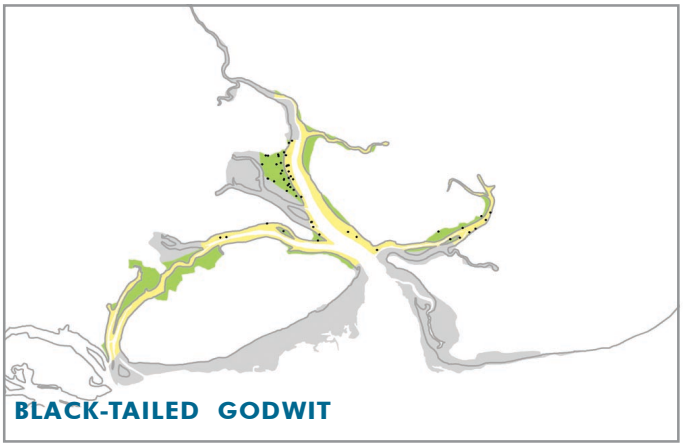


Figure 4.19.3 (iii): Low tide waterbird distributions recorded at the Colne Estuary, winter 1994-95