

BURRY INLET

Internationally important: Pintail, Oystercatcher

Nationally important: Dark-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Shoveler, Knot, Dunlin

Site description

The Burry Inlet is a large estuarine complex, lying between the Gower Peninsula and the town of Llanelli in South Wales, and forms the estuary of the river Loughor. Its status as a Ramsar Site and an SPA is based on the birds supported by the large intertidal sand and mudflats and the extensive areas of saltmarsh mainly on the southern shore of the estuary. There are also substantial sand dune systems around the mouth of the estuary. Shellfishing is licensed at the site, with non-mechanical cockling in operation, and significant mussel production in the sub-tidal areas. Bait-digging activities occur. Sheep and cattle grazing are widespread in areas of saltmarsh. Tourism and recreational pressures are light, with walking, angling and birdwatching the principal pursuits. Whiteford NNR and the WWT National Wetland Centre at Llanelli provide notable refuges.

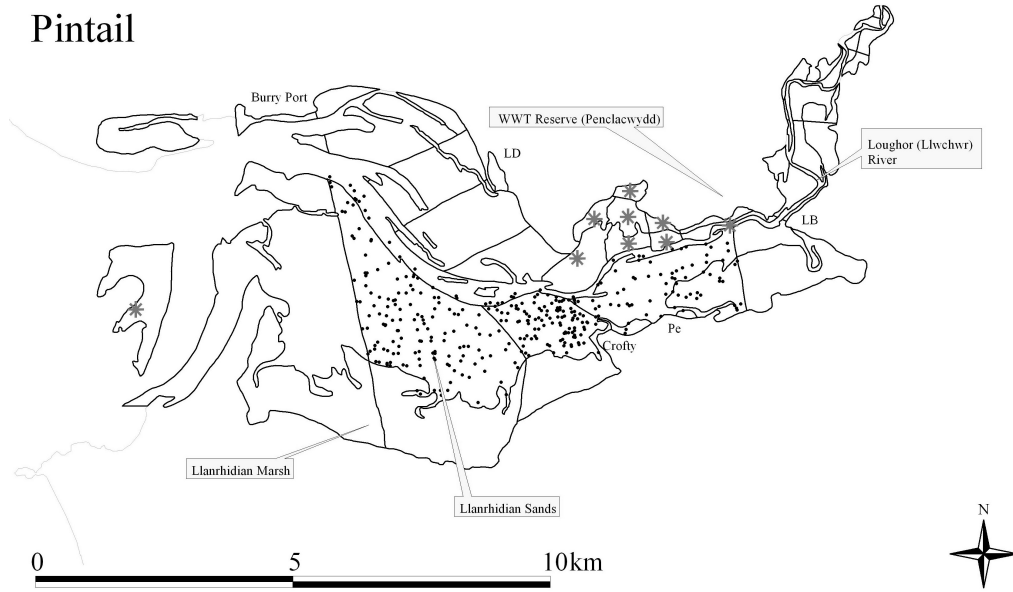
Bird distribution

Cormorants were mainly recorded in the outer reaches of the estuary, on both sides of the main river channel, whilst Great Crested Grebes were present in small numbers in the outer parts of the estuary. Low Tide Counts of Grey Heron reached 20 in January, the species being found in all areas. Little Egrets continued to increase at this site, as they have in many other areas of the UK. A peak count of 27 in January was much higher than the Core Count of 16, and was also higher than the five-year peak mean. These birds were recorded on the upper estuary, north of the Loughor Bridge and on the northern flats between Llanelli Docks and Burry Port. Both Dark-bellied Brent Geese and Shelduck were present on the estuary in nationally important numbers, but Low Tide Counts do not reflect this well. Brent Geese reached a maximum of 609 in February and were spread widely over the Llanrhidian Sands, south of the river channel and up to Burry Port. Shelduck, however, were distributed more centrally within the estuary, south of the main channel over Llanrhidian Sands and as far east as the WWT reserve.

The Burry Inlet is an important site for wildfowl, especially Pintail and Shoveler. Both species had their highest concentrations in the central estuary, south of the river on the Llanrhidian Sands (Pintail distribution is shown in Figure 59). It should be noted that one sector with traditionally high densities of these species could not be surveyed in 2003/04. Wigeon and Mallard used the tidal flats and saltmarsh north of Llanrhidian, eastwards to the Loughor Bridge, and smaller numbers were also recorded on the upper estuary. Teal were distributed in two areas of saltmarsh, to the west of Crofty and just south of the Loughor Bridge. Small numbers of five other wildfowl species (Scaup, Eider, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser and Goosander) were recorded, mainly in the river channel between the WWT Llanelli reserve and Burry Port.

Oystercatchers are of particular note on the Burry Inlet, currently ranked the sixth most important site in the UK for the species. Low Tide Counts reached a peak in February with 13,831 birds. Most areas of tidal flats held aggregations of birds, as indicated in Figure 59. Three species, Grey Plover, Knot and Bartailed Godwit, were distributed in the area between Pen-clawdd on the south bank and Burry Port, the godwits mainly to the south of Penclacwydd on the north bank. Ringed Plover numbers peaked at 37 in January with birds found mainly between the WWT reserve and Llanelli Docks. The latter site also held the highest density of Redshank, although the whole estuary was utilised. Numbers of Golden Plover exceeded the Core Count figures for the last five years, peaking at 2,530 in February, with all of these on Llanrhidian Marsh. This sector was also the favoured location of Lapwing, with lesser numbers occurring on the upper estuary north of Loughor Bridge. Curlew were recorded in all areas and were widespread over the whole inlet. Dunlin numbers peaked at 5,486 in January and were recorded mostly on the central section of intertidal mudflat and to the north of Llanelli Docks, with the highest densities just to the south of Penclacwydd.

Pintail



Oystercatcher

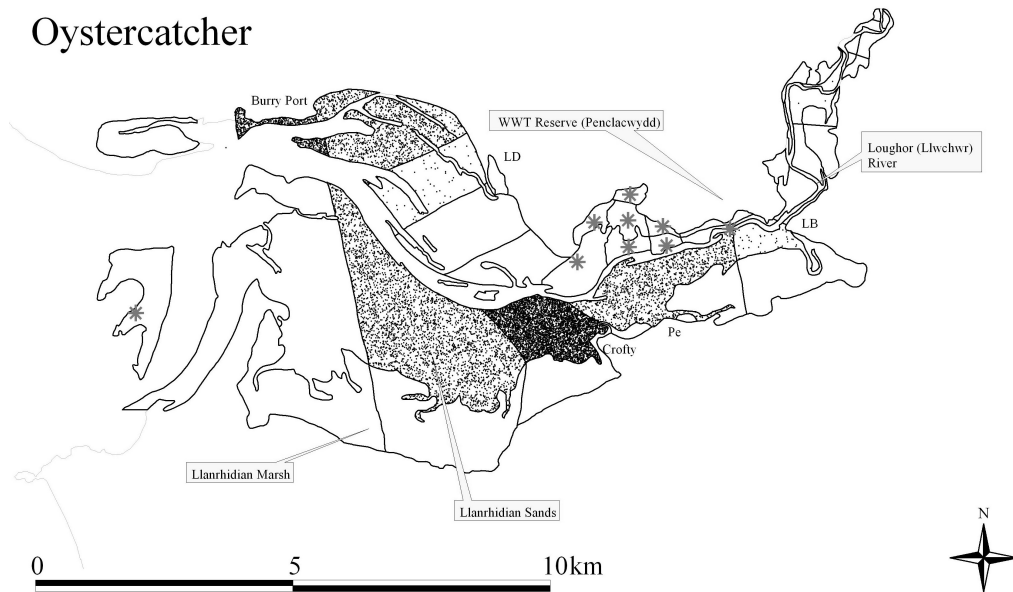


Figure 59. WeBS Low Tide Count distributions of Pintail and Oystercatcher at the Burry Inlet, winter 2003/04 (LB=Loughor Bridge, LD=Llanelli Docks, Pe=Pen-clawydd).