

Gulls of Poole Harbour

March 2008

Nick Hopper

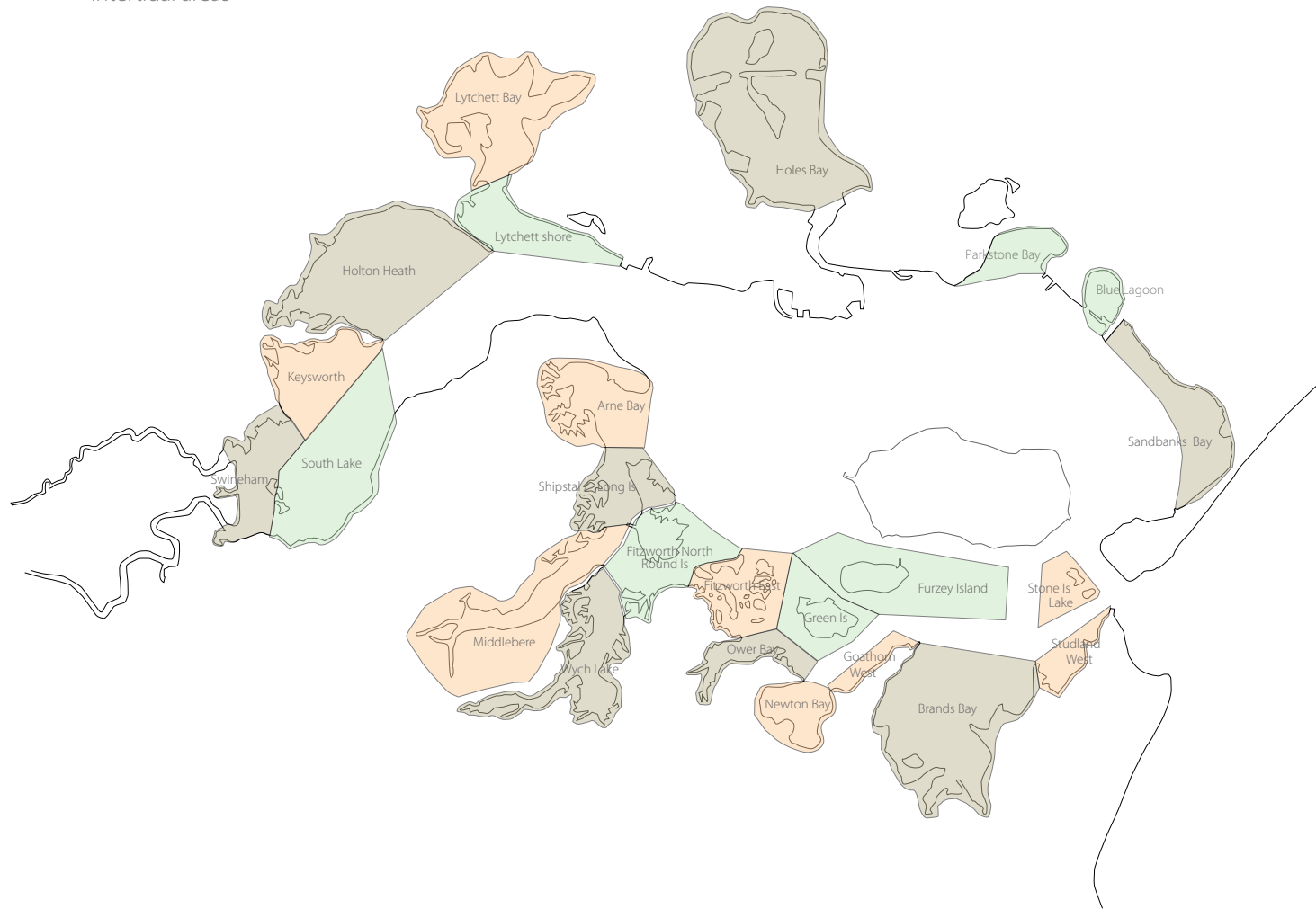
Introduction and objectives

In 2007 Mark Constantine commissioned a Waders and Waterfowl survey for Poole Harbour to run from January 2007 to February 2008. Part of the remit was to also record gull numbers and activities. At the end of the survey a dedicated gull survey was also commissioned for the whole of March 2008 to supplement findings, discover catchment areas used outside the harbour and assess numbers of birds using the harbour.

Methodology

Counts undertaken and observations made at each site visit during the Waders and Waterfowl survey.
Dedicated visits to areas outside of Poole Harbour to assess catchment area.
Co-ordinated counts to assess total numbers using the harbour.
The counting areas followed those of the Waders and Wildfowl survey.

intertidal areas



Open water areas



Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Introduction

The total number of Herring Gulls (hereafter HG) estimated to be using Poole Harbour is around 4600 with another 2-300 in the Studland area.

The maximum count for a single site was 2030 birds which came into roost at South Lake on 5th April.

The highest inter-tidal count was 1800 birds pre-roosting at Holton Heath on 11th October at an evening low tide.

Highest daytime inter-tidal count was 950, also at Holton Heath on 31st August. Next highest 800 on 17th.

Holes Bay is next most important inter-tidal area, particularly during late afternoon low tides. Maximum here of 774 on 9th January 08. Next highest count 420 Lytchett Shore on 31st August.

Inter-tidal areas

As with other Gulls, many HG seem to prefer spending the day inland. Large numbers of inter-tidal birds were only generally seen when the low tides occurred late afternoon / early evening, when most birds would loaf or wash.

Arne Bay: Moderately low numbers 3-40 in core winter months (hereafter CWM). Peaks in June (35-38 birds) and September / October. Max 60 on 12th September.

Brands Bay: Moderately low numbers for CWM (4-40), with a one off max of 116 on 7th February 08. Largest counts May - July with 3 counts over 100 and a max of 159 on 12th June.

Fitzworth East: Low numbers CWMs (1-30). Max of 116 on 13th June, next highest count 55 on 8th October.

Fitzworth North / Round Island: Very low numbers CWMs (5-16), March-April 70-144, falling May-June. Peak 83 on 14th July. Low numbers late July-mid September then a rise to a max of 121 on 26th September.

Frome Valley: Will use to bathe when flooded. Only recorded in December, January, February and March. Highest 101 on 10th December, during particularly extensive flooding.

Furzey Island. CWM 3-60 birds. Very tide dependent, as much of this area is only exposed during spring low tides. At this time, numbers increase significantly. Max of 200 on 7th February 08.

Goathorn West: Low numbers throughout year (2-26), with a one off max of 69 on 7th February 08 during a particularly low tide.

Green Island: Fairly steady numbers throughout the year April- September 13-48 birds, dropping to 1-9 birds October-November and rising again 8-30 from December-February. Max count 48 on 14th May.

Holes Bay: Through the year, as a whole, second most important inter-tidal area. 13-99 January-June 07. 146-411 July-September. 54-71 October-December. Higher numbers recorded (82-153) January-February 08.

Max count of 774 on 9th January 08 during a late afternoon low tide, 757 of these were in the south east corner.

Lytchett Bay: As with Holes Bay highest numbers occurring during late afternoon / early evening low tides. CWMs not very impressive numbers at all. March 08 was the most productive month with counts of 80, 210 and 400. 4-65 birds April-July. Only other peak in numbers was from late

August- late September with 107 on 30th August and 220 on the morning of 30th September.

Lytchett Shore: Similar numbers to Lytchett Bay which presumably included some of the same birds. High of 420 on 31st August with the next highest 101 on 17th September. Most other counts 10-60 birds.

Middlebere: Very low numbers, highest 28 on 6th June.

Newton Bay: Low numbers, highest 42 on 19th February.

Ower Bay: Extremely low numbers with a max of 8 birds on 11th October.

Parkstone Bay / Baiter shoreline: Quite low numbers, particularly low March-June 07 and October- November. Peaks July-August (40-48) December-February (38-69) with a one-off max count of 169 on Mar 19th 08.

Sandbanks Bay: Very important area throughout the year, on average more HG visit this inter-tidal area than any other. Core winter months 105-300 birds with a one off max of 700 on 18th February 08. March-May 81-198 birds. June-July 21-47. Aug-October 40-233. Second highest count 344 on 19th March 08.

Shipstal / Long Island. Moderate numbers throughout year with peaks of 87 on 29th March and 78 on 27th September.

South Lake: Very low numbers CWMs. However between April and September, 4 counts of over 100 birds with a max of 320 on 4th May.

Peak times 5th April-4th May and mid September - early October.

Studland West: Low numbers throughout year but, as with a few other places, mainly due to its small size. Small peak in mid September, also January-February 08.

Swineham: Low numbers with a max of 37 on 1st October. (700 birds roosted here on 31st July)

Wych Lake: Very low numbers, max of 13 on 26th June.

February, June and September in that order are the peak times for the inter-tidal areas. For second highest counts they are September, August and February, making overall February and September the two main peaks.

Daytime feeding / loafing

As with the other Gulls, the majority of HG will head inland to feed early morning, some however will remain in the harbour.

For birds that are using the inter-tidal areas, as high tide approaches they just seem to melt away drifting off here and there. Some will make their way inland, many just end up loafing on the water nearby.

Can be found almost anywhere in the harbour loafing on open water.

Birds at the south eastern end of the harbour congregate mainly around Stone Island Lake. As the tide pushes up and covers the islands, some of the birds are happy to remain in the same position but now on the water. Otherwise local jetties may be made use of, particularly ones belonging to the residents of Sandbanks Peninsula toward the western end, with up to 70 birds here. If a fishing boat goes by, all the birds get up and follow it out of the harbour. When the fishermen have finished throwing things overboard, most will then make their way back, some however will stop off at Shell Bay and loaf there for a while on the beach, or perhaps hang around the local Mergansers hoping to steal a meal.

Brownsea South and Brands Bay open water areas are also popular for loafing, with many more birds using the area at

very low tides when the channel forms between the Furzey tidal flats and the southern shore of Brownsea.

Brands Bay *spartina* is occasionally used for loafing and the birds can be seen alongside the local Great Black-backed Gulls. However only seem to be recorded here in winds force 3 or above, although it must be said that there were not many days with winds below this level for the whole survey! People often refer to increase in temperatures etc due to global warming but there has certainly been an increase in overall wind strength in recent times.

Numbers noticeably increased here as conditions worsened. This was particularly true for stormy conditions, when the two highest counts of 102 and 170 birds were recorded. These birds are thought to mainly be from Studland, as regular commuting between these sites was noted on previous occasions.

In the South Deep area at high water, birds occasionally used the sandbars and beaches at Furzey and Green Island to loaf, mainly in January February and March with numbers never more than 39. Also in that area, the pier at Green Island was occasionally used.

Moving west, fields to the west of Middlebere were sometimes shared with a few of the local Yellow-legged Gulls.

In the Arne area, Arne Spit was occasionally used, although only from March - September, with a max of 65 on 12th September. Also Long Island sand bar only from March to October with a max of 42 on 10th October.

Birds also seen loafing at Gold Point and Patchins Point.

Gulls could also be found in the middle of the day loafing on water in the traditional roost area in the lower Wareham Channel.

Also on and around the islands at Swineham gravel pits and on Wareham Water Meadows, with 200 birds there on 8th August until prematurely flushed whereby they flew into the lower Wareham Channel, some carrying on towards Arne, perhaps to loaf at Gold Point or Patchins Point.

At Lytchett Bay, many birds passing through late afternoon loaf here. At low tide, as mentioned, channels from which are predominantly fresh water on the falling tide providing bathing opportunities.

At Holes Bay, old pontoons and moored boats on the western side were made use of as occasionally were the central *spartina* islands.

Kerry Foods is another popular daytime feeding site. Birds will hang around on the factory roofs here waiting for the next lot of dodgy pies to be thrown out. There will then be a feeding frenzy for some minutes until all the food is gone. Afterwards, birds will go back to the rooftops to have a preen. However, if it has been a particularly messy affair many birds will fly over the dual carriageway to Holes Bay where they will bathe in the water and then haul out on the central *spartina* for a preen. In March, they were also noted to engage in some bill fencing at this time.

Another favourite area is the docks at Poole, where up to 100 birds can be found loafing on factory roofs or just wandering around the dock area.

Only single figures Baiter Park. Either regulars waiting for hand outs or birds sitting out some bad weather. Occasionally bathing in flooded areas of grass. Occasionally on Poole Breakwater.

At Poole Park, the new manmade islands were used to loaf on with a max of 43 on 11th March. In the Sandbanks area, the pier at the yacht club was popular.

A population also resided around the cliffs at Ballard, particularly favouring the stacks at Old Harry or at low tide the rocks at the base of the cliffs. These birds are basically pelagic feeders waiting on the cliffs for a passing boat then rushing out after it. They will also just forage, sometimes quite a way out and can form large foraging flocks if there is something particularly interesting about.

These birds will also loaf in the fields of Ballard. Ploughed fields are particularly attractive which can be also used for feeding. On 12 Mar; 58 HG noted feeding in grassy field at Ballard.

Birds also noted loafing in fields at Currendon Farm, just north west of the Ulwell gap. Also Kingswood Farm fields half a mile further west which were probably the Old Harry birds.

Other fields within the Poole Harbour area were also occasionally noted to contain loafing birds, particularly around Soldiers road.

Roosts

There are two main HG roost areas within the harbour itself and two others just outside. They are lower Wareham Channel, Brownsea Lagoon, Poole Bay and Studland Bay.

As expected the roost numbers far exceeded the daytime numbers.

A co-ordinated count on 27th March produced a count of 4500 birds entering the harbour to roost, the majority of which were Herring Gull.

The lower Wareham Channel is probably the most important, however, HG do not necessarily use the same roost night after night so numbers fluctuate. The problem with assessing numbers for HG roosts is that most of them arrive either as it is getting dark or when it is actually dark! Counting birds out of roosts in the morning can prove just as difficult as they will be awake before dawn and leave at the first glimpse of light and usually in large groups. Having said that, a good idea of numbers can be obtained in good weather by counting the birds in from a vantage point near the main flightpaths.

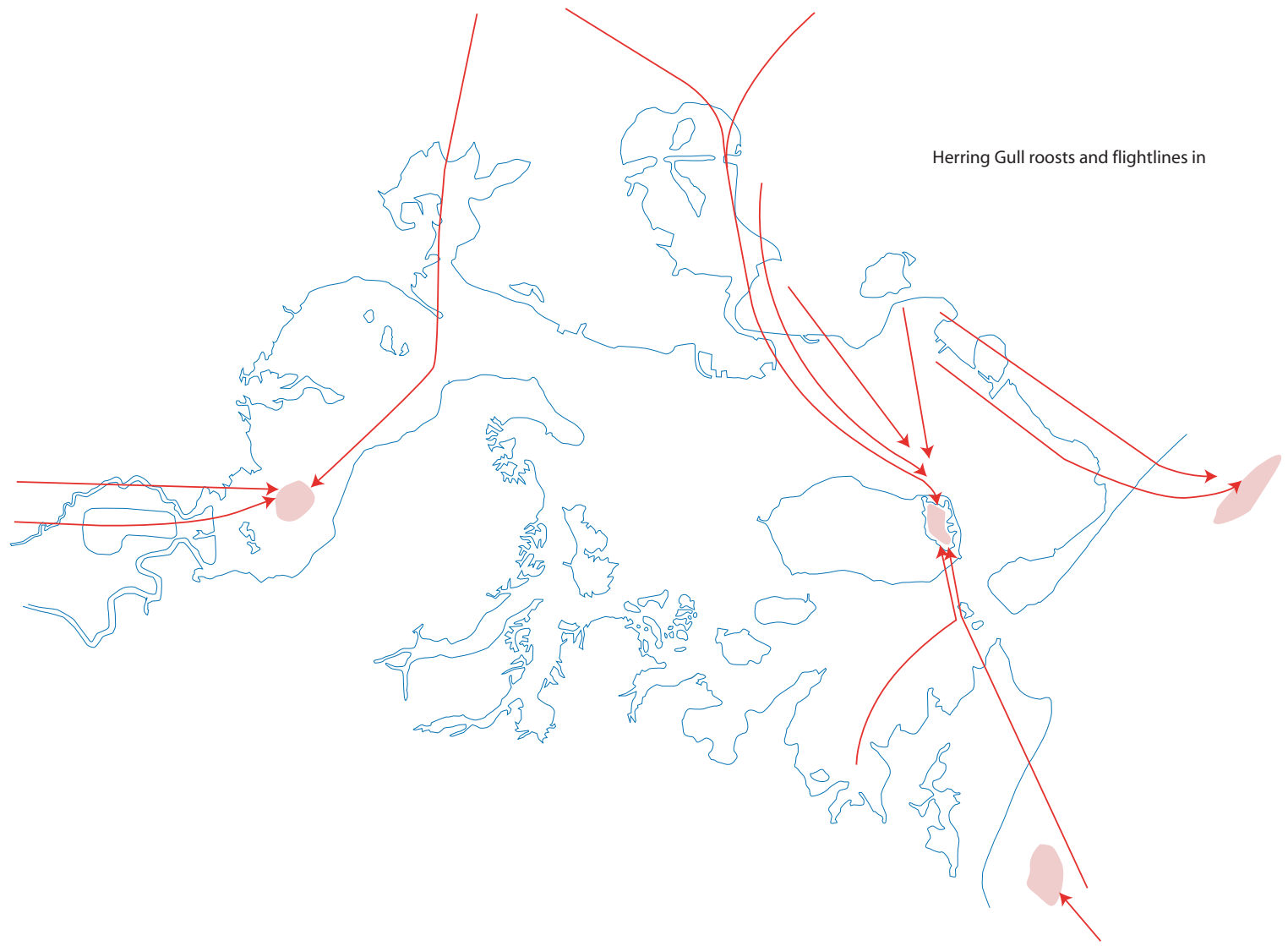
For the Lower Wareham Channel, this means being at two places at once or having two observers. Birds that roost here come in on two main flightlines. One is from the north usually through Lytchett Bay and Holton Heath with occasionally small numbers coming in from the east through the eastern part of the Wareham Channel. The other is from the west usually through Swineham gravel pits. During the co-ordinated count on 27th March, it was estimated that around 2850 birds came into roost here. 1500 of which did so virtually together, as the light was

failing. In all, 2000 came in from the north, 150 from the east and 700 from the west at the southern end.

Some birds also came in from the north east over Keyworth from the direction of the gravel pits, some stopping to bathe there before heading east to the roost.

The birds coming in from the north are basically coming in from Beacon Hill Landfill site area. Even though they are no longer allowed to settle to feed, the birds still congregate here at the end of the day from places further inland, thermalling for long periods until it is time to go. It is then a short flight south through Lytchett Bay and onto South Lake.

The same situation occurs with birds coming in from the west at the southern end of the Wareham Channel. Here the meeting place is the Wareham Landfill. This was also a favourite feeding site until the introduction of large falcons. Birds now have to wander the Frome Valley and beyond to find uninterrupted feeding, returning late in the day before finally moving off to the Wareham Channel just before dark. Three of the larger counts of birds entering from here have been 625, 642 and 700.



Brownsea Lagoon is also an important roost area. Unfortunately no official counts were able to be made but numbers can certainly run into the thousands.

A large percentage of birds that use the lagoon come in from the north west or north north west. They basically come down through the eastern side of Holes Bay, over the quay and across. At the same time birds will also come in through Poole Park and Parkstone Bay and across.

On 6th March, 975 large gulls, most of which were HG came in over the quay, the last few just before darkness. The later birds coming over slightly further east which is a more direct route. Also 150 came through Parkstone Bay, low to the water. On 27th March a total of 1380 birds came over the quay.

Further investigation revealed that these birds were coming in at the north end of Holes Bay. Beyond here there were a number of things taking place. On 9th January, (viewing from top end of Holes Bay) birds were initially coming in from a north east direction. Extrapolation of this flight line suggests birds coming from the direction of Canford Landfill, which would fit in with other observations made from this site. It is interesting to note here that this flightline is by no means the most direct route to Brownsea Island. If they were crows, they would have just flown directly south to the lagoon!

Later, all the birds were coming in from the north over Pergins Island, Upton Country Park. From earlier observations it is known that these birds were coming from Beacon Hill Landfill.

The other main arrival is from the south. Stone Island area seems to take the place of the landfill sites here as the pre roost meeting place.

Birds will come in from South Deep and beyond, Brands Bay, the harbour mouth and Studland Bay before all moving off at last light to the Lagoon.

Poole Bay roost

Although time constraints didn't allow extensive coverage of this site, some interesting observations were made. It was discovered that on occasions Poole Bay roost is an alternative to Brownsea Lagoon. On a couple of occasions, birds coming in over the quay and Baiter instead of heading out across the channel would coast along the shoreline and go through Sandbanks Bay to Poole Bay. At the same time, other birds would also still be heading for Brownsea.

Birds feeding at Sandbanks Bay have been recorded flying to Poole Bay roost. However, in a force 4 wind on 1st March no birds from Sandbanks flew here. There were, in fact, no birds at all.

On 17th March, with a force 2 ne wind c700 large Gulls counted in a long strung out group. Last birds in at 1845.

Studland Bay roost

Between 100 and 520 birds will use this roost area which is approximately 100 metres offshore. The max of 520 being on 16th January 08. Most of the birds that roost here are the local birds that spend the daytime either around Old Harry or further out to sea.

The favourite pre-roost site for this roost is Old Harry rocks and, in low tide, the rocks at the base of the cliff. Birds that are out to sea will assemble late afternoon joining the birds already there, when it is nearly dark all the birds will then make the short trip across the bay to the roost.

Some variations also occur, some of the loafing birds at Old Harry will head for Little Sea to bathe then go to the roost.

A variable number of birds, however, will continue on to Stone Island and ultimately Brownsea Lagoon. On some days only 10s of birds will carry on but in stronger winds up to 350 birds will take this route.

Also some birds were noted coming in directly from the sea to the Studland roost late in the day.

Little Sea

Herring Gulls can be seen at virtually any time of day bathing here. A typical record would be “25th February: Little Sea c1430 onwards Gulls moving in and out but no real patterns of arrivals and departures, few coming in from sea, few from north. Majority seemed to be leaving to the south”.

The main activity is during late afternoon when patterns are much more discernable. Here, most birds will arrive from Studland bay to bathe in the southern lake just north of the grebe hide. From here the main departure is to the north / north west ie Stone Island area.

In the first winter period a count of 379 birds came in from the Studland area in one hour before dark most heading off in the direction of Stone Island.

Sometimes birds will arrive directly from the south, which are probably birds that have been using the fields at Ballard.

Birds that arrive early will also be seen to head off on a more westerly direction presumably heading for the Brands Bay *spartina* which is occasionally used as a preening area.

Inland feeding areas

To the north

The traditional inland feeding area for the vast majority of the gulls that roost in Poole Harbour used to be Beacon Hill and Canford Heath Landfill sites. However since the introduction of Falcon flying much displacement has occurred as birds can no longer feed at these sites.

The largest concentration of gulls in the first winter period was at Long Crichel Pig fields, where a maximum of 2300 large gulls were recorded on 7th February 07. Although viewing was difficult here, due mainly to the undulating land most of these were thought to be Herring Gull. On subsequent visits, less birds were seen and were presumably loafing somewhere out of sight away from the main pig fields. The next highest count being only 840 birds on February 12th 07. Toward the end of the afternoon these birds started to move off and were seen to visit Crichel Lake for a quick bathe. They were then pursued by car south down the River Allen valley, over the Stour, over Broadstone and onto Holes Bay confirming how far they are prepared to travel to and from the roost area.

In the second winter period even the pig farms had been virtually abandoned with a max of only 200 being seen.

Other sightings were few and far between. On one early January day 130 miles were covered in the pursuit of inland

gulls and no significant Herring Gull numbers were seen. Other similar fruitless trips were also made.

In fact, one of the major disappointments of the survey was the non- detection of many of the inland feeding Herring Gulls. In March at least 3900 birds were out there somewhere, as this was the amount counted coming in from the north to roost in the harbour during a co-ordinated count. One idea is that many of the birds have broken up into small feeding parties which could easily go undetected in many square miles of catchment area.

Some small flocks were certainly seen in ploughed fields and all of these near roads where viewing was possible so this could be the case.

During February, early morning watches did see fairly large numbers of large gulls heading in a northerly direction extrapolation of which seems to indicate that many were heading in the direction of the pig fields at Long Crichel.

On 10th March 08, 50 birds were feeding at Blue Haze Landfill early evening, presumably after the Falcon flyer had left. However, it wasn't possible to view the direction in which these birds left. Due to their close proximity to Blashford Lakes however it is likely that they roosted there.

On 27th February 08, 82 Herring Gulls at Longham Lakes flooded quarry were possibly Poole birds.

To the west

The birds that traditionally used the Wareham tip have also been ousted and are now forced to wander the Frome Valley and beyond to find uninterrupted feeding. Again, not

that many sightings were made, however the birds that were found were nearly all in ploughed or muddy fields.

On 20th Mar 08: 70 large gulls in field being ploughed just south east of Wool then headed west some later found at New Buildings (directly south of Wool) again in a ploughed field with some of these birds loafing as well as feeding. Later again, 50 gulls in very muddy field just to south, a couple of miles south of Combe Keynes (looked like muck had been spread on it)

It seems likely that considering up to 700 birds will arrive from the west along the Frome that this was some of those birds. However there may well be an interchange of roost sites between here and Weymouth Bay, as 5 days later 230 large gulls were located about a mile and a half further west in another ploughed field. These were watched until they left for their roost site, flying west south west on a heading for Weymouth Bay. Some birds also headed south to Durdle Door and were later seen riding the updraughts over the cliffs so perhaps there is also a roost off of here. What was also interesting was that most of the Black-headed Gulls that were also in the same field headed the opposite way on a heading for Wareham.

Some birds also seen moving east along Piddle Valley

Some commuting between Studland and Swanage noted

Pre roost gatherings

Beacon Hill Landfill / Upton Heath

By mid afternoon many gulls begin to leave their daytime feeding areas and start to gather in sometimes very large flocks at various sites before eventually moving on to roost.

The area where this was most apparent was the Beacon Hill Landfill site area. Despite being unable to feed here this place still seems to have a strong pulling power and still regularly attracted over 2000 thermalling birds in the afternoon and toward the spring birds were also thermalling here throughout the day coming and going from various places to the south.

Although there was the occasional opportunity to feed here during the Falconers absence one did get the feeling that this was more of a social gathering rather than gulls hanging around in the anticipation of feeding.

Having said that there were occasions when birds were seen here feeding. On 29th May over 600 birds were doing so along with a Yellow-legged Gull.

When the site shut for the evening birds were seen to alight on occasion, however this was only to loaf and preen. With the new quick fill policy that is in force, at the end of the day all new rubbish is already buried.

As the light fails the birds then leave for the roost usually in two or three very large flocks occasionally all together. During most of the survey all the birds left to the south west over Upton Heath then south to Holes Bay. In March many birds went south/ south east to Lytchett Bay taking them eventually to the Wareham Channel roost.

As alluded to earlier, toward the spring thermalling activity was also recorded at other times of the day when one would have expected them to be at feeding sites. Despite a fair amount of observation apart from an increase in birds generally moving inland during a rising tide no real patterns seemed to appear. Birds seem to almost aimlessly fly

around occasionally and spontaneously forming into thermalling groups for a while before splitting up and heading off in various directions, again the main motivation seemed social. Towards late afternoon more of a pattern appeared which involved birds moving on a roughly north south axis between the tip and Lytchett Bay, particularly during low tide times. At this time Lytchett Bay could be heaving with gulls, even then many would get up and fly back to the tip area to thermal before heading back and then going to roost, almost like a ritual.

On 19th Mar at Parkstone bay a large group of birds getting restless on rising tide ‘thermallng quite low around the area for quite a while before eventually leaving the area’. Later around 16.00hrs large gulls making their way slowly north through Holes Bay seemingly in direction of tip where there were already a very large amount of gulls thermalling. At 16.15 c650 large gulls there also 45 birds drifted north from direction of docks.

Wareham Landfill

Here the introduction of Falcons has also largely discouraged feeding however as with Beacon Hill the local birds still ritually gather here although with this site there does seem to be more of an anticipation of getting some food. Up to 700 birds have been noted here during the late afternoon. Will also loaf in the adjacent field.

On 25th March around 270 birds were feeding right at the end of the day. The leaving procedure was quite interesting, every now and again all birds would get up and swirl around some then peel off and head east toward the Wareham Channel whilst the others eventually settle down

again. A few minutes later they are all up again with a few again peeling off. Perhaps they were being disturbed. Leaving flock sizes from 18.18 - 18.38hrs were 55, 7, 2, 54, 7, 7, 1, 22, 101, 1, 8 and 5 which appeared to be the last. All birds flew over Wareham railway station to the Wareham Channel.

If the tide was low and falling some birds did however stop and bathe in the largely fresh water at the mouth of the Piddle before moving out on the mud to loaf / roost.

If the birds are prematurely disturbed from the tip before they wish to go to roost they find somewhere else to loaf, the usual place being the gravel pits. Here birds will use the islands or just sit on the water occasionally bathing before making the short trip to the lower Wareham Channel. Sometimes the Wareham water meadows were also used. During May only a field next to the bypass / A352 roundabout was regularly used and held up to 695 birds.

Behaviour

During March scattered pairs of adult Herring Gulls could be seen just standing around close to each other in a middle of a field. Occasionally there were single birds. All of these fields were very close to a running stream of some sort. Usually just one pair per field.

Many of the fields were long grass. Below are the sightings.
13th Mar; Ad Herring Gull stood in middle of field with long grass very near the R Piddle, a couple of miles up 2 more ad pairs stood on grassy river bank. Athelhampton 2 ads near river in grassy field.
E Holme; pair in field on R Frome floodplain.

20th Mar; Herring Gull pairs seen standing around together in grass fields, mostly long grass. 3 separate pairs dotted along valley in the Steeple area of the Purbeck hills. Also pair together in grass field nr Godlingston golf course.
21st Mar; 2 ad HG stood in field with Piddle running through it and 2 more further along.
Answers on a postcard.

Feeding

As well as scavenging and parasitising other gulls, also noted to kleptoparasitise fishing Great Crested Grebes and occasionally dip feed whilst on water

Breeding

A few attempts were made to locate breeding birds. At least 7 pairs were located on roof tops in Poole Town. At least 2 pairs Panorama road, Sandbanks and a few more probable pairs here.
At least 10 pairs on Old Harry rocks

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Inter-tidal feeding areas

Baiter: Core winter months (hereafter CWM) 75-200, usual figure around 140-150. Maximum 510 on 21st January 08 when wind SW 6-7, total cloud cover but no rain, small amount of flooding. Certainly more birds are here during inclement weather, particularly high winds.

Arne: CWMs 2-150 birds, particularly low in November and December (2-20 birds). End February-May 111-130, rising quite steeply to 369 in June which presumably are finished breeders and young birds dispersing from nearby colonies. July drops to 74 birds, however a big influx of birds in September rising to 900 falling to 450 October.

Brands Bay: CWMs up to 384. No real patterns in numbers throughout year, but a peak of 700 birds in September doubling the next highest count. Seems to be a trend for many of the inter-tidal areas.

Fitzworth East: CWMs 50-380 birds. Breeding birds keeping the numbers up here. 650 counted in July with a maximum of 770 in September, falling back to 20-25 birds from October until December. 54 nests counted on 26th May.

Fitzworth North: CWMs low figures apart from 400 counted February 07. Maximum of 550 in June influenced by nearby breeding birds.

Furzey Island: CWMs 20-150. May, June and July 48-70 birds. Maximum of 93 in September. Larger numbers occurring at spring low tides.

Goathorn West: CWMs 20-60. April-July 17-36 with a maximum of 90 in September.

Green Island: CWMs 4-65. May-July 104-183 influenced by local breeding birds. September second highest count at 166.

Holes Bay: CWM counts some of the highest in the harbour away from the influence of roost areas. Peak of 2028 in January with 1600 in February. April-May counts only 250-350. June-July 350-840 and September 1750 (second highest count)

Holton Heath: Actual feeding totals influenced by proximity to roosting areas. If there is a low tide at first light, some of the roosting birds which normally leave promptly will stick around for a while to feed on the mud. If the area was just used for feeding the average figures for the CWM would probably be around 1000. On 23rd January 07 early morning c1000 BH feeding whilst another 1700 seen to fly off inland and presumably more had already left.

Also 28th February 1046 birds feeding low water from 1300-1400hrs

From March until August, feeding numbers influenced by breeding birds.

On 23rd March, 1800 birds feeding at low tide late morning with another 2000+ birds hanging around the *spartina* islands.

Lytchett Bay: Low numbers November and December, averaging 30-50 birds. An increase in January and February with anything from 100-675 birds. Numbers increase again in March with counts of 300, 500, 755 and 1000.

The largest numbers being during late afternoon low tides, where numbers are bolstered by birds stopping off at the bay before going to roost in the Wareham Channel. Good numbers using the area during the breeding season due to its proximity to the breeding islands. April-September 540-700 birds.

Middlebere: Very low numbers use this area. CWMs 1-25. March 75-125 and April-July 30-130. Large increase in September with a maximum of 465.

Newton Bay: Low numbers April-September 50-111 birds present. Maximum count of 170 in November.

Ower Bay: Very low numbers CWMs. April-October numbers significantly more mainly due to breeding birds with at least 41 sitting birds at the northern boundary of the bay. April-July 43-113 birds. September-October 68-72 birds.

Parkstone Bay: CWMs 114-173 with a freak count of 618 birds on 1st February which corresponded with a large count at Sandbanks Bay the same day. March-July 35-135. Maximum count 626 on 2nd August.

Poole Park: Popular area when water levels are low with the two highest counts occurring at these times. 844 on 7th February 07 and 572 on 20th March 07. The area also used for daytime loafing particularly during high tides: 410 on 14th November, with a small number of birds remaining throughout the day scavenging scraps thrown to the ducks.

Will make use of the new man made islands / platforms.

Sandbanks Bay: One of the most important feeding areas in the harbour with up to 3000 birds using the area at low water. Highest counts in January and February with an average count for this period being 1460 birds. April-May 37-47 birds. July 304-494 rising to 925 August, surprisingly dropping in September. September-December 220-410 birds.

Shipstal / Long Island: Relatively low CWM figures. Most activity February- March (maximum 465) and June-July with two counts over 300. Second highest count in September - 394.

South Lake: Difficult to assess as an inter-tidal feeding area due to the presence of roosting / pre roosting birds early

morning and late afternoon, which was when many of the available low tides occurred here. However, clearly an important feeding area counts over 500 were made away from roosting times with up to 2100 birds feeding at dawn.

Swineham: Same situation as South Lake with a strong influence of roosting birds. Counts away from roost times - October-January 70-144 birds, February-March 300-400. April-July 185-940, presumably this increase due to the Holton Heath colony just to the north. Maximum count 1000 in August.

Wych Lake: Handful of birds, CWMs picking up April-June 31-120 birds. July-August 50-217, September maximum count of 300 dropping to around 100 in October and 4 in December.

Black-headed Gulls are essentially gregarious flocking birds and will move about the inter-tidal areas much the same way as some of the waders using the newly exposed mud, following the tide out as it exposes more new mud. During spring low tides many areas such as Newton Bay, Ower Bay even Green Island and Goathorn will quickly become dried out and will be devoid of Gulls and concentrating larger numbers into other areas such as Furzey and the area off of Fitzworth East.

In the last week of November and the first week in December despite ample feeding there was a noticeable drop in numbers around the favoured inter-tidal areas. This corresponded to a period of heavy rainfall in which saw many areas such as the Frome Valley flooded making them more attractive areas in which to feed in.

In general, numbers build up to a peak in September then decline again by October then fairly significantly decline again in November and December picking up again in January and February.

Daytime high water roosting / loafing / feeding

At high tide only a small percentage of BH will remain in the harbour. Most birds will move inland to feed or loaf as the tide rises.

For those that do stay, grassy areas are the most popular as these will also provide some extra feeding, followed by *spartina* islands and beaches. Also used are jetties, posts, the islands at Swineham gravel pits, and areas around pools, breakwaters and moored / abandoned boats, particularly Holes and Parkstone Bay.

Baiter Park has the highest daytime high tide numbers the largest of these occur during bad weather, particularly high winds and or heavy rain. From January-Mar 07 numbers were around 50-100 dropping to a handful in spring and summer. Numbers pick up again in July rising again in September. From December 07- March 08 numbers from 85-210 with one exception. On 21st January 08 510 birds were recorded sitting out the force 6-7 SW wind.

Other areas of grass used were Turlin Moor playing fields maximum of 190 23rd January 08, Parkstone playing fields maximum of 75 on 10th January, Poole Park grass maximum 72 11th March 08 and Hamworthy Park 145 on 19th January 07. Birds here also benefit from the small boating lake where they can bathe. This is also a very popular recreational area so there is always the chance of being fed.

Will use Wareham Water Meadows in winter if there is flooding, otherwise not at all. The two largest counts for this area were in fact in summer when 200 birds were loafing in freshly cut grass 21st July and 150 in the same place on 3rd August. Other than that, it is just a place to pass through.

Most popular *spartina* area is at Upton Country Park, particularly in February for some reason. Here birds will join the roosting Blackwits (which also have a big preference for February) and Redshanks, mainly to preen. Not very big numbers 22-47 birds.

Birds using Lytchett Bay at low water will congregate on the *spartina* banks at the north end to preen, eventually these birds will then move north inland. Some birds bypass the preening stage and go straight inland. Some birds also hang around the water treatment works.

Birds will also congregate at the far western end where the Sherford River empties into the bay making use of the fresh water. Eventually these birds will also move inland. Will also do the same on a falling tide at low water, when channels form to provide a nice freshwater stream. This activity could be the main reason birds visit the bay. On many occasions at low tide a large percentage of the birds will be preening, bathing and loafing in this area rather than feeding.

Also popular is Wych Lake *spartina* spit with a maximum of 100 there on 3rd August.

Birds will also loaf around remnant *spartina* at the old traditional wader roost site at Sandbanks Bay, although not

generally at the highest tides. The most popular time is when the tide is on the turn, when birds will wait on the beach or the water sometimes preening. As the tide drops and mud is exposed may not start to feed straight away preferring for the tide to drop further. Not very high numbers usually with a maximum of 265 there on 12th September.

Other than that, very occasional records at scattered places.

Brands Bay *spartina* very occasional, also occasionally at low tide, high count of 120 sitting out some heavy rain on October 9th. Grip Heath *spartina* (one record of 30), Keyworth *spartina* (2 records), Middlebere Point (once), Middlebere *spartina* opposite hide (once), Shipstal *spartina* (once), Arne Bay *spartina* (once), Holes Bay central *spartina* (once), Beach at Jerrys Point (68 on 4th September). Occasionally will settle on the *Spartina* at the north end of Pergins Island to preen after feeding around the outfall. Occasionally *spartina* north of the marina west side of Holes Bay also the Marina roof is a favourite.

Sand bars, spits beaches sometimes used. Arne spit most popular in spring and autumn, however not noted at any other times. Up to 80 birds seen in May and 345 in September.

Occasionally Furzey Island beach (HT 40) with a maximum of 150 on 4th February 07. Two records Gold Point beach (HT22) which is the regular Oystercatcher roost, 40 on 31st August and 340 on 16th September. Occasionally Long Island sand bar with a maximum of 133 on 3rd February 07.

Studland south beach popular area usually seen feeding at the far southern end with Med Gulls. When no disturbance, can be seen in small numbers anywhere along the beach to Shell Bay. In fact the northern part of Shell bay where the freshwater stream enters the bay is a particularly popular loafing area for a small number of birds.

Wareham Moors April-Jun: 25-72 birds and July 1-5 birds. Outside of this period no birds noted.

Pre roosts

Apart from loafing areas already mentioned not many obvious pre roost areas as with Herring Gull, although Kerry Foods roof tops were occasionally used for this purpose with birds arriving late afternoon gradually building up in numbers until finally moving off together in the direction of Hamworthy Park. 300 were counted here on 31st July

Roosts

A co-ordinated count in March 08 estimated that around 21,000 birds were roosting within Poole Harbour. Most of these were in the Wareham Channel although large roosts also occurred in the Lower Wych, off of Arne, off of Hamworthy, Parkstone Bay and Brownsea north, depending on the wind.

Wareham Channel is by far the most important roost area. During the winter a maximum of 13,541 birds were counted coming in on 28th February 07. In 08 maximum of 12,608 on March 27th.

Numbers remain high throughout the year due to the large breeding colony here.

Birds will start to arrive up to 4 hours before dark particularly on a low tide.






Generally, they have more of a tendency to use the northern part of the Wareham Channel. Within this area the exact location of the roosting birds is largely wind dependent. During low or no winds flocks become very loose and scattered, the main flocks generally in the Wareham Channel NW being either side of the *spartina* islands, however strong winds will tighten the pack into the more limited sheltered areas.

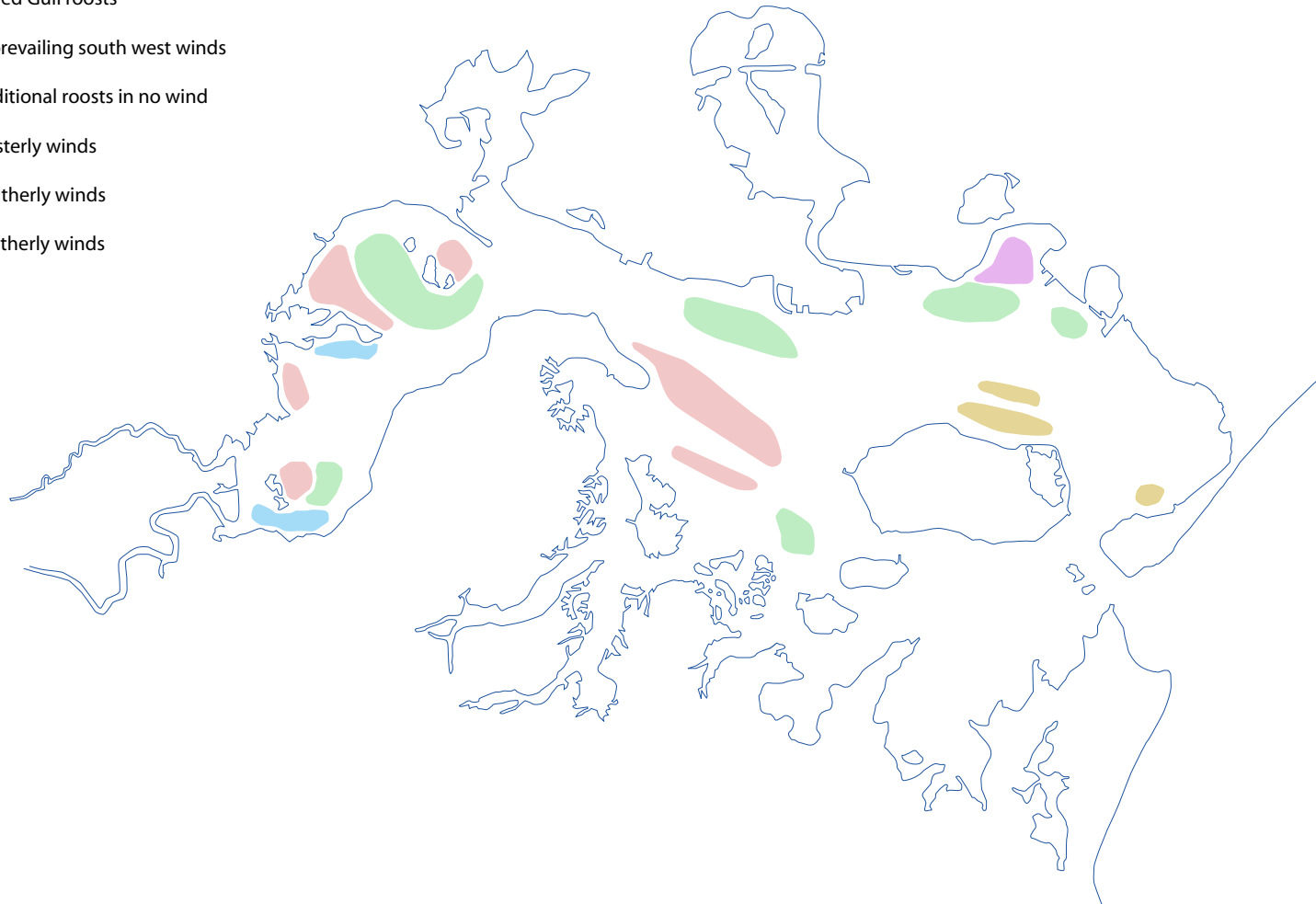
During strong southerlies, the area just north of Shag Looe head and areas north of the *spartina* islands are used. During south westerlies again Shag Looe head and *spartina* islands is the place, also the area off of Keyworth. Often long 'strips' of birds can be seen gathering in the lee of the islands. At South Lake birds will gather in the lee of Giggers Island.

During brisk northerly winds many birds will come in high due to the following wind and bypassing the northern area and whiffing down at South Lake which would be a more sheltered area.

Some late movement of birds from South Lake to Wareham Channel NW also noted. Perhaps there is an attachment to the area of the breeding islands.

Black-headed Gull roosts

-  In prevailing south west winds
-  Additional roosts in no wind
-  Westerly winds
-  Southerly winds
-  Northerly winds



Z

During low following winds birds tended to come in high on a broad front in strong winds flightlines low direct and more concentrated usually through Lytchett Bay and over Wood Bar Looe.

Birds also entered from the east directly through the channel or from the east north/east over Hamworthy where they occasionally stopped off to bathe. Birds rarely came in from the west.

At the southern end, nearly all birds entered from the west via Wareham water meadows or Swineham Gravel pits. As a rule, the vast majority of birds came in with plenty of light to spare and over a few hours. Occasionally a flock of 30-40 birds were seen flying down the river Frome in near darkness which were thought to be birds from Wareham Town bridge which probably continued to scavenge for food under artificial light.

The next largest roost is in the Lower Wych open water area. Here up to 7000 birds have been recorded. This extensive roost can stretch from virtually the western end of Brownsea all the way to Arne. Sometimes this is caused by drifting on an incoming tide. To counter this, birds finding themselves at the end will get up and fly back to the middle.

Many of these birds came in from the north over Hamworthy Park and across the water, also birds from the upper Wareham Channel area were sometimes seen heading for this roost. Birds feeding in the surrounding inter-tidal areas also roosted here.

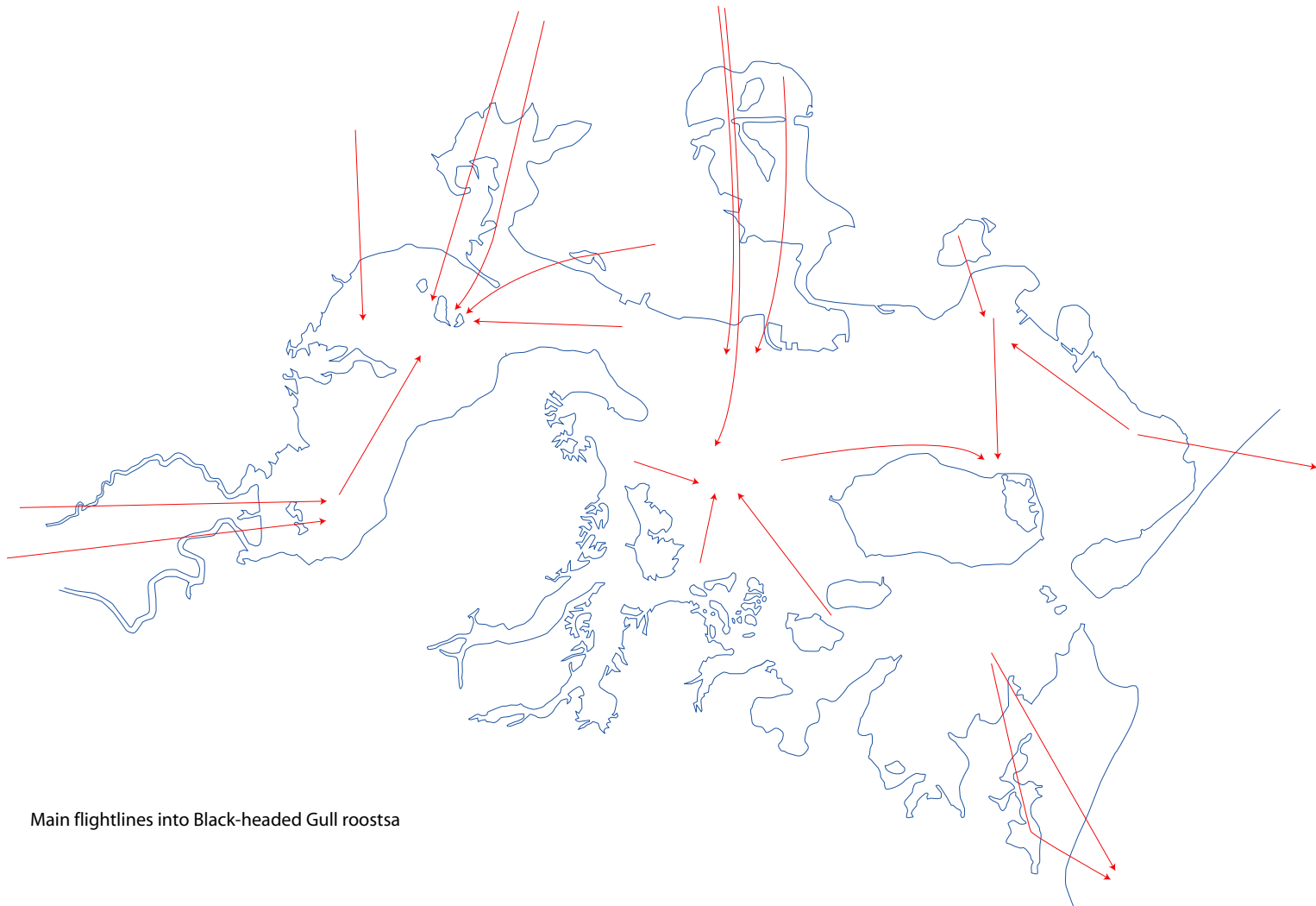
A separate roost off of Hamworthy is also regularly used, numbers however being somewhat lower. Nearly all birds arriving from the north over Hamworthy Park with some also coming from Lytchett area along shoreline. Two visits here during westerly winds force 4 and 5 revealed no birds

Moving east, there are irregular roosts at Parkstone Bay, Blue Lagoon and off of the northern shoreline of Brownsea. Parkstone Bay being sheltered by westerly and north westerly winds and is favoured in these conditions. Birds can be seen here arriving from the direction of Hamworthy in force 4 westerlies.

1050 birds were counted in Parkstone Bay on 5th March 08. As soon as the wind swings round to south west, however, it is no longer sheltered and the place will be vacated. In calm conditions there is also a small roost off of Blue Lagoon.

In strong southerlies there can be a sizeable roost off of the north shore of Brownsea which, in the main, are birds that would otherwise be roosting in the Lower Wych area. Some of these will also spill over to the other side of the Brownsea Road where birds will congregate in the sheltered waters off of the Sandbanks pontoons.

On 13th February in force 3-4 southerlies numbers of BH were coming through Poole Park and Parkstone Bay then heading across the water to roost here. On this occasion there were two main flocks parallel to each other, the later birds having to use the one further from the shore which presumably would have been less sheltered.



Main flightlines into Black-headed Gull roostsa

The only other notable regular roost was found off of Fitzworth East most popular in March presumably due to the proximity of the local breeding colony on the *spartina* islands.

Outside the harbour there was a small but regular roost shared with Herring and Common Gulls at the southern end of Studland Bay - 400 on 29th January was the highest count. Most birds arrived from the north west.

Strong westerly winds are not a problem here as there is shelter from the elevated areas beyond the shoreline. Some birds could also be coming from Sandbanks, as birds have been seen to leave here to the south and also through the harbour mouth and over Pilots Point to the bay.

The other significant roost was Poole Bay. Unfortunately, no official counts were made here but numbers did run into thousands at times.

On 21st January 07, with a westerly wind force 2-3, around 3000 birds were at Sandbanks Bay during a late afternoon low tide. All birds were gradually moving north west along the shore whilst feeding along the way, others just flying low and some walking. Over a 40 min period nearly all birds had moved out of the area in this direction. Clearly all of the birds had decided to roost somewhere to the west.

However on 1st February, again late afternoon low tide, but with no wind 2407 birds were feeding in bay. At 1655, nearly all gulls flew east across the Sandbanks road and into

Poole Bay in 2 big flocks. Presumably the windless conditions and flat sea were the influence.

Birds feeding around Furzey can also find themselves roosting at Poole Bay. On 2nd February 07 late afternoon, low tide, wind 0, small flocks of BH were making their way from Furzey along the southern shores of Brownsea and then towards Sandbanks bay, c50 birds in total. Later many of these flew over the road into Poole Bay. 19th March 08 late afternoon, wind ne 2. Some BH from Sandbanks Bay flew over Jazz's café and into Poole Bay.

Returning to roost

Usually a more relaxed pace on return to roost which will include thermalling etc. Particularly in following winds many will gain height and glide back.

On 19th February, watching from the A31 / B3078 roundabout south west of Wimborne between 1600-1700hrs at least 2750 birds drifted south in 5 flocks. Initially 600 birds thermalling to south at 1605 which drifted off south, then at 1610hrs over 1100 in a broken flock coming in from the north at approximately 150 metres up. 1615hrs another 300, 1635hrs another 510 which also included some Common Gulls. 1641hrs another 140 this time in a V formation and 1655hrs another 50. Again, extrapolations of these flightlines would take them north up the River Allen and south over Creekmoor, Holes Bay and Hamworthy and Lower Wych roosts or west over Ham Common to the Wareham Channel roost.

These sort of numbers also tie in with a timed count from Creekmoor a day earlier where 2600 birds moved north early morning on exactly the same north / south heading.

During the breeding season only a sprinkling of birds using this route.

Inland movements / catchment areas

All gulls moving inland to feed will make detours on their main route to take in areas which have recently become attractive for feeding. These areas can change from day to day due to heavy rainfall flooding certain areas or fields that have recently been ploughed.

BH do seem to head off in the same general direction every day and generally keep on that heading, just fine tuning the exact stopping off points as they see fit, ie which field is currently being ploughed etc or maybe they will see or hear another party who are feeding and will suddenly veer off in their direction. Presumably, attracted to the type of calls given by these feeding birds. During their movement inland, the regular stops can be of quite a short duration, despite many being perfectly good areas particularly in the mornings they have this urge to press on. They clearly have a destination in mind but are willing to stop off and feed on the way.

In the morning, most birds either left the Wareham Channel roost in a north easterly or northerly direction through Lytchett Bay, or north north west over Holton Heath. A small number of birds also left South Lake directly west taking them along the Frome or Piddle Valley. No birds were seen to leave to the south.

The birds on the north east bearing head for the Wimborne area of the Stour Valley, from here the main movement was then north up the River Allen, taking in flooded areas and ploughed fields around Horton Inn, Crichel Lake and eventually Long Crichel Pig fields.

Although many birds did travel in this direction, the traditional feeding area around the floodplains of the Stour at Wimborne were not as popular as in years gone by and many birds carried on north up the River Allen. For instance, in mid January 08 during quite extensive flooding, no big concentrations were found. However a small number, usually around 100 birds, made this area their ultimate destination largely influenced by a water treatment works located here. When not feeding, birds would loaf on the tall roadside lights.

On 11th March 08, however, over 900 birds were found feeding in a couple of waterlogged partly flooded field immediately south of Julians Bridge for most of the day. As is often the case, all 900 birds were packed into two fields with surrounding fields which looked the same to the untrained eye, being totally ignored. Lots of chatter with birds around the flooded parts preening and bathing also.

On the journey north any likely field will be investigated, particularly newly ploughed ones. Any of the fields surrounding the valley could be used. As soon as one is found, others are soon attracted by the noise and make a bee line for that field with a definite quickening of pace. Lots of this sort of activity around the Horton Inn area in March, where there was extensive flooding and lots of ploughing. Much frantic to-ing and fro-ing as freshly

ploughed fields became available, also during quieter periods, when the ploughing had stopped, birds would then thermal gradually higher until some feeding activity was detected at another field whereupon they would shoot off in that direction.

By 6th April, all flooding had gone and there were only a handful of birds around. 10 BH were circling over moving cows. 15 BH circling over bridge area seemingly hawking for insects. Presumably the 'freshness of the ploughed fields now gone'

Long Crichel pig farm was the other favoured area with up to 665 birds present. When not feeding around the pigs, birds will loaf and preen in adjacent fields.

Here, there also seemed to be lots of moving between the pig fields, ploughed fields, loafing fields, and Crichel Lake with lots of to-ing and fro-ing between pig fields and Crichel Lake in particular, perhaps bathing occurs more than daily here.

Another popular area was freshly ploughed fields around Tarrant Hinton in February and March. These birds had probably moved north west along the tributary of River Allen which passes through Long Crichel, although there is the possibility that it was birds following the Stour north west then heading north up the River Tarrant which leads directly to Tarrant Hinton.

The other main route out to the north / north west were birds basically heading for the Stour Valley. Although variation and interchange obviously occurred, there did

seem to be favourite routes taking in particular feeding areas.

For the gulls leaving directly north, the first was Beacon Hill Landfill which again may be more the result of conditioning than anything else as feeding opportunities were limited.

Birds arriving later in the day tended to thermal the area for quite some time before eventually moving off.

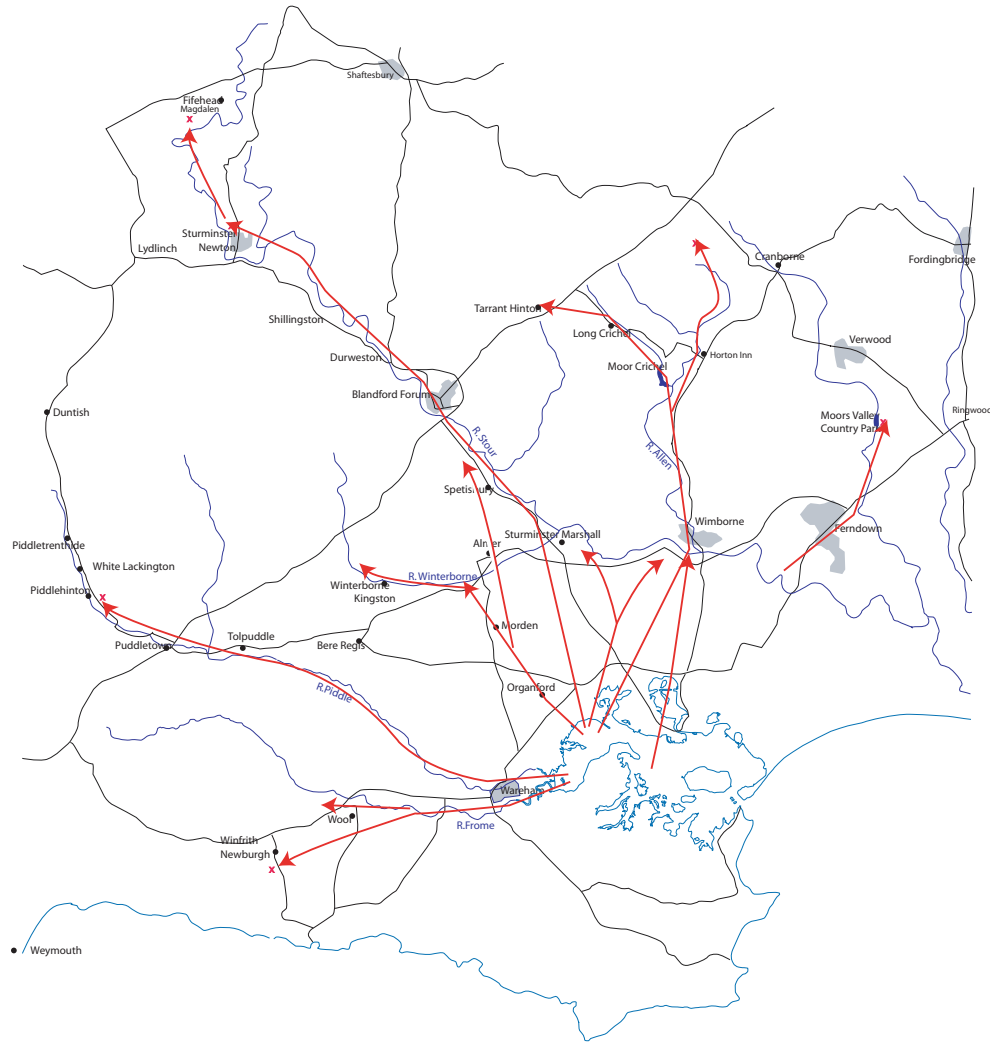
Alternatively, birds would use the fields to the north west of Lytchett Bay and Lytchett Minster, depending on the conditions many birds would remain in this area particularly when waterlogged. Around 1100 birds using this area on 6th March 07 over high tide.

Next stop was the Sturminster Marshall area. A particularly popular stop here were livestock fields containing mainly sheep at Newton Peveril. Birds here were also seen loafing ie 180 on 6th March

From here, birds moved north west up the Stour Valley again looking for likely areas.

Throughout the survey, the fields adjacent to the river from Sturminster Marshall to Blandford Forum could contain very large flocks when conditions were right .

Black-headed Gull routes inland



At Blandford Forum, a handful of birds would hang around the weir and main bridge but most of the birds that reached this far carried on north west up the river valley. Floodplain fields east of Durweston which were subject to occasional flooding were a popular loafing area. From here onwards no significant flocks were found. However, during the afternoon flocks of up to 300 birds were seen to be heading south east just past Shillingstone so they were there somewhere. Smaller numbers of birds were also seen beyond here with a few at Sturminster Newton playing fields and even birds as far up the Stour as Marnhull and Fifehead Magdalen were seen. No birds were seen to the north of Fifehead Magdalen.

Birds that headed north west out of the roost also seemed to have their favourite stopping off areas. First of these were ploughed fields near Organford and Slepe. Also a small pig field at Newton Farm and nearby horse paddocks were a regular stop. For early morning birds, many of these stops were very brief with the majority eager to continue inland. From here some fanning out did occur with some birds continuing north toward Almer, where lush short grass fields were particularly popular in early March. The attraction of calling birds was noted here when 10 birds were feeding on the grass and 15 other birds went over calling with which the 10 birds immediately got up and joined them moving north. Around 230 birds were here that day. From here, it is a short flight to the Stour Valley. Other birds however would carry on north west until reaching the River Winterborne, where various waterlogged fields along its route would be used.

If it is low tide at first light, many birds will stop to feed briefly on the mudflats first either at Holton Heath, Lytchett Shore or Lytchett Bay, or all three, before carrying on inland. It is interesting to note again how birds will stop at many places for short periods during this morning movement north. They cannot seem to resist the urge to join the feeding birds below as they are programmed to do. Many however will delay the movement inland until the tide has risen.

By mid April, only a handful of birds were seen along this valley and on 26th April no gulls anywhere along usual Stour Valley route. Obviously, shorter trips from the islands are necessary during the breeding season.

The main flightline out of the South Lake roost was west with 2600 birds moving this way on 6th March. From here birds either followed the River Frome or the River Piddle. During periods of heavy rain the Lower Frome Valley became flooded attracting up to 1000 birds although more regularly up to 500. Not so many birds are here when there is no flooding but up to 125 were seen feeding on river with others roosting on adjacent grass.

Some birds made it to the flooded parts near Wool, but only in small numbers. Not many were seen west of here, although this river valley was not one of the most visited during the survey.

Some small flocks were seen in ploughed fields adjacent to the A352 at Burton Cross. The most westerly birds that definitely roosted in the Wareham Channel were located just east of Chaldon Herring. After feeding in a muddy field

with Herring Gulls late afternoon, all birds departed virtually together with the main flock of Black-heads veering north west back towards Wareham. The Herring Gulls went in the opposite direction, west south west in the direction of Weymouth Bay, but what was interesting was that a few of the Black-heads decided to go this way also. Thus we have a clear boundary of the catchment areas of these two particular roosts at least for that day anyway!

The birds following the Piddle also visited various flooded or waterlogged fields and neighbouring ploughed fields which they encountered on the way. The first port of call would be the Wareham Landfill. As with the other tips, probably more in hope than expectation although, given the amount of times birds were seen hanging around here, presumably some feeding was had at times. 260 birds here on 1st February.

The area from here to Hyde was difficult to survey, access being quite restricted. However, beyond here small flocks of anything up to 20 birds were encountered feeding in a number of ploughed fields.

A flock of 180 birds were found feeding in a ploughed field just south east of Piddlehinton which is nearly twice as far from the Wareham Channel as it would be to the Weymouth Bay roost.

As with birds from the northern Wareham Channel roost, if there is a low tide first thing some feeding will usually occur here first before moving inland. For the ones that stay feeding will continue until the rising tide forces them off and they will move off west much as the Curlew and

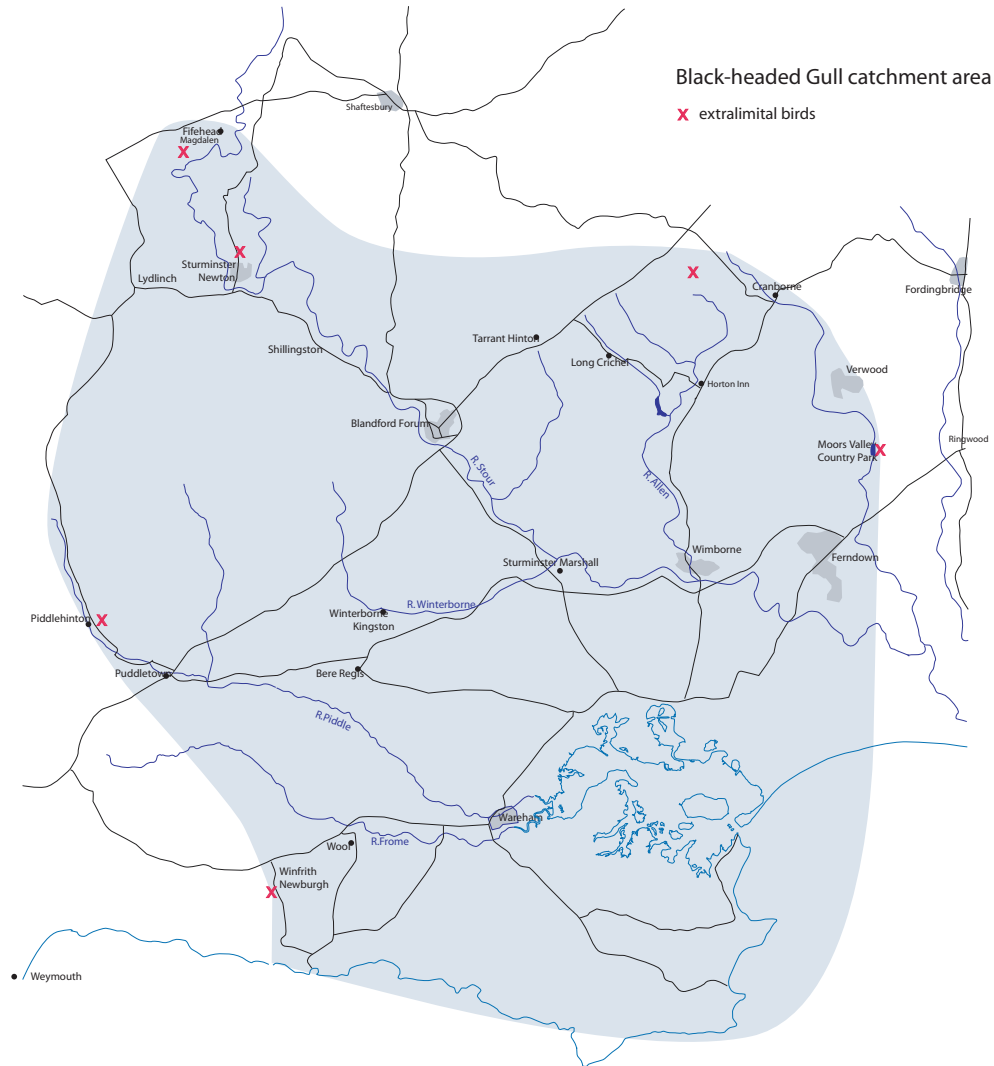
Black-tailed Godwits. These birds however tend to find places to loaf such as the gravel pit islands or any part of the lower Frome Valley.

During the summer, quite large flocks can be found loafing in freshly cut fields at Bestwall and beyond.

On 21st July on a rising tide, c200 BH loafing on freshly cut grass in the middle of Wareham water meadows. However, 10 minutes later they were gone. Presumably they had moved further up the valley as 320 birds were seen on freshly cut grass around half a mile up the valley (area to east of Wareham bypass). Also c400 birds further still up the valley again loafing rather than feeding. Also on 3rd August exactly same thing, when 150 BH were at Wareham Water Meadows at a time when the tide would have only recently risen to push them off the mudflat feeding area. This suggests that this was their first stop perhaps before moving further up the valley later. Will also use Wareham school playing fields.

Also some birds noted to fly north from South Lake, perhaps heading for the more popular inland areas to the north west of Lytchett.

Birds moving out of the Lower Wych roost mainly head north taking them through Holes Bay and north or may go in a north westerly direction taking them past Ham. As with other gulls, will stop off at Holes Bay if there is a low tide and many will continue on long before the tide rises.



Small numbers of birds were also noted further east namely, Longham Lakes (maximum of 163), Longham Wiers, West Parley, Ferndown and Tricketts Cross. The furthest point north east that birds were seen in this direction were at Moors Valley Country Park. (Up to 30 birds)

Late afternoon observations of flightlines strongly suggested that these birds were travelling back to Poole Harbour to roost .

By mid March, changes in the usual habits were being detected, ie groups of BH now drifting around, heading back south etc in middle of day. Thermalling flocks appearing and disappearing, lots of calling etc with passing birds being drawn into the gathering.

By now there was a general reluctance to stray too far from the breeding islands.

During the breeding season, trips inland now have to be shorter and more frequent. The main route out of the breeding islands being on a 90 degree quadrant from west to north.

One of the most popular routes is through Lytchett Bay and then north towards Beacon Hill Landfill. Here, small groups of birds regularly noted moving along this north/ south axis preferring to move in small, albeit loose flocks rather than singly. If they had young, you would expect each individual to return when they had enough food but they still tend to to-and-fro in small flocks as they would in the winter when moving from feeding back to roosting sites. Is this a form of protection, or is it just because it is a habit formed in the winter?

Many trips are also made on the north west route taking them to fields nr Organford, Newton pig farm and onto the Winterborne valley. Also quite a few to the west toward the Wareham Forest, which was hardly noted during the winter. In June. birds also noted to leave to the south west which was very rarely noted during the winter. It is thought that these were birds heading for the Piddle Valley as on an earlier date groups of 5 or 6 birds were seen moving up and down here in quite a determined manner.

On 5th June nearly all birds were heading out north at around 1400hrs, later a flock of around 1000 birds were seen thermalling over Beacon Hill Landfill. There must be a reason for this, you would think they would have more pressing things to do at this time of the year.

The large numbers of birds making their way inland over Creekmoor and eventually towards Wareham is not a feature during the breeding season, which is logical considering the distances, as shorter local trips have to be made.

Feeding observations

Will use inter-tidal areas, Horse paddocks, newly manured fields, golfcourses, sewage outlets, sewage works, pie factories, town bridges, beaches, public parks, industrial estates and schools at lunchtime.

At inter-tidal areas will feed at the waters edge, much the same way as waders. When the tide is particularly low, they will feed in the channels.

Prone to walking in about an inch of water feeding and are also happy to feed on the water even when mud is available.

Will feed on water where rivers enter the inter-tidal areas pecking at things that float down.

Will wade about in deeper water pecking at water, resembling long legged waders.

Will also duck heads into the water and even upend in an attempt to get to things just below the surface and if this fails they will also plunge dive short distances.

Will scavenge in main channels sometimes in a real feeding frenzy, as noted off of Ham Common when many birds were seen along with 5 Sandwich Terns presumably trying to feed on a shoal of fish.

Also seen kleptoparasitising fishing Red-breasted Mergansers.

Inland, as mentioned, ploughed fields are very popular. The activity is most intense during the actual ploughing process after which there is a downward curve of activity which will continue over a period of days as the newly turned ground dries up. An example was a field just south of Newton Farm two miles north west of Holton Heath. On 10th May 300 birds were feeding here, on 11th 100 birds, on 12th 5 birds then none.

Will also use newly sown and stubble-type fields with very short crops. 20th February 200 BH in such field near the River Allen. The whole flock moving slowly just above

ground then dropping, then all getting up and flying low a short distance again before dropping.

Particularly during spring and summer will fly up and down rivers either looking for floating scraps or hawking insects. Also anywhere there is an irrupting ants nests.

Can be seen hunting insects in various heathland and open forest areas south of the southern shores in summer.

At the end of May and beginning of June, flocks of about 50 birds encountered at the Norden area circling and generally moving north feeding on insects, not staying for long in any one particular area.

On further investigation, many of these birds seem to be flying alongside Wytch Heath plantation on the eastern most part of Hartland Moor ie following the River Corfe.

On 30th July, at Middlebere whilst feeding on the mud at the mouth of the channel, the BHs suddenly started piling out of the area rapidly to join birds that were already circling over the west shoreline of Fitzworth. There was lots of calling and a general commotion until virtually every BH in the area was in this 300 strong thermalling flock.

It looked like they were feeding on insects presumably irrupting ants. The constant calling by the frantically thermalling flock certainly seemed irresistible to the surrounding BHs.

23rd May c100 BH hawking over fields at Wych.

Late May also sees birds following tractors cutting grass: On 24th 40 birds following a tractor cutting grass near Bakers Arms also 20 on the 26th doing same near Wareham.

Breeding

Four breeding colonies were identified during the survey. By far the largest was the Holton Heath islands. No attempt was made to count the breeding pairs however a scientific count was undertaken by the RSPB in May 08.

A total of 8991 nests were counted. The central island had 5152, the North west island had 2419 and the South east island had 1380.

During the survey, a colony was noted on the *spartina* islands off of Fitzworth an unscientific count of 141 nests (including 35 at Ower Point) was obtained which will clearly be an underestimate.

A colony was also on Furzey Island where there were an estimated 70+ nests and a small colony of 7 nests were also located at the west end of Green Island.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Introduction

A large percentage of the Common Gulls using the harbour, mainly did so in the evening to roost, feeding by day in fields inland. Large numbers could, however, be found feeding on the inter-tidal areas at low tide. It is estimated that around 4100 birds used the harbour during the winter.

Inter-tidal areas

Daytime feeding birds were mostly confined to the southern shores. They seem not so tolerant towards humans as other gulls and were found only in very small numbers along the built-up northern shorelines in mid-winter peak of 24 birds at Holes Bay and only 5 in Sandbanks Bay on 21st January amongst 3000 Black-heads.

The most important feeding area is in the south east of the harbour between Fitzworth and Stone Island. Here, up to 900 birds have been counted in a single count area. However these numbers are quite variable, particularly at Brands Bay where consecutive 'winter' counts were as follows: 6, 83, 779 and 31 for 07 and 2, 6, 900 and 120 for 08. Reasons for this being the most popular area are probably a combination of lack of human disturbance and the sandier nature of the inter-tidal flats which Common Gulls are thought to prefer.

Furzey Island maximum count is also 900. Numbers here are a bit more consistent with other counts of: 469, 800, and 535. Other important areas are Green Island (max 299), Newton Bay (max 240) Fitzworth East (max 450) and the area between Goathorn and Newton Bay (max 360). Ower

is also regularly used, but not for long as this is one of the first areas where the mud dries out.

Common Gulls are gregarious flocking birds and will move about the whole area depending on the exact state of the tide. This would account for some of the fluctuations of low tide counts, particularly at the slightly peripheral area of Brands Bay. In fact, Gulls using the inter-tidal areas to feed behave in a very similar fashion to waders. Initially, they will be concentrated around the *spartina* islands until the tide drops low enough to allow some feeding. As the tide recedes further, these areas begin to dry out and the gulls will follow the tide out and eventually areas such as Ower and Newton Bay will be empty. During spring tides, further areas around Green Island and Goathorn will also become deserted and all the gulls will then be found feeding in an area which stretches to the east and west of Furzey Island.

Next highest count was 150 at Fitzworth north on 19th February which borders Fitzworth east being peripheral to the main area. Moving east again, rather surprisingly Wych Lake's highest count for the whole survey was 2 birds and Middlebere was only 1!

Shipstal: 1-12 birds with a max of 45 on 17th March 07.

Arne: 1-6 birds throughout survey with peaks of 20 on 12th September and 10 on 21st February 08.

Holton Heath: most birds that used this area did so either just before or just after roosting with no significant counts outside of these times.

Lytchett Bay: as with Holton Heath, very small numbers used this area for daytime feeding with no significant counts away from pre / post roost times. However during the passage months of February and March when there were

afternoon low tides, it became quite a popular place to loaf. Quite high numbers could occur with an impressive 300 birds there on 20th March 08.

On occasion, there will be exposed mud in Poole Park, at this time small numbers will feed here.

As mentioned, many Common Gulls just use Poole Harbour as a night time roost area, preferring to feed inland during the day. A certain percentage obviously do stay, but even these can desert the harbour.

In last week in November and the first week in December, there was a noticeable drop in numbers around the favoured inter-tidal areas. This corresponded to a period of heavy rainfall and many areas, such as the Frome Valley which became flooded, proving too much of an attraction.

Daytime loafing

Numbers of daytime roosting / loafing birds less than a third of feeding numbers, indicating a preference to move inland either to loaf or to feed. The birds that do stay almost exclusively use the *spartina* islands. The most important are the islands off of Fitzworth East with a max count here of 258.

Green Island *spartina* islands are also used (max 162) as is Ower *spartina* (max 73).

Furzey beach was also occasionally used.

Brands Bay *spartina* was used regularly in March and early April but no birds were noted here in the main winter months. Also, rather oddly, Ower *spartina* also seemed more popular for newly arrived birds in August and September.

Other odd sightings included 29 birds loafing at Cleavel Field.

Two birds sitting out heavy rain and wind on the grass at Baiter.

A few at Turlin Moor playing fields

Two birds were roosting on the island at Swineham Gravel pits, with 3 birds roosting on the water there late morning. A small number of birds will hang around Kerry Foods.

Birds will also regularly just sit around loafing on the water, occasionally hanging around fishing Goldeneye in the hope of snatching something. Will also peck at water and were even noted dancing on the water like a petrel snatching at prey items on the surface.

Pre roosts late afternoon

As alluded to, some birds that have been feeding inland will use inter-tidal areas for pre-roosting and preening when low tide occurs during the late afternoon.

Many inter-tidal areas, such as Lytchett Bay, Holton Heath, Swineham and South Lake record their highest inter-tidal counts during this time.

Lytchett also has the added attraction of the River Sherford, which enters the bay at the western end providing a source of fresh water with which to preen, bathe and drink.

Evidence suggests that birds will arrive from their inland feeding areas earlier, in order to spend some time in these areas. In fact, on more than one occasion, birds were seen as early as 13.40hrs moving south east past Patchins Point

toward Fitzworth on a falling tide. Not all were in a hurry as some birds were stopping at Patchins Point to loaf.

Evening roosts

Wareham Channel

The Wareham Channel is by far the most important roost area for Common Gulls, with up to 3800 birds using the area at any one time during the winter. This is down on a 5000 estimate made in the 1984/5 survey.

The maximum count of 3800 was on 10th December 07. The next two highest counts were both 3000+ birds in January 08. Mid to late February saw the number drop to 2000-2200.

On 5th March dropping 874 birds with 400 on 13th March, 300 on 27th and 32 birds on 5th April.

The South Lake part of the Wareham Channel was the most important area, with most birds eventually ending up here. In general, birds would just fly straight through the northern part of the channel. However, during low tides it was a favourite stopping off area where birds could feed or just loaf.

Most of the birds that used this roost came in on two main routes, either from the north / north east or from the east, with slight variations on these according to the weather conditions.

The majority of birds came in from the north to north east. These are the birds that have been feeding inland to the north.

If the winds were light and from the north, birds would arrive at a quite a height, on a broad front and in not such tight groups. Most of these would carry straight onto South Lake, whiffing down at the last minute.

If winds were strong and from the south west, birds arrived in a very concentrated flightline and low to the water namely over Wood Bar Looe from the direction of Lytchett Bay. Providing some shelter could be found, these are the best conditions for obtaining an accurate count. If the tide was up, these birds would just continue down either to South Lake or the sheltered area to the north of Shag Looe Head.

The tendency for birds to head straight for South Lake seemed most apparent in early spring. One could almost speculate that the constant noise and activity coming from the Black-headed Gull breeding islands was an influence in their choice of roost site!

On 31st Mar 08, the 70 or so birds that had arrived by 1720 were all in an isolated group that were preening on the mud just to the south of Giggers Island. In fact many times noted in species specific flocks

The other main route in from the west found birds that were using the inter-tidal areas to feed. The bulk of which would be coming from the favourite feeding area centred around South Deep and Fitzworth. The birds headed for

Patchins Point then followed the northern shoreline of Arne west, continuing past Russell Quay and straight down to South Lake with some cutting across to the area just north of Shag Looe Head.

Birds also pre-roosted on water around Patchins Point or occasionally loafed on the point before eventually moving off to roost.

Birds using the Piddle followed the valley back down, entering over Swineham. Some would stop to bathe at the river mouth particularly on a dropping tide, when the salinity level was at its lowest.

On the return passage 565 birds were counted roosting at South Lake on 31st August which seems a pretty high count for this early in the season.

Studland Roost

Numerically, the next largest but hardly comparable to Wareham Channel with numbers ranging from 130 in November to 340 in February. Numbers were highest here during February suggesting a passage influence.

Most birds using this area arrived from the north west over the north end of Little Sea, which were presumably birds from Green Island / Furzey area. Of these, only a small proportion diverted to Little Sea to bathe with the majority just coming straight into Studland Bay. Interestingly, birds were noted to come into bathe from Studland roost in the early morning seeming to prefer to start the day with a wash instead.

During particularly low early evening tides, birds fed longer in the Green / Furzey area, coming into roost much later.

Fitzworth Roost

Anything from 30-100 birds used the Lower Wych open water area, just north east of the Fitzworth *spartina* islands. These were generally local birds that had been feeding in the surrounding area.

Blue Lagoon

The final roost was rather oddly off of Blue Lagoon, bearing in mind their dislike of the northern shoreline. This was noted on a limited number of occasions with a maximum of 210 birds on 6th March 08 and 110 on 19th March. Interestingly, around 1050 Black-headed Gulls were also roosting there and the Common Gulls preferred to be in their own group just away from the Black-heads.

Flightlines out / catchment areas

In the morning, most birds either left the Wareham Channel roost in a north easterly or northerly direction through Lytchett Bay, or north north west over Holton Heath. A small number of birds also left South Lake directly west, taking them along the Frome or Piddle Valley. No birds were seen to leave to the south. Obviously these were not strict but did seem to form the basis of their movements.

North east route

The birds on the north east bearing headed for the Wimborne area of the Stour Valley, from here the main movement was north up the River Allen, taking in flooded areas and ploughed fields around Horton Inn, Crichel Lake and eventually Long Crichel Pig fields.

Although many birds did travel in this direction, the traditional feeding area around the floodplains of the Stour

at Wimborne were hardly used, most birds preferring to carry on north up the River Allen. Even when flooding occurred in early March, only a handful of Common Gulls were seen, compared to up to 900 Black-heads. Most of the birds on this route seemed to end up at Long Crichel pig farms.

First stop, although only seen in small numbers, were the fields on the Stour floodplain just west of Wimborne Minster. From there, birds moved north up the River Allen, stopping at any likely looking areas. Any of the fields surrounding the valley could be used. In March, a few birds got caught up in the excitement around the Knowle Hill area and were seen accompanying Black-headed Gulls as they rushed from field to field.

They were also seen in stubble fields with newly sprouting crops near Didlington just east of Crichel lake 20th Feb 08 with BH. The whole flock were flying slowly just above the ground, dropping, getting up as one, flying low some more before dropping again.

Birds on this route were noted as far north as Brockington Farm (SU019108) and Gussage All Saints.

The main destination however seemed to be Long Crichel pig fields where flocks of up to 220 birds were counted. The maximum of 220 was counted there on 20th February 08. Also around 200 birds in February 07, with up to 120 still there on 28th March 07.

When not feeding, birds loafed mostly in nearby grass fields and also in the pig fields. On a few occasions, birds were

quite restless in this area, constantly moving between the pig fields, ploughed fields, loafing fields, and Crichel Lake with lots of to-ing and fro-ing between pig fields and Crichel Lake in particular. Even loafing birds would regularly get up as one and go straight back down again to same spot.

After heavy rain on 12th March 07, the area around Horton Bridge and the waterworks was extensively flooded. During this time, a maximum of 93 CM were counted. Also during this time, other nearby flooded areas had presumably been found as a visit to Long Crichel pig farms revealed no birds present on that day. Once the floods had receded, the Horton bridge area was again empty.

Another popular area was freshly ploughed fields around Tarrant Hinton in February and March. Up to 50 CM were recorded in this area. These birds had probably moved north west along the tributary of the River Allen which passes through Long Crichel. There is also the possibility that the birds had followed the Stour north west then headed north up the River Tarrant, which leads directly to Tarrant Hinton.

North route

Birds taking the more northerly route headed for the Stour Valley. The exact bearing is more north north west. Although as with other routes each day had its own little detours and deviations. Livestock fields containing mainly sheep at Newton Peveril seemed to be the first main stop, with birds being seen here on several occasions.

From here birds moved north west up the Stour Valley again looking for likely areas to pitch down.

Another site regularly visited were fields around Nutford Farm, just north west of Blandford Forum. These, in fact, held one of the largest inland feeding flocks found on the survey with 250 birds there on 25th March feeding in non flooded rough pasture.

Quite an interesting feeding pattern was observed here. Whilst in the grass, the birds seemed to move rather quickly from one end of the field to the other and back again as a group. This speed came about as the birds at the back of the flock decided to leap frog over the others and get to the front. When this occurred, the 'new' birds at the back then did the same and so on. When they reached the end of the field they mooched around a bit, before some headed back the other way. Others followed, the ones at the back flew to the front and the whole thing started again. After a while, they all got up and flew to a neighbouring stony field with short crops on the other side of the road where half carried on feeding and the other half decided to loaf.

Six birds were seen as far as Sturminster Newton School playing fields which had also presumably followed the Stour up. Apparently an independent observer also noted some birds near Lydlinch.

North west route

A few birds flew this way with BH which took in Newton Farm pig fields. The BH that took this route were thought to follow the Winterborne Valley.



West route

Birds going west from South Lake followed either the Frome or the Piddle.

During times of floods, the lower Frome Valley certainly became more popular with a maximum of 78 birds in and around the floods in February. Not all of the time was used feeding.

On 18th February, many Black-heads were feeding around the flooded areas. However, the 20 or so Common Gulls seemed content to stand on the line of fence posts watching on.

Along the Piddle the initial part of the valley was difficult to survey, with access restricted anywhere to the east of Hyde Farm. Although, as there were a fair few birds moving up and down this valley, it is safe to assume that certain parts of this area would have been utilised.

It was not until the Piddle reached the Tolpuddle area that significant numbers were encountered. A favourite spot was a tussocky field where the river ran through just south of Tolpuddle. Here up to 70 CM were counted, most feeding some loafing. A further 65 birds that day headed downstream late afternoon.

Birds in a ploughed field just south east of Piddlehinton, with 180 BH were the furthest point up the valley where feeding birds were seen. Two birds were also seen flying up the valley at Piddletrenthide and a bird heading north up the valley near Duntish (two miles north of the source of

the Piddle) was thought perhaps to be a migrant heading north.

Interestingly, the ploughed field at Piddlehinton is nearly twice as far to the Wareham Channel as it is to the Weymouth Bay roost.

It must be said that despite extensive searching inland, surprisingly few large flocks of Common Gull were actually found.

Early / late dates in the harbour

Late: 17th May sub adult Brownsea Lagoon.

Early: 6th July 2 Ad Common Gulls Brands Bay *spartina* islands.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

Introduction

During Collins 1984/5, survey there were a total of 5 Mediterranean Gulls recorded - two in November, a pair in summer plumage at Holton Heath and another adult in summer plumage at Round Island. How things have changed since then.

During 2007/8, Med Gull sightings can be almost daily and on 23rd April 2007 a minimum 77 birds were recorded at Holton Heath.

Distribution

During the winter months, distribution is restricted to the more coastal type environments of Studland Bay, Sandbanks Bay, Blue Lagoon, Parkstone Bay and Baiter. Studland Bay attracts the largest numbers, with up to 13 birds present. Within this area, the rocky beach in the far southern corner is often used for feeding.

The other advantage of Studland Bay is access to the sea, and birds can often be seen flying out beyond the bay in search of food. In bad weather, they will also be seen scavenging amongst the breaking waves. During the evening, they will roost in Studland Bay with Black-headed Gulls.

The occasional bird can also be found inland, such as the lower Frome Valley during floods. Also possibly the same bird can be seen scavenging at Purbeck School, in Wareham, during lunch hour with Black-heads.

Towards the end of February and into March, there is an increase in adult birds as potential breeding birds arrive. First birds being seen on Brownsea by middle of February with some birds having already formed pairs, with plenty of calling and displaying. On 21st March 2007, 27 birds were on Brownsea Lagoon, including 20 adults. On 9th March 2008, 32 birds were on the lagoon, which reflects the general increase in numbers year on year. Also on the same day there were a further 10 birds in the Parkstone Bay area, including 7 adults.

At this time of year, numbers also build up at Baiter and can be seen here at any time of day. However, many of them will arrive through the afternoon to loaf on the shingle point before going to roost nearby. On 27th March 2008, a maximum of 33 birds were here.

By April, most of the birds have gravitated towards the Holton Heath area. Here the feeding strategy changes to include trips inland to feed. The roosting area also changes to the Wareham Channel.

By April numbers begin to build, on the 6th Apr 07 45 birds were recorded at Holton Heath, 44 of which were adults. However, by 27th April 2007 Bay and Brands Bay where they could often be no less than 77 birds were counted, of which 74 were adults. Due to the difficult viewing conditions with many birds undoubtedly hidden, this total was regarded as a gross under-estimate.

In early May 2008, an official count of the nesting birds was undertaken by the RSPB. No fewer than 87 Mediterranean

Gull nests were found, putting the minimum number of adult birds using the area to 174.

Away from the main breeding area, 6 first-year birds remained at Studland Bay. By June however birds had already begun to make their way back here presumably including some failed breeders, reaching 31 birds by the 21st more than doubling the usual winter count. The breakdown was 11 adults 3 second-years and 17 first-years. These stayed around through July and commuted regularly between here and the loafing areas of the *spartina* islands at Brands Bay. Early morning seemed to be the most popular time for this. Some birds still used the *spartina* in August and September. No birds were seen doing so after September but up to 26 birds were still at Studland Bay.

Inter-tidal areas

Baiter: 6-8 birds Jan-Feb steadily increasing to 30-33 birds max end of March / beginning of April. By third week of April, back down to 6 birds with 1-4 birds for the rest of the year.

Blue Lagoon: 4 birds throughout the core winter months.

Brands Bay: Jan-Jun 1-2 birds, max of 17 in July, max of 7 in Sept, Oct-Dec none recorded.

Brownsea Lagoon: Jan none recorded, Feb 6-10, March max 32 birds, April max 28 birds, May-July 1-2 birds, Aug-Dec none.

Furzey Island: Only recorded from Apr to June with a max of 6 birds on 15th Apr. Two birds were seen by an independent observer hanging around the Furzey Black-headed Gull colony May 2007.

Green Island: 1-4 birds Feb-July only

Holes Bay: Only recorded on 2 occasions - once in Apr and once in Nov.

Lytchett Bay: Jan-Feb 1 bird, March 5-10, Apr max 11, May-July 1-2 birds, Aug-Sept 1 bird, Oct-Dec none.

Middlebere: Throughout survey only recorded here on one date, when a pair of adults and a first summer bird came in on 20th June. They did a bit of preening, calling and flying around before leaving after a few minutes. Interestingly, the first summer bird wasn't so much with the adults as following them.

Parkstone Bay: Baiter Point lies at the boundary of Parkstone Bay and so is discussed separately. Birds, however, obviously did regularly enter the area. Jan 1-3 birds, Feb 6-11 birds, March max 20 birds, Apr max 2 birds, May-July no birds recorded, Aug 2 birds, Sept-Nov no birds and Dec max of 3 birds.

Sandbanks Bay: Jan 1-3 birds, Feb 1-2 birds, March max 8 birds, Apr-May none, June-July 1 bird, Aug-Sept none, Oct-Nov 1 and Dec up to 4 birds.

Studland Bay: Jan 3-9 birds, Feb 10-17 birds, March 3-7, Apr-May 6 birds, all of which were 1st summers, June max 31, July max 10, Oct-Nov 17-26 birds and Dec 11-13 birds.

Studland West: Oct-Feb 1-2 birds, Mar-Apr 3-5 birds with none recorded from May-Sept.

Feeding

During winter, Studland birds can be seen on the beach loafing and also feeding. Birds can often be seen pecking at invertebrates amongst the seaweed, which on occasion will involve a leap before grabbing its prey out of the air.

Periods of bad weather are a favoured feeding time here. Birds can often be seen in a particularly choppy area of the

sea, beyond Old Harry for example scavenging amongst flotsam and jetsam.

On 10th January, 10 birds were feeding over large breaking waves in Shell Bay when the wind was force 8-9, a time when most other gulls are keeping their heads down.

As birds move west through the harbour to Holton Heath during the spring, the diet will begin to change. Birds at Baiter are sometimes seen taking bread from people along with the Black-heads. Once settled at the breeding islands, most feeding will be done inland and birds can be seen to-ing and fro-ing with the Black-heads.

During this time however they were not regularly recorded actually feeding with the Black-headed Gulls. Although initially taking the same route inland, they were seen to carry on flying past areas where the Black-heads had decided to stop and feed. A few attempts were made to locate these birds, without success. An independent observer did note 6 adult birds feeding in the Wareham Forest.

They will follow Black-heads south to the heath and forest areas of the southern part of the harbour. In particular, seen hawking insects around areas such as Norden and Hartland.

7th June 2008, 5 Meds hawking insects with around 200 Black-heads over fields south east of Milborne St Andrew.

17th June, 2 Meds following tractor which was grass cutting at Woolgarston, Corfe Castle.

Roosting

In winter all birds in the area seem to roost in Studland Bay. Birds already in the area can be seen arriving from the north probably from Sandbanks Bay, the harbour mouth and Shell Bay.

During early spring, particularly when numbers are high at Baiter, Parkstone Bay becomes an important roost area, with the immature birds still using Studland Bay.

Toward the breeding season, the Wareham Channel will be the main roost area.

Behaviour

Can be seen thermalling with Black-headed Gulls, noted doing this over Swineham a couple of times in April, over Upton Heath in June.

Also noted to fly to join a calling thermalling flock of Black-heads. It is known that these calls can mean 'come and join me' aimed at their own congeners, but presumably Med Gulls can also recognise this call.

When leaving the breeding islands, tended to rise upward 'thermallng' first before flying off.

Breeding

As well as Holton Heath, breeding was confirmed at Fitzworth *spartina* islands where a pair with 2 young were seen on 14th July.

Also a pair was seen by an independent observer hanging around the small Black-headed colony at Furzey Island although further investigation drew a blank. However, if a

bird was sitting out of sight and the other off feeding, they would have gone undetected.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*

Introduction

Poole Harbour is one of the most important areas in Britain for Yellow-legged Gulls. The bulk of which will be seen at Holes Bay / Kerry Foods and the lower Wareham Channel. The maximum co-ordinated count produced 170 birds.

Poole Harbour is also host to Britain's only breeding pair which in 2007 successfully raised two young and in 2008 one.

Inter-tidal areas

Arne Bay: 2 birds in September and October, also 5 birds on Arne Spit on 27th September

Fitzworth North / Round Island: 1-5 birds with max of 5 on 26th September. Also 5 on 7th April.

Holes Bay: The most important inter-tidal feeding area in Poole Harbour. Here, up to 74 birds could be found feeding, usually on the algal covered areas in September. It is helped by the close proximity of Kerry Foods. In the core winter months, 1-2 birds present.

Holton Heath: 1-2 birds

Lytchett Bay: August-October 7-16 birds. Core winter months 1-2 birds.

Middlebere: Present in small numbers throughout the year. January: 3-4 birds, February-April: 1-2 birds, June 3-7 birds, July 4-6 birds, August 4-11 birds. Max of 19 birds in September, November-February 2008: 1-3 birds. Although often feeding here, many of the sightings refer to birds that were generally around the *spartina* banks opposite the hide which was a favourite loafing area.

1st July Middlebere sub adult YLG feeding in channel doing a “fly up and drop” routine.

Parkstone Bay: A 2nd winter bird was seen here on a number of occasions between February and June making a nuisance of itself, attacking Herring Gulls and hanging around Great Crested Grebes.

Shipstal: 1-3 birds July-October.

South Lake: Numbers influenced by roosting birds. 15-18 birds in July. 2 birds March 08.

Swineham: Again influenced by roosting birds. On an evening low tide on 31st July, 98 birds were counted loafing on the mud. August up to 42 birds, September-October 6 birds and November 1-2 birds.

Wyche Lake: 1-3 birds in core winter months, 2-3 April-June, with a max of 9 birds on 11th September.

Away from the inter-tidal areas, Kerry Foods was a major loafing / feeding area. Many birds seemed content to sit on the factory roofs ignoring the regular delivery of pies. Throughout the afternoon and into early evening there was a steady build up of numbers.

Birds came in from the north west which would either be birds feeding in the north of Holes Bay or Beacon Hill Landfill. A more northerly direction was also noted which would indicate a departure from somewhere further inland.

On 31st July, 72 birds came in all of which were adults. At 2100hrs, 90% of birds left (along with other large gulls) to the south east later veering south over road. A few minutes later the remaining birds did exactly the same thing. As we know from the Herring Gull studies, birds would have more than likely then gone on to Brownsea Lagoon.

Two other counts were made, one on 18th July when 91 birds were present and another on 31st August when only 31 birds were present. However, this coincided with an evening low tide where others were probably feeding. One juvenile bird present with the adults. An adult with a leg ring was present (314Z, ringed on 24.05.02 at Besson, Bouches-du-Rhone, France). Also seen by D.Chown at Radipole Lake on 16.12.03.

On 31st July, the visit was co-ordinated with the lower Wareham Channel and Lytchett Bay.

98 birds were recorded at the lower Wareham Channel and 7 were recorded at Lytchett Bay. However, these later moved south so were probably included in the late count at lower Wareham Channel making a minimum total of 170 birds.

Another co-ordinated count on 31st August, when 83 birds were recorded at the Wareham Channel roost making a total of 114.

During evening low tides at the lower Wareham Channel, some birds would feed but most seemed to be content with loafing mainly near the channel. Many would congregate together in their own specific flock away from the Herring Gull.

Birds entering the lower Wareham Channel to roost do so from the north west or west. Birds from the north west coming straight in, whilst birds from the occasionally stopping off at Swineham gravel pits to bathe.

Pre-roost loafing was also recorded at the gravel pits with one or two birds also being seen in the winter months.

Away from the main influx, 4 birds roosted Wareham Channel on 27th March 08 and 4 on 5th April 2007.

Also seen loafing in fields just to the west of the creek. 4 birds here on 20th June with some Herring Gulls.

On 1st July, again 2 or 3 birds. Viewing difficult due to distance and haze, but possibly a juvenile bird also present.

Earlier in March, 2 adult birds at Middlebere calling to each other including long calls. Given that at least 2 adult birds are seemingly resident here, it could be quite possible that breeding could be occurring. On 29th September, 2 adults and a juvenile were seen feeding in a nearby field adjacent to Wych Lake.

On 29th October, 10 birds loafing in middle of Bestwall at high tide with Herring Gulls and a few Lesser Black-backs.

On 23rd March, a 2nd winter bird in Lower Frome Valley

Outside the harbour, 3 birds were recorded at Long Crichel pig farm on 15th February 2007 and 2 there on 16th January 2008. Interestingly, on a rare occasion when birds were able to feed at Beacon Landfill site, amongst the 600 or so Herring Gulls there was an adult on 29th May. Given the date, this may have been one of the Brownsea breeding birds. In fact in 2007, a pair successfully raised 2 chicks on Brownsea Lagoon after chicks after a few unsuccessful years. In 2008 they managed to successfully raise 1 chick.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Introduction

As with Herring Gull, many birds using the harbour do so only to roost, they are notoriously difficult to count with many arriving after dark. Even birds arriving earlier can sometimes be difficult to separate from Herring Gulls at distance in low light levels, particularly immature birds and sometimes have to be recorded as 'large Gulls'.

However, there are occasions when birds would come in early and sit out on the mud allowing accurate counting. The largest count of the survey by some margin was 1100 at Holton Heath on 10th December. A late afternoon low tide is certainly the best time to count large Gulls.

Despite the difficulties of counting, numbers still seemed low with the next highest survey count being only 300 on 11th October, again at Holton Heath. The third highest was 95 at Lytchett Bay on 16th March 08.

Numbers using the harbour in the daytime were generally small throughout the year. The two highest counts occurred within two days of each other during a passage influx with 50 at Holton Heath on 17th September and 35 at Holes Bay on 15th September.

Inter-tidal daytime by month

In January most important daytime feeding area was Holes Bay with up to 25 birds. February, again Holes Bay and Holton Heath with up to 20 birds.

March (07) highest count Holes Bay with 16 birds along with April 34 birds, May 18 birds, June 14 birds and July 8 birds.

In August only one area had a count of over 4 birds with 8 at Holton Heath. 30th August - 17th September saw quite an increase in numbers with up to 35 birds at Holes and Lytchett Bay and 30 at South Lake with a max of 50 at Holton Heath. Highest October count 20 at Holton Heath. Highest November count 3 birds and December 5 birds at Holes Bay.

Inter-tidal areas

Arne: no sightings

Brands Bay: odd singletons apart from 8 on 18th February 07 and 12 on 7th February 08.

Fitzworth East, Fitzworth North / Round Island, Furzey Island and Green Island: only 1-2 birds throughout the survey.

Holes Bay: Consistently the most important feeding area of the harbour with up to 35 birds present. January-March 16-25 birds, April 15-34, May-June 14-18, July 8, August 25, September 35, October-December 3-5 birds.

Holton Heath: (away from roosting times) low numbers January-late July increasing fairly significantly in August with 30 on 31st and 50 on 17th September falling again to 20 in October.

Lytchett Bay: Single figure counts January- July 31st. Large rise to 35 on 30th August falling off again to single figures from end of September to mid March. The location of Lytchett Bay means that evening low tides will attract pre-roosting birds that wish to preen and loaf. The max count for Lytchett Bay of 95 birds was during such a time on 16th March 08.

Lytchett Shore: 1-4 birds throughout survey.

Ower and Parkstone Bay: 1-2 birds.

Sandbanks Bay: Despite the attraction to large numbers of Herring gulls, only two records of 2 and 5 birds.

South Lake: Difficult to assess, as a purely inter-tidal feeding area due to the closeness of the roost and the many low tides that only occur either early morning or late afternoon. Max of 30 early morning on 16th September were probably birds that had roosted here.

Swineham: Same situation as South Lake. Max count away from roost time was only 8 on 14th February 07 and 1st October.

Wych Lake: only 3 records all involving single birds.

High water daytime loafing

Only occasionally seen in the harbour during daytime high tides, the most regular area being the *spartina* islands in Brands Bay. Even there numbers limited to 1-4 birds. Other places very occasionally recorded were Long Island Sand bar (March and October), Holton Heath islands, Lytchett far fields and Holes Bay central *spartina* with a single record of 6 birds on 27th Apr.

Will also loaf at Wareham water meadows 1-3 birds from August to February.

Lower Frome Valley 2-3 birds November-February

Swineham gravel pits a regular haunt, particularly towards the end of the day when birds come in with the Herring Gulls to bathe before moving out to roost. Max of 11 birds in January, 1-4 birds February - March, 2-3 birds April-May the odd bird in June and July, a max of 8 in November and 2 in December.

Nearby odd birds seen loafing at Purbeck School roundabout and fields at Soldiers Road, both times in the company of Herring Gulls. Also small numbers loafed around Kerry Foods. 1-3 birds January-March Poole Park with one dip feeding in choppy water.

Roosting and flightlines in

Same habits as Herring Gulls, during survey nearly all major movements of Herring Gulls included a small proportion of Lesser Black-backs.

Wareham Channel most important roost area, as mentioned counting very difficult due to late arrival of birds. Maximum count 1100 on 10th Dec.

Birds arrive on same flightlines as Herring Gulls in from the north through Lytchett Bay or east through Swineham gravel pits.

No counts at Brownsea roost, however large Gulls heading out there from Quay area toward dusk contained at least a small proportion of Lesser Black-backs and perhaps many more.

Only noted on one occasion in the Studland Bay roost involving one bird on 29th January 08.

Also seen occasionally bathing at Little Sea, usually singletons with 6 being seen on 3rd May.

On 28th February in strong south west winds at around 18.15hrs a group of 8 birds headed out from Parkstone Bay area trying to head south west, after reaching mid channel

they thought better of it and arc-ed back round to then head south east in the direction of Brownsea Lagoon roost. Later another group of 10 birds did exactly the same thing.

Catchment area

As with Herring Gull birds roosting in the harbour by day reach as far north at least as Long Cichel pig farm. Also as with HG lower than expected numbers found. The most reliable place to find them was Long Cichel pig farms in February. The highest count here was 86 in mid February the second highest was 60, also mid February of which around 95% were adults.

On 10th April still 48 birds present including 35 adults.

Also seen thermalling over Beacon Hill Landfill with Herring Gulls but numbers very difficult to assess.

On 29th May during a rare feeding opportunity at the tip 10 birds were there with around 600 Herring Gulls.

Birds seen occasionally at Longham Lakes with a few heading south west from here possibly heading for the harbour.

Breeding

No actual evidence of breeding recorded but a couple of pairs seen hanging around rooftops at Poole Town in the summer were more than likely breeding. Pairs have also been present in recent summers (per obs)

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Distribution

By far and away the two most important areas in the harbour are Brownsea Lagoon and Brands Bay *spartina*. The 29 highest counts come from these two areas. The maximum count at Brownsea was 60 birds on 30th August and for Brands Bay 58 on 9th October

Both areas are essentially loafing areas.

Outside of these two areas Holton Heath had the next highest count with 11 birds. Furzey Island, Sandbanks Bay and South Lake with 10 birds.

Inter-tidal areas

Arne: 1-2 birds throughout year with a max of 8 on 21st February.

Brands Bay: monthly maximums quite consistent
January 29, February 24, March 20, April 25, May 23, June 41, July 39, September 35, October 58 and November 32.

Furzey Island: 1-3 birds throughout year with a max of 10 on 7th February.

Holes Bay: 1-4 birds April-January, 6-8 birds February-March.

Holton Heath: no real pattern throughout year with around 1-5 birds except for a max of 11 on 16th February.

Lytchett Bay: 1-4 birds throughout year.

Lytchett Shore: 1-4 birds throughout year.

Middlebere: 1-4 birds throughout year.

Parkstone Bay: 1-2 birds throughout year

Sandbanks Bay: 1-4 birds throughout year with peak of 10 on 18th February.

South Lake: 3-8 birds January-May, 8-10 birds July-September and 1-5 birds October-December.

Studland West: 1-2 birds throughout year with max of 5 on 25th September.

Swineham: 1-2 birds throughout year with max of 6 on 7th October

Wych Lake: 1-3 birds throughout year.

Of the regular haunts 5 sites had peak numbers in February and March. Brownsea max was late August, South Lake September, Brands Bay and Studland West early October.

Not encountered feeding very regularly within the harbour, its one of those birds that just don't seem to eat! At high tide at Brownsea birds are loafing and at low tide at Brands birds are loafing!

Are most active at sea and were seen regularly with Herring Gulls off of Studland Bay scavenging or following fishing boats.

As mentioned the main loafing areas are Brownsea Lagoon and Brands Bay but were also encountered at a variety of other sites.

Poole Quay Breakwater is a regular loafing area for around 2-4 birds, with a max of 9 here on 10th December.

Baiter will hold birds particularly during heavy rain and wind. Max of 5 here on 10th January.

Stone Island also regularly used with usually 3 or 4 birds in attendance. As with Herring Gulls will also happily sit around on open water with counts including 16 at Brownsea North open water area.

1 or 2 birds regularly seen in the lower Frome Valley with a max of 10 birds on 12th January.

A few birds also used a ploughed field near the Purbeck School Wareham bypass roundabout during May accompanied by up to 635 HG.

6 birds were found loafing in fields just to east of Lytchett Minster on 18th November.

The odd bird also seen loafing at Poole Park on the pontoons, the middle of Bestwall, Long Island sand bar, Arne spit, Furzey beach, Wareham Moors, ploughed fields at Ballard and the islands at Swineham Gravel pits

Roosting

Known to use Wareham Channel and Brownsea Lagoon with up to 15 seen in Wareham Channel on 27th March 08.

Birds seen making their way to Brownsea from Little Sea after bathing. Also seen coming across Parkstone Bay heading for Brownsea Lagoon.

Breeding

A pair with young on a building in Poole Town.

At least 2 sitting birds on Old Harry

Several pairs on Brownsea Lagoon.