

## **SFCC SAWBILL COUNTING METHOD – Example provided by Tweed Foundation**

- 1.1 The main river and tributaries are split into sections which are walked downstream early in the morning on the same day and the same time before there is too much disturbance from anglers, dog-walkers etc and when the birds have come off their roosts and are feeding or preparing to feed. Counts are not made when the river is in spate or the weather is poor as these conditions discourage birds.
- 1.2 A minimum coverage of the river main stem should be surveyed. Where resources allow, tributary streams can be surveyed.
- 1.3 The counts are made in January (of the overwintering Goosander population); April (peak salmon Smolt run time in the main channel) and October (Autumn migration of parr ). Counts are sometimes made in May as well, to see what is happening later in the year.
- 1.4 Each recorder sets off at an identical time, starting at the top of their allotted section and proceeding downstream. When a bird or group of birds are sighted, the position is marked on a map of the section and the time recorded along with information on what the birds were doing when seen and what they did afterwards. Ideally, the counter attempts to get past the birds without driving them off the water as this simplifies the assessment of the count numbers. The maps of the sections are divided up into kilometres so each sighting can be assigned to a particular length of river, the purpose of this being to show up any particular points at which birds regularly aggregate.
- 1.5 When the count is completed, each recorder signs their sheet as a declaration that the figures they have recorded are correct to the best of their knowledge.
- 1.6 Before the data is entered into a database, all field sheets are annotated to show which birds are recorded as “sitting” (feeding, swimming or resting on the bank) or “flying” (upstream or downstream). Annotations are also added to show which birds are not added to the database if there is any likelihood that they are a repeat sighting. These annotations ensure that anyone entering bird count data in the future can exactly copy the method of eliminating repeat sightings.  
Birds that are “sitting” but then move downstream out of sight are only counted at the location of their first sighting. For example, if 2 black head Goosanders and 4 Red Head Goosanders are sighted at location 2, but 1 Black Head and 3 Red Head Goosanders were previously sighted 30 minutes earlier flying downstream from location 1, only 1 Black Head and 1 Red Head will be entered into the database for location 2. The numbers and activity of birds (sitting or flying) near the start and end of adjoining sections are also checked and any possible double counts eliminated. E.g. birds at the top of one section which are recorded at the start of one survey fly into the bottom of the next section further upstream and are recorded at a later time.