

Autumn Arrivals on our Coasts by Charlotte Goswell

The northern coastline of the island provides a home to many different species of migratory bird over the autumn and winter months. They begin to arrive in September and October and will usually stay with us until the end of March. The Solent is of worldwide importance for wildlife, with up to 125,000 ducks, geese and wading birds returning each year.



There is a diverse range of habitats around our coast such as rich intertidal mud, seagrass beds, saltmarsh, sandy beaches and rocky shores, all of which offer important feeding opportunities for these birds. With different beaks, behaviours and adaptations it's possible to see many species together at once as they are not always competing for the same food.



The estuaries and harbours around Yarmouth, Newtown, Bembridge and the River Medina are particularly good places spot species such as oystercatcher, curlew, redshank, lapwing, dunlin and even ringed, golden and grey plovers. Ducks including wigeon, teal and shelduck can also be seen in good numbers depending on the area and tide, and you may even be lucky enough to spot gadwall and pintail.

Thorness Bay is another important site for many of these birds and it is also a good place to see turnstones. These wading birds live up to their name by flipping and turning over stones to look for small items of prey underneath.

Dark-bellied brent geese are perhaps one of the easiest birds to spot. You often hear them before you see them, with their lovely chattering calls echoing across the shore. These small geese migrate here from Siberia and can be seen feeding on seagrass and seaweeds on the intertidal shore and grazing on grass in nearby fields.



Not much bigger than a mallard, they have a beautiful plumage with a striking black head and neck, a grey-brown back and a dark belly. Family groups migrate together so you will sometimes see adult birds (identified by the white collar around the neck) with juveniles (no collar and with a white barring pattern on some feathers) in large flocks.

Another very special bird for the island is the sanderling. The sandy beaches of Ryde and Seaview are the place to spot these wonderful little wading birds as they run around dodging the waves and catching small creatures like worms and crustaceans. Once the tide comes in you will then find them on the beach having a rest up at the top of the shore.



Having travelled hundreds, and in some cases even thousands of miles, from the Arctic to get here, all of these birds need our help to ensure they can feed and rest undisturbed. By giving them lots of space they will have a better chance to make it through the winter and successfully return to their summer breeding grounds and habitats in the spring.

When birds are disturbed, they lose valuable feeding and resting time and can become stressed which wastes precious energy. If this happens regularly, for example over the course of the winter, the impact can be significant. Some birds may return in too poor a condition to breed, whilst others may not be able to complete the journey at all.

Our coastlines are becoming increasingly busy with people, recreation and development meaning that safe spaces for wildlife are limited. Anyone who visits the coast can cause disturbance, but this also means that anyone can help to reduce it. Simple measures like just looking out for the birds, sticking to pathways and keeping your distance can make a really big difference.



I am one in a team of Rangers from Bird Aware Solent who engage with visitors and communities around the coast to help them understand the importance of the different bird species and the impact of disturbance.

We are very lucky to have these birds here with us each year, so it is important that we look after them and share our coastlines with wildlife.

If you spot anything interesting out on the coast we would love to hear from you, just send us an email or message on social media. In November we will also be running our 2nd 'Great Solent Birdwatch' - a citizen science project that helps to raise awareness of these fantastic birds. Further updates about how to take part in this will be released soon. For more information please see our website or follow us on social media.

www.birdaware.org