

Common Winter Birds at Rye Harbour Nature Reserve

On the short circular walk around the southern part of the nature reserve between **October** and **March** you might see all 42 birds in this leaflet. There will be others and for those you may need a bird book. When the weather is very cold many birds may leave, but others will arrive!

Birds that catch fish



Grey heron is large and feeds along the edge of any water, waiting for fish or frogs or voles.



Little egret is smaller than grey heron and feeds in the water where its yellow feet are used to flush out fish or shrimps. It has a black bill.



Great crested grebe can be seen on the deeper pools and on the sea where they dive for fish.



Little grebe are common on the deeper pools, often in small groups, where they catch small fish and shrimps.



Kingfishers sit patiently on posts waiting to dive in for a fish. Often seen only as a blue streak flying away.



Cormorant fish mostly out in Rye Bay and roost on islands on the pools where they stand upright and often hold their wings out. The white-bellied ones are young birds.



Waterfowl

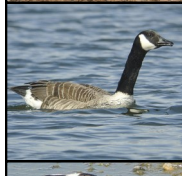
Mute swan is a very large bird and uses its long neck to feed on submerged plants, even in saltwater.



Brent goose is small, not much bigger than a mallard. They breed in the Arctic and winter on saltmarshes.



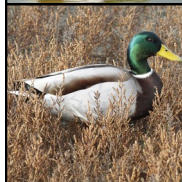
Greylag goose was introduced to southern Britain for shooting. Greylag means "grey goose". It is the ancestor of the farmyard goose and some are all white.



Canada goose was introduced as an ornamental bird. The black and white head is distinctive. They occasionally interbreed with greylags.



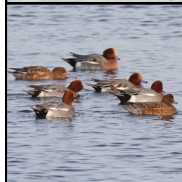
Shelduck is our only duck where both sexes look similar. They feed on the tiny snails and shrimps in the mud of saltmarshes. Most migrate to moult, only returning here in November.



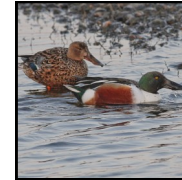
Mallard is the most familiar duck and feeds on seeds by dabbling in shallow water, fresh or salt. The wing has a metallic blue flash.



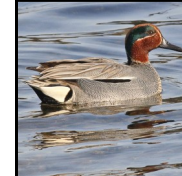
Gadwall is similar to mallard, especially the females, but there is more white in the wing. The males look grey, but the plumage has many fine black lines. They have a croaking call.



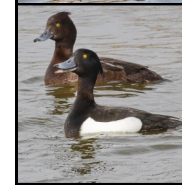
Wigeon is a grazing duck with a short grey beak. There can be flocks of several hundred which are often noisy with their whistling call.



Shoveler has a short neck and large bill that is used as a sieve to collect tiny seeds and animals from the water. It occurs here in nationally important numbers.



Teal is the smallest of our ducks and likes shallow water. The females are plain brown. It calls its name.

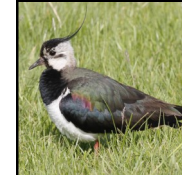


Tufted duck is a diving duck and seen on the deeper pools where it feeds on snails and shrimps found in the bottom mud. Although they have golden eyes they are not the duck of that name!

Waders



Oystercatchers are large and distinctive with their long orange bill which they use here to catch worms (not oysters). They feed in the intertidal areas but roost in large flocks at high tide.



Lapwing usually roost by day in large flocks near water but when disturbed fly with rounded black and white wings. Can be very noisy calling "peewit".



Golden plover can look quite golden in the sun, but lack distinctive features. They can be very noisy and have pointed wings. Occur in large flocks of many hundreds which roost by day.



Grey plover in flight have distinctive black "arm pits" and the call is a plaintive whistle. Only occur in small numbers, often less than 10, usually on the shore.



More Waders

Ringed plover is small with distinctive blackish rings around the head. By February they will start their display flights over their shingle nesting territories.

Curlew is our largest wading bird and has a long down-curved bill. It feeds on worms from the shore and from grassland. At dusk several hundred will come from the surrounding area to roost within the protection of the fences.

Bar-tailed godwit is smaller than curlew and with a slightly upturned bill. Usually seen on the shore, but only in small numbers.

Redshank has red legs and feeds on tiny shrimps in mud and saltmarsh. In flight they have a large white patch on each wing.

Knot is a medium sized wader that feeds on the shore, but at high tide will be found among the other roosting waders. It calls its name.

Dunlin is the most common small wader and can be found feeding on the shore and roosting with other waders at high tide.

Sanderling similar size to dunlin, but silvery in appearance. Often seen along the tide line running rapidly at the water's edge.

Turnstone is a short legged wader that has a brown and white striped appearance in flight. Often seen feeding along the edge of the river and even on the road.

Gulls



Herring gull is the typical seaside gull and here they drop mussel shells onto the road to break them open.

Lesser black-backed gull is the same size as herring gull but has bright yellow legs.

Great black-backed gull is the largest and darkest of our gulls and has flesh coloured legs.

Common gull is like a small version of herring gull, but with a "kinder" face. Its call is like a small dog.

Black-headed gull is the smallest gull, but doesn't get its dark brown head until February.

Crows



Carrion crow is the most common black crow, but there is also jackdaw, rook and raven.

Magpie has amazing metallic blue, black and white plumage. In winter they are often seen in small flocks.

Small Birds



Meadow pipit is a small olive brown bird with pale legs that often flock in grassland calling "*sip sip sip*".

Rock pipit is similar to meadow pipit but with darker plumage and black legs and only found near saltmarsh. Call is a rasping "*zeep*".

Skylarks flock in winter, feeding on seeds in grassland and saltmarsh. Stockier than meadow pipit. They often sing in good winter weather.

Linnets can form large flocks that bounce along in flight and show white flashes in the wing. They sit on the fences. Other finches (with yellow in wing) could be greenfinch or goldfinch.

Stonechats usually occur in pairs. They sit on a post or stem and fly down to the ground to catch their prey. In flight they show white wing patches.

Starlings look all black from a distance and often form large flocks that can resemble wading birds.

Rye Harbour Nature Reserve has many special habitats: shingle, saltmarsh, saline lagoons, grazing marsh and reedbed. These are managed for more than 200 rare or endangered plants and animals and more than 4,000 other species. The fences are designed to reduce the impact of badgers and foxes on the ground nesting and roosting birds, which is why there are so many birds to see here. You can support our work by joining one or both charities;

Friends of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve — supporting this reserve

Sussex Wildlife Trust — caring for wildlife across the whole of Sussex

Find out much more at www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/ryeharbour