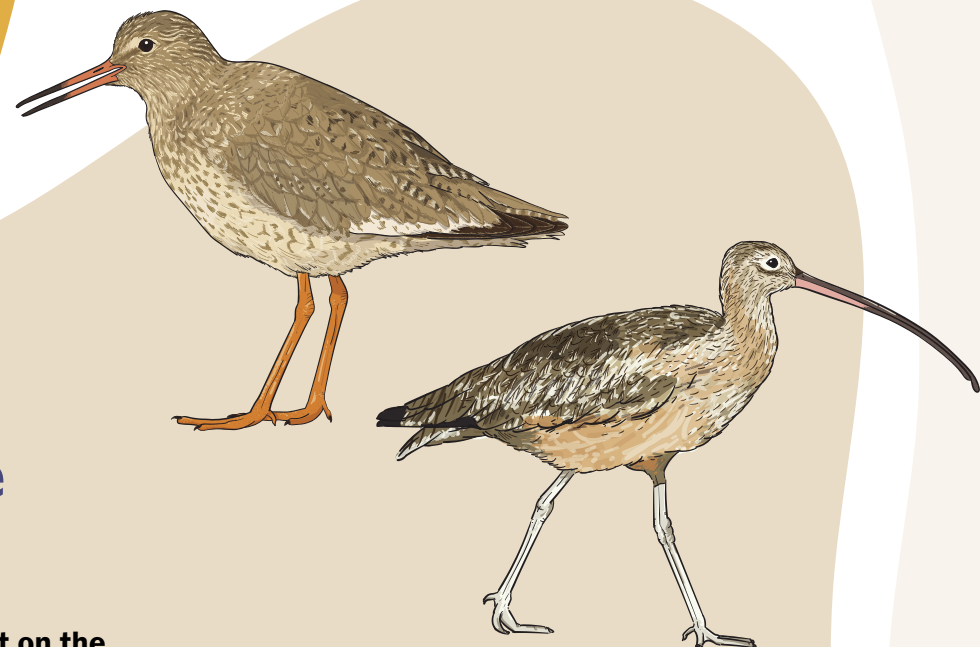


The River Axe Refuge Area

The River Axe estuary is a key waterbird roost on the Somerset coast and hosts internationally important numbers of birds in passage or overwinter. While here, they feed in the extensive areas of mud, sand and saltmarsh at low tide and roost at the water's edge during high tides. If disturbed during this time it can deplete their energy resources leaving them vulnerable and weak.

To protect the birds from disturbance, the Brean Seasonal Riverside Walk on the King Charles III England Coast Path closes when the waterbirds are here, creating a Refuge Area where they can feed and rest safely.



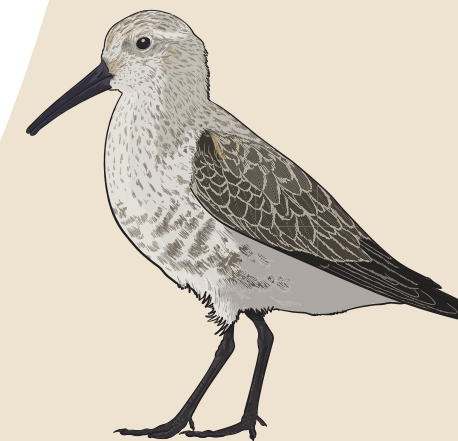
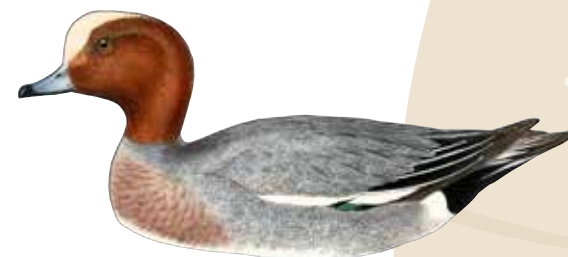
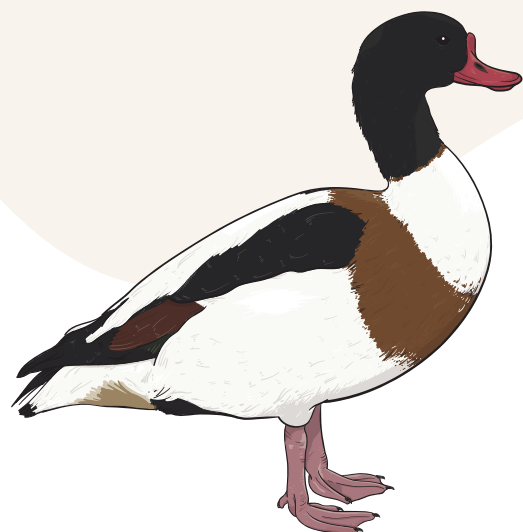
How does disturbance affect the waterbirds?

Disturbance is the biggest challenge facing the birds here. In winter the days are short, and the cold means that the birds need to keep feeding to replenish their energy and build up reserves to migrate and breed in the spring.

Most food is available at low tide and as the tide comes in they look for a safe place to roost until they can begin feeding again – this is often closer to the path at the water's edge and on sea defences.

Getting close to the birds or allowing our dogs to roam on the shore at this time will disturb the birds. This results in them using energy to fly or move around and stops them feeding, putting their health and survival at risk.

Even when they are further away, activities such as cycling, jogging, water sports and flying drones can cause birds to take flight and interrupt their feeding.



To help the birds feeding here stay safe

Stick to the paths and keep your dog on the path too.

Always keep your dog under close control - use a lead if you need to.

Obey the signs telling you when it's not OK to enter the refuge area.

Be aware of what's around you - if you see birds, try not to disturb them.

Take extra care at high tide when the birds roost close to the path.

If you are with children, explain why it is important for the birds to feed and rest.



GIVE SPACE TO THE BIRDS

If birds stop feeding and look alarmed, you are too close

Meet the waterbirds feeding and resting in the estuary and Refuge Area

Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

Redshank do breed in the UK but most are visiting from Scandinavia and northern Europe.

Visitors begin arriving in July and leave during the following April.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Whimbrel overwinter in southern Europe and Africa and head north to their breeding grounds, which stretch from Greenland to Siberia.

They stop here to refuel during their long journeys in April to May and again in July to September.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

Dunlin do breed in upland areas of the UK, but these birds head south to winter in Europe and North Africa. The birds overwintering here come from northern Europe and Russia.

Visiting birds begin arriving in September and most have left to breed by the following March.

Teal (*Anas crecca*)

Visiting Teal come from northern and central Europe to overwinter here.

They begin arriving in August and have left by the following May.

Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

The UK Shelduck population more than triples in winter when resident birds are joined by birds visiting from Europe.

They begin arriving in September and most have left by the following June.

Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)

Wigeon breed in northern Europe and Iceland. Each year nearly half a million birds come to the UK to overwinter.

They begin arriving in September and stay until April.

Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

Migrant birds are visiting from northern Europe and Iceland.

Resident birds may be on the coast all year round but they are joined by large numbers of migrant birds in the winter. These begin arriving in August and have left by the following May.

Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

Some birds visit the coast from other areas of the UK, but they are joined by birds from continental Europe.

Curlew may be in the area all year, but numbers increase dramatically from June through to April.

About the birds and why they need our protection

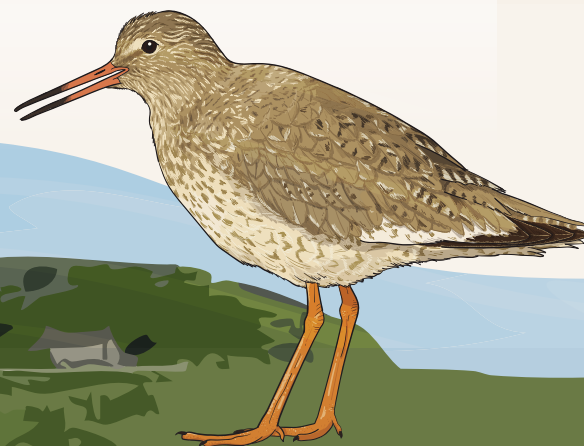


Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)

UK
LIST
AMBER

Redshanks are flighty birds and easily startled, responding with loud, piping alarm calls as they take off, often alerting other birds to potential danger too. Populations here in the UK are declining, mainly due to a loss of breeding habitat.

In winter they visit the estuary to feed and rest. Because they take flight so easily, too much disturbance leaves them weak and vulnerable, and unable to find sufficient food.



Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)

UK
LIST
RED

Whimbrel look like smaller curlews but their bill is shorter and they have a distinctive stripy head pattern. They pass through here on migration, using our coasts and estuaries to stopover and refuel.

In spring they are on their way to their arctic breeding grounds, making it important that they are able to rest and feed undisturbed.

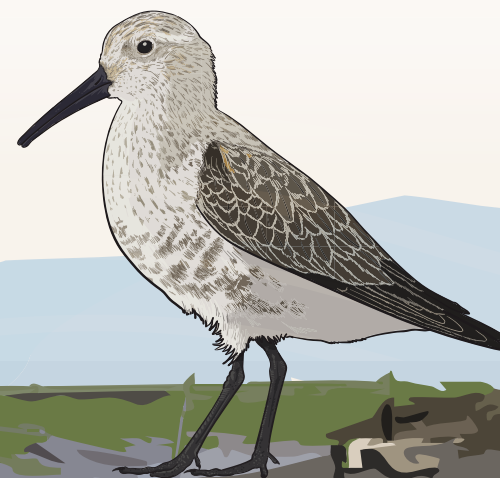


Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

UK
LIST
RED

Dunlin are one of the more common small waders seen in the UK, although breeding pairs here are declining. This is because in winter visiting birds form large flocks to feed on our mudflats and shores, sometimes taking off to perform synchronised aerial displays.

To help support breeding populations it is important to ensure that their overwintering habitats are protected and that they can feed and rest safely while here.



Teal (*Anas crecca*)

UK
LIST
AMBER

Teal are the UK's smallest duck. In winter more than half a million migrant birds visit the UK to overwinter with resident birds on our shores and estuaries. This is where they form breeding pairs before migrating in spring.

European populations are in decline and protecting the areas where they overwinter ensures that they can feed and find breeding partners for the following year.



Level of Conservation Concern

UK
LIST
RED

High

UK
LIST
AMBER

Medium

UK
LIST
GREEN

Low



SCAN ME



Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)

UK
LIST
AMBER

Very noticeable on the shore, Shelduck are among our biggest ducks with the males and females both having the distinctive black and white colouring and orange chest band.

They become especially vulnerable in winter when they 'moult' – an energy intensive process that involves renewing all their flight and tail feathers. During this time they are unable to fly for about a month and disturbance can be devastating for them.



Widgeon (*Mareca penelope*)

UK
LIST
AMBER

Widgeon are susceptible to disturbance and are among the first birds to take flight, and head to safety. Studies have shown that when disturbed they take flight more quickly, move further away and take longer to return.

Because their feeding is limited by the tides this means that disturbance can have a significant effect on their ability to find sufficient food in winter.

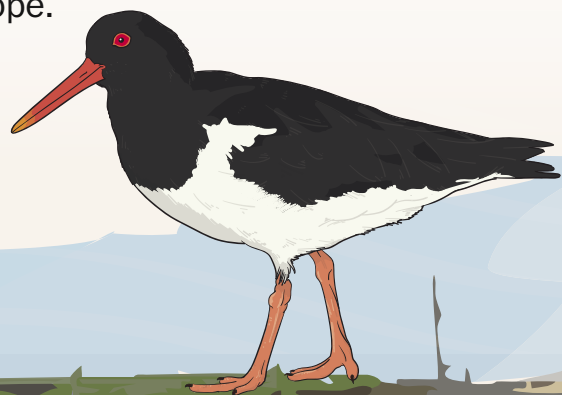


Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*)

UK
LIST
AMBER

Oystercatchers stand out on our winter shores when they move to the coast and estuaries, gathering in large flocks to feed. Like many other waterbirds, pressure on their breeding habitat has resulted in declining populations.

By protecting them while they are here and looking after the wetland and saltmarsh habitats they breed in we are helping to support Oystercatcher populations in the UK and Europe.

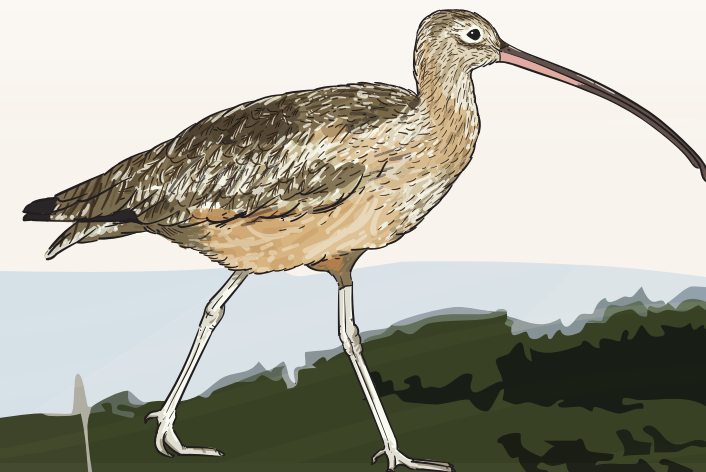


Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)

UK
LIST
RED

Curlew, with their soft bubbling song, are suffering a global population decline, mainly through loss of habitat. Here in the UK their decline has been rapid as both their breeding and overwintering areas are changing.

This makes it all the more important that the estuary here where they feed and overwinter is protected and they remain undisturbed.



Level of Conservation Concern

UK
LIST
RED

High

UK
LIST
AMBER

Medium

UK
LIST
GREEN

Low

