

The Solway Firth


a special place for birds

Solway Firth



Partnership



A large flock of oystercatchers is shown in flight over a body of water. The birds have distinctive orange-brown plumage on their heads and backs, with grey wings and white underparts. They are captured in various stages of flight, with wings spread wide, creating a sense of movement and energy. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue, suggesting the ocean.

The Solway Firth is a very special and important place for birds. As one of the biggest areas of intertidal habitats in the UK it supports nationally and internationally protected populations of waterbirds, over 100,000 of which come here in winter to feed and rest. Many have come thousands of miles to be here!

It's a great place to see and enjoy these birds whilst also making sure we protect them from disturbance. Once disturbed birds can take a long time to settle back down to feeding and resting and this uses up vital energy reserves which can decrease their chance of survival.

In spring and summer some birds such as the oystercatcher and ringed plover nest on the ground. Please be careful not to accidentally trample their well camouflaged eggs or chicks, or disturb parents away from the nest for so long that eggs and chicks could die.

We can all help by:

- Looking out for birds feeding and resting on the coast
- Taking care not to scare or disturb them
- Moving further away if a bird becomes alert and stops feeding
- Staying on the paths where they exist
- Always following requests on signs
- Exercising your dog away from resting or feeding birds
- Keeping your dog in sight and on a short lead if you cannot rely on its obedience



SOLWAY BIRDLIFE



The whooper swan is a large white swan which can be identified by the distinctive yellow patches on its bill. The local mute swan is bigger with an orange bill. Most whooper swans in the Solway fly in from Iceland to spend the winter here.

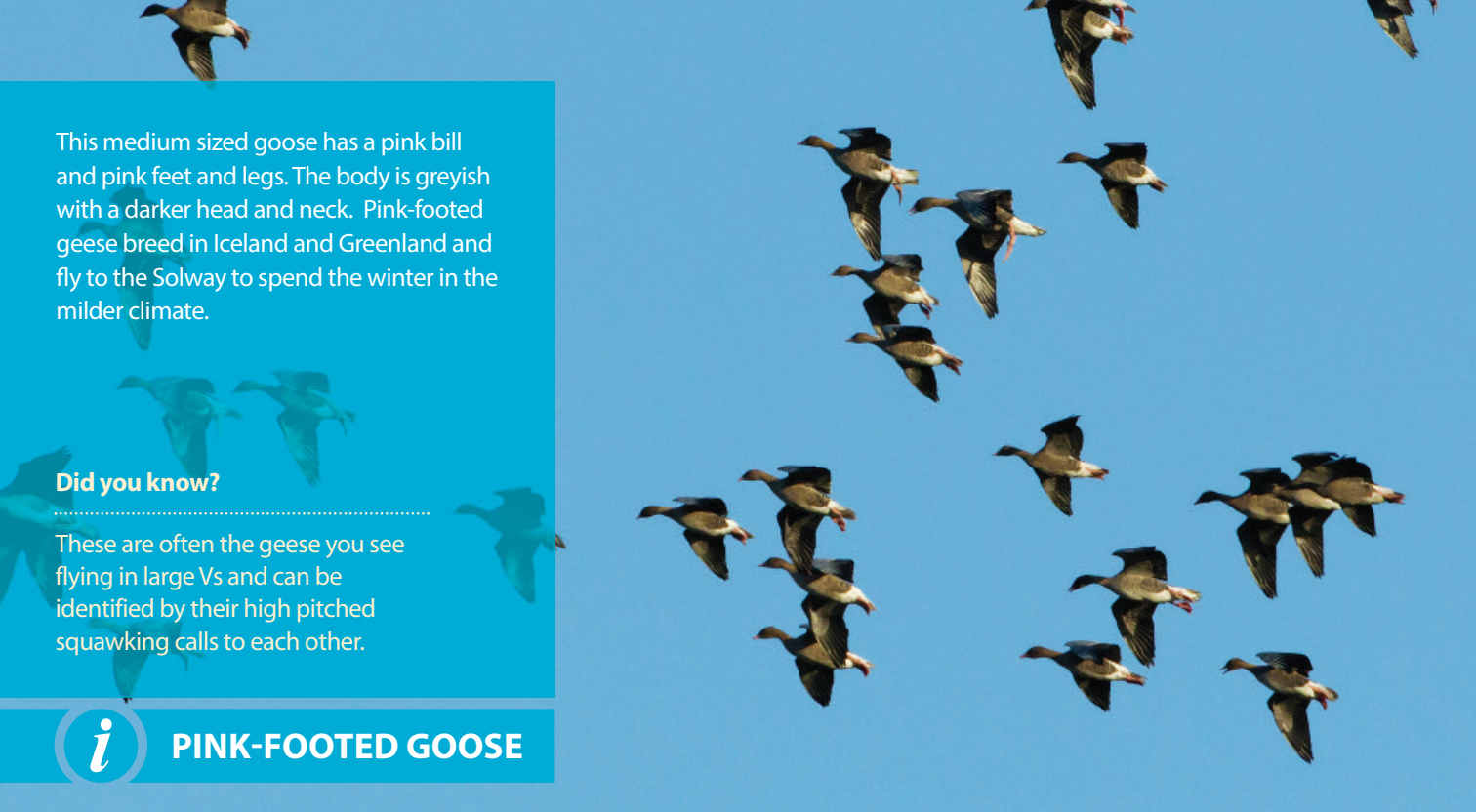
Did you know?

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The yellow patterns on whooper swan bills are unique to each bird, just like finger prints.

WHOOPE SWAN





This medium sized goose has a pink bill and pink feet and legs. The body is greyish with a darker head and neck. Pink-footed geese breed in Iceland and Greenland and fly to the Solway to spend the winter in the milder climate.

Did you know?

These are often the geese you see flying in large Vs and can be identified by their high pitched squawking calls to each other.



PINK-FOOTED GOOSE



The oystercatcher is a large, stocky, black and white wading bird with a long, orange-red bill and reddish-pink legs. Its bright colours make it an easy bird to identify.

There are not many oysters on the Solway anymore so they feed mainly on mussels and cockles using their long bill to break into the shells.

Did you know?

Oystercatchers have been known to live up to 40 years of age.

OYSTERCATCHER



The ringed plover is a small, dumpy wading bird with a brown cap, white forehead, a black mask around the eyes, orange legs and a short orange and black bill. It can be seen all year round on the Solway feeding on insects and crustaceans which it lures to the surface of the beach by tapping its feet on the ground to mimic raindrops.

Did you know?

If a predator gets too close to its nest, the ringed plover will pretend to have a broken wing to lure the intruder away.



RINGED PLOVER



Knot are a chunky, short wading bird with silvery-grey plumage on top and white underneath (red in summer) with short grey/green legs. Knot spend the winter on the Solway where they form large wheeling flocks of many thousands. They feed on shellfish and worms.

Did you know?

Some knot undertake one of the longest migrations of any animal from their Arctic breeding grounds to the coasts of Europe, Africa and Australia.

KNOT



Bar-tailed godwits are large, tall wading bird with a long beak. They have grey/brown plumage with a barred tail and white wedge on the rump and up onto the back. These birds breed in the far north of Scandinavia and Siberia but come to spend the winter on the Solway.

Did you know?

When they breed, both the male and female bar-tailed godwits care for the eggs and the baby godwits once they hatch.



BAR-TAILED GODWIT





The black and white barnacle geese found on the Solway Firth are the entire population of geese from an island group in the Arctic called Svalbard. These geese fly thousands of miles every autumn to spend the winter on the saltmarshes of the Solway, the main areas being Caerlaverock and Mersehead on the Scottish side and Rockcliffe Marsh and Newton Marsh on the Cumbrian coast.

Did you know?

It was thought that barnacle geese hatched from goose barnacles on the beach each year as the birds were never seen in the summer but suddenly re-appeared in autumn.

BARNACLE GOOSE



The curlew is the biggest UK wading bird and is easily identified by its long, down-curved bill, mottled brown plumage and long, bluish legs. The Solway Coast is one of the top sites in the country to see curlew as they are found in flocks of several thousands in the winter months especially January / February time.

Did you know?

A group of curlews is called a "curfew".



EURASIAN CURLEW



The goosander is a diving duck which feeds on fish in rivers and along the coast. It is a member of the sawbill family, so named as they have long, narrow bills with saw-like teeth for catching fish. The males have a green head, black and white body and red beak with a hooked tip while the females have a red head with a more grey body but similar beak.

Did you know?

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The goosander first colonised Scotland in 1871 but has spread across the UK since then.

GOOSANDER



Cormorants are large, black, long necked water birds with hooked beaks often seen around the coast on favourite roosting spots. They hold their wings out to dry in a distinctive pose, as their feathers are not waterproof. This feature, which seems a disadvantage, allows them to dive to greater depths to catch fish.

Did you know?

Cormorants can dive up to depths of 10 metres and hold their breath for 70 seconds.



CORMORANT





The shelduck is one of the largest ducks in the UK, growing as big as a small goose. It has a distinctive dark green head and neck, a red bill and a mostly white body with chestnut and black markings. They can be spotted all year round along the Solway feeding on invertebrates in the mud and sand but numbers rise significantly in winter.

Did you know?

Shelduck will nest in rabbit burrows or tree holes rather than on the ground. Young shelduck are often placed in a Crèche supervised by one or two adults.

SHELDUCK



Adult golden plovers have a summer plumage of black front surrounded by a band of white with a spotted-gold and black back and cap. In winter, the adults lose the black and have a yellow front. Golden plover spend the summer in the uplands but form large flocks in winter on the coast, often in the company of lapwings.

Did you know?

The Guinness Book of Records was founded in 1955 with one of the first records being a golden plover having flown at 60 miles per hour during a shooting party in Ireland.



GOLDEN PLOVER



A small, plump wading bird with grey back and white belly, black legs and a short black bill. They are characteristically light silvery grey in winter which helps distinguish from the similar dunlin. This bird doesn't breed in the Solway but fly from the Arctic breeding grounds to spend the winter here. They can be found on the long sandy beaches of the Solway, running up and down the shore with each passing wave, feeding on small marine worms, crustaceans and molluscs.

Did you know?

The sanderling is unique within wading bird species as it has no hind toe, giving it a distinctive running action.

SANDERLING



The dunlin, a small wader, forms large flocks on the Solway coast in winter, often mixed with ringed plover. They fly here from their breeding grounds in the uplands of Scotland and northern England. The small dull grey brown bird looks similar to the sanderling in winter plumage with a grey back and white belly but it can be identified by its bill which is slightly longer and curves downwards. They prefer the mud of the Solway to the sandy beaches.

Did you know?

There are at least 11 different races of dunlins in the world with three of them visiting the UK each year, each one at a different time.



DUNLIN



The redshank is a resident breeder and winter visitor to the Solway. It is a medium sized wader with distinctive red-orange legs, a medium-length bill with an orange base, brown speckled back and wings and paler belly. They are nervous birds and so are often the first to panic and give noisy alarm calls to other nearby waders.

Did you know?

The redshank find their food by sight and only rarely probe into the mud or sand.

REDSHANK



The turnstone is a medium sized wading bird with brown / black upperparts and a brown and white or black and white head pattern. They can be seen along the UK coast in small numbers on shingle or rocky shores for most of the year but don't breed here and are more commonly seen in winter picking over rocks looking for food.

Did you know?

The turnstone got its name from the habit of turning over stones, some as big as itself, to find insects, crustaceans and molluscs.



TURNSTONE



The grey plover is a winter visitor to the Solway, arriving in late summer / autumn from their breeding ground in the Arctic tundra. The pigeon sized bird has a brown/grey plumage with a white rump and black armpits under the wings which become obvious in flight. They are prone to disturbance and are usually the first shore birds to take flight.

Did you know?

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Away from their breeding ground the grey plover can be found on all six continents during winter.

GREY PLOVER



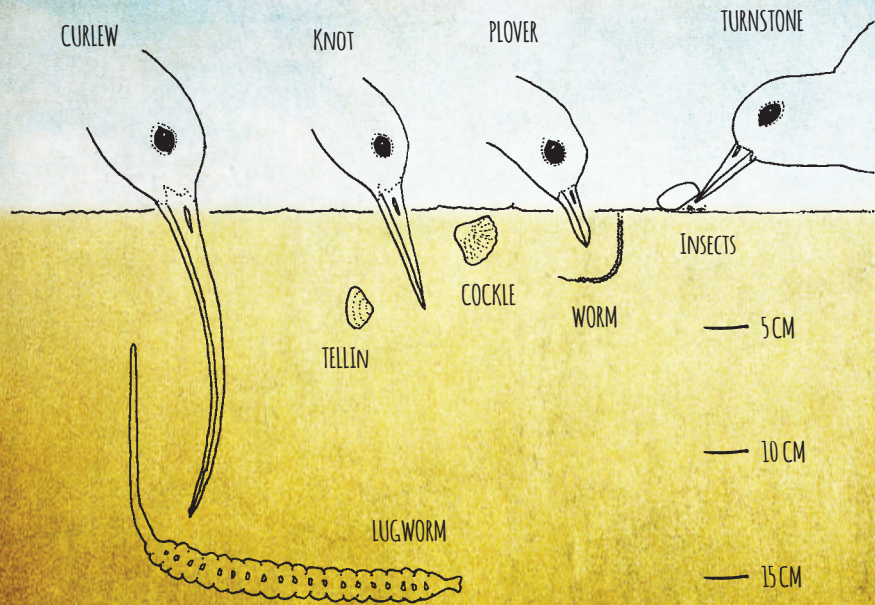
Lapwing have black and white plumage with shiny green on the upper part of the body and a black crest on top of the head. They are easily recognised by their 'peewit' call and their round winged, wheeling flight pattern. They are resident around the Solway and so can be seen all year round.

Did you know?

Lapwings are nocturnal, preferring to hunt during the night to avoid black headed gulls which often steal their food.



LAPWING



At high tide water covers the birds feeding areas so they are forced to move to drier ground along the edges of the estuary. Birds flock together in their hundreds or thousands in certain areas along the Solway; these are called high tide roosts. The birds need to conserve their energy so enjoy watching them at a distance without disturbing them.

DIFFERENT SIZED BILLS FOR DIFFERENT FOOD



WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS

- A** RSPB MERSEHEAD
- B** CAERLAVEROCK NNR
- C** WWT CAERLAVEROCK RESERVE & VISITOR CENTRE
- D** BOWNESS-ON-SOLWAY
- E** RSPB CAMPFIELD MARSH
- F** SILLOTH PUBLIC CAR PARK BY LIFE BOAT STATION
- G** SIDDICK POND LOCAL NATURE RESERVE
- H** WORKINGTON HARBOUR



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