

Environments 1: COASTLANDS:

Basic Information from 'Discovering Birds': Rob Hume

'RSPB'S guide to finding and enjoying birds in any patch of countryside anywhere in Europe': an excellent book with beautiful photographs of the various environments...

[Notes by Di Stagg: many other birds may be present; territories overlap. Specific sightings for each environment underlined. Other birds are happy in different sites.]

Although many set in Scotland, many sites (dunes, sandy bays, saltmarshes) also appropriate to Norfolk. Also migration routes.

Seabirds – that breed on North-Western remote islets:

Cormorants and Shags: upright prehistoric birds (literally – eg: feathers not waterproof, so need drying), black or near black. Hold wings out to dry. Look like crucifix in the air. Swim very low on water, tail up.

Gannets: large birds, found in huge close colonies on high cliffs. Only bird to dive from high in the sky at speed into the sea with a splash. Sky full of them. Huge beak, white with black wingtips.

Kittiwakes: huge noisy colonies, all cry out their name. Dainty gull-like birds.

Fulmers: flying gull-like gliders. Look for them by Cromer cliffs near top carpark!

West Coast Cliffs and bays, topped with natural rocky grass and wild flowers: Spring and early summer

Guillemots: look a bit like slim, long-necked black and white penquins with tapering beaks. Sit upright. Very fast flight; feet project past tail. Packed sea-cliff colonies. A smart bird: Very pointed beak; long body.

Razorbills: VERY black and VERY white; black bill has dainty white lines ('painted on it'); upright, dumpier.

Kittiwakes (seaweed nests); (see above)

Storm petrels: tiny flying sea swallows (house martin size); skim waves. Nest in holes between rocks and stone walls (they come in at dusk because they are badly predated); swallow/ bat-like flight low over waves.

Puffins: (tiny birds with the well-known multicolour 'painted' beaks. Comics, nesting in burrows in the grass. Excellent swimmers and divers from water-level (as compared to Gannets from high in the air)

Great and Lesser Black Backed Gulls: watch alone from nearby perches for the small birds.

Manx Shearwaters: Summer visitor; nest in holes in grassland at top. (They come onto land late on moonlit nights. Flight: stiff-winged, shallow beats, then glide, with rocking movement).

Little Owls: live amongst rock and hunt storm petrels.

Short-eared owls: hunt voles on grassy slopes.

Choughs: on cliffs and grassy cropped tops. (Crow with red legs and down-curved red bill. 'Plays' in air).

Scottish Isles – remote, with flat land round sheltered bays, lochs, reedbeds:

Farmland: twites (upland linnet, by sea in winter; sparrow-like finch; yellow beak; pink rump m.), stonechats, wheatears, buntings: corncrakes (rare, summer, old hay meadows; skulking; water rail size; streaky brown)

Hills: golden eagles (HUGE rare, flying 'barn doors'; 2meter wingspan; V-wings when soaring), grouse

Reedbeds: warblers, reed buntings (also known as reedlings: sparrow-like)

Lochs and quiet bays: Whooper Swans (winter) (tall, straight necked swans; yellow and black beaks); Greylag geese (resident); terns on islets; oystercatchers, mallards, common scoters (sea diving duck: males black, yellow on beak; fm brown).

Shallow lochs with lilies and rushes: coots, mute swans, red-necked phalaropes (very rare, summer; bobs and spins on water; very thin bill; thin neck; 'pretty' markings; mascara eye-stripe).

Far North-Western Coastal Pasture and farmland:

Sea Lochs: Winter: eider duck (black and white ducks with Roman 'noses'), mergansers (green-headed duck with thin, hooked beak), scaup, long-tailed duck, great northern divers (seabird: low in the water, black with white flecks, sharp beaks), red-throated divers, Slavonian grebe, razorbill.

Low Tide (beach): lapwing (green-black and white common plover with crest), redshank (shank = leg), curlew (tall wader with long curved beak and haunting cry), oystercatchers (b&w wader, med-long red beak, they pipe), dunlin (little fast waders), godwits (long-legged and long-billed wader),

High Tide (fields, saltmarsh): they move to roost.

Fields grassy: Barnacle geese (small black-necked, white faced, black bands on wings), Greenland white-fronted geese (rushy corners by stone walls: white 'noses')

Rough Pastures: snipe (dumpy, tiny headed wader with very long beak), curlew, lapwing, skylarks, black grouse (lek sites: where males show off)

Field edges, ditches, walls, gullies: Hen Harriers, merlin (summer), kestrel, marsh harriers ('our' birds-of-prey), buzzards, golden eagles.

North-western bleak, island moors:

Wet Areas: golden plover, dunlin, whimbrel (like curlew), curlew, oystercatchers, snipe, lapwing, red-necked phalarope.

Open Heather Moorland: meadow pipits, twite (streaked finch, tiny beak), wrens, rock pipits

Bleak Rocky Moors: snowy owls (very rare), Great skuas (gull-like, big heavy, vicious) arctic skuas

Tiny Moorland pools: red-throated divers, common gulls, lesser black-backed gulls

Slopes and tideline: arctic terns (terns are dainty, swallowlike gulls, black caps very alike)

Heather slopes: merlins (winter: smallest raptor), kestrels (russet brown, male's grey head, hovers), hen harriers (rare pale grey, slim)

Scottish Rugged Exposed coasts:

On the Sea: Black-throated divers; red-throated divers; Black Guillemots; eider duck (near seaweed edges), white-tailed Sea Eagles.

Stony Storm Beaches: (by pebbles) rock pipits; dunlin; turnstones; oystercatchers; curlew; (sandy stretches) sanderlings (whitish wader), bar-tailed godwits, knot (winter: medium wader, rufous underparts).

Old raised beaches (grass-covered): pied wagtails, starlings, jackdaws (near sheep); whinchats (in bracken)

Cropped Hillside: wheatears; ring ouzels (crow family); meadow pipits, crows, corncrakes (very rare)

Higher Hills: ravens; ptarmigan; golden eagles

North-western flat exposed coast: sheltered bays and inlets; small villages, fields –

Bays: eiders; red-breasted mergansers; WINTER: scaup, golden-eyed ducks; northern / red-throated divers.

Harbours: herring & great black-backed gulls; occasional glaucous & Icelandic gull

Exposed areas: FEW SMALL BIRDS: meadow / rock pipits; skylarks, wrens, starlings. Rock Doves (common)

Shorelines: Carrion crows, grey heron, redshanks, oystercatchers, curlew, song thrush.

Sheltered rocky shore & bay: black guillemots, cormorants. Occasional white-tailed eagle.

Heathery moor tops: SPRING: ring ouzels, wheatears, golden plover, curlew.

North-Western shingle beach: enclosed lagoons with brackish water; rough grazing

Lagoons: (Sheltered) little terns; common terns; Sandwich terns

Close-cropped coastal fields: wheatears

Shingle beach: ringed plovers, oystercatchers, little terns (all lay eggs in the shingle at the top of the beach)

Grass, sand, bracken and gorse: stonechats

Off-shore from Headland: gannets (diving); fulmars, terns, kittiwakes, Manx shearwaters;

Bays: eiders; mergansers, terns (fishing);

North-Western secluded sea loch surrounded by hills:

Low tide exposed seaweed: song thrushes steal winkles; rock pipits (thrushlike, smudged streaks not spots)

Stony, rocky and grassy shore: *oystercatchers* (nest, and 'pipe' in calm evenings)

Shoreline: *common sandpipers; curlews; redshanks; greenshanks; turnstones*

Sea loch: *eider ducks* (m. White and black sides and cap; fm. Brown; both have 'Roman nose'; say 'Ooo!'); *red-breasted mergansers* (grebeshaped, m. huge green, fluffy head; very thin straight beak with hook)

Coastal Woodland: *redpolls* (sparrowlike; m. with red on head and breast); *crossbills* (crossed beaks designed for getting seeds out of pinecones)

Rolling, rocky, grassy hills by loch: *buzzards, kestrels, golden eagles; occasional ospreys*

North-Western seabird breeding cliffs: order of ledges

High level predators (nesting): *peregrine falcon, white-tailed eagle, golden eagle, great skuas, Arctic skuas.*

Grassy slopes and debris: *puffins, Manx shearwaters, storm petrels, lesser black-backed gulls.*

High Ledges: *herring gulls (crowded); great black-backed gulls (isolated on pinnacles);*

High Earth ledges: *fulmars* (and fly close to cliff edge)

Cliffs by smooth turf: *choughs,*

Wide ledges towards top: *cormorants (and stacks); gannets* (crowded on broadest ledges)

Narrow ledges that run across cliff-face: *guillemots*

Deep crevices and caves: *razorbills; shags; stock doves, rock doves* (far north), *feral pigeons, jackdaws.*

Low wave-cut platforms: *kittiwakes*

Bolder scree and rubble at the foot of the cliff: *black guillemots; little auks* (seen in water close to cliffs)

Western headlands and sandy beaches:

Rise at the top of sandy beach with rough ground: WINTER: *black redstart*

Main beach: *variety of gulls* (resting in loose flocks), including occasional *glaucous* and *Mediterranean gull*

Pure sand and shoreline: *mainly sanderlings; also dunlins, curlews, bar-tailed godwit,*

Flying close to shore: *razorbills*

Flying further out to sea: *guillemots*

Rocks, groynes, piers that reach the sea: *turnstones* (very visible), *redshanks, purple sandpipers* (blend in)

Flying off prominent exposed headlands in gale: *fulmars, shearwaters, petrels, skuas, gulls*

Western headlands with rocky headlands and scrub:

In Bays with sandy bottoms: *common scoters* (autumn + winter); *divers; eider ducks, cormorants, shags*

Rocky slopes: *little owls* (nesting in cavities)

Rocky cliffs: *herring gulls* (nesting); *house martins; (rare) swifts* in narrow cavities; *ravens* (West); *jackdaws; choughs* (rare and localised); *rock doves* (far north); *feral pigeons* on the rest

Low, wave-cut rock platform: *waders: turnstones, purple sandpipers, curlews, oystercatchers*

Headlands: (off-shore; nearer to land in onshore winds): *gannets, fulmars, shearwaters, terns, auks; storm & Leach's petrels*

Gorse & rough ground on top: *stonechats; (summer): linnets, yellowhammers; wheatears* (spring, may nest)

Northern firth: headlands, soft estuaries, shallow sandy bays – also much of Norfolk

Far off Shore & in Sandy Bay: *great northern divers* (winter), 'rafts' of *sea ducks* (*long-tailed* (black and white), *eider, mergansers, common & velvet scoters* (black))

Sandy Beach: (winter) *sanderlings* (running whitish waders; short straight beak); *dunlin* (small brown; black belly (breeding) hunchback wader; short curved beak; very busy) *snow buntings* (beautiful brown-flecked white sparrows); *shore larks* (rare)

Rolling Dunes: *grey partridge; shelduck* (nest in burrows); *sandwich terns*

From Headland: (on strong onshore winds) passing *terns, gannets, skuas, shearwaters, fulmars.*

Marram Grass: *nesting shelducks, meadow pipits, skylarks; migrants* (goldcrests, redstarts, pied flycatchers, wheatears)

Chalk cliffs & Rough Grazing: English Channel

Outgoing Migrants following coastline in autumn: *swallows, linnet and chaffinch flocks; starlings in lines; kestrel, hobby*

Incoming Migrants in spring: *wheatears (short grass); pipits (rough spots); swallows; (rare) hoopoes*

On cliffs: *herring gulls; fulmars, kittiwakes (just a few colonies left); very few guillemots and razorbills; peregrine falcons (slowly returning after pesticide drop)*

Top of cliffs: *feral and domestic pigeons; kestrel*

Chalky fields: *red-legged partridge; skylark; corn bunting*

Offshore in Spring: *Arctic and pomarine skuas; scoters, divers, bar-tailed godwits, other waders (vast numbers)*

Dunes, links and sandy beaches: many parts of Norfolk – mud or rocks when tide out

Pure sandy beach: *sanderlings (shoreline); ringed plovers*

Slippery outcrops: *turnstones, curlew, dunlins, purple sandpipers*

Dry sand, shells, shingle: *nesting ringed plovers, little turns, Arctic turns*

Wet lower beach at low tide: *Brent Geese*

Pasture and saltmarsh: *greylag geese, wigeon, Whooper swans, Hen harriers, merlins*

Sand dunes: *skylarks, pipits*

Woodland patches: (Autumn and Spring) *passing migrants resting.*

Netherlands & parts of Norfolk coastlines: wet pasture, reedy swamps, shallow sea –

Shallow seas and freshwater pools: *avocet, spoonbills, little egrets, black-winged stilt, great crested grebe, teal, gadwall, pochard, wigeon, garganey ducks, shelducks, little gulls, common terns, black-tailed godwits*

Woods by dunes: *treecreepers, coal tits, long-tailed tits, nuthatches, long-eared owls, jays, magpies*

Reed and Willow mix: *reed and sedge warblers, reed buntings, bearded tits,*

Bushy Dunes: *stonechats, redstarts, skylarks, fieldfares and redwings, grasshopper warblers*

Quartering the reedbeds and pools: *marsh and hen harriers, kestrels, sparrowhawks near the woods*

Coastal Lagoon + shingle Islands and spits + gravel pits: English Channel has built-up beaches and after gravel extraction, freshwater lagoons appear

Gravel Pits: *great crested grebes; (spring) black terns (when they are black) and autumn (dull grey and white)*

Weedy, stony patches by water: *linnets, pied wagtails*

Shingle Islets and spits: *safe refuge for moulting (eclipsed) ducks late summer: tufted, mallard, pochard +, nesting common and little terns – rare Roseate terns, lapwings, coots, ringed and little ringed plovers*

Shingle with vegetation: *black-headed gulls, greylag geese, Canada geese*

Coastal Reserve: lagoons and islands: RSPB, NWT, reedbeds and scrapes, thickets

Isolated thickets: *nightingales, ring ousels*

Reedbeds: *bittern, bearded tits, water rails*

Reeded pools: *teal, gadwall, shovelers, mallards, coot, great grey heron, snipe (at the reed edges);*

Dead tree in marsh: *perching marsh harrier (they nest deep in reeds)*

Shingle islets: *breeding common terns, black-headed gulls, Sandwich terns,*

Open Lagoons: *Canada and greylag geese; shelducks, gadwall, shovelers, gulls*

Shingle edges and dry mud at water edge: *ringed plovers (nesting), lapwings, dunlin, little stint, ruffs, greenshank, curlew sandpipers*

Deeper water: *avocets, black-tailed and bar-tailed godwits, spotted redshanks*

CREAKS AND ESTUARIES: provide a sanctuary for migrating birds to rest and refuel –

Marsh and Muddy Creeks: West Norfolk / Suffolk: beach, muddy estuary, small quay –

Sea-front roads, quays, rocky embankments: *pied wagtails, turnstones (quite tame)*

Muddy Creek: *shelducks, curlew, whimbrel, black-tailed godwit, redshanks, ringed plover, black-headed gulls, oystercatchers, cormorants, grey and golden plover*

Edge of Saltmarsh: *rock pipits, reed buntings, skylarks, meadow pipits, Brent geese, black backed gulls*

Estuaries with coastal industrial development: Great Yarmouth (Braydon Water); Wash

Sewage outflows, piers, bridge supports (where tide stirs up food): *gulls, cormorants, red-throated divers*

Estuary mud at low tide: *feeding waders, gulls: dunlins, oystercatchers, black-headed gulls,*

Rough grassland; thistles, teasels, yellow-horned poppies: *barn owls, kestrels, merlins (autumn, winter), goldfinches on seeds*

Tideline, embankments: *(winter) snow buntings, skylarks, shore larks, rock pipits, (winter) assorted finches*

Gravel pits, borrow pits, clay pits: *wader roosts; pochards, tufted ducks, goldeneyes, smew (rare), grebes; (autumn) ruffs, greenshank, green sandpipers, other waders, black and common terns*

Estuary: sandbar and stream:

Water's edge and strandline: *cormorants (hang out their wings to dry); (winter) chaffinches, snow buntings*

Dry beach: *carrion crows;*

Mudflats (moving up beach with incoming tide): *gulls of all kinds; Mediterranean and little gulls on migration; all kinds of terns migrating also*

Sandbars: *oystercatchers, godwits, curlews, grey plovers (keep together in huge flocks)*

Close to shore: *grebes, divers eiders, scoters*

Stream Edge: *dunlins, sanderlings, knots, redshanks (near spartina grass)*

Wide Muddy Estuary:

Wide open mudflats: *knot, bar-tailed godwits, dunlin, golden and grey plovers (roosting)*

Marsh area: *hunted by sparrowhawks, merlins (winter), kestrels, peregrine falcons*

Smelly Strandlines on upper marsh: *greenfinches, chaffinches, brambling, reed buntings, linnets, sparrows*

Green sward: (winter) grazed by wigeon, mallards, gadwall, shovelers; (locally) pintails

Shallow marsh pools: *migration: ruffs, spotted redshank, greenshanks, curlew, sandpipers, little stints*

Saltmarsh sward with dangerous creeks and runnels: *rock pipits (winter); shelduck*

Coarse foot-high squelchy grass: *common snipe, Jack snipe; water rails*

Estuary: saltmarsh and mudflat:

Wet Mud: *dunlin, grey plovers, redshanks; knot and godwits prefer open mud*

Lower saltmarsh: *flocks of wigeon grazing; Brent geese; shovelers, mallard, pintails in deep creeks*

Strandline seaweed and stones: *carrion crows, twites, shore larks, snow buntings*

Sea beyond: *brent geese, goldeneyes, eiders, mergansers, grebes; many varieties of gulls*

Estuary: pasture and marsh – no saltmarsh, creeks in sheep-cropped grass

Hilltops: *meadow pipits, skylarks, ring ouzels, red grouse, peregrines, merlin, buzzards*

In lower hills: *redstarts, whinchats, tree pipits*

River's edge: *common and green sandpipers, greenshank (winter); little egrets; kingfishers; grey heron*

On the river: *red-breasted mergansers,*

Broad, wet freshwater marsh: *snipe, redshanks (summer); wigeon, Barnacle geese;*

Surrounding Rushy Fields: *curlews, pink-footed, white-fronted and greylag geese (winter);*

Lower Oakwoods: *redstart, wood warblers, pie'd flycatchers.*