

How to use this guide. Fold in half then in 3.

## THE GUIDE

The birds are arranged by type **Waders, Floaters, Fliers and Perchers** and then in descending order of size.

### How To Identify Your Bird:

•**Description** of the bird at the time or soon afterwards. Make a note of its shape and size, we suggest you compare it to a robin, blackbird, pigeon or goose in the Guide. Better still, is there another bird nearby that you know and can see at the same time?

•**Markings** - Are there any obvious markings you can see whilst the bird is resting or in flight - head markings and those on wings and tail are often crucial?

•**Habits** - Does it hop, walk or shuffle? Is it shy or bold? Does it perch on posts or run on the ground? Does it fly erratically, soar or flap heavily?

•**Habitat** is very important too. Is it in trees, bushes, grass or sand on dune, marsh, scrub or beach?

•**Listen** - is it calling occasionally, a lot or not at all? Is it loud, soft, squeaky or mellow?

If you get all this information you cannot fail to identify every bird you see!

**Binoculars:** Its worth spending £200 to get a decent pair. Avoid miniatures and big magnifications. Look for between 7 and 10x magnification and at least a 40mm objective lens - something like 8x40 is a good bet. Its worth buying them from birdwatchers who know what they are talking about. There are RSPB shops at the Leighton Moss and Conwy Reserves.

**Further reading:** There are dozens of good books and websites. Two of the best books are free when you join the RSPB. Why not go along to Marshside and get started?

### Websites:

[www.seftoncoast.org.uk](http://www.seftoncoast.org.uk)  
[www.rspb.co.uk](http://www.rspb.co.uk)



### When visiting the coast please follow the Coastal Code:

- Check tide times and the weather forecast
- Dispose of litter correctly
- Wear appropriate clothing and suitable footwear
- Protect yourself in the sun
- Keep dogs under control and clean up after them
- Leave flowers and wildlife for everyone to enjoy

*This leaflet is produced on behalf of the Sefton Coast Partnership by and with funding from Sefton Council. Text and some images provided by the RSPB*



## Nature & Wildlife

# Birds

## Coastlines Guide



This guide introduces a selection of the most commonly encountered birds to be found along the Sefton Coast.

The Sefton Coast:  
**a dynamic coastline**

**Key:** Time of year seen:

**W**= Winter **S**= Summer **Y**= Year-round

Approximate Size **+** or **-** :

**R**= Robin **B**= Blackbird **P**= Pigeon **G**= Goose

## The waders

### HERON **Y G**

The familiar fisher along the coast. It has a much smaller, rarer relative, the little egret, which is becoming more common now. This attractive white heron feeds on small fish.



©Steve Young

©Philip Green



©Angela Hargreaves

### CURLEW **W P+**

The biggest wader with an amazingly long, down-curved beak. Might be over-looked

but calls loudly too. The similar

whimbrel passes through in May and September. It is much smaller with a stripey head, a smaller bill and has a tittering call.

### OYSTERCATCHER **W P**

The unmistakable 'sea-pie' is found in thousands along Sefton's beaches in winter. It nests on local farmland too. They are fond of oysters but cockles will do. Bigger and brighter than the average wading bird.



©RSPB Images

### BLACK-TAILED GODWIT **W P-**

A silly name for an elegant bird. Very long legs and bill but not as big a bird as the curlew. Large numbers are found at Marshside. The bar-tailed godwit looks more like a small curlew and prefers the sandy beaches of Ainsdale and Birkdale.



©Mike McKavett

### LAPWING **Y P**

Also known locally as 'chewits' after their distinctive calls. Black and white wings, a stylish crest and butterfly-like flight make them easy birds to spot. Can be found nesting on undisturbed sites along the coast



©Tony Baker

### GREY PLOVER **W P**

A stunning combination of black, white, silver and grey (if seen in summer plumage on migration to and from Siberia). Many spend the winter here too when they really are just grey. The similar golden plover is a bit smaller and really is golden



©RSPB Images

### REDSHANK **Y P-**

Known as the 'watchdog of the marshes' for its loud anxious calls in the nesting season. Please call your dog to heel if you hear it - there may be chicks nearby!

The only wader with bright red legs (although the similar-sized ruff can sometime have orange legs. Ruffs show no white in the wing when they fly and are much more rarely seen).

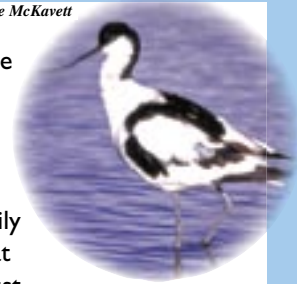


©Tony Baker

### AVOCET **S P-**

Boldly black and white like the oystercatcher but has much more sophisticated looks. Long legs and a very long upcurved bill make it unique. Once very rare indeed. Happily it can now be found nesting at Marshside from April to August.

©Mike McKavett



### SNIPE **W B**

Amazingly well camouflaged. Take off when you least expect it and go vertically and erratically upwards like a dangerous firework. A smaller snipe that takes off and lands again quite quickly could be the much rarer jack snipe.



©RSPB Images

### RINGED PLOVER **W B-**

A smart little relative of the golden and grey plovers. Many visit the beaches in winter. A very few birds still nest on our coast. Sadly, most have been frightened away by human activity.



©Steve Young

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### DUNLIN **W B-**

These pocket-sized waders are very numerous along the coast especially in the winter months. They breed up in the Arctic countries together with several similar species. Knots are larger

and dumpier

and can be seen in huge wheeling flocks of up to 20,000 birds. Sanderlings are much paler and usually less numerous. Little stints are even smaller and are much rarer.



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## The floaters

### CORMORANT W G

The big black bird with the slightly prehistoric look. Not liked by anglers who are jealous of this birds' far superior fishing skills. **Shags** are not seen away from deep water, (and so are rarely seen on this coast).



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### PINK-FOOTED GOOSE

#### Y G-

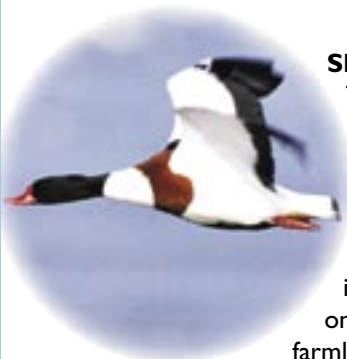
This is the small wild goose that passes overhead in thousands in the autumn. The larger **Canada** and **greylag geese** can be found in town parks and are with us all the year round. These birds are descended from domestic stock.



©Steve Young

### SHELDUCK W G-

The biggest duck around and with spectacular colours too. Feeds on the shore on shellfish. Moves inland to nest in rabbit burrows on the dunes and on farmland.



### WIGEON W P

A niosy gregarious duck found in thousands at Marshside in the winter months. They eat short grass on salt and fresh marshes. Wigeon have a melodic whistling call quite unlike the **mallard's** quack.



©Steve Young

©Steve Young

### SHOVELER W P-



The shovel-shaped bill gives this bird its name. It uses the bill to sift water for microscopic life. **Wigeon** and **shoveler** are much smaller than the **mallard** (the common British duck). The tiny **teal** is smaller still. You may flush teal from the smallest pool or splash along the coast in winter.

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©Mike McKavett

## The perchers

### STONECHAT Y R

The 'Robin of the Coast' is a scarce bird. Males have black heads and red chests and perch right on the top of the plant or bush.



©Mike McKavett

©Mike McKavett



Their name comes from their calls which are said to sound like a conversation between a couple of stones.

### REED BUNTING Y R

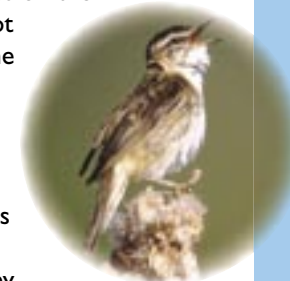
Black-headed like the **stonechat** but is streaky-brown with a much longer tail and a nervous twitch. Look for it in tall vegetation usually in damp places.



©RSPB Images

### LINNET Y R-

The abundant wild flowers along the coast provide plenty of small seeds for linnets and other finches like the goldfinch and the greenfinch. A little brown bird with striking crimson patches on the male. Should not be confused with the **stonechat** as it is much more timid and seldom sits still.



©Mike McKavett

### SEDGE WARBLER S R-

**Warblers** are summer visitors from Africa. This



©Mike McKavett

is a tiny, stripey brown bird with a noisy song in May and June. It lives in tall vegetation in damp areas. The plainer **whitethroat** is another warbler with similar habits found in drier scrub.

Both birds may do song-flight 'dances' which make them a bit more conspicuous (but only a bit).

# The fliers

## SHORT-EARED OWL

**W P+**

A winter visitor to the coast which may be seen during the day. It sometimes shares its saltmarsh hunting grounds with **hen and marsh harriers**, two rare birds of prey. All three species hunt for voles and small birds by slowly quartering the area and pouncing on their prey.



©Tony Baker



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## GULLS Y P+-

The 'official' 'sea-gull' is the herring gull, the big pale grey one that shouts from the

rooftops.

There are four

other gulls to see - **the greater black-backed gull** (*biggest and fiercest of all*), **the lesser black-backed gull** (*common in summer*), **the common gull** (*only common in winter*), **the black-headed gull** (*dove-sized with a black head in the summer*).



Common ©RSPB Images



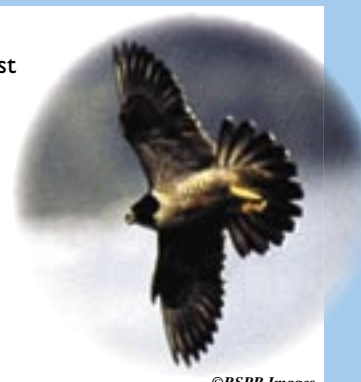
Lesser Black-backed ©RSPB Images



Black-headed ©Phil Smith

## PEREGRINE Y P+

Reputed to be the fastest bird in Britain. Carries out spectacular 70 mph dives onto its prey. Feed mainly on the small waders that are so numerous on the Sefton coast. Nest on steep 'cliffs', natural or man-made.



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## KESTREL Y P-

The bird of prey you are most likely to see. Its habit of hovering helps it to stay in one place long enough for it to spot a vole, mouse or beetle moving through the grass below.



©RSPB Images



Merlin ©RSPB Images



Greater Black-backed ©RSPB Images

## SPARROWHAWK Y P-

Hunts for birds rather than mice and flies fast and low to avoid being seen. The **merlin** is a winter visitor with similar habits but it has a short tail and pointed wings (the sparrowhawk has a long tail and rounded wings).



©Angela Hargreaves

## TERNS S P-

These 'sea-swallows' are the smaller, more elegant versions of the gull family that visit Britain in the summer. **Common terns** are truly the most common



Sandwich ©Steve Young



Common ©Steve Young

tern and can be found nesting at Seaforth. Sandwich, little and arctic terns are regularly seen from our beaches as they migrate from Africa to and from nest sites in northern Britain.

## SKYLARK Y R+

Famous for its sublime song. Try and spot the singing bird high above you on a sunny spring day- not easy. Can be a disappointment when seen well - it's a small streaky brown bird. It does possess a very fine crest which it erects when excited.



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