



Get close to birds

on National Nature Reserves

English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency. Working in partnership to conserve and enhance our landscapes and natural environment, to promote countryside access and recreation as well as public well-being, now and for future generations.

This is one of a range of publications published by: External Relations Team, English Nature, Northminster House, Peterborough PE1 1UA

Our Enquiry Service is the first point of contact for all general enquiries about English Nature and its work, and can provide information on careers in conservation including volunteering.

The Enquiry Service can be contacted on:

Tei: +44 (0)1733 455100/101/102

Fax: +44 (0)1733 455103

www.english-nature.org.uk

© English Nature 2005

ISBN 1 85716 890 9

Catalogue Code ST11.7

Designed by Coral Design Management, Peterborough.

Printed by Belmont Press on Evolution Satin, 75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, elemental chlorine free. 5M.

Cover photograph: Red kite. Paul Keene/Avico Ltd



Awarded for excellence



working towards *Natural England*
for people, places and nature

Get close to birds

on National Nature Reserves



National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are the 'jewels'

of England's wildlife and geological treasures. Those included here offer ideal opportunities for observing wildlife and especially birds.

The information in this booklet is arranged on a seasonal and regional basis making it a handy guide for both the casual visitor and serious birdwatcher.

More detailed leaflets are available for nearly all the NNRs described here and most sites have hides, trails and viewing areas. You can also find out more by visiting www.english-nature.org.uk (look in the Special Sites section) or by telephoning the local contact for the NNR (see index at back of booklet).

Above: Male redstart. John Clemens/English Nature
Left: Little egret. David Hosking/FLPA

Tips for successful birdwatching

- Be quiet. Birds have very good hearing and are startled by loud or sudden noises.
- Wear dull-coloured clothes – birds have excellent colour vision. Bright colours, such as reds and yellows, can alarm birds and make them harder to see so wear dark blues, browns or greens instead.
- Move slowly. Birds' eyes are attracted to sudden movement. If you move slowly and steadily, you are more likely to have good views.
- Plan the timing of your visits carefully. Woodland birds are usually much more active in the mornings whilst the middle of the day and afternoons are taken up with feeding. When visiting coastal areas, it is normally best to avoid low tides when the birds are often a long distance away from the shore – an incoming rising tide will drive them towards you.
- Summer can be a very quiet time when many birds go into moult (see page 3) and stay out of sight. In upland areas the season is very short and many species are confined to just a three-month period from April to June.



Spring and summer

Spring is the best time to see birds in England for many reasons. There are the resident birds, winter visitors ready for departure to more northerly breeding grounds and birds arriving from southern climes to breed in England. Try to visit woodlands in early May when all the migrants have arrived and before the leaves come out.



Birds can be scarce or difficult to identify in summer. Wildfowl go into a post-breeding moult phase known as 'eclipse' and woodland birds disappear into the canopy to search for food or skulk away in bushes to moult. There are still birds to be seen but the birdwatcher has to work a bit harder to track them down!

Why do birds migrate?

Migration is a risky business but the rewards can be worth it! The northern latitudes have much longer hours of daylight compared with the low latitudes and the tropics. This gives the birds more time for feeding and raising young.

North-East England

Castle Eden Dene

Green and great spotted woodpeckers are active here throughout the spring. Chiffchaff, willow warbler and blackcap arrive with grasshopper warbler in the coastal scrub. In late spring there are woodcock 'roding' over the woods in early evening.

The **northern brown argus** butterfly is on the wing in late June/early July on the headlands at Dene Mouth.

In summer the woodland can be quiet but there are little terns breeding at Crimdon a couple of miles south of the reserve and the coastal fields support skylark and grey partridge.

Lindisfarne

As the wintering birds depart they are replaced by spring migrants. Early sand martins, some of which stay to breed, are followed by wheatears and whinchats whilst the bushes come alive with chiffchaff and willow warbler. Thrushes and pipits move through the site and breeding birds such as lapwing and skylark patrol their territories

in the dunes. Along the coastline eider duck, rock pipit, arctic and little terns are starting to nest.



Little tern. Piet Munsterman/Foto Natura/FLPA

By July the breeding season is well underway and birds forage in the dunes amongst the diverse flora. Linnets and meadow pipits descend to feed on the seeds and invertebrates amongst the thousands of marsh orchids and helleborines. At The Lough little grebes with young can be seen next to families of shoveler, and on the intertidal sandbanks young common seals take to the rising tide. The island coast is alive with parties of shelduck and mergansers whilst offshore terns and gannets plunge into the sea for food. Fulmars on the cliffs and at the castle are bringing food to their offspring and waders, such as the ringed plover, begin to congregate on the open mudflats.

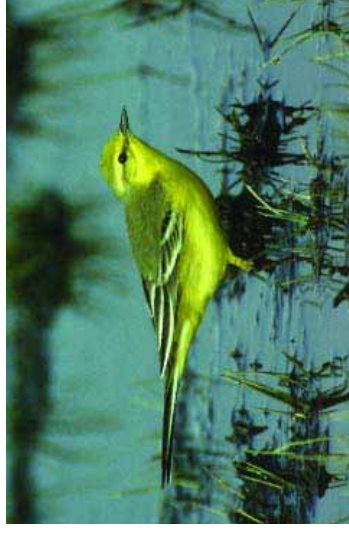
Moorhouse-Upper Teesdale

In early March golden plover, lapwing and oystercatchers return to their nesting areas. Curlew arrive a week or so later followed by redshank and snipe. Common sandpiper and a few pairs of dunlin and ringed plover follow from mid to late April. Black grouse can sometimes be seen in the hay meadows north of the B6227 at Langdon Common and red grouse are active on the moorland. The pasture just west of Widdybank Farm is a good place to see ring ouzels.



Black grouse. Mike Hammett/English Nature

A few pairs of peregrines breed locally and the small terns on the moorland have breeding wigeon, teal and some colonies of black-headed gull.



Yellow wagtail. Roger Wilmshurst/FLPA

June and early July are the best time for seeing wader chicks. By mid-July post-breeding wader flocks are evident and by mid-August the breeding season is effectively over. Twite are best seen in July when family groups move from their breeding territories on the heather moorland to pastures in the valley. Newly-cut hay meadows near Harwood-in-Teesdale are one of the best places to see the elusive passerine and this is also a good time to see yellow wagtails.

Ring ouzel. Michael Callan/FLPA



Yorkshire and the Humber

Duncombe Park

All three species of woodpecker can be seen here as well as the elusive hawfinch. By mid-April the residents are joined by pied flycatchers and redstarts. Dipper, grey wagtail and kingfisher can all be seen on the River Rye.

Hawfinch. Duncan Usher/Foto Natura/FLPA



Hawfinch is a late-nesting species and summer is a good time to pick out small family groups foraging in the tree tops for fruits, seeds and insects.

The Lower Derwent Valley

In spring the flocks of wildfowl, swans and waders move on to their breeding grounds on the Arctic tundra. Lapwing and curlew call

from the meadows and the song of skylarks can be heard overhead. Early morning or dusk heralds the sound of 'drumming' snipe and small numbers of mallard, teal, shoveler and gadwall can often be seen in aerial combat, squabbling over territorial disputes.



Gadwall. Allan Drewitt/English Nature

In summer screaming swifts fly over the area in search of food for their young and lapwing and curlew chicks search for food amongst the growing meadow grass. An occasional yellow wagtail can be seen along the drain sides and flood banks and reed buntings give their presence away by their plaintive calls. In the evening barn owls can be seen quartering the fields in search of voles and mice. During the late summer, marsh harriers from breeding areas on the Humber are sometimes seen.



Black-necked grebe. Diemar Nill/Foto Natura/FLPA

Thorne Moors (part of Humberhead peatlands NNR)

Spring sees the arrival of large numbers of warblers, including willow, sedge, grasshopper, reed and garden warbler with blackcap, lesser and common whitethroat all adding to the morning chatter of bird song. On the open water areas black-necked grebes are now a familiar sight.

June sees increased hawking activities from hobby and marsh harrier whilst late evening/night-time guided walks offer an opportunity to hear nightjar and grasshopper warblers and young long-eared owls calling their parents.

North-West England

Finglandrigg Woods

In spring departing redwings and fieldfares fly overhead and the first

chiffchaff arrives. The nuthatch is a recent colonist here and can usually be heard calling whilst warblers such as blackcap, garden warbler and willow warbler arrive. On early mornings and evenings the skulking grasshopper warbler can be heard 'reeling' from patches of rush pasture and scrub.

By mid-summer much of the breeding activity is over and the nestboxes are empty. Family parties of tits plus treecreepers and others move through the canopy searching for food. Newly-fledged buzzards fly over the wood and begin to seek out suitable territories for next year.

Grasshopper warbler. Frits van Daalen/Foto Natura/FLPA



Reed bunting. Nick Warts/English Nature 25,242

North Walney

Flocks of waders gather at the high tide roosts before beginning their spring migration northwards. Off the coast migrating sea ducks such as common scoter and eider can be seen whilst resident waterfowl start to nest on the pools – look out for mute swans, dabchicks, teal and tufted ducks. The reed fringes are full of reed buntings, and by late April are joined by sedge warblers. On sunny days wheatears move up the coast towards their breeding grounds in the Cumbria Fells, whilst rarer passage migrants in recent years have included hoopoe and dotterel. On the dune heath there are stonechats and meadow pipits and the air is full of the trilling songs of skylarks.

Song birds become quiet in summer but the low croaking calls of grey partridges can be heard over the marram-covered dunes.





Pink-footed geese. Peter Wakely/English Nature 15,330

The pools have broods of young ducks and swans while the occasional squeal of a water rail may be heard from the reed fringes. The Channel near the North Point is a good place to look for non-breeding eider ducks.



Redshank. Allan Drewitt/English Nature

The Ribble Estuary

Most wildfowl have departed for their breeding grounds by spring, although up to 1,000 pink-footed geese remain into May. Passage waders stop off here to 'refuel' before continuing their long flights northwards together with others that have over-wintered on the estuary. High tides push the birds close in-shore where they can be seen in breeding plumage. The calls and displays of breeding lapwing and redshank can be heard and seen on the saltmarsh.

In early summer the saltmarshes are a haven for ground-nesting birds. Careful searching from the seawall can reveal redshank, lapwings, oystercatcher and avocet. Gulls and terns breed in large colonies on the outer edges of the saltmarsh.

West Midlands

The Stiperstones

Display calls of the resident red grouse climax in early spring in areas of heather. Wheatears are, as always, the first migrants to arrive and can be seen on the rocky habitats of the ridge as well as ring ouzels which land in fields on the hill edge. By the end of April redstarts and tree pipits sing from trees at the heathland edge. Stonechats are present all winter and are joined by a few pairs of whinchat whilst reed buntings sing from the wetter spots.

By high summer young kestrels are testing their hunting skills over the heathland and recently-fledged buzzards call incessantly for food. Stonechats are feeding their second or third broods and the adults 'chat' anxiously from sprigs of gorse. Skylarks are still in song and meadow pipits abound.

Aqualate Mere

Flocks of redwing and fieldfares head north in spring and are followed by returning sand and house martins, swallows and swifts. Shelduck return to join resident mallard and tufted duck.

By late April reed, sedge and willow warblers can be seen and heard from the hide and osprey are regularly seen on their northward spring passage.

Curlew, lapwing, snipe and redshank all breed on the pastures to the west, north and east of the Mere.



Lapwing. Allan Drewitt/English Nature

Depending on weather conditions and insect abundance, in summer there can be thousands of swifts, swallows and martins hunting over the Mere. Grasshopper warbler can often be heard reeling from the thickets around the lake. Barn owls may also be seen quartering the eastern meadows during daylight hours.

East Midlands

Derbyshire Dales

There are six pairs of dippers spread along three miles of the River Lathkill and they are usually easy to see. Redstart and wheatear are



Dipper. Paul Hobson/Photo Nature/FLPA

widespread in all the White Peak dales. In June most of the resident birds are busy feeding young and by July grey wagtails are busy with second, or even third, broods.

Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes

Jack snipe is a winter visitor and in spring is replaced by migrants such as wheatear, chiffchaff, marsh and hen harrier, rock pipit, merlin, barn owl and little owl.

In summer the various warblers are feeding young whilst hobby and migrating osprey can be seen, as



Jack snipe. Mike Hammett/English Nature

well as passage waders such as green and wood sandpiper, spotted redshank, ruff, curlew sandpiper, greenshank and whimbrel.

The Wash

Brent geese depart in early spring but there are still some large flocks of wildfowl around including shelduck and teal, and waders such as dunlin, greenshank, lapwing, grey plover and oystercatcher. Skylark and meadow pipit return to breed and can be heard singing over the saltmarsh.

In summer the saltmarsh offers feeding and nesting areas for redshank, skylark and reed bunting. At high tide there are roosts of oystercatcher, curlew, godwits and dunlin. Marsh harrier can be seen hunting and there are also little egrets.

South-West

East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths

From April the woodland is alive with the song of blackcap, chiffchaff and willow warbler whilst grey wagtails and ravens are already nesting. By mid-April there are also pied flycatchers, redstarts, wood warblers and in May cuckoos displaying and calling on the moorland.

Trendlebere Down is alive with the song of skylarks and meadow pipits as well as Dartford warblers and whitethroats. Nightjars are the last of the migrant species to return and can be seen and heard at dusk from mid-May onwards.

By the end of June pied flycatchers have moved into the canopy and are extremely difficult to see. Noisy parties of small birds attract the attention of nesting

sparrowhawks the young of which hatch out just as the availability of these feathered 'take aways' is at its peak. Heathland in summer is usually more rewarding – species

During early May look out for **pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies** in the woodland clearings and also on Trendlebere Down.



Pied flycatcher. John Clements/English Nature

In July look out for **grayling butterflies** on the short grass of the mown firebreaks – although much more common on coastal sites they are found here in good numbers.

such as Dartford warblers are particularly noticeable as they 'scald' humans who wander too close to the nest sites. Displaying nightjars are usually double-brooded and carry on into August.

Wood warbler. John Clements/English Nature





Nightjar. Mike Hammett/English Nature

Hartland Moor

Migrant species are moving northwards through the site in spring and there is always a chance of seeing osprey. Resident heathland and coastal birds are starting to sing and display. These include Dartford warbler, stonechat, meadow pipit, raven and peregrine. Arrivals during April include wheatear, redstart, cuckoo, hobby and nightjar. In the small areas of reed the distinctive songs of reed bunting and Cetti's warbler can be heard, especially on warmer days.

Hartland really comes alive in the summer. Against the purple backdrop of the heath, Dartford warbler, meadow pipit and woodlark are very vocal especially

in the early morning. Hobbies are on the wing collecting food for their young and can be seen hunting dragonflies over the wetter areas of the heath. Shelduck nest in rabbit burrows and can be seen leading their fledged young on the overland 'trek' back to the coast.

Dartford warbler. Paul Keene/Avico Ltd



Corn bunting. Nick Watts/English Nature 25,236

At dusk the eerie 'churring' of the nightjar can be heard on the heath and 'drumming' snipe in the mire system.

Martin Down

Waves of warblers set up territories in the scrub and hedgerows from late March onwards. Chiffchaffs and blackcaps are the first arrivals, followed by willow warblers, whitethroats, lesser whitethroats and garden warblers. Other song birds include corn buntings along the Bokerley Dyke and nightingales in Kitts Grave and Hanham Hill. Cuckoos can turn up anywhere but the scrub near the Bronze Age camp is a favourite haunt.

Insects are also abundant here. Look out for the mean-looking **hornet robber flies** which hang round livestock dung waiting to pounce on dung beetles, or search the trackways for equally ferocious **tiger beetles**. The chalk grassland is outstanding for butterflies especially the **adonis blue**.

Birds of prey are abundant in the summer months. The resident buzzards, sparrowhawks and kestrels are often joined by hobbies and rare species such as Montagu's harrier, honey buzzard, red kite and marsh harrier, have all been recorded passing through the reserve in recent years.

Lesser whitethroat. Duncan Usher/Foto Natura/FLPA



Shapwick Heath

In spring drake gadwall, shoveler, teal, tufted duck and pochard can be seen in small groups in pursuit of females. The song of the Cetti's warblers explodes from the many reed beds and the secretive water rail, with its pig-like grunting and squealing, is heard but seldom seen. In late April the flooded scrape attracts passage waders such as



Water rail. Neil Bowman/FLPA

godwit, ruff, little stint and at least three species of sandpiper. Herons and egrets love the shallow water, and up to six different species have been recorded here. Swifts arrive in early May and up to 50 hobbies can be seen catching insects on the

Hairy dragonflies near water, **brimstone butterflies** in the woods and hornets along the paths are some of the other highlights in May.

can provide excellent views of hunting barn owls. Otters are frequently seen from the observation hides and young broods of garganey in the more overgrown pools.

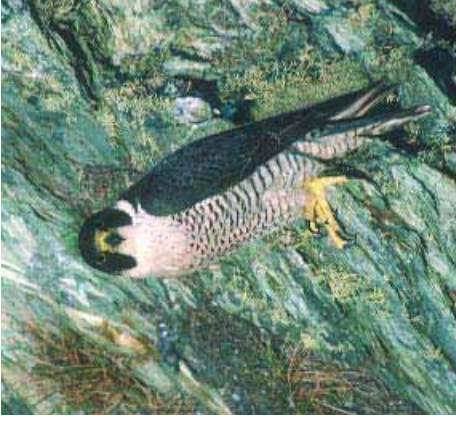
The Lizard

On the springtime cliffs the ravens have already built their nests, peregrines are checking out their old breeding sites and fulmars are taking up their positions on the ledges. Watch out for gannets heading north over the sea towards their breeding islands.



Chough. Mike Hammett/English Nature

The choughs nest at Lizard Point but the young from previous years may be seen anywhere on the western coastline between Lizard Point and Porthleven. Inland there are buzzards displaying and flocks of golden plover wheeling about in addition to cuckoo. As well as the residents, scarce migrants are always likely to turn up on what is



Peregrine. Mike Hammett/English Nature

the most southerly point in England.

In June the young choughs should have hatched and there is a flurry of activity on the cliffs as the adults search for food. Once fledged they gradually move further away from the nesting site and eventually link-up with their brothers and sisters from previous broods. Peregrines are also out hunting and from any coastal headland you can hear the growls of fulmars as they fly in and out from their breeding ledges.

Dartford warbler and nightjar are both found in the heathland areas and both are very vocal when they have young.

Spring is also one of the best times to see the coastal flora with masses of **spring squill** and **thrift** in flower as well as many national rarities.





Red kite. Paul Keene/Avico Ltd

South-East England

Aston Rowant

This is one of the best places to see red kites in England, sometimes in large numbers. There are buzzards and kestrels about so be sure to look out for the red kite's distinctive forked tail!

In early March the woods are full of the song of chiffchaffs. By mid-April the areas of scrub have other warblers such as blackcap, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat. In early May there are migrating ring ouzels and some of them stop for about a week before continuing northwards.

Red kites undergo a summer moult and often look distinctly 'ragged' at this time of year. A conspicuous bird on the downland in summer is the green woodpecker which is often seen feeding on anthills.

Lullington Heath

Migrants passing through include redwing and fieldfares on their way to cooler climes and wheatear and ring ouzel on their way west. The reserve is an oasis for breeding birds including migrants such as blackcap, garden warbler, chiffchaff, willow warbler, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat and nightingale.

Nightingale. Roger Wilmshurst/FLPA



Resident breeders include yellowhammer, bullfinch, song and mistle thrush and linnets. Grey partridge, skylarks and meadow pipits as well as the occasional corn bunting also nest on and around the reserve.

In July and August look out for some of our more **unusual butterflies** including grayling, dark green fritillary, chalkhill blue, Adonis blue and silver-spotted skipper.

North Solent

The Mediterranean gull first bred in the UK here, at Needs Ore Point on the mouth of the Beaulieu river. The site also supports 8,000 pairs of breeding black-headed gulls and the largest colony of breeding sandwich terns on the south coast as well as common and little terns. Redshank and lapwing breed in and around the saltmarshes as well as Cetti's, reed and sedge warblers and bearded tits.

As well as the resident breeding birds, summer is the time for the return of non-breeding and

Mediterranean gull. Hans Schouten/Foto Natura/FLPA



Black tern. Flip De Nooyer/Foto Natura/FLPA

passage waders including little stint and curlew sandpiper. Peregrine falcon is always likely to be seen hunting along the shore. There is a public hide at Needs Ore Point with disabled access.

Stodmarsh

The big flocks of lapwings and wintering wildfowl have declined by March. The first summer migrants arrive in the early part of the month with chiffchaffs, blackcap and garganey. Sand martin, the first sedge warblers and yellow wagtails arrive during the last week. Arrivals in early April usually include nightingale, willow warbler, reed warbler, whitethroat and little ringed plover. By mid-April large numbers of migrants start to arrive with swifts, hobby, swallow, house martin, common tern and turtle dove; then garden warbler and lesser whitethroat at the end of the month.



Garganey. Danny Ellinger/Foto Natura/FLPA

Large movements of swifts occur in early May and hobby numbers increase during the month with 30 to 40 regularly seen together. Ospreys and black terns are regularly recorded during the first half of May, as well as a mix of waders.

In late April/early May resident species are well into their breeding with bearded tits feeding young. Other resident breeding species include Cetti's warbler, marsh harrier, grey lag goose, cormorant and water rail.

By late June there are mallard, shoveler, lapwing, redshank, snipe and the rare garganey in the wet grazing meadows. By the end of the month returning waders include spotted redshank and green sandpiper.

Thursley

Displaying woodlark (February onwards) are a special feature of the site with up to eight nesting pairs.

East of England

Castor Hanglands

The scrub areas are full of breeding summer migrants including nightingale, willow warbler, blackcap, chiffchaff, whitethroat, lesser whitethroat, garden warbler, grasshopper warbler as well as turtle dove and cuckoo.

In June look out for the **black hairstreak butterfly** on blackthorn scrub – the caterpillars feed on the leaves and the adults are sometimes seen feeding on privet blossom.

The woodland has roding woodcock, treecreeper, nuthatch, tawny owl, all three native woodpeckers, long-tailed tit, coal tit, bullfinch and mistle thrush as well as sparrowhawk and jay.

Summer is a quiet time for birds in the woodland but the scrub areas still have good numbers of warblers and turtle doves.

Turtle dove. Nick Watts/English Nature 25,238



Stone-curlew. Geoff Higginbotham/English Nature

Cavenham Heath

Woodlarks are singing and displaying from late January/early February onwards and there are often large numbers of redwing, fieldfare and lapwing in pre-migratory gatherings. Arrivals from March onwards include stone-curlew, wheatear, tree pipit, nightingale, and grasshopper warbler plus reed and sedge warbler.

In summer there are occasional sightings of kingfisher on the river as well as nesting reed and sedge warblers. Hobby and buzzard both breed nearby and one or two green sandpiper and greenshank may be seen or heard from mid-summer along the river. Woodcock are 'roding' at dusk up until early July together with 'churring' nightjars.

Heathland butterflies are much in evidence with lots of **small heath** and **small copper**, plus good populations of **grayling** and **brown argus**.



Marsh harrier. Mike Hammett/English Nature

Holkham

By April most pink-footed geese have departed but up to a thousand will linger into May along with remnant flocks of other wintering wildfowl. The grazing marshes are alive with the evocative calls of lapwing and redshank, while shoveler, gadwall and other wildfowl also stake out their breeding territories. Marsh harriers are prominent and may be seen 'sky dancing' over the reedbeds and marshes. Passage waders move through the reserve from late March until early June and may include rarities, such as lesser yellowlegs or broad billed sandpiper. The woodland is a great

place to be in the spring with resident warblers and occasional passage and scarce migrants like golden oriole and wryneck.

By late April common, little and sandwich terns may be seen on the beaches where oystercatchers and ringed plovers are already nesting.



Avocet. Allan Dewitt/English Nature

By June there are many lapwing, redshank, avocet and wildfowl chicks on the grazing marshes. These have to run the gauntlet of many predators including marsh harrier, kestrel and sparrowhawk. Reedbed songbirds are extremely active whilst bearded tits and reed buntings may also be found here along with water rail. On the beach, terns are constantly back and forth taking sandeels and



Bittern. Mike Hammett/English Nature

fledging bitterns and marsh harriers. Later in the summer young bearded tits form flocks of up to 200 to roam above the reeds. On the heaths the churring of the nightjars dominates warm evenings, whilst hobbies' acrobatic flights punctuate the days.

Late night or early morning forays can startle **otters** and **badgers** on undisturbed paths, whilst in the sun **silver-studded blue butterflies** can be seen on the flowering bell heather.

In early summer the secretive bittern is seen more often as it takes food to its young. This is followed by the crashing early flights of



Bearded tit. Tony Hamblin/FLPA

Autumn and winter

Autumn is all change as many birds go into moult while others migrate. Coastal areas provide the best birdwatching

opportunities but some inland sites with open water are also worth checking. The arrival of wintering fieldfares and redwings in mid-autumn signals the end of summer and the onset of short days.



Because of its relatively mild climate and long coastline and estuaries, England is a major wintering area for birds from the European mainland. Inland areas are usually less productive with regards to birdlife but there are still some surprises, especially in cold weather.

North-East

Castle Eden Dene

Easterly winds in autumn can produce good falls of migrants at the coast especially if there is rain as well. Short-eared owls and stonechat return for the winter whilst whinchat are ready to depart. There are often large numbers of terns heading south and a possibility of seeing skuas and shearwaters from the coastal headlands.

Large numbers of common birds are seen on the feeders. On the coast, oystercatcher, redshank and turnstone are found on the beach and great crested grebe, common scoter and red-throated diver on the sea.

Pale-bellied Brent goose. Roger Tidman/FLPA



short-eared owl. Duncan Usher/Foto Natura/FLPA

Lindisfarne

Large flocks of waterfowl begin to gather. Pale-bellied Brent geese arrive from Spitzbergen in September and are joined by other internationally-important species such as wigeon, grey plover and bar-tailed godwit. Mallard, pintail, and pink-footed geese are also much in evidence. On the land other migrants arrive in their thousands and the bushes are full of goldcrests, warblers, redwings and fieldfares.

In winter over 50,000 waders and wildfowl throng the mudflats, with redshank, curlew, dunlin and knot feeding next to shelduck, whooper swans and roosting greylag geese. On the saltmarshes flocks of twite and skylark try to avoid hunting merlin and peregrine whilst in the dunes small mammals fall prey to short-eared owls. Turnstone and oystercatcher are busy foraging on



Whooper swan. Peter Wakely/English Nature 20,465

the rocky shore and on the open sea red-throated divers and red-necked grebes feed next to parties of long-tailed duck and common scoter.

Moor House-Upper Teesdale

In September most of the waders have left for lower ground but Cow Green Reservoir attracts a few migrant waders such as whimbrel and greenshank whilst the moorland sees the arrival of wintering raptors.



Snow bunting. Hannu Hautala/FPA

The winter moorland can be bleak but the red grouse form larger flocks and black grouse can still be



Lesser spotted woodpecker. John Clements/English Nature

seen on Langdon Common. A few hen harrier, merlin and short-eared owl can be seen on the higher ground as well as peregrine and the occasional goshawk, red kite and rough-legged buzzard. Snow buntings are also a possibility on the higher ground and bramblings and siskins can be seen in the woodlands.

Yorkshire and the Humber

Duncombe Park

The departing summer visitors are replaced by fieldfares, redwing and woodcock. When the trees start to lose their leaves there is always the chance of seeing lesser

spotted woodpecker and hawfinch. Winter sees the usual resident birds plus over-wintering redwings, fieldfares and bramblings. Late February can be a good time to see and hear displaying lesser spotted woodpecker.

Lower Derwent Valley

Various warblers are seen as they pass through the willow copses, alder woodland and hedgerows. Hirundines follow the river valley south but hundreds rest overnight in nearby fields of maize. Large numbers of golden plover and lapwing are evident and the first returning whooper swans are usually seen flying over in October.

Wigeon arrive in thousands from their breeding grounds in Iceland and northern Europe to graze the short grass on the edge of the flooded areas. Pintail, goosander and teal are usually seen and, depending upon the depth of flooding, diving pochard and tufted duck are also present.

Goldeneye. Wil Meinders/Foto Natura/FPA



Wigeon. Mike Hammett/English Nature

Mid-winter can be a good time to see 'grey geese', either flying over the valley or feeding in adjacent fields. Goldeneye regularly occur on the river and occasionally smew. During the late winter months numbers of wildfowl can be as many as several thousand.

Thorne Moors (part of Humberhead Peatlands NNR)

Huge numbers of hirundines gather to feed on the masses of insects in order to build up much-needed energy before their long-haul flights to their winter residence.

Large numbers of winter thrushes build up on the edges of the site and there are hen harriers, peregrine falcons and merlins as well as the resident species. Wader numbers are also good with large flocks of lapwing present of which increasing numbers are staying on to breed.



North-West

Finglandrigg Woods

In October winter thrushes return and are joined by the occasional brambling. Willow tit, a speciality of the area, can be found within mixed flocks of tits and other small passerines.



Willow tit. Duncann Usher/Foto Natura/FLPA

In autumn and winter large groups of tits roam through the woodland and this is the best time of year to get views of the diminutive goldcrest. Flocks of redpoll and siskin hang acrobatically from the birch and alder trees whilst jack snipe is a rare visitor to Little Bampton Common and the damp pastures.

North Walney

By early September most of the summer visitors will have departed, leaving the stonechats and reed



Twite. Derek Middleton/FLPA

buntings in sole occupation of the dune heath and reedy pools. The coast often provides views of passage birds like skuas, while the first flocks of arctic waders begin to arrive on the extensive sand flats on the seaward side of the island.

From late September large flocks of oystercatchers, curlews and dunlins fly in to roost at high tide as well as the first sanderlings, scuttling along the very edge of the tide.

Winter highlights include small flocks of snow buntings and twite that feed on the strandlines left by the high autumn tides. The Walney Channel and seaward sand banks are scattered with wading birds feeding on the wide inter-tidal stretches. As the tide begins to turn, thousands of oystercatchers, curlew, dunlin, sanderling and knot move to safe roosting areas.

The Ribble Estuary

Most waders returning from their breeding grounds in the Arctic use the estuary to feed and rest before continuing southwards, whilst some will remain all winter. Wildfowl return from September onwards – wigeon come from eastern Russia, whooper swans and pink-footed geese from Iceland and Bewick's swans from Siberia.

The estuary is the most important wildfowl site in the UK and is at its best in winter. At dawn and dusk thousands of wigeon, teal, shoveler and pink-footed geese can be seen as they fly to and from the saltmarsh to feed and roost. The spectacle of 150,000 wading birds on the estuary is best appreciated at the high tide roosts at Southport, Marshside and Lytham and St. Annes.

Bewick's swan. Mike Hammett/English Nature



West Midlands

The Stiperstones

This is a good time to see ring ouzels as they profit from the abundant rowan berries on their way south. Others on the move may include hen harrier or short-eared owl, with fieldfares and redwings arriving from October.



Red grouse. Derek Middleton/FLPA

Winter is a quiet time in the uplands with just a few hardy residents such as red grouse, joined by occasional visitors. This is a good time to see ravens and buzzards and there is always the chance of a peregrine or red kite.





Shoveler. Allan Drewitt/English Nature

Aqualate Mere

By late August, flocks of swallows and other hirundines assemble prior to autumn migration. Wintering wildfowl numbers build up with shoveler reaching peak numbers during September and October and increasing numbers of pochard, wigeon and teal. A large roost of lesser black-backed gulls starts to assemble and there is the chance of seeing an occasional osprey on autumn passage.

In winter, marsh and willow tits are regular visitors to the feeder at the reserve's hide. Huge numbers of roosting starlings start to assemble over the Mere just before dusk, often attracting sparrowhawk and peregrine. Barn owls regularly hunt over the eastern meadows and

may be joined by the occasional short-eared owl and hen harrier.

Wintering bittern are also regularly seen from the hide where there is also a good chance of seeing or hearing the distinctive squeal of water rail.

East Midlands

Derbyshire Dales

Following the departure of the summer migrants, October brings the winter thrush flocks feeding on the hawthorn. Little owls, perched on the drystone walls, are often obvious at this time of year.

Ravens (which have only recolonised here in the last ten

years) are very obvious around the limestone outcrops and dippers are easy to see because of the lack of bankside vegetation.

Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes

There is a great variety of migrant birds, especially during easterly winds, with over 220 recorded species.

In cold conditions there might be twite, snow and Lapland buntings feeding on the seedheads of samphire and other saltmarsh plants. Predators include hen harrier, peregrine, merlin as well as short-eared and barn owl.

Little owl. Mike Hammett/English Nature



Ringed plover. Mike Hammett/English Nature

Ringed plovers and sanderlings eat the small sandhoppers and shellfish found at the edge of the sea, curlew probe the mud for lugworms and dark-bellied Brent geese graze on the saltmarsh.



Pintail. Danny Ellinger/Foto Natura/FLPA

The Wash

The arrival of wintering species includes dark-bellied Brent geese, pink footed geese (from Iceland and Greenland), pintail, wigeon, curlew, oystercatcher, knot, godwits, golden plover, lapwing and many others.

Dark-bellied Brent geese. Allan Drewitt/English Nature



Winter is the best time to witness huge flocks of waders and wintering wildfowl which are hunted by hen harrier, merlin and peregrine. Dark-bellied Brent geese are found on the saltmarsh and pink-footed geese feed on the sugar beet close by. Large flocks of twite and linnet are also seen.

South-West

East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths

By November the flocks of redwing and fieldfares start to return and set to work on the rowan and holly berries. The colder the weather in the north, the more of these birds there are. They may be joined by flocks of

siskins and redpolls which feed on the birch trees. Out on the heath and moorland there are only the resident Dartford warblers and meadow pipits plus the occasional over-wintering stonechat.

Feeding at the Yarner Wood hide takes place from November to mid-March and provides close up views of common species such as marsh tit and great spotted woodpecker. By February the days start to get longer and this is the best time for seeing the elusive lesser spotted woodpecker which starts drumming and displaying.

Hartland Moor

Autumn is the time to see migrant birds such as fieldfare, cuckoo, hobby, swallow, nightjar and wheatear heading for warmer pastures. Migrant osprey can be seen as they stop off to fish in the adjacent Poole harbour whilst occasional hen harrier and merlin move in the opposite direction to spend winter on the heaths.

Winter is usually a quiet time on Hartland but hen harrier and merlin can sometimes be seen going to roost together with the occasional great grey shrike and marsh harrier.

Martin Down

Early autumn is a good time to see coveys of grey partridge and families of stonechats in the rough grassland and scattered scrub bushes on the open down. October brings the first winter visitors and redwings and fieldfares plunder the berries in the scrub and insects in the neighbouring farmland.

In winter large flocks of linnets, goldfinches and meadow pipits gather in the open rough grasslands and gorse scrub. Winter also brings more predators including short-eared owls, merlin, peregrine and hen harriers.

Grey partridge. Terry Andrewartha/FLPA





Young hobby. Dietmar Nill/Foto Natura/FLPA

Shapwick Heath

This is the prime time for seeing unusual waders such as lesser yellowlegs, pectoral sandpiper and Temminck's stint, together with abundant wildfowl. Young hobbies are very obvious in September, catching darter dragonflies along the over-grown ditch edges. Good numbers of wildfowl are seen daily from the observation hides at this time of year.

One of the most spectacular wildlife events in the country is the winter starling roost at Shapwick. From November onwards the number of starlings increases

(particularly in hard weather) to a staggering five to ten million birds. They first arrive from their daytime feeding grounds on the wet pastures of the Somerset Levels, around half an hour before sunset. Small groups of birds gather gradually in the sky until they form into one massive ordered flock before funnelling down to their vast roost in the reeds.

Winter wildfowl include wigeon and teal in large numbers flying from one marsh to another. In the woodland, large flocks of siskins and redpolls are sometimes joined by bramblings as they feed in birch and alder trees. The elusive bittern is most likely to be seen after hard winter weather on the Continent.

Teal. Allan Drewitt/English Nature



The Lizard

The choughs move further afield to areas where there is still some coastal grazing and cow pats under which they find much of their food. Inland at Croft Pascoe Pool, on Goonhilly Downs, are flocks of migrating swallows feeding up before their long journey south. If you walk across the downs you may flush snipe and woodcock from under your feet. As in spring scarce migrants are always likely to turn up at this time of year.

In winter there are still ravens on the coast but the choughs could be



Winter starlings. Will Meinders/Foto Natura/FLPA

anywhere between the Lizard and Lands End! Inland there are hundreds of snipe and woodcock on the heaths and occasional hen harriers over the downs.

Brambling. Duncan Usher/Foto Natura/FLPA





Woodcock. Peter Wilson/Foto Natura/FLPA

South-East

Aston Rowant

Departure of the summer migrants brings a lull in activity as winter visitors arrive and red kite numbers build up for the winter.

The kites are particularly conspicuous in the winter months when they gather in large groups around communal roosting sites close to the reserve. Hawthorn and other berryed shrubs are popular with redwings and flocks of bramblings are regular visitors to the beechwoods in December and January.

Lullington Heath

Autumn swifts, swallows, house martins and the occasional late hobbies can commonly be seen hunting insects over the reserve as they head south with other migrants.

Finch flocks are a common sight on and around the reserve particularly when winter stubbles are left in neighbouring fields. Marsh harrier are sometimes seen quartering the area and roosting woodcock are often flushed.

North Solent

Following the departure of the breeding summer migrants there is

a build-up of wintering waders and wildfowl including large numbers of dark-bellied Brent geese and little egrets.

Stodmarsh

Little egrets may be seen throughout the year but are most numerous at this time and large numbers of wildfowl arrive including wigeon, teal, pintail and white-fronted geese. Because of its close proximity to the coast and Continent, many migrant species are recorded. Those seen annually include osprey, hobby, whimbrel, black tern and spotted redshank.

Large numbers of wildfowl are present in winter and if the weather is severe in December and January, wild geese and swans arrive in good numbers. Up to a dozen hen

White-fronted geese. Allan Drewitt/English Nature



Little egret. Henk Heerink/Foto Natura/FLPA

harriers may gather together in a communal roost and short-eared owls are regularly seen.

Thursley

The heathland is fairly quiet but passage migrants can include common as well as occasional green sandpipers, merlin and red kite.



Great grey shrike. Flip de Nooyer/Foto Natura/FLPA

In winter the usual resident birds are often joined by great grey shrikes and are sometimes joined by hen harrier, peregrine and merlin.

East of England

Castor Hanglands

Flocks of redwing and fieldfares arrive to feed in the scrub and on the open grassland. Green woodpeckers feed on meadow ants' nests and hobbies are regular late visitors feeding on dragonflies.

Berries in areas of scrub attract wintering flocks of tits and finches, yellowhammers, linnets and redpolls. Winter parties of crossbill and goldcrest are sometimes found in the woodland whilst woodcock are regularly flushed.

Cavenham Heath

Winter thrushes arrive in October, plus small flocks of meadow pipits and skylarks. There are often up to 50 yellow wagtails on passage.

Flocks of meadow pipits and stonechats overwinter in small numbers. In cold weather there are sometimes large numbers of fieldfares and redwings. Winter also brings the occasional surprise such as a great grey shrike.

Holkham

South-easterly winds in early September bring the first sprinkling of migrant songbirds, and pied flycatchers, redstarts and the common warblers may be present in good numbers. Rare songbird migrants are an annual feature at Holkham and may

Arctic warbler. S&D&K Maslowski/FLPA



include greenish or arctic warbler early on, followed by Pallas's, dusky and yellow-browed warblers. By late October winter thrushes along with brambling and siskins make their landfall on the reserve. Great grey shrikes and rough-legged buzzard may also appear.



Shore lark. Richard Brooks/FLPA

As the winter progresses pink-footed geese increase in number to over 50,000. They perform spectacular morning and evening flights and are easily observed from Lady Ann's Drive. Bittern is usually present at the Meols House reedbed from October onwards and firecrests may be found, together with other wintering songbirds, in the adjacent woodland. On the beach, large flocks of snow bunting, shorelark and twite may be found from October to April and these may attract the attentions of merlin and sparrowhawk.

Walberswick (Suffolk Coast NNR)

Early autumn sees a congregation of swallows and martins feeding over the reedbeds prior to migration, whilst other passage migrants drop in to the pools around the Blyth estuary. Later on, the wildfowl and waders build up on the mudflats and grazing marshes with up to 700 avocets joining the flock of wigeon, teal and pintail. Hen harrier also arrive at their wintering roosts on Westwood marshes.

Joining the autumn arrivals are flocks of dunlin and knot, redshank and ever-increasing numbers of black-tailed godwits. Twite and snow bunting can be found on the saltmarshes and foreshore. Over-wintering marsh harriers sometimes join up with hen harriers to hunt the heaths whilst the over-wintering Dartford warblers huddle in the gorse.

Black-tailed godwit. Allan Drewitt/English Nature



NNR

site details

Yorkshire and the Humber

Region	
NNR	Duncombe Park
County	North Yorkshire
Location	1.5 km west of Helmsley on the A170.
Contact details	Tel: 01904 435520
NNR	Lower Derwent Valley
County	North Yorkshire
Location	There are three main car parks and access points, two are near Wheldrake and the other is at North Duffield.
Contact details	Tel: 01904 435520

NNR	Thorne Moors (part of Humberhead Peatlands NNR)
County	South Yorkshire
Location	8 km north-east of Doncaster.
Contact details	Tel: 01924 334500

North-West

Region	
NNR	Finglandrigg Wood
County	Cumbria
Location	13 km west of Carlisle on the B5307 road to Kirkbride.
Contact details	Tel: 01697 350005
NNR	North Walney
County	Cumbria
Location	From Barrow-in-Furness follow the signs to Walney Island. The car park is located at Earnse Point.
Contact details	Tel: 01539 531604

North-East

Region	
NNR	Castle Eden Dene
County	Durham
Location	Signposted from the A19 and from Peterlee town centre.
Contact details	Tel: 0191 586 0004

NNR	Lindisfarne
County	Northumberland
Location	Holy Island (Lindisfarne) is signposted from the A1 south of Berwick-upon-Tweed.
Contact details	Tel: 01289 330773

NNR	Moor House-Upper Teesdale
County	Durham
Location	Follow the B6277 road westwards from Middleton-in-Teesdale for about 11 km to the Langdon Beck Hotel. From here a minor road leads to the car park at Cow Green Reservoir.
Contact details	Tel: 01833 622374

North-West continued

Region
NMR
County
Location
Contact details

The Ribble Estuary
Lancashire
Area can be viewed from coastal roads east of Southport and Lytham.
Tel: 01704 225624

West Midlands

Region
NMR
County
Location
Contact details

The Stiperstones
Shropshire
The reserve is 3 km east of the A488 which runs parallel to The Stiperstones ridge. By car, access is via minor roads from the A488. There is a number of car parks in the area, the main NNR car park being found on the road to Bridges village.
Tel: 01473 282000

Region
NMR
County
Location
Contact details

Aqualate Mere
Staffordshire
The reserve is situated 1.5 km east of Newport (Shropshire). The reserve is crossed by footpaths and bridleways.
Tel: 01473 282000

East Midlands

Region
NMR
County
Location
Contact details

Derbyshire Dales
Derbyshire
The reserve consists of five limestone valleys in the Peak District National Park. It is well served by public rights of way.
Tel: 01629 816640

Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe Dunes

County
Location
Contact details

Lincolnshire
The reserve can be accessed from seven car parks all located a short distance from the A1031 between Saltfleet and Mablethorpe.
Tel: 01507 338611

The Wash

County
Location
Contact details

Lincolnshire
The reserve is north-west of Kings Lynn along the southern edge of The Wash. There are public footpaths along the seawall in Lutton Outmarsh and between the Rivers Nene and the Ouse.
Tel: 01553 818500

South-West

Region
NMR
County
Location
Contact details

East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths
Devon
The reserve lies on the road from Bovey Tracey towards Becky Falls and Manaton. Yarnor Wood is approximately 3 km from Bovey Tracey. There are roadside car parks where the road crosses Trendlebere Down (SX 778787). The Yarnor Wood car park is open from 8.30 am until 7 pm (or dusk if earlier).
Tel: 01626 832330

Hartland Moor

County
Location
Contact details

Dorset
Hartland Moor is approximately 3 km south-east of Wareham adjacent to the A351.
Tel: 01929 557450

South-West continued

- Region
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- Martin Down**
Wiltshire
The reserve is 14 km south-west of Salisbury, 1 km south-west of the village of Martin Drove End. The northern part of the site is crossed by the A354. There is a car park on the A354 and another on a minor road from the village of Martin, 1 km east of the reserve.
Tel: 01980 620485
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- Shapwick Heath**
Somerset
The reserve is 1 km north of Shapwick village and 7 km west of Glastonbury. By car, access to the site is via minor roads from the A39 and B3151. The nearest car park is at the Peat Moors Centre, 0.5 km north of the NNR's main entrance.
Tel: 01458 860120.
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- The Lizard**
Cornwall
By road The Lizard peninsular lies to the south of Helston and is accessed via the A3083 (from the A394) and the B3293.
Tel: 01326 240808

South-East

- Region
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- Aston Rowant**
Oxfordshire
Aston Rowant is 15 km north-west of High Wycombe and 22 km south east of Oxford. The reserve straddles the M40 between junctions 5 and 6. By car, access to the reserve is via minor roads from the A40.
Tel: 01844 351833
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- Lullington Heath**
East Sussex
Lullington Heath is 7 km north-west of Eastbourne on the northern fringe of Friston Forest, 1.5 km west of Jevington village and 1.5 km east of Litlington village. Jevington and Litlington are accessed via minor roads from the A259 and A27.
Tel: 01273 476595
- NNR**
County
Location
Contact details
- North Solent**
Hampshire
The Beaulieu River is 8 km west of Southampton Water and 8 km east of the town of Brockenhurst. By car, access to the reserve is via minor roads from the B3054. The nearest parking is in Beaulieu and the village of Bucklers Hard (2 km to the south).
Tel: 023 8028 6410.

South-East continued

Region	
NNR	Stodmarsh
County	Kent
Location	The reserve is on the Great Stour river south of, and almost immediately adjacent to, the A28, midway between Canterbury and Margate. The nearest villages are Upstreet on the A28, and Stodmarsh, 1 km to the south. The nearest car park is in Stodmarsh. By car, the village is accessed via minor roads from the A28 and A257.
Contact details	Tel: 01233 812525
NNR	Thursley
County	Surrey
Location	The reserve is immediately north of the village of Thursley, 5 km south-west of Milford and 8 km south-west of Godalming. To the east the reserve is bounded by the A3 and to the south by a minor road from the A3 to Thursley village. The reserve's western boundary is the minor road from Thursley to the town of Elstead. By car, access to the reserve is from these minor roads.
Contact details	Tel: 01273 476595

East of England

Region	
NNR	Castor Hanglands
County	Cambridgeshire
Location	Castor Hanglands is 3 km north of the villages of Ailsworth and Castor and 7 km west of Peterborough. There is car parking close to the reserve on Heath Road, connecting Ailsworth and Helpston.
Contact details	Tel: 01780 752796
NNR	Cavenham Heath
County	Suffolk
Location	The reserve is 1 km south of the A1101 (between Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall) near the village of Icklingham.
Contact details	Tel: 01284 762218
NNR	Holkham
County	Norfolk
Location	The reserve stretches from Burnham Norton to Blakeney and covers about 4,000 hectares. It is possible to explore most of the area by following footpaths from the main settlements and car parks.
Contact details	Tel: 01328 711183
NNR	Walberswick (Suffolk Coast NNR)
County	Suffolk
Location	Walberswick lies between Blythburgh and the Blyth Estuary South. There is a car park on the reserve, and others in the surrounding area.
Contact details	Tel: 01502 676171

KEY

North-East

- 1 Castle Eden Dene
- 2 Lindsfarne
- 3 Moor House-Upper Teesdale

Yorkshire and the Humber

- 4 Duncombe Park
- 5 Lower Derwent Valley
- 6 Thorne Moors (part of Humberhead Peatlands NNR)

North-West

- 7 Fingladdrigg Woods
- 8 North Walney
- 9 The Ribble Estuary

West Midlands

- 10 The Stiperstones
- 11 Aqualate Mere

East Midlands

- 12 Derbyshire Dales
- 13 Saffleby-Theddlethorpe Dunes
- 14 The Wash

South-West

- 15 East Dartmoor Woods and Heaths
- 16 Hartland Moor
- 17 Martin Down
- 18 Shapwick Heath
- 19 The Lizard

South-East

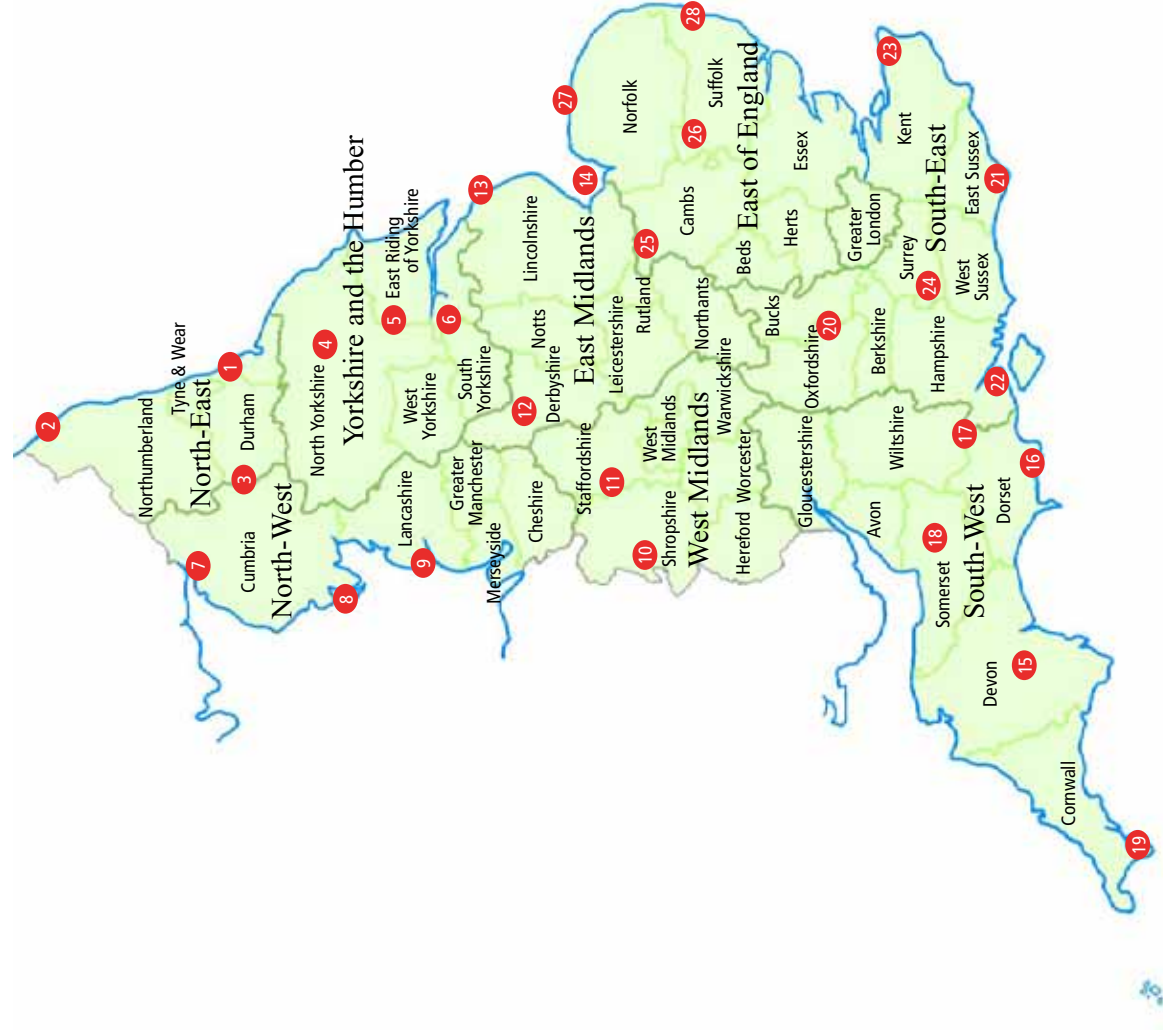
- 20 Aston Rowant
- 21 Lullington Heath
- 22 North Solent
- 23 Stodmarsh
- 24 Thursley

East of England

- 25 Castor Hanglands
- 26 Cavenham Heath
- 27 Holkham
- 28 Walberswick (Suffolk Coast NNR)

Get close to Birds

on National Nature Reserves



Notes



Right: Short-eared owl.
Richard Brooks/FLPA