



Milford Environment Group  
(Formed 1989)



Wildlife Recording Group  
(Formed 2001)

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## TIPS ON LOCATING BIRDS AT STURT POND

### Binoculars and Telescopes

To see birds clearly, it is important that you have one or other of the above. We are trying to find a secure way of leaving a good pair of binoculars at the hide. We have lost two pairs over the past few years, even though they were both chained and padlocked. If you have any ideas on how to safely secure a pair of binoculars, please let us know.

### How to Calibrate Binoculars using a Standard Diopter

Most binoculars have a focussing wheel located in the center of the binocular that is used to focus on your subject and when turned, it focusses both barrels on the binocular simultaneously. These binoculars should also have an adjustment ring called a **diopter** that adjusts the focus on one barrel independently of the other and thus can be used to compensate for any differences that you may have between your left and right eyes. The Diopter is usually located on either the left or right barrel of your optics near the eyepiece and is usually marked with something like the following: - 0 +

This only needs to be done once, unless you share your binoculars with someone who has different vision to yours. From then on it is only a matter of focusing on the subject depending on how near or far away it is from you using the main central focussing wheel:

### Focusing binoculars:

1. If the diopter adjustment ring is on the right barrel, start by shutting your right eye and leaving your left eye open (do the opposite if it is on the left barrel) - If you prefer, you can also just cover the end of the barrel with your hand. If the diopter is located on the central focusing wheel, refer to your manual to establish which barrel it affects, but it is usually the right one.
2. Keeping your eye shut, use the center knob to focus on an object about 8 - 10 meters away (approx. 30ft) until it becomes sharp.
3. Open your right eye.
4. Next, shut your left eye and leave your right eye open
5. Now look at the same object and turn the diopter ring until you are also clearly focused on it.
6. Look through the binoculars with both eyes open, and you should have a clear, crisp view of the object. Done! The binoculars are now correctly calibrated for your vision.

### The MCV Elevated Bird Hide

Birdwatching from the Bird Hide gives you good panoramic views over much of the southern end of Sturt Pond Nature Reserve. So it is therefore worth noting the various

habitat locations of the site which can be seen in the photographic montage pinned up in the Hide.

### Low Tides

The best time for birdwatching from the bird hide is at Low Tide, when a large expanse of silted mud is exposed and which is used by a variety of waders, duck and geese. Check out the low tide forecasts for Hurst Point. These can be used to estimate the best time to visit the hide when more birds are present on the mud flat for feeding, resting and roosting.

### Posts, Wires and Rails

Posts, wires and rails are important look-out-posts for birds. They can see predators from their vantage points and they often find food as it passes by, so always keep a keen lookout on all the posts, rails and wires around the reserve. You will see from a number of the photographs just how much our posts are used. The rails in the Scrape and Pond are there specifically so that you can see the colour of the birds legs, which is extremely important when distinguishing certain birds like Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, not forgetting Yellow-legged Gulls, which do turn up from time to time.

### Kingfisher

Seen mostly between Autumn and Spring. Their favourite perches are on top of the last post stretching into the Pond by the taller reed bed area. Look north from the two windows of the hide. A telescope is required to see them at this distance. They will occasionally use the perch and rails in the Scrape in front of the hide, but you need to be quiet as they sense your presence.



*The last post*



*Scrape perch*

### Teal

Again, mostly seen during Autumn and Spring. Teal are Britain's smallest duck and often use the Scrape in front of the Hide. At other times they tend to favour the upper reaches of the Pond and are sometimes obscured by the reeds. Teal are easily disturbed from the Scrape and rise vertically from the water when they fly back to the Pond.



*Teal in Summer plumage - in Winter sexes are alike*

### Snipe

During winter, we get up to 150 Common Snipe using the saltmarsh between the Hide and the Pond. Occasionally, we also see Jack Snipe, but these are not easily seen. Snipe can often be seen in Winter jumping out of the saltmarsh and landing 20 or 30 metres away. If disturbed or distressed, they tend to fly up zig-zagging away from you giving their short sharp alarm call. Small gatherings of a few birds can be seen along the edges of the pond at low water.

#### Little Grebe

Up to 5 birds can be seen using the Pond during the Winter. They tend to dive underwater when they are being observed. They can be seen primarily at the entrance to the Danes Stream at the top (northern) end of the Pond.

#### Gull Species

These can often be overlooked by casual observers as just 'seagulls'. However, it is worth checking each bird out individually as we have a good variety of species who use the reserve. The most common species in order of most regularly seen are; Black-headed (which has a brown head during Summer and just a small patch during Winter), Herring, Mediterranean (which has a black head during Summer and no black-tips to its primary feathers when at rest and a very distinctive call, which is worth learning), Great Black-backed (pink legs), Lesser Black-backed (Yellow legs) and Common, with the occasional Little and Sabine's Gull visiting infrequently. Please don't overlook the many gulls that use the Pond.

#### Stonechat and Wheatear

Stonechat breeds along the Milford coast so there is every chance of seeing this species at any time of year. They are most likely to be seen during Spring and Autumn migration as local bird numbers are swelled by those passing through on passage migration. Wheatear can also be seen at these times, though it does not breed locally. Both use post-tops surrounding the Meadow and other posts around the reserve. The white rump of the Wheatear will also be seen as they fly away from you along Hurst Spit.



*Stonechat on post*



*Wheatear on post*

#### Cormorant

Up to about five birds can be seen on the Tern Raft, the wooden perching rails or swimming and diving on/in the Pond. We rarely get its close relative the Shag at Sturt. The Cormorant will often be seen hanging his/her wings out to dry in a typical pose often seen at the reserve.

#### Brent Goose

Synonymous with Sturt Pond, New Lane farmland and the Solent. The species visiting Sturt Pond is the Dark-bellied form and anything up to 2,000 birds visit Sturt and surrounding farmland and pasture. An occasional Light-bellied Brent Goose can sometimes be seen. A Red-breasted Goose can also occasionally be seen on either the Pond, surrounding saltmarsh or New Lane farmland, readily mixing in with the Brent Geese, but often on the outside of the flock. Milford-on-Sea birds arrive mainly in October/November and return in late February to Siberia (northern Russia). They travel some 2,600 miles to their breeding grounds hundreds of miles inside the Arctic Circle. Individual families stick together when flying, resting and feeding and little groups of 3, 4 or 5 birds can usually be recorded with a fair degree of accuracy. First winter birds do not usually have the white neck markings of their parents until their return to Siberia. The above tips should help you recognise family groups.

### **Water Rail**

These skulking and secretive birds are more often heard than seen. However, during winter keep a careful look out along the Pond margins at low-tide. From the Hide a bird can occasionally be seen walking in and out of the base of the reeds behind the silt mud-flat by the footpath, and close to the Sturt Pond Monster (stick).