



## Creeks & Saltmarsh Trip (55) Report

*Trip held on Monday 9th December 2024*

We were again fortunate that following some awful weather over the previous few days, we managed to slip this Trip in. It was cold but dry, with the only shower starting whilst we were enjoying a few extra birds at the Keyhaven Bird Observatory at the end of the boat trip. The session was led by MCV volunteer Keith Metcalf and supported by Tony Knox from Bird Aware Solent. The dory was skippered by Jason Crane – Hurst Marine owner.

**Bird Aware Solent** (BAS) undertake important public engagement work along the Solent between Chichester Harbour and Milford-on-Sea, which is the most westerly part of the area they cover. BAS are supported by several local authorities and funded through Natural England, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the RSPB and Chichester Harbour Conservancy. Bird Aware is a tool being used to lessen potential recreational impacts.

Tens of thousands of birds come to the Solent coast for winter and three Special Protection Areas (SPAs) have been designated for them. A team of rangers visit local sites where people visit along the coastline and help communities recognise and understand how disturbance impacts birds and wildlife.

Additional work BAS undertake is to encourage responsible dog walking and invite them to use less sensitive parts of the coast. On Hurst Spit, dog-walkers are being encouraged to walk along the outside of the Spit i.e. the Solent beach area where there are far fewer birds. During spring and summer, the most sensitive ground-nesting bird areas where the birds nest and raise their young is on the leaside of the Spit, often along the 'strandline' where there is a mixture of shingle and vegetation and small waders like ringed plover attempt to nest.

*The following are some of the tips that BAS rangers pass on to visitors to Hurst Spit.*



*Dog's off-lead can be walked along Hurst Beach (Isle of Wight side of the Spit) where birds are much less likely to be disturbed. THANK YOU*

This was our third 2024/25 winter bird trip and no sooner had Jason got us underway when a group of about **70 or 80 golden plover** were seen resting at the entrance to Keyhaven Harbour on the right hand side. This is a favoured spot for this species as the river level begins to drop and expose large areas of mud-flat where these birds come to rest. On our return journey into the harbour, numbers of these plovers had risen to between 250 and 300 birds. (*See a small portion of these birds in the photograph below which we saw just before visitors disembarked at the Hurst Ferry pontoon.*)



***Golden plover are winter visitors to the south coast and breed in upland moorlands in northern England, Scotland, Wales and Devon.***

Our next brief encounter was with a male **marsh harrier** seen quartering the saltmarsh just outside the harbour. It didn't hang around long before drifting eastwards and putting up lots of birds as it flew low over the marsh. These raptors are more commonly seen flying over the reedbeds of The Pans and Avon Water.

As we moved south along Keyhaven River towards Mount Lake on the right, a lone **spoonbill** was seen sweeping its bill left and right as it sifted out small fish, molluscs and crustaceans. Spoonbills are now breeding in Cambridgeshire (Ouse Washes) and in the Norfolk Broads for the first time in 400 years.

At Normandy Lagoon on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024 a record number of **29** individual birds were recorded huddled together by wildlife photographer Steve Laycock. The birds were roosting on one of the islands.

As with all larger birds that are ringed, if you do see any birds with coloured leg rings, please note date, time, location and what colour rings were on each leg e.g. Left Leg top colour, middle colour and bottom colour, and then the same for its right leg. Please email the details to Keith at [keithmetcalf2022@btinternet.com](mailto:keithmetcalf2022@btinternet.com) and he will report to Euring and let you know the birds history i.e. where and when ringed, and the locations the bird has visited since being ringed.



The following adult Spoonbill seen in Keyhaven River during the Trip was not ringed. It was an adult bird (black beak with an orange/yellow tip to the spoon). By the way, did you know that in Yorkshire, young chick juvenile spoonbills are nicknamed '**teaspoons**'. Juveniles have pink bills with no yellow spoon which they acquire as they reach adult stage.



***Adult spoonbill with a handful of dunlin in the foreground and an oystercatcher at the top of the photograph***

In spring and summer 2024, Milford Conservation Volunteers and Wings Wildlife Heritage monitored 'ground-nesting' birds using Hurst Spit under the guidance of the RSPB. From spring 2025, 6 *additional 'engagement volunteers'* have been appointed by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and will add to the work that MCV, Wings and BAS has been undertaking.

Start looking out for any of the volunteers this winter. They will usually have scopes for you to look at the various birds and will be pleased to show them to you. They will answer your questions about the birdlife at Hurst Spit and surrounding saltmarsh.

During the trip we saw lots of large groups of **dunlin** usually feeding in water close to the mud-flat edges. These were often seen with **grey plover**, **oystercatchers**, **curlew** and a couple of **ringed plovers**.



***Curlew and Oystercatcher photos courtesy of Mike Rees***

Here are a few more photos taken on Trip (55).



***Male, Red-breasted Merganser and Great Crested Grebe***



***Shelduck and Brent Geese with rainbow over Pennington Marshes***





***Flock of dunlin flying across the stern of our boat***

***List of all the birds we saw during Trip (55) and an estimate of the numbers seen.***

Brent Goose	750	Mute Swan	4
Cormorant	3	Great Black-backed Gull	1
Herring Gull	2	Black-headed Gull	50
Golden Plover	250	Dunlin	600
Curlew	8	Grey Plover	20
Little Grebe	4	Oystercatcher	20
Marsh Harrier	1	Redshank	12
Shelduck	28	Turnstone	4
Linnet (FO)	5	Goldfinch (FO)	4
Spoonbill	3	Ringed Plover	2
Mallard	25	Little Egret	6
Wigeon	50	Great Crested Grebe	6
Woodpigeon	2	Lapwing	18
Red-breasted Merganser	12	Carrion Crow	7
Black-tailed Godwit	3	Gadwall *	10
Teal *	20	Great Tit *	2
Ringed Plover *	4	House Sparrow *	4
Moorhen *	1	Robin *	1
Canada Goose (HO) *	1	Greylag Goose *	4

FO = Flying over    HO = Heard Only    \* = Seen at/from the Observatory