



Milford Conservation Volunteers

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Creeks & Saltmarsh Birding Trips (60 & 61) Report

Thursday 27th November 2025 and Thursday 11th December

Trips (60 & 61) was led by MCV member Keith Metcalf. Keith was assisted on the first trip by David Horne (MCV Chair) and on the second by Pete Durnell (HCC Manager of the Keyhaven/Lymington Nature Reserve). Andy Digby was our skipper on both trips.

Trip (60): It was touch and go whether the weather would hold fine, and it did just about stay dry till the last few minutes as we were pulling back onto the pontoon in Keyhaven Harbour at the end of the trip.

We saw 27 different bird species of which highlights were: 600+ Dark-bellied Brent Geese, 250 Golden Plover, about 1250 dunlin, 30 Ringed Plover, 10 Red-breaster Merganser and a single Peregrine perched on a stump. We also saw the Common Seal again. Unfortunately, a dead seal was seen at various locations along the seafront between Milford and Iley Point around the beginning of December.

List of species recorded on Trip (60) together with estimated numbers

SPECIES	NUMBER	SPECIES	NUMBER
Brent Goose	600	Mallard	10
Curlew	8	Wigeon	56
Grey Plover	13	Turnstone	6
Little Grebe	6	Oystercatcher	12
Dunlin	1250	Ringed Plover	30
Little Egret	5	Golden Plover	310
Shelduck	20	Mute Swan	2
Redshank	15	Red-breasted Merganser	10
Black-headed Gull	1	Pintail	26

Carrion Crow	4	Herring Gull	4
Cormorant	10	Black-tailed Godwit	30
Golden Plover	310	Teal	20
Gadwall	10	Marsh Harrier	1
Peregrine	1	Total Species	27

Trip (61): The weather for this trip was much more pleasant and we had a full complement of twelve trippers. Pete Durnell gave a brilliant running commentary all the way through the trip pointing out all species seen.

The undoubted highlight of this trip was seeing a pair of *White-tailed Eagles* land at Hawkers, where they stayed for several minutes before lifting off and heading low over Hurst Castle and across the Solent back to the Isle of Wight. Contact with the WTE Reintroduction Programme Project Officer, Steve-Eggerton Read had recently told us that MEG (*G3-24*) the MCV sponsored satellite-tagged female, was still carrying her tag and had paired with a younger male bird a couple of seasons ago. Steve told us that she was still occupying a territory at the western end of the Island. It is therefore likely that the female we saw on this trip, was indeed MEG. With luck, the pair will breed this coming season or the one after and produce a mini-MEG.

In the 61 trips we have undertaken to date, this is the first time that we have seen white-tailed eagles, though we have been expecting to see them around the saltmarshes of Hurst, Keyhaven and Iley for some years. The programme of reintroducing them begun in 2019. To date there has been about 48 young eagles brought to the Isle of Wight, with probably just one more year of bringing in further birds to complete the project. Fingers crossed we shall start to see MEG, her partner and more youngsters more regularly as their numbers increase.

List of species recorded on Trip (61) together with Estimated Numbers

SPECIES	NUMBER	SPECIES	NUMBER
Brent Goose	1,000	Curlew	9
Dunlin	700	Golden Plover	150
Shelduck	20	Redshank	8
Lapwing	60	Little Grebe	10
Little Egret	6	Great Crested Grebe	3
White-tailed Eagle	2	Red-breasted Merganser	7

Bar-tailed Godwit	1	Oystercatcher	10
Carrion Crow	3	Meadow Pipit	4
Peregrine	2	Magpie	2
Teal	10	Gadwall	8
Pintail	3	Pied Wagtail	2
Turnstone	15	Black-tailed Godwit	50
Spoonbill (Juvenile)	1	Grey Plover	10
Mallard	30	Wigeon	10
Mute Swan	2	Cormorant	15
Black-headed Gull	17	Herring Gull	5
Gt. Black-backed Gull	7	Total	33

Bird Observatory: Following the boat trip, visitors were invited back to the Bird Observatory where the following birds were also seen:

Marsh Harrier (1), Kingfisher (2), Coot (10), House Sparrow (35), Chaffinch (2), Blue Tit (4), Great Tit (1), Egyptian Geese (2), Kestrel (1) and Woodpigeon.

Here are some photos of a few of the birds we saw on these two trips. Some of the photos are from previous trips.



Two distant White-tailed Eagles at Hawkers - Trip (61)



One of two Peregrine's seen on Trip (61)



Family of six Dark-bellied Brent Geese - Trip (61)

*The juveniles are those showing white-tips to their secondary flight feathers.
Some still have to acquire their white half-necklaces, which they get around this time of year*



Some of the Golden Plover hidden in the foreground amongst the vegetation (Trips 60 & 61)



Flock of Dunlin in flight



Great Crested Grebe in its winter plumage



Male Red-breasted Merganser - As Pete Durnell explained, note the thin beak, which has saw-like teeth for grabbing hold of the fish they catch



Pair of Egyptian Geese seen on The Pans after Trip (61)



Two unknown fishermen walking over internationally protected saltmarsh near Hurst