

Langstone Harbour's Winter Birds

Every year, thousands of wildfowl and wading birds spend the winter in Langstone Harbour before returning to their Arctic breeding grounds in the Spring. This wildlife spectacle is visible to anyone on a boat or using the footpaths around the harbour's perimeter. They come here because of the food and shelter the harbour provides. Many birds feed on shellfish, worms and other invertebrates that thrive in the mud, while others feed on harbour plants and nearby grasslands. When the tide covers their feeding grounds, the birds need quiet undisturbed places to roost. Places like Farlington Marshes and the harbour's islands provide ideal roosting sites.



Photo by Chris Cockburn

Brent Geese—*Branta bernicla*

Perhaps Langstone's most noticeable winter birds, youngsters born the previous summer in Siberia are looked after by their parents in family groups throughout the winter, feeding on marine eel grass, seaweeds and nearby grasslands.



Photo by Ken Dolbear

Shelduck—*Tadorna tadorna*

These striking ducks feed on invertebrates and small shellfish found in the shallows. Drakes have a prominent bright red bill.



Photo by Jonathan Lethbridge

Dunlin—*Calidris alpina*

Dense flocks of these small grey-brown waders are commonly seen flying between their feeding and roosting sites. In winter the harbour is home to up to 20,000 individuals!



Photo by Louise MacCallum

Redshank—*Tringa totanus*

The bright red legs and bill make these elegant waders easy to identify. They are wary birds that feed on worms and other invertebrates and have a loud piping call that warns others of danger.

Getting through the winter...

Winter is a very tough time for wildlife, and life for the birds in Langstone Harbour becomes increasingly stressful as temperatures edge towards freezing. The colder it gets the harder it is for them to find food, and it is this food alone that gives them the energy they need for flying, moulting and just keeping warm. Many of the birds can only find food at low tide, so they roost at high tide to save vital energy. During icy conditions they may seem much tamer and approachable. In fact they are just reluctant to use up life saving energy by flying away.



Photo by Chris Cockburn

Whilst enjoying the winter bird spectacle, we can help them to survive by staying on the footpaths, keeping our pets under control and not getting so close that they take fright and fly off.

The nature reserves at Farlington Marshes, the Hayling Oysterbeds and The Kench are all particularly good places to watch Langstone Harbour's fantastic birds.

To find out more about the wildlife and habitats of Langstone Harbour please visit:

www.langstoneharbour.org.uk

Winter Wildlife



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