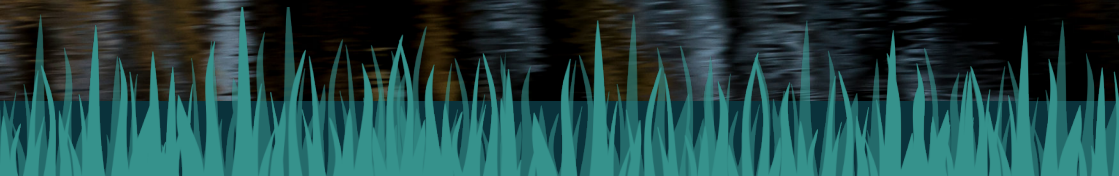




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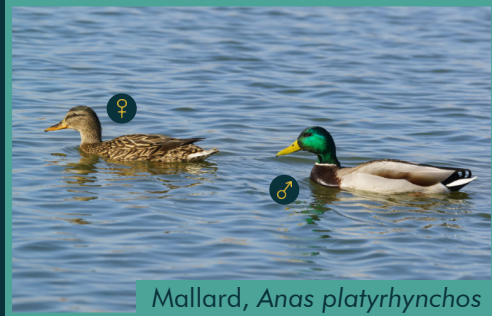
POOLE HARBOUR

ID Guide for Local Wetland Birds



DABBLING DUCKS

Dabbling ducks are surface-feeding species, usually found in lakes, rivers and shallow water. They regularly upend to feed and occasionally graze on land. The sexes are generally very distinct, with the males showing more prominent colours and the females dull and dappled. Most species can be seen commonly around the harbour, with Holes Bay and Brands Bay being a particularly good locations to practice identifying them.



Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*

Mallard

Length: 50-60cm, Wingspan: 81-95cm

Male displays emerald green head and neck with yellow bill. Female streaked brown with a dark crown and eye-stripe. They have a dark blue speculum prominently bordered white. Regular across the harbour including Poole Park, Hatch Pond, and Swineham.



Gadwall, *Mareca strepera*

Gadwall

Length: 45-56cm, Wingspan: 78-90cm

Slighter than Mallard, and male much less distinctive, with delicately lined brown body, dark bill and black rump. Female brown and dappled with orange bill. In flight, note whitish belly (buff in Mallard). Small white speculum is diagnostic but can be difficult to detect at distance. Seen commonly throughout the harbour, including the Wareham Channel,

Swineham, Hatch Pond, Brownsea Lagoon, Arne Moors and Little Sea.

Shoveler

Length: 44-52cm, Wingspan: 73-82cm

Medium-large duck with short neck and impressively long and broad bill, giving front heavy appearance. Male has metallic green head contrasting strongly with white breast and rich chestnut flanks. Female resembles Mallard, except for oversized bill, green speculum and dull pale grey leading edge to upper forewing.



Shoveler, *Spatula clypeata*



Teal, *Anas crecca*

Teal

Length: 34-38cm, Wingspan: 53-59cm

Smallest duck, making them distinctive even when silhouetted. Males have a chestnut coloured head, with a green eyestripe outlined in pale yellow, and a dark bill. Much of the body is grey, with yellow rump and breast, with a white bar along the upper wing. Female mottled dark brown, with dark eyestripe and grey-brown neck. Both sexes have a green speculum. During

winter, 2000-2500 birds present, with numbers in Holes Bay alone as high as 600-700 individuals, as well as large numbers on Brownsea Lagoon and at Hatch Pond, amongst other locations across the harbour.



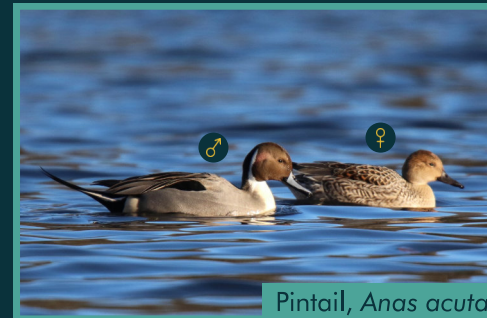
Wigeon, *Mareca penelope*

Wigeon

Length: 42-50cm, Wingspan: 71-85cm

Medium sized duck, with distinctive large rounded head and short neck. Bill is comparatively small, with pale grey colouration, black towards tip. Adult male has a chestnut head and neck, with a creamy-yellow forehead and crown. Blushed pink breast and grey body with large white patch on upper forewing diagnostic in flight. Females mottled brown, though head-

shape helps distinguish from other species. Fast flight action, with outwring swept back and white 'pot-belly' striking. Regularly encountered at Brands Bay, Middlebere, Lytchett Bay and Holes Bay among other sites.



Pintail, *Anas acuta*

Pintail

Length: 51-62cm, Wingspan: 79-87cm

Noticeably long and slender, adult males are unmistakable with impressive elongated tail feathers. Brown head features striking white stripes either side of the nape. Breast white, with grey back and underside. Black streaking also accentuates feathering along back. Females resemble a slender, elegant Mallard with a dark bill, and mottled brown

body contrasting with a plain brown, rounded head. Wings slender in flight. Arne Bay and Holes Bay NW offer the best viewing opportunities, although good numbers also feed in Newton Bay and Brand's Bay.

DIVING DUCKS

Most diving ducks are often seen in deeper bodies of water, with some more numerous outside of the harbour, with Studland Bay being a particularly productive site for sea ducks, like Common and Velvet Scoter. Many of the diving ducks have specific areas of the harbour that they are likely to be seen, due to their feeding habits. This can be really useful in helping you to narrow down your list of possible species when identifying them.



Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*

Tufted Duck

Length: 40-47cm, Wingspan: 65-72cm

A familiar park lake duck with short body and large head showing crest, most pronounced in breeding males. Males show sharp contrast between black back and white flanks, whereas the pale flanks are less striking in brown plumage of females. Some females have extensive white at base of bill, resembling female Scaup.



Scaup, *Aythya marila*

Scaup

Length: 42-51cm, Wingspan: 71-80cm

Rarer and larger than Tufted Duck, with a more rounded head and no crest. Males have white flanks and a pale back with subtle grey vermiculation, while females are variable brown with a striking white blaze around the base of bill. Coastal, with small flocks seek shelter within the harbour during unsettled or stormy weather, typically appearing in South

Deep, as well as occasionally Holes Bay south or Swineham GP.



Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula*

Goldeneye

Length: 40-48cm, Wingspan: 62-77cm

Large, rounded head with peaked crown. Adult male has green-black head & white loreal spot, with white flanks & breast. Females & first-winter plumage have a subtle grey body & brown head. Bright yellow eyes in all but first-year females. Shipstal Point, Wareham Channel, Brands Bay & Poole Park are reliable sites for viewing.

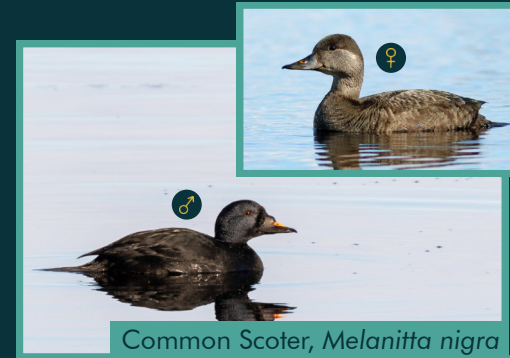


Pochard,

Pochard

Length: 42-49cm, Wingspan: 67-75cm

Male striking, with dark chestnut head contrasting with pale grey body and black breast. Female a nondescript grey-brown plumage with diffuse pale head markings. Note sloping forehead and dark grey bill with pale band near tip. Numbers decreasing with 4-10 individuals each winter, most regularly seen on Swineham Gravel Pit.



Common Scoter, *Melanitta nigra*

Common Scoter

Length: 44-54cm, Wingspan: 70-84cm

Males entirely black; bill features a small knob at base and yellow patch above. Female and first-winter birds are dark brown showing pale cheeks. Silvery primaries visible as two-tone plumage in flight, flying over the sea in dense flocks. Annual visitor regularly visible from Knoll and Middle Beaches at Studland, off Brands Bay, Goathorn Point or within Central Harbour.

Confusion Species: Velvet Scoter

Length: 51-58cm, Wingspan: 79-97cm

Large scoter with distinctive white wing patch obvious in flight. Adult males darker than females with a small white mark under eye. Females brown, with two smudgy pale patches on head. Uncommon, with single or low numbers occasionally visible in Studland or Brands Bay, usually in Dec or Jan.

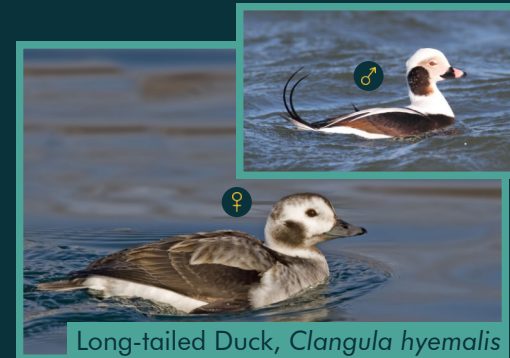
Velvet Scoter, *Melanitta fusca*



Long-tailed Duck

Length: 39-47cm, Wingspan: 65-82cm

Non-breeding males have long, slender tail and pale head with dark cheek, pink band on small dark bill and pale grey scapulars covering dark back. Females and immature males lack the long tail and are grey-brown with white face and dark crown and cheek patch. Scarce, typically found between Goathorn and Brownsea from December to February.



Long-tailed Duck, *Clangula hyemalis*

DIVING DUCKS



Red-breasted Merganser, *Mergus serrator*

Red-breasted Merganser

Length: 52-58cm, Wingspan: 67-82cm

Usually arriving in dull eclipse plumage, males soon develop crested black heads with a clean white collar. Females similar to eclipse male, with crested brown head and grey-brown body. Both have upturned orange-red bill. Seen regularly across the harbour, as well as in Studland Bay and Poole Park.

Confusion Species: Goosander

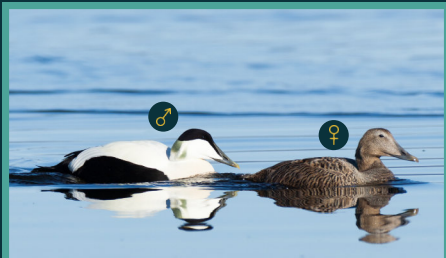
Length: 58-68cm, Wingspan: 78-94cm

A few sightings typical each winter. Note the difference in bill shape, with the Goosander having a shorter, downturned bill. Females have brown head with a long crest, though males lack a crest on their black head. Male significantly more white, with white breast & flank.



Goosander, *Mergus merganser*

Less Common Diving Ducks to Poole Harbour:



Common Eider, *Somateria mollissima*

Common Eider

Length: 60-70cm, Wingspan: 95-105cm

Very distinctive coastal duck, with wedge shaped bill. Male have black side, tail and crown, with pale back, breast and cheek, and green markings also visible on nape. Females mottled brown with paler face. Most frequently seen in Studland Bay, or occasionally in the central and south of the harbour.



Smew, *Mergellus albellus*

Smew

Length: 38-44cm, Wingspan: 56-69cm

Male head and body white with black accentuations and a grey-brown rump. Head crested with black eye patch. Females have distinctive red head, with white throat and grey-brown body. Rare visitor, most likely seen at Swineham GP or in Holes Bay during very cold periods.

SWANS

Large, white, long-necked waterfowl. The only species of swan which is resident and regularly seen in Poole Harbour is the Mute Swan. Size and bill colour are key identification features.



Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*

Mute Swan

L: 140-160cm, WS: 200-240cm

Familiar resident. Large white swan with long neck, tail and blood-orange bill. Black knob above bill prominent in adults. 1st Winter individuals are patchy grey, with dull pink bill. Young arrive from Abbotsbury Swannery into the harbour area in the winter to moult. Other local breeding populations may also be moving back and forth across the Wareham

Channel and floodplains. Loud sound of wingbeats in flight is diagnostic, as Bewick's and Whooper are silent.



Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*

Bewick's Swan

L: 115-127cm, WS: 170-195cm

Like Whooper Swan, with proportionally shorter neck and more compact body and bill. Reduced yellow pattern on bill does not exceed beyond nostrils. Once a regular visitor at Little Sea in the 1960s, appearances are now scarce with Wareham Water Meadows becoming the most reliable place to encounter this species.



Whooper Swan, *Cygnus cygnus*

Whooper Swan

L: 140-160cm, WS: 205-235cm

Scarce visitor to Poole Harbour. Separated from other swan species by long, wedge-shaped bill, which is extensively yellow with black running from above nostril to tip. Best searched for in the Frome Valley, though cold weather snaps could also see birds turn up at sites such as Holes Bay or Lytchett Bay.

GEESE

During winter, Dark-bellied Brent, Canada and Greylag Geese are all numerous in the harbour. Aside from other feral populations, including Egyptian Geese and the occasional Barnacle Goose, other species rarely crop up, though we do have the occasionally White-fronted Geese and Bean Geese visits. Shelduck are an important species in the harbour, and although they are not strictly classified as geese, they are typically grouped with them.



Brent Goose, *Branta bernicla*

Dark-bellied Brent Goose

L: 55-62cm, WS: 105-117cm

Small, compact goose with small white crescent on side of upper neck visible in adults. Middlebere, Newton Bay and Baiter are among the best places to encounter large flocks. Calls are a bubbly, gargling *rhut*. Winter visitor from Western Siberia and Russian Arctic, with numbers of over 2000 in the harbour each winter. The 'pale-bellied' race that breeds in Svalbard

and Greenland is an occasional visitor, and the bulkier North American race 'Black Brant' is a rare vagrant to the harbour.



Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*

Canada Goose

L: 80-105cm, WS: 155-180cm

Large, long-necked goose with black head and neck, with a white 'throat-strap'. Loud honking calls. Numbers normally peak in August when there is a large moulting flock around Swineham and Arne. Large numbers persist into winter. Resident, introduced American species, seen commonly around the harbour.

Confusion Species: Barnacle Goose

Medium-sized, fairly compact, with thick-set short neck, rounded head and small bill. Strong contrast between black breast and whitish belly. Shrill, monosyllabic barking, *ka*. Most sightings locally relate to feral individuals that associate with Canada Geese, however there are numerous records that are considered to be wild.



Barnacle Goose, *Branta leucopsis*



Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*

Greylag Goose

L: 74-84 cm, WS: 149-168cm

Large goose, with leading edge to the wing frosty pale, contrasting with darker trailing edge. Recent ringing study in Poole Park began in 2019 to help understand Greylag movements and distribution across the harbour and wider area. Cackling vocalisations.

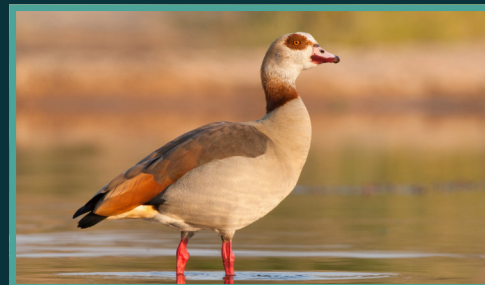
Confusion Species: White-fronted Goose

L: 64-78cm, WS: 130-160cm

Similar in appearance to the Greylag, with extensive white above bill and dark patches on belly. Now a scarce winter visitor to Poole Harbour. Be careful not to confuse with Greylag/domestic hybrids.



White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*



Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Egyptian Goose

L: 63-73cm, WS: 110-130cm

Distinctive dark eye-surround, pale brown body and large white wing panel diagnostic, although note extensive individual variation. Legs and bill feature bright red colouration. Most regularly seen on Swineham scrapes or from Holme Lane. Feral resident originating from Africa, with 2-4 individuals usually present.



Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*

Shelduck

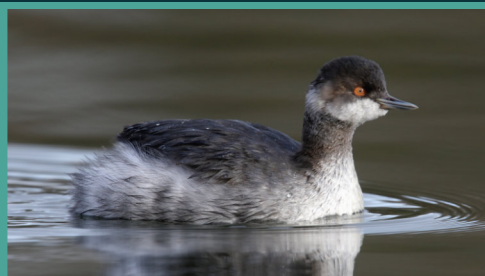
L: 55-65cm, WS: 100-120cm

Medium-sized, goose-like duck with white body and chestnut-brown patch across breast. Bill red, with prominent knob at base in males only. Large difference in size between sexes, with males being noticeably bigger when seen together. Poole Harbour is nationally important for the population (BTO). Regular seen throughout the harbour, including on Brownsea

Lagoon, favouring mudflats elsewhere on a low tide.

GREBES

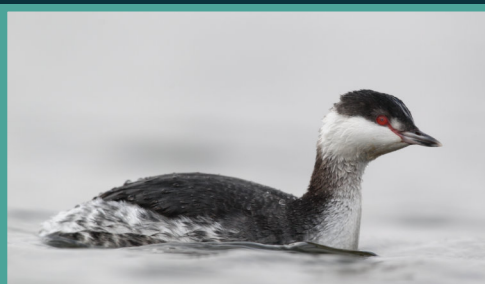
During winter, Poole Harbour becomes a haven for Grebes, holding national importance for Black-necked Grebe (c.20 individuals) and with numbers of Great Crested Grebe rising to c.240 individuals. Little Grebe are often seen fishing in shallow areas, with numbers of around 35 in the winter. Poole Harbour historically held nationally important numbers of Slavonian Grebe until the late 1990s, but sightings are now limited to just a few each winter. Red-necked Grebes are the rarest species locally, with only 1 typically seen each winter, usually in Shell Bay at Studland.



Black-necked Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*

Black-necked Grebe (BNG) and Slavonian Grebe are easily confused, so it's worth getting to grips with their general shape to identify them at distance, as well learning the subtler differences. The most notable difference is in head shape, with the Black-necked Grebe having a very steep peaked forehead, compared to the more gradual incline of the Slavonian Grebe. Note the difference in head colouration, with the black on on a BNG diffusing onto the cheek making it less distinct, whereas Slavonian Grebe have a well-defined cap extending beyond they eye.

At a closer distance, you can also determine the difference in bill shape and colour, with BNG having a more slender, slightly upturned bill, whereas the Slavonian has a rounded and short bill with a pale tip.



Slavonian Grebe, *Podiceps auritus*

Black-necked Grebe

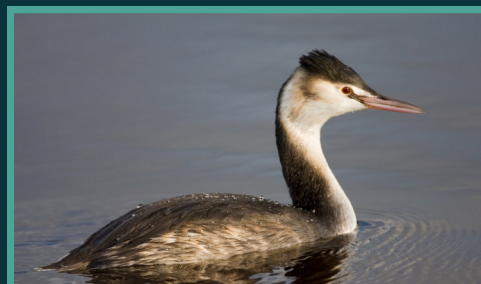
Length: 28-34cm, Wingspan: 58cm

Medium-sized grebe, with a notably dark grey collar and substantial black over the head and facial features. Often a pale buffed rear end is visible, giving a similar appearance to Little Grebe. Most regularly visible in Shell Bay and Studland Bay, as well as Brands Bay.

Slavonian Grebe

Length: 31-38cm, Wingspan: 46-55cm

Medium-sized, with a long body. The dark cap is well defined, extending beyond the eye to the back of the head. A light grey collar is often visible, though darkness is variable. Most regularly visible in Studland Bay, as well as occasionally inside the harbour, near the harbour entrance and Jerry's Point.



Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*

in the central and southern harbour and into the Wareham Channel. Evening roosts of 100+ individuals gather between Furzey and Green Island in the winter.



Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

of reedbeds within the harbour, very frequently in the mouth of the River Frome and on Swineham Gravel Pit. Numbers in Poole Harbour average around 30 individuals each winter.



Red-necked Grebe, *Podiceps grisegena*

Slavonian and Black-necked Grebe, though not comparable to the length and slenderness of a Great Crested Grebe. Much less commonly seen in Poole Harbour, occasionally putting in an appearance in Shell Bay and near the harbour entrance.

Great Crested Grebe

Length: 46-51cm, Wingspan: 59-73cm

The largest of the European grebes, with a distinctive long, slim neck and body. Their pale face and neck are recognisable at distance, and the long pale bill adds to the very slender overall appearance. Their black crown doesn't extend below the eye, unlike the other grebe species. They can easily be seen in open water bodies across the harbour area, particularly

Little Grebe

Length: 23-29cm, Wingspan: 42cm

As the name suggests, Little Grebe is the smallest of the grebe species, having a compact and very dumpy overall appearance. Unmistakeable due to their size and appearance. During winter, their plumage is dull brown with a pale buffed rear end. Very distinctive due to size and quick, regular dipping under the water to feed. Regularly seen close to the edges

Red-necked Grebe

Length: 40-46cm, Wingspan: 81cm

Similar in size to Black-necked Grebe and Slavonian Grebe. They have a distinctive down-curved yellow bill, which can appear striking even at a distance. Black forehead and crown have a pale outline leading into a light red-brown coloured neck - a shadow of their bright summer plumage. The have a dark grey back, with a pale lower body. Their neck is longer than

DIVERS

Large, open-water species that sit low on water, but float higher when resting or preening. Dives without leap, often preceded by periods of 'snorkelling'. Breeding plumages are striking, but more attention is required in winter. Note size, bill shape, pattern and extent of light and dark areas on head, neck and body.



Great Northern Diver, *Gavia immer*

Great Northern Diver

L: 73-88cm, WS: 122-148cm

Large diver, with a pale front to the neck & body, and dark back, with dark half-collar. Steep forehead & flat crown, with large pale bill. The most common diver with c.6 individuals usually wintering. Regularly seen in Studland Bay, as well as the deeper harbour channels, often around Brownsea, Brands Bay & the harbour mouth, also occasionally seen in the

north of the harbour, including Poole Park & off Hamworthy beach.



Red-throated Diver, *Gavia stellata*

Red-throated Diver

L: 55-67cm, WS: 91-110cm

The smallest of the divers, with extensive white over throat and underside during winter. Bill narrow & slightly upturned, adding to the slender appearance of the bird. Slim & straight neck, with no protruding chest. Sightings in Poole Harbour are low in number but regular, most frequently seen in Poole Bay and Studland Bay. Passage birds are more common in

Spring and Autumn, with up to 20 passing through in the right wind conditions.



Black-throated Diver, *Gavia arctica*

Black-throated Diver

L: 63-75cm, WS: 100-122cm

Slightly larger than the Red-throated Diver, with thicker neck and protruding chest. Forehead is often peaked and Distinctive white flank is diagnostic and usually visible. Rarest diver in Poole Harbour, with very occasional sightings in the North Channel, and sometimes seen from Sandbanks and Branksome Chine.

CORMORANTS

Large, dark-plumaged, open-water species with long neck and tail. Immature birds show pale underparts. Build, distribution, bill and head shape are important considerations when separating Cormorant and Shag. Winter sees the resident Cormorant population (ssp. carbo) bolstered by the arrival of continental birds (ssp. sinensis). Plumage differences between the two subspecies are near impossible to assess in the field, but behavioural differences are key. Sinensis form large feeding 'rafts' whereas carbo are more solitary.



Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Great Cormorant

L: 77-94cm, WS: 121-149cm

Large with stout, heavy bill. Yellow base to bill (gular pouch) with white "cheek". Extensive white on head in breeding plumage (from Jan/Feb), with white thigh. Juveniles have pale plumage on neck and belly. Widely dispersed across different water bodies over the harbour, rather than being strictly pelagic.

A common cause for confusion is the difference between Cormorant and Shag. Getting used to the general appearance of each is useful for identifying them at a distance. Cormorants are significantly **bulkier** than Shags, which give a **smaller** and more **slender** impression. Notice the difference in head shape, with the crown of the Cormorant being **flatter**, in line with the bill, whereas the Shag has a **steep "forehead"** up to a peaked crown. The bill shape is also important, with the Cormorant having a **stout** and **large** bill compared to the narrow bill of the Shag.

When diving, Shag will visibly jump out of the water, whereas Cormorant have a more gentle dive, not clearing the water. You will not (usually!) see Shag using freshwater, so birds seen further inland are very likely to be Cormorant.



Shag, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Shag

L: 68-78cm, WS: 95-110cm

Dark and slender, and narrow bill with yellow base at the gape. Steep head is crested in breeding plumage. Juveniles appear more brown with pale throat. They are a pelagic species, meaning most are seen on the outside of the harbour, though some enter during the day before roosting on the cliffs at Durlston.

WADERS

Poole Harbour hosts huge numbers of waders during the winter, being nationally important for multiple species. The best way to learn how to identify waders is through time and practice in the field. Different locations, numbers and feeding strategies are key clues to their identity, as well as learning their calls. Brownsea Lagoon is an important roost and feeding area for many species. On a low-tide, the Wareham Channel and Holes Bay are fantastic places to see waders in impressive numbers.



Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*

Dunlin

Length: 17-21cm, W2-36cm

Small and round-shouldered, with black legs and a drooped-tipped bill of variable length. Non-breeding plumage consists of plain mouse brown upperparts, streaked breast band and white underparts. In flight shows a white wing bar and distinctive white rump with dark central streak. Brownsea Lagoon, Arne and Lytchett Fields are popular high tide roost sites.

Feeding flocks can be encountered across any exposed mudflats across the harbour at low tide.

Dunlin is a must-learn benchmark when tackling the world of wader identification. Familiarity with their diminutive size and medium length (though variable) slightly down-curved black bill is essential when looking to gain confidence and lay the groundwork for identifying small waders. Knot are the largest of the small waders, with a somewhat disproportionate stocky build, their short, straight bill, silver-grey upperparts and green-grey legs help aid ID. Observation of behaviour is equally important to note as well as plumage! Look for the erratic needle-like actions interspersed with quick runs in Dunlin and slower, more considered probing of Knot.



Red Knot, *Calidris canutus*

Knot

Length: 23-26cm, Wingspan: 47-53cm

Plump, medium-sized shorebird with relatively short bill and grey-green legs, stockier than Dunlin. Non-breeding plumage is a rather nondescript plain grey with pale underparts and a pale supercilium. Never particularly numerous in Poole Harbour, Holes Bay featured a notable flock of c.50 through winter 2020/21.



Sanderling, *Calidris alba*

shoreline during times of high activity at Studland Beach. In recent years, a small flock has also taken to feeding among the Bar-tailed Godwit at Whitley Lake during December and January.



Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres*

with around 10-20 feeding throughout the winter. They can also be encountered at close range at Poole Quay, Bramble Bush Bay, Brands Bay and Shore Road.



Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus*

beach around the harbour and calling regularly with an excitable, shrill peep. 800+ individuals can be seen on Brownsea Lagoon alone, with a further 300+ can be seen on the shingle bank at Shipstal, Arne.

Sanderling

Length: 18-21cm, Wingspan: 42cm

Lively, Dunlin-sized wader. Appears significantly paler than other species, with clean white neck and underside, and dappled pale grey along the top of the head, back and wings. Bill and legs are black. Flocks of 10-20 individuals are usually seen at Pilot's Point, well known for running along the shoreline and feeding actively in the sand. Scan Bramble Bush Bay

Turnstone

Length: 21-24cm, Wingspan: 43-49cm

Fairly small and compact with short, dark, chisel-shaped bill. Non-breeding plumage features smart patterned brown on the upperparts, with a bold black breast, pure white underparts and orange legs. They typically feed by flipping over rocks and shells to expose invertebrates. This is the only species where Baiter Beach is the main site to find them,

Oystercatcher

Length: 39-44cm, Wingspan: 72-83cm

Conspicuous and often noisy large wader with distinctive black-and-white plumage, long bright orange-red bill and pinkish thick-set legs. A broad white wingbar, white rump and tail with broad black band at tip evident in flight. We have significant numbers of Oystercatcher wintering in Poole Harbour. They are readily seen feeding on any mudflat or shingle

WADERS



Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*

Common Redshank

Length: 24-27cm, Wingspan: 47-53cm

Medium-sized wader, with bright orange legs and bill base. Dumper than Spotted Redshank & Greenshank. Plain grey-brown plumage in winter with white underparts, breast diffusely mottled and diffuse head pattern, often whitish eye only prominent feature on head. In flight, broad white trailing edge to wing and white wedge along back obvious, often settling with

raised wings, flashing white underside. Frequently found patrolling every creek, channel and mudflat across the harbour.



Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*

Spotted Redshank

Length: 29-33cm, Wingspan: 64cm

More slender and long-legged Redshank with longer, fine-tipped bill. Pale plumage resembles Greenshank, separated by bright red legs and long, slightly drooped-tipped bill, with red restricted to the base of lower mandible. Clean white underparts, whitish head/neck and clear-cut fore-supercilium. Often swims in deeper waters and upends frequently. In flight,

wings are plain, lacking white trailing edge of Common Redshank. Brownsea Lagoon, Middlebere, Brand's Bay and Holes Bay are the best sites to find them.



Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*

Greenshank

Length: 30-34cm, Wingspan: 55-62cm

Appear grey, with pale neck and white underside. Delicate dark grey streaking over pale head, with grey-green legs. Bill dark grey, long and slightly upturned. Extensive white along back onto pale tail, which is visible in flight. Longer-legged and larger than Common Redshank. During winter, only 20-30 birds are usually present harbour-wide. Low numbers are

regularly seen on Brownsea Lagoon, and can be seen feeding on mudflats around the harbour on a low tide.



Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

Grey Plover

Length: 26-29cm, Wingspan: 56-63cm

Bulky, medium-sized wader with stout bill. Non-breeding plumage speckled grey with pale belly. Black auxiliaries (armpits) diagnostic in flight. Brownsea Lagoon holds key high tide roost, with favoured feeding areas along the southern and western shores including Brands Bay, Fitzworth and Holton shoreline.

Confusion Species: Golden Plover

Length: 25-28cm, Wingspan: 53-59cm

Smaller, daintier and spangled buffy golden above, Golden Plover are a scarce visitor to the harbour. Cold weather movements make Golden Plover more conspicuous, seeking shelter within the harbour. The fields around Bestwall and Swineham are typically the best sites to search for birds among the Lapwing.



Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*

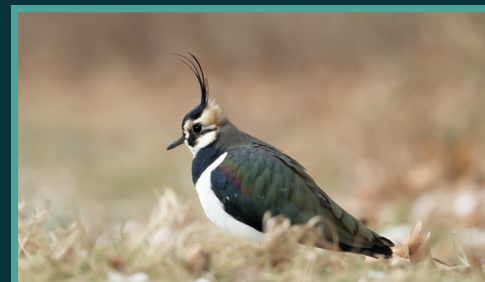


Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*

Ringed Plover

Length: 17-20cm, Wingspan: 35-41cm

Small and compact shorebird, with stubby black bill with orange base. Note orange legs and dark breast band contrasting with white underside, as well as dark mask and strap above bill. A bold white wing bar visible in flight. Best viewed on the Studland shoreline, as well as Brownsea lagoon and Baiter, roosting with Dunlin.



Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*

Lapwing

Length: 28-31cm, Wingspan: 67-72cm

Stocky plover with long, wispy crest, distinctively broad, rounded wings and flappy flight. Bill short and narrow. Plumage looks black and white at distance, but shows iridescent green and purple in good light. Flocks regularly commute between the mudflats at Middlebere and the fields behind. Smaller flocks also gather around the harbour at Lytchett Bay,

Brand's Bay and Swineham.

WADERS



Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*

Black-tailed Godwit

Length: 37-42cm, Wingspan: 63-74cm

A large wader, with long straight bill, slender body and long black legs. During winter, plumage is duller, with grey-brown body, paler underparts and black and white tail. Unmistakable in flight, with white wing-bars and white rump square visible. Bill is orange at base leading to a black tip, and there is a short pale supercilium above the eye. Poole Harbour is an internationally

important site for the species, with counts >2000 individuals. The Middlebere Channel, Brownsea Lagoon and Holes Bay are amongst some of the sites to hold large flocks.

Although smaller than Curlew, their large size, long, straight bill and long legs helps single out the two godwit species. **Shorter legs**, particularly above the 'knee' and a shorter, **slightly upcurved bill** helps separate Bar-tailed Godwit at distance or in silhouette. At closer range, Bar-tailed Godwit show a **finely streaked back and wings** compared to the **plain uniform brown plumage** of Black-tailed Godwit.

Birds in flight are far simpler to separate, with Black-tailed Godwit showing a strongly contrasting **broad white wingbar, square white rump and black tail**. Bar-tailed Godwit lack any wingbar, and instead show a **white wedge** on their back, much like Curlew.



Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica*

Bar-tailed Godwit

Length: 33-41cm, Wingspan: 62-72cm

Legs and subtle upturned bill are shorter compared to their commoner Black-tailed counterpart. In flight, barred tail, white rump and plain wings recall Curlew. Pale supercilium more extensive and grey upperparts finely streaked offer a delicately patterned appearance. Feeding and roosting habits are far more localised than 'Blackwits', with 'Barwits' favouring the

sandy shoreline off Shore Road, Sandbanks and commuting to Brownsea Lagoon at high tide or when disturbed by windsurfers or bait diggers. Feeding flocks may also be encountered across the shores of Furzey Island, Middlebere and Arne through the winter with total harbour counts averaging between 60-100 overwintering individuals.



Curlew, *Numenius arquata*

Curlew

L: 48-57cm, WS: 89-106cm

Largest wader, with unmissable long down-curved bill. Plumage is a dull, streaked brown with pointed white rump noticeable in flight. Bubbling call often alerts you to their presence. They can be confused with a Whimbrel, due to the similar, although shorter, bill shape, as well as colouration, but Whimbrel very rarely overwinter in the harbour. During winter, numbers build

up to c.2000 individuals across the harbour. They can be seen regularly on the Brownsea Lagoon, Swineham scrapes, Shipstal Point at RSPB Arne, as well as any exposed mudflats on a low-tide, for example, in the Middlebere and Wareham Channels, Holes Bay and Brands Bay.



Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Avocet

Length: 42-46cm, Wingspan: 67-77cm

A very elegant bird, with a slender upcurved bill which they sweep through the water to feed. They have striking black and white plumage and long, blue-grey legs. The harbour supports an internationally important overwintering population. They favour feeding in the Wytch Channel and in the Middlebere Channel, with up to 800 feeding on the Brownsea Lagoon

on a high tide. Holes Bay and the Wareham Channel on a low tide also provide good views. Numbers are continuing to do well in Poole Harbour, consistent with the trajectory of the national population. We currently have c.1800 overwintering Avocet in Poole Harbour.



Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax*

Ruff

Length: 22-32cm, Wingspan: 46-49cm

Plumage in sexes similar in winter, though females are considerably smaller. Wings and upper side dappled brown, with pale fringes to the feathers. Underside pale, with light brown marbling on breast and white throat. Legs and bill orange, with black tip to bill and white at the base. Uncommon, although during cold winters they have been known to turn

up across the harbour, including on Swineham scrapes and even in Poole Park.

WADERS



Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*

Common Sandpiper

Length: 18-21cm, Wingspan: 32-35cm

Combination of the distinctive tail-bobbing action and white 'spur' on shoulder are the key features to look for. Legs a pale greenish-grey and upperparts plain brown, with indistinct shaft streaks only visible at close range. Underparts white with diffuse brown streaking on breast. Forages visually, pecking for small prey items.

Scarce winter visitor, mainly found as

singles with records generally isolated to the rocky shoreline of Holes Bay, but occasionally found elsewhere around the harbour.



Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*

Green Sandpiper

Length: 20-24cm, Wingspan: 39-44cm

Medium-sized wader, with dappled dark wings and back, white underside and densely streaked neck and head, which contrast sharply. Legs and bill dull green, and broad black bars on white tail most easily visible in flight. While they are most common on passage during spring and autumn migration, overwintering birds occasionally put in an appearance,

most often on Swineham Scrapes, as well as Lytchett Bay.



Purple Sandpiper, *Calidris maritima*

Purple Sandpiper

Length: 19-22cm, Wingspan: 37-42cm

Dumpy, rock-loving wader with subtly drooping bill. Grey-brown upperparts, pale belly, streaked underparts and orange-yellow legs and base of bill. They are rarely recorded above single figures within Poole Harbour, with North Haven being the only semi-reliable site to observe Purple Sandpiper within the harbour as they feed on the exposed groynes at low

tide. They are sometimes seen from Branksome Chine, interchanging with birds further up the coast at Hengistbury Head.



Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*

Woodcock

Length: 33-38cm, Wingspan: 55-65cm

Shape distinctive with large thick-set body, peaked head and long bill. Underparts and head are pale brown and barred, while wing and back are richer brown with heavier barring, contrasting with rusty rump. Large head, with broad transverse barring from crown across the nape. Most easily seen by watching the skyline by the edge of a woodland at dusk, when

Woodcock will be leaving their daytime roosts in search of feeding grounds. During winter, the harbour holds an estimated 650 individuals.



Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*

Common Snipe

Length: 23-28cm, Wingspan: 39-45cm

Medium-sized wader with streaked brown back and wings, barred breast and white underside. Long bill with pale yellow facial markings, including a crown-stripe. Due to preference for feeding undercover, most commonly seen taking flight, letting out a distinctive abrupt call when flushed. During the winter, numbers of Snipe rise across wet heathland and water

meadows, including Sunnyside Farm, Lytchett Fields, Middlebere and the Frome Valley, peaking in December and January.



Jack Snipe, *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Jack Snipe

Length: 18-20cm, Wingspan: 33-36cm

Very small wader, barely noticeable in the field due to size and camouflage. Much shorter bill than Common Snipe, and significantly smaller body size, giving a rounder appearance. Highly distinct yellow stripes running down back, adding to camouflage, as well as a pale split supercilium on head. Rest of back and wings dark, with streaked breast and white

underside. Hard to see during the day time, although nocturnal ringing indicates that there is a good population across the harbour's wetlands, and have even been found feeding on Baiter playing fields at night. Typically only flushes in very close proximity to disturbance and will fly without calling, dropping down into a nearby area.

SPOONBILL & HERONS

Herons (including egrets) are large, conspicuous waterbirds, although they can sometimes be skulking in nature. Herons vary in size, bearing dagger-like bills, and showing arched wings and curled back necks in flight. By comparison, Spoonbills have a distinctive spatulate bill, holding their necks out straight in flight. Assessment of size, bill shape and colour are important identification criteria. Numbers of overwintering white herons and Spoonbills have been gradually increasing across Britain in recent years, and that is being reflected in the Poole Harbour populations.



Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*

Spoonbill

L: 80-93cm, WS: 120-135cm

Very distinctive long-legged wading bird, with a long spatula-shaped bill. Full white plumage during the winter, with dark legs. Can be confused with egrets at distance when at rest and bill is not visible, though worth noting that Spoonbills carry a more horizontal posture, whereas egrets are upright. Numbers average 20-30 individuals during the winter, peaking at 80

during autumn passage. Brownsea Lagoon and Shipstal Point at Arne undoubtedly the best sites to observe roosting birds at high tide. Low tide sees birds commute to the Wareham Channel to feed. During particularly cold weather, some individuals visit the warmer waters of Holes Bay during the day. Poole Harbour currently hosts the second-largest overwintering population in the country.



Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*

Grey Heron

L: 84-102cm, WS: 155-175cm

Large heron, with blue-grey wings and black and white underside. They have a white head and neck, with a extended black crest and long golden yellow bill. Dark streaks run up the white front of the neck, and their legs are dull yellow and grey. They are common across Britain, regularly seen skulking around the harbour, particularly on river margins, such as

at the mouth of the Frome, and on intertidal mudflats. Numbers usually reach around 50 individuals during the winter.



Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*

Little Egret

L: 55-65cm, WS: 88-106cm

Despite the name, a medium-sized egret, with full white plumage and dark, dagger-shaped bill, with distinctive dark legs contrasting with yellow feet. Long crest present in breeding plumage. By far the most common egret present in the harbour, with numbers reaching c.240 during the winter. They can be seen regularly feeding on shorelines across the

harbour, and are often seen roosting in trees on the Swineham Gravel Pit, Brownsea Shoreline and on the Arne peninsula, where the largest heronry currently resides. They bred in Britain for the first time in 1996 on Brownsea Island. Poole Harbour is now nationally important for both overwintering and breeding Little Egret populations.



Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis*

Cattle Egret

Length: 45-52cm, Wingspan: 82-95cm

Small heron, with white plumage and relatively short legs and bill compared to other egrets. Bill is bright yellow, and legs are a nondescript grey-brown. They were a rare visitor up until recently, when records have become more common. Swineham, Arne Moors and surrounding water meadows provide the most reliable views, as well as high numbers

occasionally recorded in the Frome Valley. They are often seen, as the name suggests, in close proximity to cattle.



Great White Egret, *Ardea alba*

Great White Egret

L: 85-100cm, WS: 145-170cm

Very large white egret, comparable in size to Grey Heron, with a disproportionately slender neck. They have a long yellow bill during winter, with long dark legs. Originally a vagrant to Poole Harbour, but numbers are increasing annually. During the winter of 2021/22 we had 4 individuals overwintering. Most regular sightings occur in the

Middlebere Channel, Little Sea and Brands Bay, with birds also starting to show up at Swineham.

GULLS

Six species regularly occur within the harbour. Progression from juvenile to adult through intermediate plumages can make gull identification overwhelming. Begin by familiarising yourself with adult plumages, where the combination of size, upperpart colour, wingtip pattern, bill and leg colour is easier to assess than immature birds.



Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*

Herring Gull

L: 54-60cm, WS: 123-148cm

Full adult winter plumage has a clean grey wing and back, with white underside and chest, and a grey streaked neck and head. Wing tips black with large white spots. Legs pink, with yellow eyes and bill, and a noticeable red spot on lower bill. Despite huge declines in breeding numbers over the last 50 years, wintering numbers still reach

2000-3000 individuals. Commonly seen across the harbour.



Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Black-headed Gull

Length: 35-39cm, Wingspan: 86-99cm

In adult winter plumage, the deep brown coloured head is replaced with a dark "earring" and subtle eye smudge on a white head. Pale grey wings and back, with white leading edge to wings and black wing tips. Legs and bill are orange-red, with dark tip to bill. One of the most common and widespread birds locally.



Mediterranean Gull, *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

Mediterranean Gull

L: 37-40cm, WS: 94-102cm

Winter plumage adults show a very pale body, with subtle grey to the wings and back. Wing tips are white, and legs are a deep red. Head pale, with black lightly streaked 'eyepatch' during winter. Bill red, with black band towards tip. Less widespread in winter, easiest to find feeding off the Studland beaches amongst other gulls.



Great Black-backed Gull, *Larus marinus*

Great Black-backed Gull

L: 61-74cm, WS: 144-166cm

The largest gull, similar in appearance to the Lesser Black-backed Gull, but distinctly larger. Legs are a pale dull pink, and bill is bright yellow with red spot near tip. In flight, they are very broad winged, with black upperparts, with a white leading and trailing edge, as well as more substantial white on the wing tip, compared with a LBBG. Noticeable

pale grey streaking on head during winter. Can be seen regularly across the harbour during winter, with Holes Bay attracting good numbers, as well as the Brownsea Lagoon.



Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull

L: 48-56cm, WS: 117-134cm

Similar in size to Herring Gull, with slate grey upper parts, with narrow white leading and trailing edge to the wings, as well as a small white patch on the black wing tips. Wings are slender comparatively with Great Black-backed Gull, and they are considerably smaller in size. Legs a dull yellow in winter, with yellow bill and red spot near tip, as well as

yellow eyes. Head lightly streaked grey-brown during winter. Present around the harbour and, on rare occasion during the winter, a Continental sub-species can also be found.



Common Gull, *Larus canus*

Common Gull

L: 40-46cm, WS: 100-115cm

Variable plumage dependent on age, with full adult wintering plumage showing pale grey wing and back, with pale white trailing edge, and black wing tips patched with white. Considerably larger than a Herring Gull, with a small dark eye and short banded yellow bill. Legs are yellow-green and the head is dappled grey during winter. Numbers build through

the autumn from October, increasing towards December. Poole Park, Lytchett Bay, Holes Bay and the Wareham Channel on a low tide hold good numbers in the winter.

RAILS

All common species across the harbour, found in marshy areas, as well as parks with lakes. Small to medium sized, they are typically good at concealing themselves, often announcing themselves by their call.



Coot, *Fulica atra*

Coot

Length: 36-42cm, Wingspan: 70-80cm

Slightly larger than a Moorhen, with very dark grey body, black head and white forehead leading up to the crown. In flight, a white trailing edge to the wings is visible. Bill is pale, short and down curved, and legs are grey-green. Numerous in several areas of the harbour at sites like Hatch Pond, Swineham Gravel Pit and Poole Park.



Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*

Moorhen

Length: 27-31cm, Wingspan: 52cm

Medium-sized, with dark body and white line along the flank, as well as a white and black tail feathers. Forehead and bill are bright red, with a yellow tip to the bill. Legs are yellowy-green with long toes on feet. Most often seen scanning around the edges of water bodies. Common around the harbour, visible at many sites including Poole Park, Holes Bay, Brownsea Lagoon, and Hatch Pond.

Brands Bay, Lytchett Bay, Upton Country Park and Hatch Pond.



Water Rail, *Rallus aquaticus*

Water Rail

Length: 23-26cm, Wingspan: 38-45cm

A round-bodied bird, with a long, often upright neck. Wings are a warm brown with black embellishments, neck a deep grey, with a barred belly and pale rump. Legs are pale, and long down-curved bill is red. Elusive, although numerous around the harbour. Listen out for their squealing call to help locate them. The best time to see them is during extremely cold

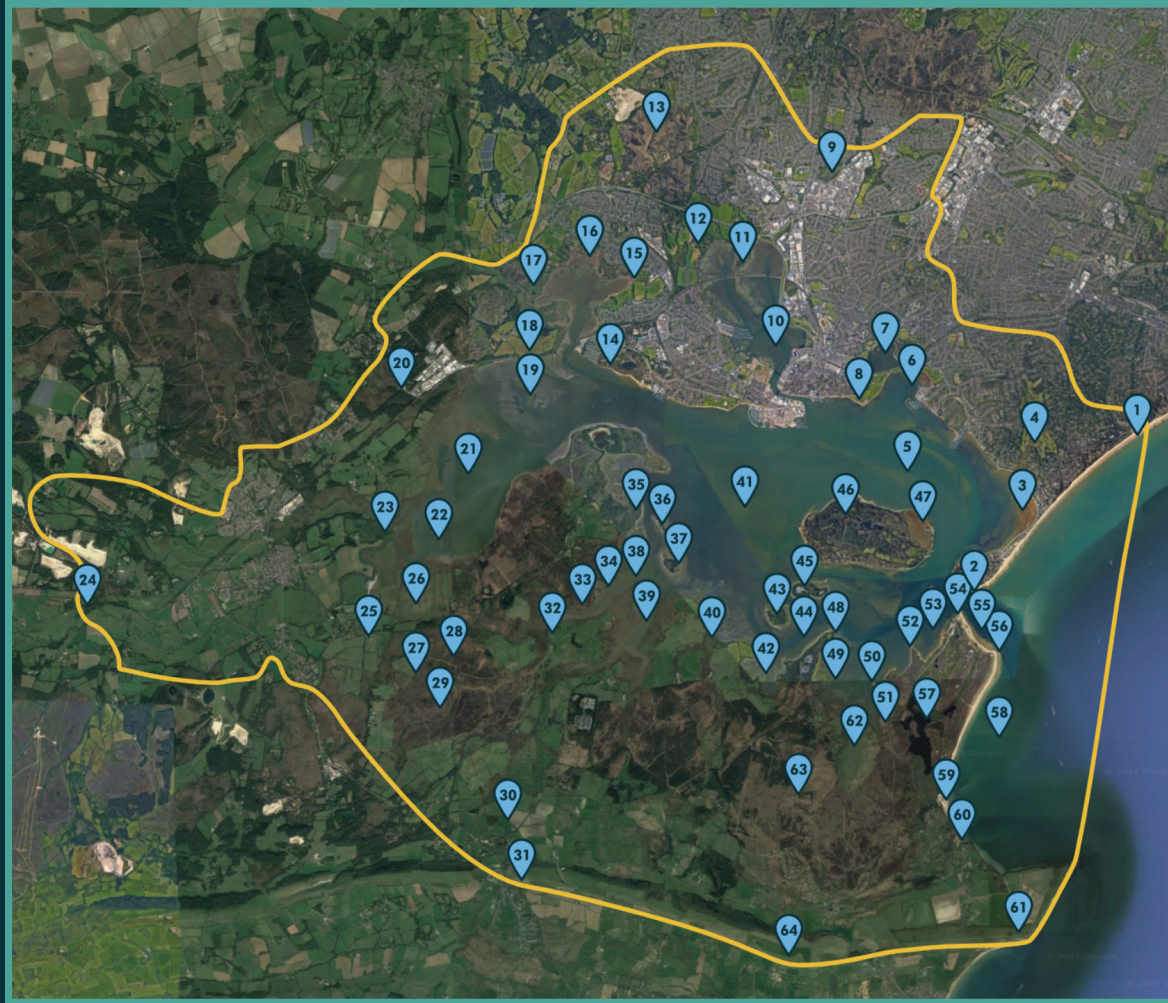
weather, with Lytchett Fields, Sunnyside Pools, Swineham and Brownsea all reliable.

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MAP OF POOLE HARBOUR

We are lucky to be situated in one of the largest natural harbours in Europe. The Poole Harbour basin contains a wide variety of habitats, in no small part due to its size and the fact that most of the harbour bed falls within the intertidal zone. Poole Harbour is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA), in part due to the volume of species that visit each winter, so understanding how, where and when to go in search of a particular species is crucial. Use the Poole Harbour map, which features the vast majority of locations mentioned in the ID guide, in conjunction with the Go Birding page on our website to discover the best birding hotspots to watch birds locally.



- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Branksome Chine | 23 Swineham & Bestwall | 45 Furzey Island |
| 2 North Haven | 24 Holme Lane | 46 Brownsea Island |
| 3 Whitley Lake | 25 Sunnyside Farm | 47 Brownsea Lagoon |
| 4 Luscombe Valley | 26 Arne Moors | 48 Goathorn Point |
| 5 North Channel | 27 Soldiers Road | 49 Brands Bay |
| 6 Parkstone Bay | 28 Slepe Heath | 50 Redhorn Quay |
| 7 Poole Park | 29 Hartland Moor NNR | 51 Brands Bay Hide |
| 8 Baiter Park | 30 Corfe River Valley | 52 Jerry's Point |
| 9 Hatch Pond | 31 Challow Hill | 53 Bramble Bush Bay |
| 10 Holes Bay | 32 Middlebere Hide | 54 South Haven |
| 11 Pergins Island | 33 RSPB Coombe Heath | 55 Shell Bay |
| 12 Upton Country Park | 34 RSPB Arne Lookout Hide | 56 Pilot's Point |
| 13 Upton Heath | 35 Shipstal Hide | 57 Little Sea |
| 14 Ham Common | 36 Long Island | 58 Studland Bay |
| 15 Lytchett Bay Viewpoint | 37 Round Island | 59 Knoll Beach |
| 16 Lytchett Heath | 38 Middlebere Channel | 60 Middle Beach |
| 17 RSPB Lytchett Fields | 39 Wych Channel | 61 Ballard Down |
| 18 Holton Lee | 40 Ower Bay | 62 Greenlands Farm |
| 19 Gull Islands | 41 Central Harbour | 63 Godlingston Heath |
| 20 Holton Heath | 42 Newton Bay | 64 Nine Barrow Down |
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REFERENCE MATERIALS

This ID guide is a tool for navigating Poole Harbour as you build your confidence with understanding the local bird populations and identification of those species. However, there are many extensive guides that are useful for aiding your growth. We recommend the following:

Collins Bird Guide - *guide to birds of Britain and Europe. Also available as an app.*

Britain's Birds - *guide to birds of Britain and Ireland*

Waders of Europe - *very informative introduction to waders*

Gulls of the World - *extensive guide to gulls*

Helm Bird Identification - *gives detailed information on species confusion*

The Sound Approach to Birding - *specialises in the understanding of bird sound*

(Please note: Within this guide, species measurements are given based on figures given by Collins Bird Guide, the BTO and RSPB. Please note that all measurements provided exclude additional length from elongated tail feathers (e.g. Pintail, Long-tailed Duck).

