



# Solent Bird Studies-Methodology

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## Aims

The Solent Bird Studies is a collaborative project that arises from a need to understand how birds may be affected by future coastal defence needs across the Solent. The study area includes the open coastline and harbours from Milford-on-Sea to Pagham. It also includes the northern coastline of the Isle of Wight, from Totland running east to Bembridge. The Solent's harbours, estuaries and coasts support internationally important populations of over-wintering waders and wildfowl and much of the area is recognised as such as Special Protection Areas (SPA) (under the EU Bird Directive). The Solent is also home to hundreds of thousands of homes that require protection from flooding and coastal erosion.

The project is in 2 main parts i) roost network study ii) bird movement study.

The roost network study aims to understand the importance of the network of high tide roost sites and inland feeding areas within the Solent for the conservation of the overwintering populations of birds, and how best to maintain and enhance the network of sites. In survey approach this will be a similar to the Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy 2010, with potential roost sites requiring regular survey visits throughout the over-wintering and some extent passage period. The data will be used to determine the relative importance of the sites both as an individual site and as part of the network. For example with enough data we can determine the importance of a site for an individual species, for different parts of the season and in extreme tidal or weather conditions.

## Methodology.

In order for the project to determine the importance of sites regular visits which (with the exception of inland feeding geese) **should coincide with the high tide period**. While weekly visits would be preferable, it is appreciated that volunteers lead busy lives; therefore a minimum of fortnightly visits to the site should provide sufficient data. But even if you cannot commit to regular surveys any records submitted will add to the knowledge gained and we are therefore happy to receive records whenever you get an opportunity on an ad hoc basis.

Where possible we hope that volunteers will be able to nominate their preferred patch, but where this is not possible will be allocated sites within easy reach of their home, or further afield if they are happy to travel further.

Surveyors will be asked to submit their sightings through the project website [www.solentbirds.org.uk](http://www.solentbirds.org.uk) or the smartphone app, which is a user friendly interface that will prompt you to records all the relevant data via a standardised recording form (separate guidance in the use of the app and website is available). Maps will be provided based on WeBS sectors, with the already identified roosts and inland field marked and labelled. There will be an option for paper copies of the form for those surveyors who prefer to do data input once back at home and for those without access to a computer, smart phone or tablet we are happy to receive paper records that we will input on your behalf.

The survey period shall be between September 2015 and April 2016. **All counts should be undertaken over the period 2.5 hours either side of high tide; all wildfowl and wading birds should be recorded and counted during the site visit.** The only exception for the timing of counts is **inland feeding behaviour in geese** especially Brent Geese, which are less affected by the changing tides. Site visits should take place during the day when Geese are more likely to be feeding and identification will be more straightforward. We would also





be happy to receive records of nocturnal inland feeding activity by wildfowl where species and location can be identified.

Surveyors should follow the “look see” methodology similar to that used for the Wetland Bird Survey for each site. Birds present in relatively small numbers or dispersed widely may be counted as individuals whereas larger groups of birds are likely to be a flock. Estimating large groups of birds is made easier by dividing the flock into smaller groups, depending on the flock size (e.g. 10s, 50s, 100s, 1000s). The number of groups is then counted and from this, the total group size can be estimated. Notebooks or tally counters can help to accurately record your data.

The basis of the survey is to determine the importance of individual roosts and inland feeding areas for waders and wildfowl, **it is therefore just as important that we record when no birds are present.** Amongst other things this will enable us to identify correlations with weather and tidal conditions, time of day and time of year and the degree of usage of a site.

The app, website and paper forms will record the same information, and where possible all of the required information should be collected, on the whole the options will be provided;

**Date and time:** of sightings/observation.

**Location:** on the app your location will be indicated aiding correct allocation of site. The website will include a google maps or satellite view where the site/flock location can be clicked. Paper records should be submitted alongside a map marking and cross referencing the locations of sightings.

**Species:** choose from a list of species (waders, wildfowl and seabirds), both individually and a species list for a site. Please record none for sites (roosts and inland fields) where no birds are observed. Rarer species may not be listed, please continue to submit rare bird sightings through appropriate systems, e.g. county bird recorder or BirdTrack.

**Number:** number of each species at a site (indicate if an estimate)

**Activity:** feeding, roosting, nesting (for seabirds), the dominant behaviour e.g. what most of the individual birds are doing.

**Habitats:** choose from a list of standard habitat types.

**Disturbance:** choose from a standard range of human activities related to the categories used in the Solent Recreational Disturbance Project, which might affect usage of the site.

**Crop Protection:** choose from a standard range of crop protection measures e.g. bangers, kites, which might affect usage of the site.

*Where you are in doubt about what information to record please do contact the project team for advice.*

### **Bird Movement Study -colour marked birds**

As noted earlier there is an allied project looking at bird movements, principally through coloured marked birds. Further details on what to look out for will be provide in due course. There are several active colour marking projects in the Solent and beyond that are regularly sighted, please do continue to pass these records onto the projects, otherwise we will happily pass records onto the correct project leaders. For more information on existing colour marking projects see <http://www.cr-birding.org/>



## Data ownership

Wildlife observations collected through this site will be stored securely at the Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership and made available to experts for verification. Verified observations will be made freely available to key data users including Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre and Local Authorities

By submitting your wildfowl and wader observations & counts, you are saying that:

- the content is yours, or you have the permission of the owner to agree to this usage, and
- you agree that the content can be used on Solentbirds.org.uk, and
- you agree that your wildlife observations can be made publicly available for wider use.

## Data protection

Your contact details will be held in a database at the Eastern Solent Coastal Partnership and may be used to contact you if there is a query about the verification of your wildlife observations, or with information relating to the project. Your contact details will not be passed on to any third parties without your permission. Your name (not email address) will be stored as part of the record and may be made publicly available along with the species name, date and location of the record.

## Health and safety etc

As a volunteer, you are under no obligation to participate or continue with a survey or scheme. Volunteers are responsible for their own health and safety, and should not put themselves in a position that could place them, or others, in danger. You should never undertake any work if you have concerns about your own or others' health and safety. You are under no obligation to visit a particular site, even if the organisers have requested it.

Before undertaking any activities, every fieldworker should consider the particular health and safety hazards associated with their individual study sites and whether their individual circumstances and medical conditions expose them to particular hazards. Individuals should assess any potential risks arising from their fieldwork activities, which should include considering the risks specific to individual sites. You should think about what precautions should be taken against any risks.

Always obtain permission from the relevant landowner or tenant to enter any private land not subject to open access legislation, before commencing fieldwork. Do not continue fieldwork if access permission is later revoked. Please abide by The Countryside Code.

## Further information

We will be sending out further information to volunteers via email, but please also keep an eye on the project blog on <https://solentbirdstudies.wordpress.com/>, Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/solentbirds> and twitter feed @SolentBirds.

## Contact details

To contact a member of the project team:

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