

Coastal Bird Guide

Identify birds from
the Rhins of Galloway
Coast Path





This guide will help you identify 16 common coastal birds that can be seen from the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path. From colonies of nesting birds on towering cliffs to overwintering waders and waterfowl on Loch Ryan, the Rhins of Galloway coast provides many opportunities to get privileged views of wildlife. The more you look the more you will see so if a bird you spot does not match those in this guide, then search the internet or a bird book to help identify what you have seen.

Dumfries
& Galloway



Coastal
Communities
Fund

Solway Firth
Partnership



This coastal bird guide has been produced as part of the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path project made possible with the Heritage Fund and managed by Dumfries and Galloway Council.

How to use this guide

The guide identifies the best time of year and sections of the walk to see each bird. Compare your sightings with the pictures in this guide. The more you look the more you will see so if a bird you spot does not match those in this guide, then try and remember the overall appearance of the bird, sometime known as the 'jizz' – the shape, size, flying style and movement. With practice the impression a bird gives you will be invaluable when searching the internet or a bird book to help identify what you have seen.

Visit one of the coastal nature reserves to see wildlife and go to visitor centres to find out more about wildlife watching. Ask people who know the area where the good places are to go or get a detailed Ordnance Survey map and plan your own adventure.





Gannet

Morus bassanus

Looks: Gleaming white with pointed tail and long pointed wings with black tips. Younger birds are dark grey and may be seen flying with adults.

1

Found: They can be seen along the coast although in the winter most birds migrate to the coast of West Africa. The jagged Scare Rocks at the mouth of Luce Bay is one of the few nesting colonies in the world.

Easiest to see: During the summer months in route sections 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Did you know? Gannets were first seen on Scare Rocks in 1883 when 2 nests were recorded. Recent surveys show that there are over 2,300 nests on the islands!

Oystercatcher

Haematopus ostralegus

Looks: The oystercatcher is a large, stocky, black and white wading bird with a long, orange-red bill and reddish-pink legs. Its distinctive colours make it an easy bird to identify.

Found: A common sight all the way round the Rhins coast, and often inland on farmland too.

Easiest to see: All year in all route sections.

Did you know? The long bill is used to prise open or break shellfish. Some birds specialise in hammering shells and tend to have blunter bills than the birds that lever shells open.

2





Ringed plover

Charadrius hiaticula

Looks: A small, dumpy, short-legged wading bird with a black-and-white pattern on its head and breast. The contrasting colours are surprisingly good camouflage on a shingle beach.

3

Found: At the edge of the water or on the strandline of shingle and sand beaches feeding on insects and crustaceans.

Easiest to see: All year in all route sections.

Did you know? If a predator gets too close to its nest, the ringed plover will pretend to have a broken wing in an attempt to lure the intruder away.

Peregrine

Falco peregrinus

Looks: A large and powerful falcon with broad pointed wings and a short tail. It is blue-grey above, with a blackish top of head and an obvious black 'moustache' that contrasts with its white face.

Found: Coastal cliffs are its favourite haunt where it is swift and agile in flight.

Easiest to see: All year in all route sections.

Did you know? When swooping on its prey it can reach great speeds. It has specially adapted nostrils, so the air pressure does not damage its lungs.

4





Raven

Corvus corax

Looks: The largest of the crow family, with a distinct shape when flying including a diamond-shaped tail and a heavy bill.

5

Found: Tumbling in the updrafts of a sea cliff the 'gronking' call of a raven is one of the most evocative sounds of our rugged shoreline.

Easiest to see: All year in all route sections. Flocks of young birds are particularly noticeable in the winter.

Did you know? Ravens often return to the same spot each spring and bring new nest material so that nests become large, untidy piles of sticks.

Fulmar

Fulmarus glacialis

Looks: This gull-like seabird is related to the albatross. It flies low over the sea on stiff wings with shallow wing beats, gliding and banking to show its white underparts and grey upper parts.

Found: Feeding in flocks out at sea. At its breeding sites it will fly high up a cliff face riding the updraughts.

Easiest to see: During the months of June, July, August and September in route sections 2, 4 and 5.

Did you know? They defend their nests from intruders by spitting a foul-smelling oil.

6





Guillemot/Razorbill

Uria aalge/Alca torda

Looks: Two similar looking birds with black above and white below. Often seen sitting upright on a ledge. A razorbill is distinguished by its thick beak with a blunt end compared with the slender beak of a guillemot.

7

Found: Coming to land only to breed, both can be seen in large numbers at the Mull of Galloway where they lay eggs on cliff ledges.

Easiest to see: During the months of June, July and August in route section 4.

Did you know? Both razorbill and guillemot lay a single pear-shape egg on a rock ledge. It is thought that the shape of the egg reduces the risk of it rolling off the cliff.

Eider duck

Somateria mollissima

Looks: A large duck, the male is a striking black and white bird, whilst the female is mottled brown to provide camouflage when sitting on her nest.

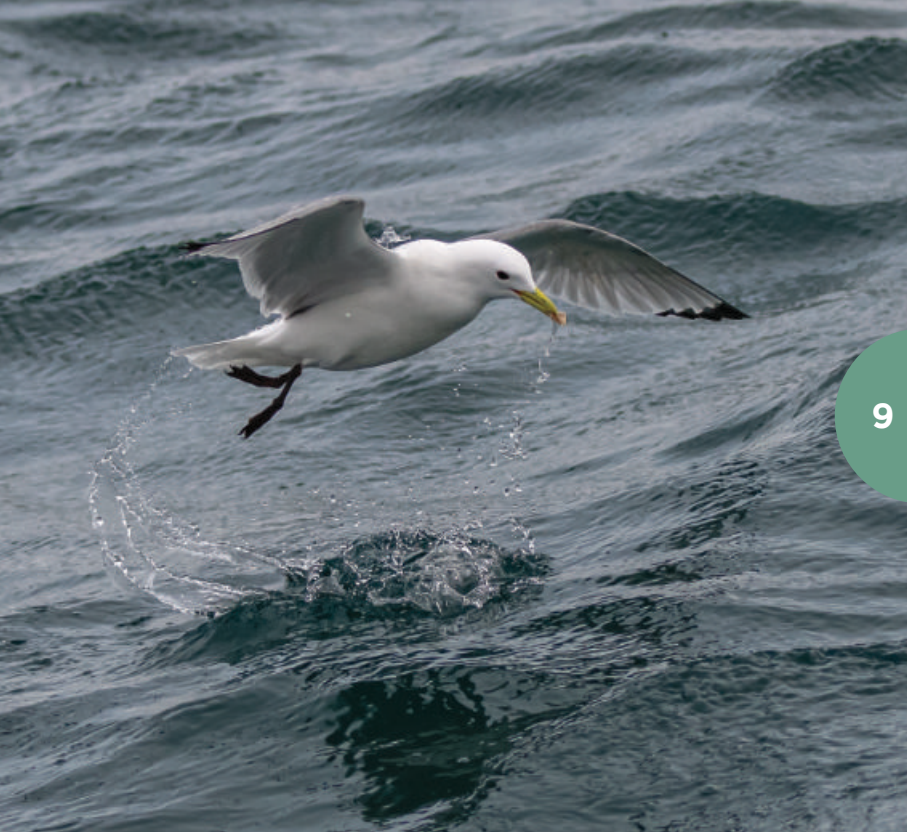
Found: Spends its life at sea, where it feeds on shellfish, swallowing them whole and crushing the shell with its strong throat muscles.

Easiest to see: All year in route section 1 with groups of males in the summer.

Did you know? The female duck nests close to the sea lining the nest with the famous eiderdown from her breast. It has long been harvested for the soft and warm lining of pillows and quilts.

8





Kittiwake

Rissa tridactyla

9

Looks: Kittiwakes are gentle looking medium sized gulls with a small yellow beak and a dark eye. They have a grey back and are white underneath. Their legs are short and black. The wing tips are black and look like they have been dipped in ink.

Found: In breeding colonies on cliffs. These birds spend the winter in the Atlantic.

Easiest to see: During the months of May, June and July in route section 3 and 4.

Did you know? The population is declining perhaps because of a shortage of sand eels.

Cormorant

Phalacrocorax carbo

Looks: These are large, black, long necked birds often seen around the coast on favourite roosting spots. They hold their wings out to dry, with a distinctive wing-spreading posture. A shag is all black without white throat and thigh patches and is more slender than the cormorant.

Found: Spot cormorants and shags on all rocky shores.

Easiest to see: All times of year in all route sections.

Did you know? The birds have a number of different names and in Galloway is known as a Scart which is probably derived from Skarfr the Old Norse for cormorant.

10





Black guillemot

Cepphus grille

Looks: In summer it is unmistakable; all black with big white wing patches and bright red legs and gape – the latter surprisingly noticeable when they open their mouths.

11

Found: Black Guillemots nest in small numbers under the boulders at the base of cliffs, but also in holes in the walls of Portpatrick Harbour, where they can be easily observed.

Easiest to see: Present all year in route sections 2, 3 and 4.

Did you know? In the UK, this is almost entirely a Scottish species, with just a few pairs breeding in England.

Brent goose

Branta bernicla

Looks: A small goose about the size of a mallard duck it has a black head and neck and grey-brown back. The birds in Loch Ryan are the pale bellied race.

Found: On the mud flats of Loch Ryan where it feeds on eel grass.

Easiest to see: A winter visitor it can be seen in route section 1.

Did you know? The pale bellied race of brent goose nests in Svalbard and Greenland while those with darker bellies nest in Siberia and usually spend their winter on the east coast of England.

12





Herring gull

Larus argentatus

Looks: Large noisy gulls with light grey backs, white underneath and black wing tips that have white flashes. It has pink legs and a heavy yellow bill with a red spot. Young birds are mottled brown.

13

Found: Mostly on cliffs but often seen inland during the winter.

Easiest to see: All through the year in all route sections.

Did you know? The red spot on the bill plays an important part in feeding its young. When a chick taps the spot, the parent opens its bill wide and allows the chick to feed on regurgitated food.

Rock dove

Columba livia

Looks: Even on the remote Rhins coast, rock doves have interbred with their domestic cousins resulting in pigeons with a variety of colours and patterns. However, many cliff dwelling pigeons still retain the markings of wild birds with a grey body, two dark wing bars, a blue head and white rump.

Found: On cliffs nesting in caves.

Easiest to see: All year in all route sections.

Did you know? Cave dwelling pigeons are among the strongest fliers of all birds and need to be highly agile in flight to avoid being caught by peregrine falcons.

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83 mile
circular walking route
on Scotland's south
west coast

Find out more about
the Rhins of Galloway
Coast Path by visiting:
dgitrails.org



best bird
watching
locations

Route Sections

- 1 Stranraer - Corsewall
- 2 Corsewall - Portpatrick
- 3 Portpatrick - Port Logan
- 4 Port Logan - Mull of Galloway
- 5 Mull of Galloway - Ardwell
- 6 Ardwell - Stranraer