

Information for visitors and residents about

Sandwich & Pegwell Bay

A home we share with thousands of the world's migratory birds



Why is the bay so special for wildlife?

The bay is home to such spectacular bird life that it is designated as a protected area under UK¹ and EU² legislation, and is also considered a world class wetlands³.

The bay attracts internationally important numbers of turnstone and nationally important numbers of waders including ringed plover, golden plover, grey plover and sanderling. The little tern, a species specially protected by law and listed in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, has bred here in the past and the Sandwich tern is another summer visitor here.

The site is used by large numbers of migratory birds. They migrate here to take advantage of our sheltered shores and the soft unfrozen mudflats that are rich feeding grounds.

The bird life of the bay makes it a popular place to visit and a very special place to live.

However, people can easily disturb birds and prevent them feeding, resting or breeding. Authorities and local people need to work together to make sure the area continues to be a safe haven for the world's birds.



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¹Sites of Special Scientific Interest are sites that are nationally important for plants, animals or geological or physiographical features and are protected by law. The bay is also a National Nature Reserve.

² Special Protection Areas are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. (Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay SPA)

³Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention 1971.

Sandwich & Pegwell Bay - a Special Protection Area

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive. SPAs are classified for rare and vulnerable birds, and for regularly occurring migratory species.

The bay contains the most important sand dune system and sandy coastal grassland in South East England and also includes a wide range of other habitats such as mudflats, saltmarsh and chalk cliffs. These areas provide an important landfall for migrating birds and also support large wintering populations of waders, some of which regularly reach levels of national importance with some internationally important species, such as, the European golden plover, ruddy turnstone and little tern.



The bird interest is centred on the large numbers of waders and wildfowl which use the area in winter and during the spring and autumn migrations. Dunlin is usually the most common wader present, found particularly on the mudflats where the rich food source also attracts a wide range of other common species such as oystercatcher, curlew and redshank.



Grey plover and sanderling both overwinter in nationally important numbers, whilst ringed plover also occurs in nationally important numbers during migration. Wildfowl that occur on the site include mallard, shelduck and occasionally Brent geese. Many of the birds use more than one habitat, some for example feed on the mudflats at low tide and then move up to roost on the saltmarsh or grazing marsh.

Breeding birds include ringed plover, oystercatcher and little tern (a species specially protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) although the latter has not nested successfully for a number of years now.



Thanet Coast and Sandwich Bay qualifies as a Ramsar site, a wetland of international importance, as it supports on average 1% of the ruddy turnstone population over winter (source: JNCC). However in the last few years the population here has almost halved and recreational disturbance, particularly dogs off leads, is likely to be a significant factor in this decline. The UK as a whole supports over 50% of the Greenland/Canada birds in winter

Wild birds are being threatened by human activities—but you can help

Large numbers of different types of bird shelter in the bay in the winter and others nest here in the summer, but bird disturbance is a serious problem in Sandwich & Pegwell Bay.

Why? Birds are easily frightened and they will take to the air if disturbed by noise or human activity or particularly by loose dogs. This is a problem because they desperately need to be resting and conserving their energy in cold weather or busy finding food on the open mudflats. Birds can be discouraged from visiting the best feeding areas by human activity and they can become exhausted through unnecessary flying.

Which activities are a problem?

- Dogs playing off the lead on the salt marsh or mudflats.
- People, particularly in groups, digging for bait
- Well-meaning individuals—photographers, bird-watchers, nature-lovers and picnickers, just lingering too long or walking through sensitive sites, particularly across the inter-tidal area
- Watercraft - motorboats, yachts, canoes & kayaks and kite-surfers close to feeding or roosting birds.
- Clearly objects in the air have a large potential for causing disturbance, and kites and 'drones' should never be flown across the bay.

By walking quietly near the water's edge and keeping off the mud everyone can enjoy the bay without putting birds at risk.



Willie McKnight

Walking with your dog near the water

Birds are easily frightened by dogs or people when they need to be resting on the shore line or feeding on the open mud.

When you walk near the water please put your dog on a lead.

Why? Allowing your dog to roam and explore over the mudflats or the saltmarsh, even if they are not *trying* to chase birds, has been assessed as one of the top two most disturbing activities for birds.

You might be surprised how much you can help wild birds just by making this choice.

Keep your best friend close

Away from the water please follow the country code and keep your dog under control—this doesn't necessarily mean on a lead.

Remember that it's an offence to let your dog harm wildlife and use a lead if you're not confident that you have sufficient voice control and can keep your dog in sight at all times.

Take pride in having a well-trained dog.

It's easy for dog lovers to help protect the wild birds in our bay.



Willie McKnight

Great places to go to around the bay if you'd like...

...a walk in woodland: East Blean Wood National Nature Reserve	...to see birds without a walk at all!: Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust Field Centre
...to let your dog off the lead: King George VI Memorial Park, Ramsgate	...pubs/ cafes and public conveniences nearby: Ramsgate to Broadstairs coastal walk
...to walk by the water: Minnis Bay to Reculver	...a long/er walk: Saxon Shore Way
...a short walk: Reculver Country Park	

Planning a trip out to see the birds? Some tips: Check the weather and tides, wear warm clothes in dull colours, bring binoculars or a telescope and a hot drink in cold weather. Take your time, be prepared to watch and wait. Don't walk on the mudflats as you can easily get stuck and will frighten the birds, and leave your dog at home if you want to see bird-life. **Enjoy the bay!**

Discover more about:

The SPA designation and the special features of the bay:

www.jncc.defra.gov.uk,
www.naturalengland.org.uk

The birds of the bay: www.rspb.org.uk

Out and about in the bay: Guides to walking in Thanet including long distance walks and short pub walks, see Visit Thanet and Kent websites: www.visitthanet.co.uk, www.visitkent.co.uk/things-to-do/active-and-outdoors/walks-in-kent and <http://explorekent.org/> and refer to OS Explorer map 150.

Nature reserves; particularly special areas, managed for wildlife

Reculver Country Park (coastal wildlife reserve) and East Blean Wood NNR (a quiet spot for birdwatching) - visit www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/wildlife/reserves

Yachting and boating www.rya.org.uk/regions/southeast

Wildfowling /shooting www.basc.org.uk