

# The Wildlife of the Exe Estuary

This leaflet is a guide to when and where to see some of the wildlife highlights on the globally important and protected Exe Estuary.

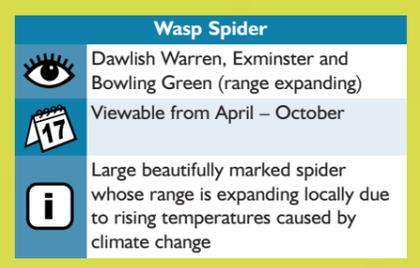
Estuaries are a hostile environment for the animals that live there, the changing tide requires less mobile species to be specially adapted to survive under water at high tide and at low tide when exposed. Birds use different parts of the estuary depending on the position of the tide; feeding on the estuary mudflats at low water and roosting on higher ground (such as Bowling Green) at high-water. To avoid disappointment please check the tide table and consider the timing of your visit carefully, a guide to the best season and tide to see some of the star species is available below.

For information on guided wildlife cruises, accessing the estuary and local amenities available, the Exe Explorer leaflet is an informative guide to the footpaths, cycle ways, public transport and ferry services on the Estuary. Copies are available from Tourist Information Centres and the Exe Estuary website [www.exe-estuary.org.uk](http://www.exe-estuary.org.uk)

Enjoy your visit to the estuary and please consider your impact on the wildlife you are hoping to observe. Birds are especially sensitive to disturbance and repeated disturbance can threaten their survival.



**Grey Seal**  
 Sandbanks throughout the Estuary  
 All Year  
 While there are a few identifiable individuals regularly seen in the estuary others could visit at any time



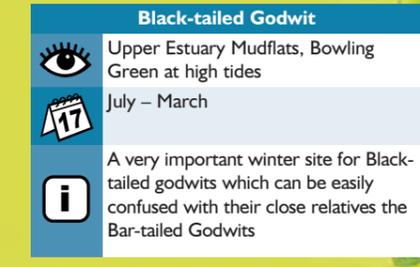
**Wasp Spider**  
 Dawlish Warren, Exminster and Bowling Green (range expanding)  
 Viewable from April – October  
 Large beautifully marked spider whose range is expanding locally due to rising temperatures caused by climate change



**Otter**  
 Upper Estuary  
 All Year  
 From the brink of extinction in the UK, due to poor water quality, otters are now found on every river in Devon



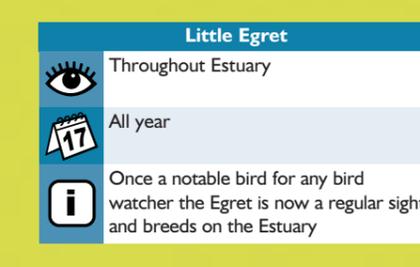
**Black-tailed Godwit**  
 Upper Estuary Mudflats, Bowling Green at high tides  
 July – March  
 A very important winter site for Black-tailed godwits which can be easily confused with their close relatives the Bar-tailed Godwits



**Osprey**  
 Throughout especially Powderham and Exminster Marshes  
 March April and August – October  
 Ospreys use the estuary like a highway for their annual migrations and are seen briefly in spring on their way to Scottish breeding sites and tend to spend longer in Autumn on their way back towards West Africa



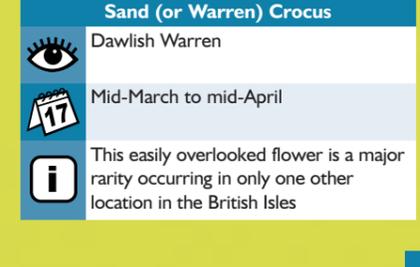
**Little Egret**  
 Throughout Estuary  
 All year  
 Once a notable bird for any bird watcher the Egret is now a regular sight and breeds on the Estuary



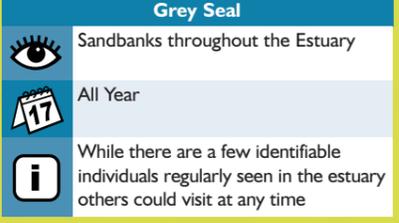
**Redshank**  
 Throughout the estuary but most likely seen at high water roosts  
 All year  
 Exminster is one of only 2 places where Redshank breed in Devon



**Sand (or Warren) Crocus**  
 Dawlish Warren  
 Mid-March to mid-April  
 This easily overlooked flower is a major rarity occurring in only one other location in the British Isles



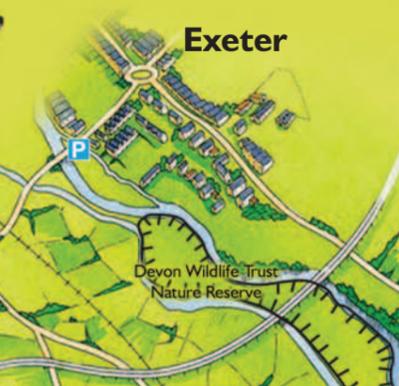
**Sand Lizard**  
 Dawlish Warren, around the Warren Point area of the reserve.  
 Warm days from March onwards  
 Likes areas where there is a good mixture of Marram grass and bare sand. Best seen basking before the day gets too warm



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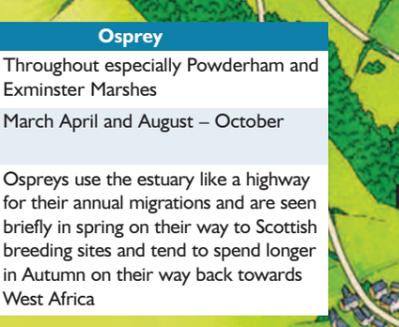
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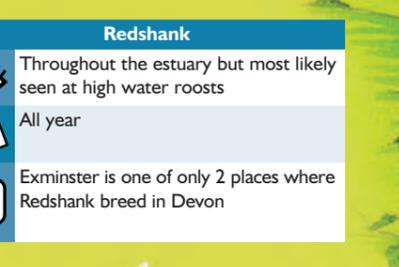
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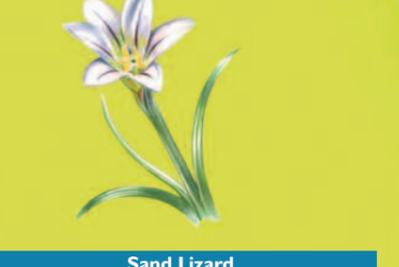
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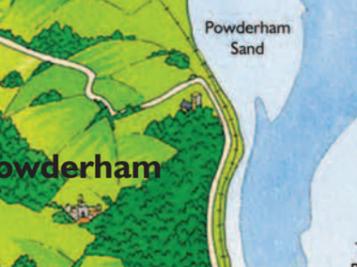
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**Avocet**  
 Upper Estuary Mudflats, and roosting at high tide at Bowling Green  
 Predominantly July to March  
 The only wading bird with blue legs and an up curved bill which they scythe from side to side when feeding



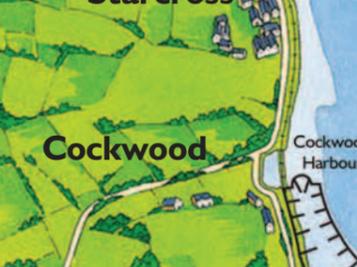
**Dunlin**  
 Feeding on estuary mudflats and at high tide roosts throughout the estuary  
 Predominantly July to March  
 Flock in large numbers when feeding and can be seen flying in formation to avoid predators such as Peregrine Falcon



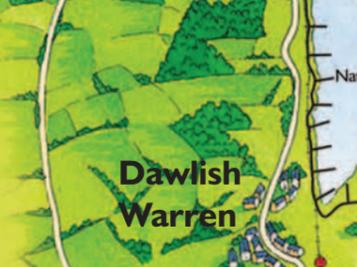
**Eel Grass**  
 Grows in large beds on intertidal areas of the Southern Estuary  
 Visible from May – December  
 The only flowering plant capable of growing submerged in salt water; eel grass is the primary reason for wildfowl wintering in the estuary



**Dark Bellied Brent Geese**  
 Resting at high tide roosts and feeding on eel grass beds and at wetland areas throughout the estuary  
 September – March  
 The Exe Estuary is the winter home to 1% of the worlds population



**Wigeon**  
 Resting at high tide roosts and feeding on eel grass beds and at wetland areas throughout the estuary  
 September – March  
 Wigeon pair for life and partners keep in contact in large flocks by constant calling



**Hairy Dragonfly**  
 Wetland locations such as Dawlish Warren and Exminster Marshes  
 April – June  
 This beautifully marked emerald green dragonfly is one of the first to emerge in early Spring

# A Guide to Wildlife on the Exe Estuary



Cover photo - Andy Hay, rspb-images.com

# Exe Wildlife



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 County Hall, Topsham Rd, Exeter, EX2 4QW  
 Tel: 01392 382236  
 www.exe-estuary.org  
 exestua@devon.gov.uk  
**Exe Estuary Officer**

## Exe Estuary Management Partnership

Protecting our Estuary for Future Generations  
 with many and varied activities taking place.

**Respect Other Users** - The Estuary is a busy place with many and varied activities taking place.

**Be Safe** - Check tide times and keep to designated rights of way

**Observe Estuary Bylaws and Warning Signs**

**Prevent Litter** - Litter is a major cause of seabird deaths. Bin litter or take it home.

**Keep Your Dog Under Control** - Dogs chasing birds are a major cause of disturbance and can impact greatly on bird survival. Please avoid using the estuary to exercise your dog during winter when the greatest numbers of birds are present and the seafront is available as an alternative. Please clean up after your dog.

**Keep Your Distance** - Wildlife is incredibly sensitive to disturbance. High tide is a critical rest time for birds.

**Take nothing but photographs** - Do not remove plants or animals or damage their habitat.

**Exe Estuary Wildlife Code**

**Wildlife Protection**  
 The Exe Estuary is a 'Special Protection Area' and 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' due to the internationally important number of birds that visit the Exe each winter. It is also a 'Ramsar' site' showing its global importance as a wetland; while Dawlish Warren is a Special Area for Conservation.  
 All of these bring extra protection to the estuary making it an offence to knowingly damage the site, this includes disturbing the wildlife. It also requires that Natural England must give their consent for development projects such as boat pontoons.

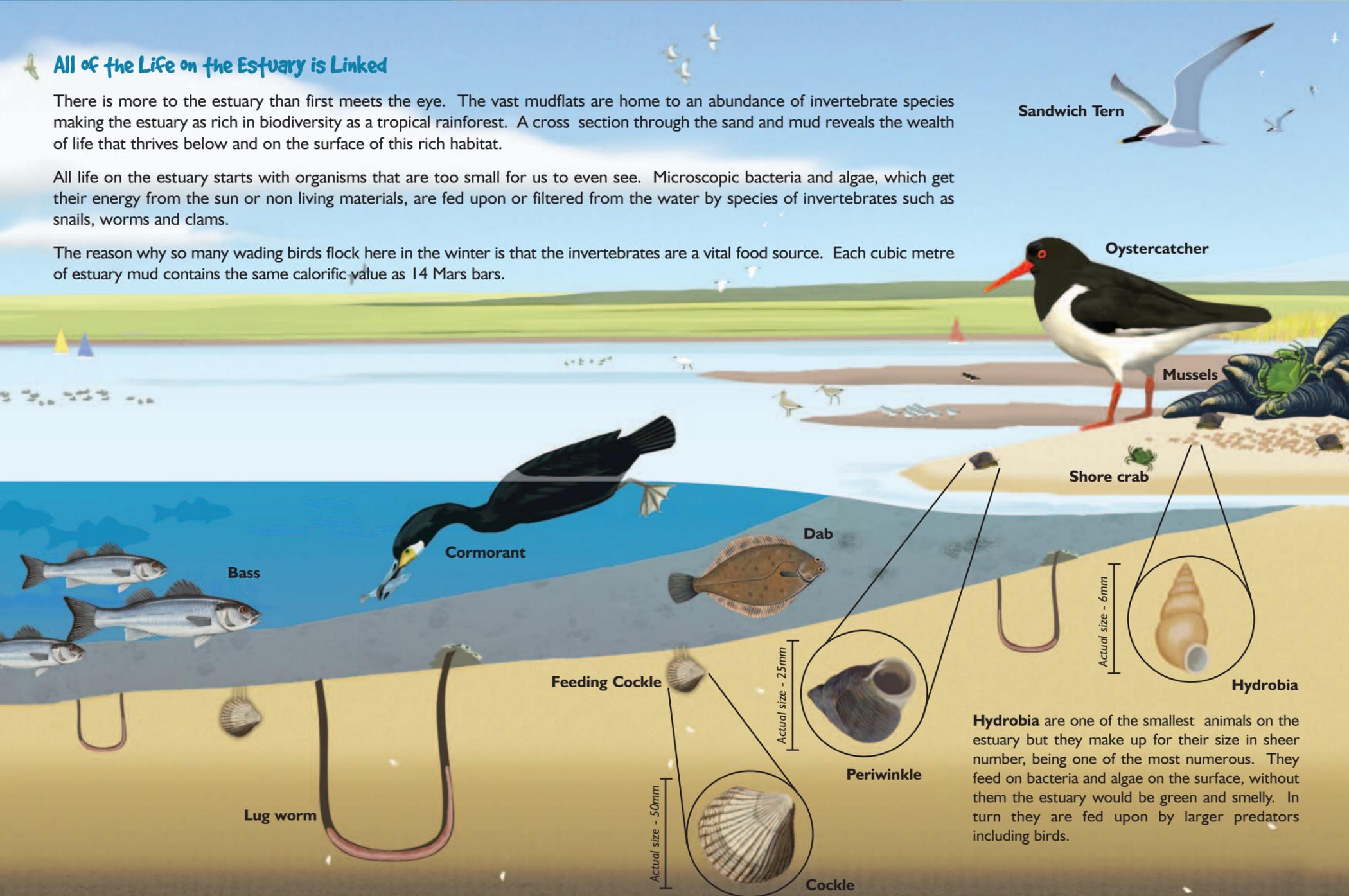
**Sources of Further Information**  
 The Partnership brings together organisations with responsibility for managing the estuary. The Estuary Officer delivers the aims of the Partnership and is responsible for coordinating activities on the estuary such as clean up events, education and forums.  
**Dawlish Warren**  
 Rangers are available at the visitor centre throughout the year and provide lots of activities to help you learn about this unique area of the estuary.  
**Exmouth Local Nature Reserve**  
 Tel: 01626 863980 Web: www.teignbridge.gov.uk  
 The Education Ranger provides educational events for both school groups and members of the public including seashore safaris and bird watching.  
**RSPB**  
 The RSPB manage wetland habitat at Exminster Marshes and Bowling Green and have a shop at Darts Farm in Topsham. They offer various events including avocet cruises in the winter.  
**Devon Wildlife Trust**  
 DWT manage the Exe Reed beds and Inner Warren which is rented to Dawlish Warren golf club.  
 Tel: 01392 279244 Web: www.devonwildlifetrust.org.uk  
**Natural England**  
 The key government body for monitoring and maintaining the condition of designated sites  
 Tel: 01392 457405 Web: www.naturalengland.org.uk  
**National Trust**  
 Manage 18th Century house and lands of A-La-Ronde on the Eastern bank of the estuary.  
 Tel: 01395 265514 Web: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

## All of the Life on the Estuary is Linked

There is more to the estuary than first meets the eye. The vast mudflats are home to an abundance of invertebrate species making the estuary as rich in biodiversity as a tropical rainforest. A cross section through the sand and mud reveals the wealth of life that thrives below and on the surface of this rich habitat.

All life on the estuary starts with organisms that are too small for us to even see. Microscopic bacteria and algae, which get their energy from the sun or non living materials, are fed upon or filtered from the water by species of invertebrates such as snails, worms and clams.

The reason why so many wading birds flock here in the winter is that the invertebrates are a vital food source. Each cubic metre of estuary mud contains the same calorific value as 14 Mars bars.



**Hydrobia** are one of the smallest animals on the estuary but they make up for their size in sheer number, being one of the most numerous. They feed on bacteria and algae on the surface, without them the estuary would be green and smelly. In turn they are fed upon by larger predators including birds.