

2024

annual update
report

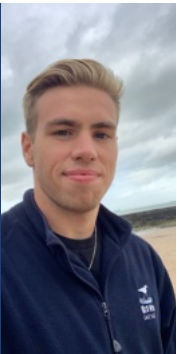


Bird Wise
EAST KENT



Thank you for wising up to bird disturbance

A MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT MANAGER



Hello everyone,

I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself and share an update on the Bird Wise East Kent project.

My name is Gregory Bessant, and I've been part of the Bird Wise East Kent team for several years as an Engagement Officer. With a background in wildlife, particularly along our coastline, I'm also a passionate wildlife filmmaker and photographer. I'm now proud to be stepping into the role of Project Manager.

This season has brought several changes to the team structure. Michael Lee, our previous Project Lead, has moved on to an exciting new role as Biodiversity Officer at Thanet District Council. While we were short-staffed for a time, the team remained committed to our mission — and we've been as active as ever.

Despite the challenges, we've delivered or participated in 148 events, reaching over 7,165 people. These events, especially our popular coastal pit stops, help raise awareness of bird disturbance and promote positive behaviours in sensitive areas.

One of the highlights of the year was our Photography Competition, which saw a major boost in engagement. The exhibition alone attracted an impressive 4,577 interactions, making it our most successful event to date.

We've also made significant progress at Long Rock, where new signage has been installed at all main entrances. We've increased our on-site presence to inform visitors and help protect wildlife. Similar efforts have taken place at Plum Pudding and Cold Harbour, where we've worked with Natural England to install interpretive signage that both educates and safeguards key roosting and breeding areas.

Our schools programme has continued to grow, with bookings from a wide range of groups including Brownies, colleges, walking groups, and heritage organisations — a positive sign for the future.

Here's to another impactful season ahead!

Gregory Bessant



ONLINE MEDIA

The website has seen a steady increase in engagement, particularly driven by interest in the Photography Competition. Our social media platforms are also continuing to grow, with engagement and reach improving consistently over time.

Website & Social Media

This past year has seen strong performance across several digital platforms, especially in reaching local audiences. Thanks to Ranger Jasmine’s dedicated focus on social media, we’ve significantly grown our reach. One standout Instagram video helped make us the most followed SAMMs Project in the UK. As always, engagement varies by platform due to differing algorithms and what works well on one may not on another.

We’ve begun stepping back from Twitter (X) due to ongoing controversies. The account remains for now, but we’re monitoring developments and following the lead of other organisations.

TikTok and YouTube haven’t been priorities, as they require regular content to build engagement. They’ve taken a back seat this year, though we hope to increase our presence in future.

Social Media Reach

83.6k

↑





↑

2.5M

23 Follows





38 Follows

764



@BirdWiseEK

ON SITE ENGAGEMENT

Each engagement represents a meaningful interaction that goes beyond a simple greeting, with a focus on raising awareness and promoting the Bird Wise East Kent project.

Printed Media

We've improved our core printed materials, including a large reprint of our general leaflet to ensure long-term availability and wider distribution across key locations. In addition, we've been developing new and updated resources such as There's No Such Thing as a Seagull, an enhanced Know Your Daring Dozen, and several other leaflets either already in circulation or currently in development. These materials are designed to better engage, educate, and inspire visitors about the importance of protecting our coastal wildlife and habitats.

Interpretative Signage

New signage has been introduced along key points of the coastline, including the Wantsum Stretch at Cold Harbour and Plum Pudding, in collaboration with Natural England. These signs aim to protect vital breeding and roosting areas by raising awareness among visitors. At the Long Rock site, large new signs have also been installed to educate the public and encourage changes in how the area is used, helping to create a more suitable environment for roosting and potentially breeding bird species.

Turnstone Sign
Viking Bay

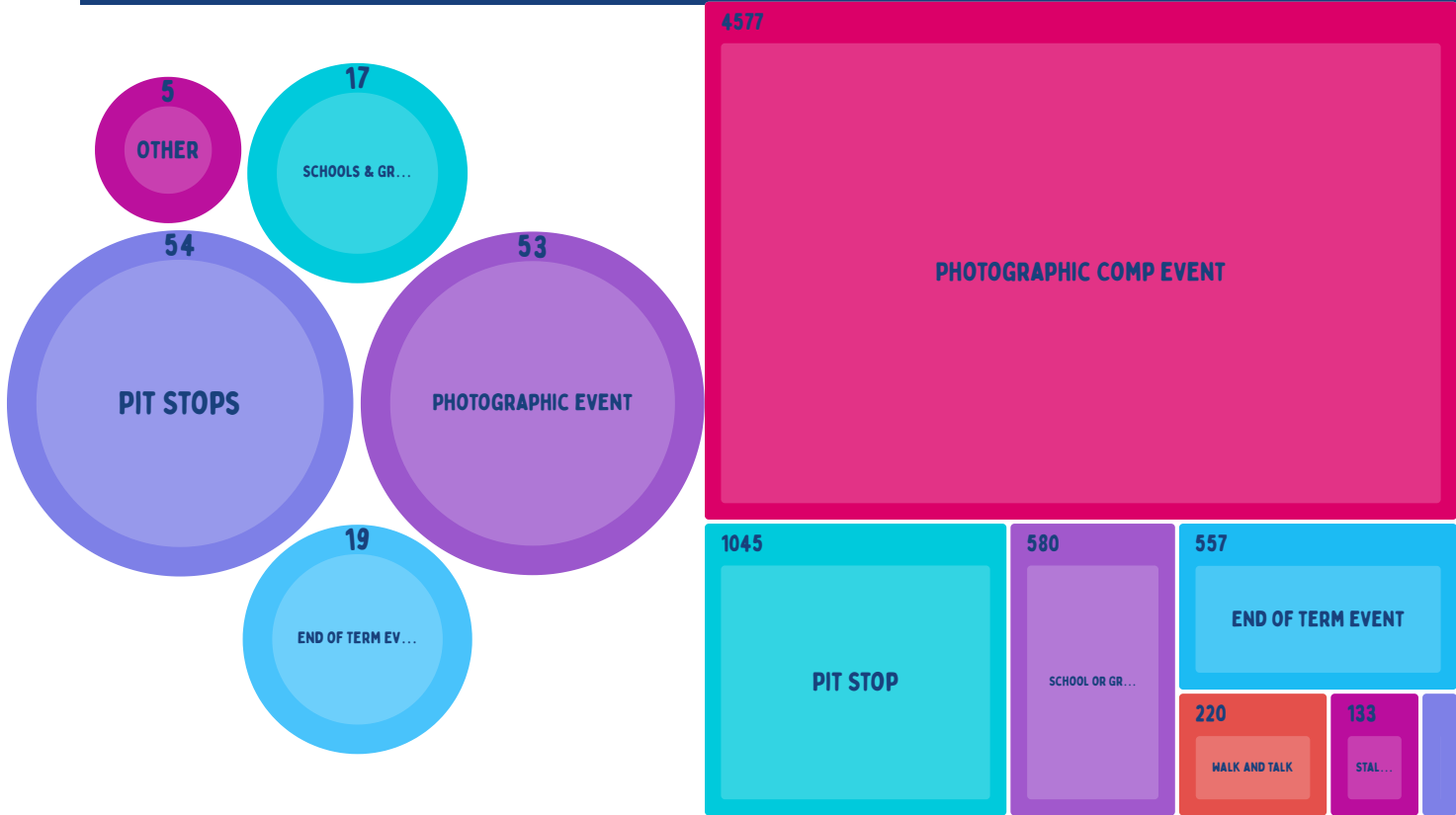
Bird Wise Team

Thanet Coast Project Event

NE Sign

ON SITE ENGAGEMENT

With school visits, pit stops, and social media we have been successful in engaging with a variety of different coastal users this year



Number of Events
Total - 148

Event Attendees
Total - 7,165



MONITORING BIRD NUMBERS

Thanet District Council Lapwing and Golden Plover Numbers

Numbers and Distribution of Golden Plover and Lapwing on Thanet, Kent - Jan, Feb, Nov & Dec 2022-2023, with Jan 2024 Supplementary Data

Surveys show a steady decline in Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) and Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) across the Thanet and Sandwich Bay SPA.

Milder winters are a key factor, allowing birds to winter further north, reducing numbers in southern parts of their range. There is many other factors such as habitat changes may also influence roosting and feeding choices.

Ongoing monitoring is vital to understand trends and guide conservation.

Further surveys are planned, including in 2024 - 2025 Wading Bird Survey with Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust. We've also been conducting our own population checks, noting an increase in breeding at several Bird Wise East Kent sites.



Photography Comperition 2024 Winner!

BUDGET

Funding accumulated is continuing to be used for day to day activities

Use of Budget

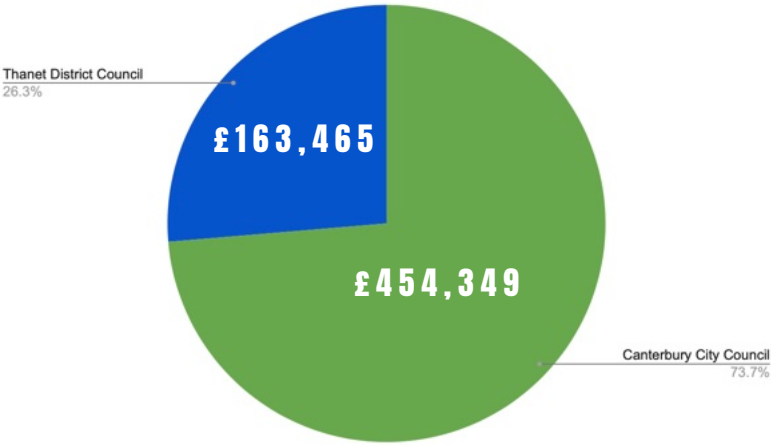
The project budget has been primarily directed towards staffing, funding two dedicated Engagement Officers and a Project Lead who deliver public engagement, events, and outreach across the East Kent coastline. This core team is essential to the ongoing success of the project.

A significant portion of the budget has also supported day-to-day delivery — including the photography exhibition (printing, venue hire, and prizes), as well as large-scale leaflet production, interpretative signage, and other visual materials. These printed and visual resources are crucial for raising awareness and encouraging responsible behaviour across key coastal areas.

Total expenditure for the 2023–2024 period of the Bird Wise East Kent project stands at £144,135. Contributions came from Canterbury City Council (£454,349) and Thanet District Council (£162,465). The lower figure from Thanet reflects a higher contribution made in the previous financial year.

The funds used are covered by the interest gained from the pot of S106 contributions gained over a number of years by both Councils.

Bird Wise East Kent Funding (£)



ONGOING WORK

Contact with people whilst on the coast provides us with valuable feedback and enables effective delivery of the service

Future

With recent staffing changes, including Michael moving into a new role, there is an opportunity for fresh perspectives and new personnel to shape the next phase of the project. While the approach may evolve, the core goal remains the same: to protect the coastal Special Protection Area (SPA) through public engagement in surrounding communities.

Engagement

Our regular pit stops remain one of the most effective ways to engage directly with the public on site. However, they don't always reach the numbers required to meet our targets. That's why broader events which attract both regular visitors and potential new audiences are essential for extending our reach and raising awareness across the wider area.



COLLABORATION & COMMUNITY



Working with Other Organisations

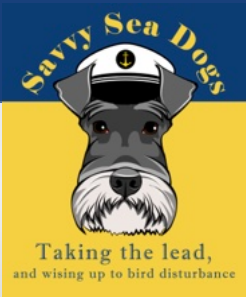
We've successfully built strong working relationships with a range of local organisations, helping us to expand our reach, share expertise, and work collaboratively to protect East Kent's coastal wildlife.

At Pegwell Bay, we've continued our close collaboration with Kent Wildlife Trust, particularly with Nina Jones, working together to reduce wildlife disturbance across the site.

We're also grateful to Hayley Taylor from Bird Wise North Kent for her invaluable support during the transition of the Project Lead.

This year, we proudly hosted our annual photo competition and exhibition. The event launched once again at the Crab Museum before touring venues across East Kent, including Hāthats Coastal Classroom at Reculver, York Street Gallery in Ramsgate, Droit House Drum Room in Margate, and The Horsebridge in Whitstable.

We've been fortunate to work with a range of fantastic projects and organisations this year, and we'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported and collaborated with us.



THE FUTURE

We are planning some exciting projects for the next year

Long Rock

We have just started a monitoring phase following the installation of new signage. Using Huq technology, we’re beginning to track visitor numbers, movement patterns, and time spent at the site over the next two years to assess the effectiveness of the new signs.

The Wantsum Stretch

As our largest roosting site — and now an active nesting site for some of our waders — the Wantsum Stretch is a key location. Over the next year, we aim to enhance this area further, building on the existing fencing around the lagoons and creating new signage.

Pegwell Bay

In collaboration with Kent County Council and Kent Wildlife Trust, we plan to run further events to engage visitors while promoting responsible behaviour. We are also looking at additional ways that we can reduce disturbance to help protect this vital habitat and wildlife.

Looking forward to a productive year ahead!

