

Bird Wise East Kent

Business Plan

2025 - 2030



Foreword

“Welcome to the refreshed Bird Wise business plan, which details our collaborative strategy for mitigating recreational disturbance to coastal birds across East Kent.

Our coastline faces escalating pressures on its bird populations due to significant environmental and societal shifts since the original Footprint Ecology Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS) was first published in 2016.

Changes in working and recreational habits following the Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with Avian Influenza outbreaks and a warming climate, make our work to reduce disturbance more crucial than ever.

The Bird Wise East Kent partnership has successfully evolved and adapted since its formation in 2019. We now have dedicated, year-round staff, prominent signage in key locations, and strong relationships with a wide range of stakeholders from Sandwich to Canterbury. Our outreach activities engage thousands of coastal visitors, reaching approximately 29,444 in the first 5 years.

The partnership is deeply committed to the long-term sustainability of our work. Our defined Mission, Vision, and Values prioritise nature conservation while actively considering the needs of all coastal recreational communities. We firmly believe that close partnership working can collectively make a positive difference for the East Kent Coast’s wildlife, allowing people to enjoy the benefits of time spent outdoors simultaneously.”

The Bird Wise East Kent Partnership Board



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Background & Introduction

The Thanet and Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) extends along the North Kent Coast from Whitstable to Pegwell Bay, protecting internationally important coastal and intertidal habitats. It is designated under the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019.



The SPA supports key bird species — Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), European Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*), and Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) — which rely on its mudflats, saltmarshes, and shingle beaches for feeding, roosting, and breeding. The area also contains overlapping designations such as NNR, LNR, MCZ, Ramsar, SAC, and SSSI sites.



Ruddy Turnstone



Little Tern



Golden Plover

As development and recreation increase along this popular coastline, disturbance to birds has become a growing challenge. Under the Habitats Regulations, planning authorities must ensure that developments do not cause significant harm to SPAs unless suitable mitigation is in place.



To address these pressures, the Bird Wise East Kent Project delivers the local Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Strategy (SAMMS), reducing disturbance and promoting responsible access through education, monitoring, and mitigation. The project covers the stretch from Whitstable to the River Stour, excluding harbours and the Sandwich Bay section managed by Dover City Council.

Over the past five years, Bird Wise East Kent has achieved significant progress, including strong public engagement with over 29,444 interactions on site engagement and 10,947 followers across social media platforms, the introduction of new signage and awareness projects, and extensive monitoring of wildlife and disturbance. Funding from housing developments provides a sustainable foundation for the project's long-term delivery, with continued growth expected over the next five years.

5 years  **29,444** face-to-face interactions

From 2025–2030, the project will continue to strengthen conservation, expand public education, and protect the unique wildlife and habitats of the Thanet and Sandwich Bay SPA.



Our Purpose

Protecting East Kent's Coastal Birds

Bird Wise East Kent works to mitigate the impacts of increased housing development and coastal populations along the Thanet and Sandwich Bay SPA, reducing disturbance to migrating and breeding bird species.



Wise Up to Bird Disturbance

Your coast is designated a Special Protected Area because it's an internationally important site for waders and wildfowl on migration and over-winter.

Share the coast with our amazing birds

The passing birds are here to stay and don't seem to care for anything. In fact, some have spent **over 10 hours non-stop flying** across the North Sea from as far as Russia and as far as the Arctic. This has cost them about 1000 calories. That's 1,000 times as many as they need to get through the winter!

Over-winter: They make the journey during the winter months from our west coast across the North Sea, through the English Channel and the Dover Straits. In order to make it back they need to refuel and get back here they are disorienting the hunting grounds by using flight. While they are here they may not make the return journey back to their summer homes and to stay there.

The birds need food to eat, rest and to reproduce.

As a general rule the larger the bird the larger the required habitat. A small bird with a 10cm wing needs at least 50 metres and a large bird with a 20cm wing needs about 200 metres of space.



Report disturbance here

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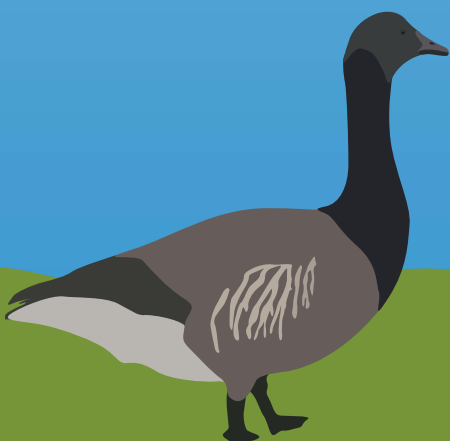


Reasons

- The area lies on a key migration route for birds, known as the East Atlantic Flyway, including many coastal and wading species.
- Increasing pressure from development, along with people, dogs and other coastal activities, is impacting sensitive habitats and the birds that depend on them.
- Habitat loss is affecting essential feeding, roosting and nesting sites across the coastline.
- Bird numbers are declining worldwide, including in East Kent, with most species showing downward trends.
- Breeding numbers in East Kent remain low, indicating ongoing disturbance and continued pressure on nesting birds.



The East Atlantic Flyway



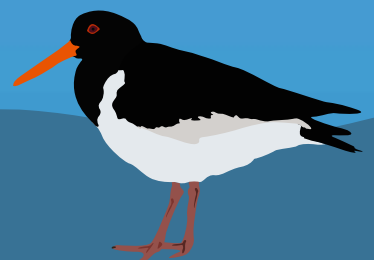
Bird Disturbance

Bird disturbance occurs when human activity causes a change in natural bird behaviour, resulting in negative impacts such as wasted energy, missed feeding opportunities, reduced breeding success, and potentially lower survival rates.

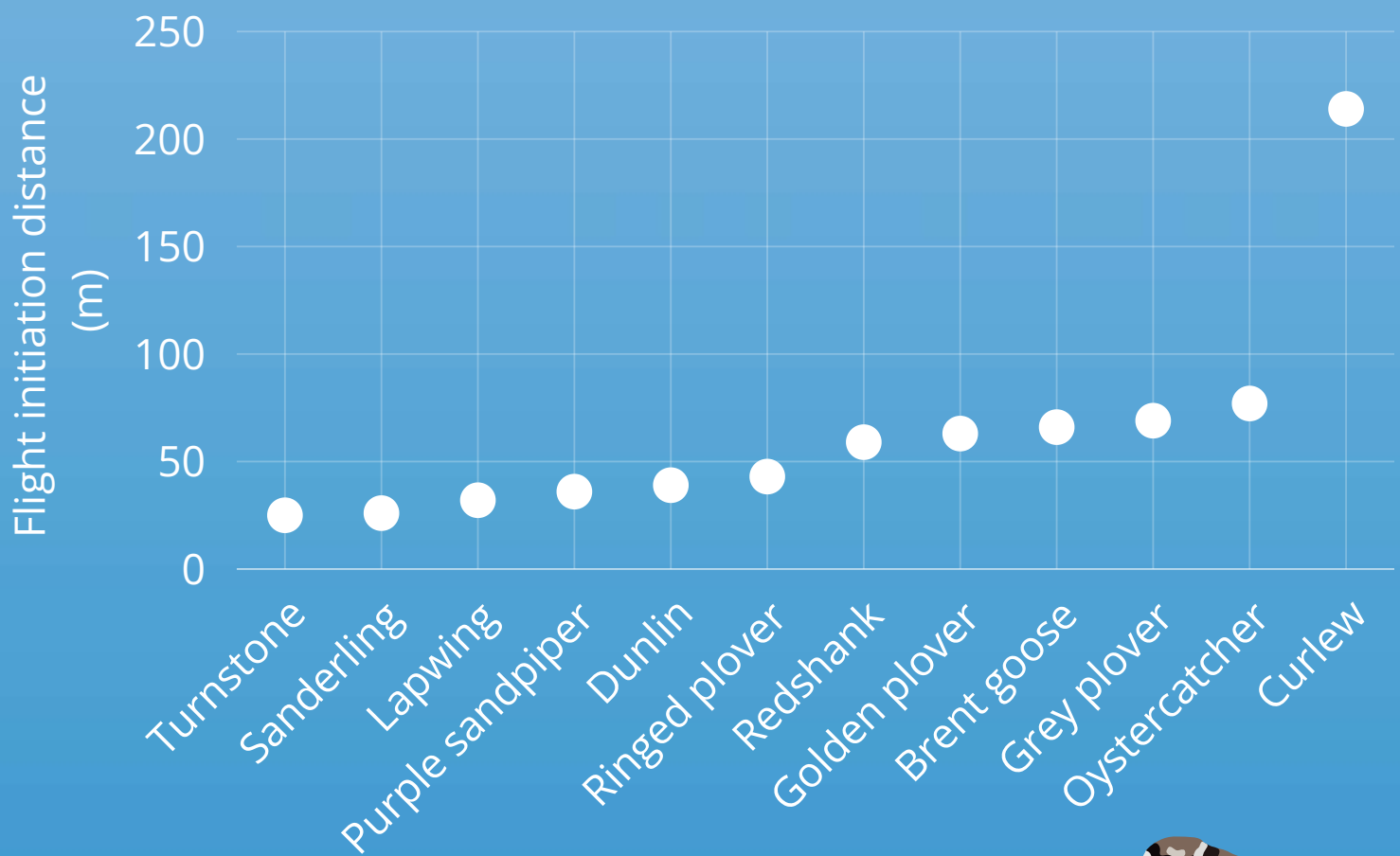
Bird populations are declining across the world, not just in the UK or along Kent's coastline. While multiple factors contribute to these declines, one of the most significant pressures affecting local waders is direct human disturbance. Unlike other threats, this type of disturbance is preventable through education and responsible behaviour.

Key points

- Disturbance can come from walkers, dog walkers, anglers, watersports, and other recreational activities.
- Even small disturbances can have a cumulative effect, particularly on roosting and feeding sites.
- Reducing disturbance helps safeguard breeding success, feeding efficiency, and overall population stability.
- Education and targeted mitigation strategies can directly prevent these impacts, making conservation efforts more effective.



Name	Mass (g)	Flight initiation distance (m)
Turnstone	105	25.12
Sanderling	54	26.44
Lapwing	270	31.63
Purple sandpiper	67.5	36.36
Dunlin	48	38.67
Ringed plover	64	43.04
Redshank	143	59.09
Golden plover	200	63.26
Brent goose	1450	66.41
Grey plover	215	69.01
Oystercatcher	500	77.74
Curlew	751	214.29



Mitigation strategy

Continuation of Officer-Led Engagement

Officers will continue delivering education programmes on-site, teaching the public about Bird Wise East Kent and best practices to reduce bird disturbance.



Education for Groups

Targeted sessions for schools, clubs, colleges, and universities to promote awareness and responsible behaviour.

Events

Organise and attend events across East Kent and surrounding areas to reach wider audiences.



Dog Projects

Deliver initiatives such as Savvy Sea Dogs and the creation of designated dog parks to reduce disturbance to wildlife.

Digital Outreach

Expand online engagement to reach individuals who may pose a threat to birds and share guidance on responsible behaviour.



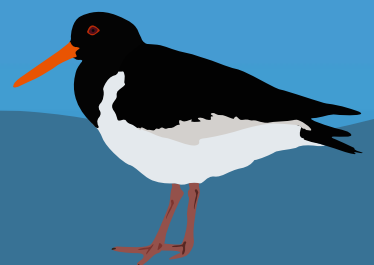
Partnerships

Collaborate with environmental organisations, local authorities, recreational clubs, landowners, and other relevant projects to educate and engage the public.



Highlights to date

- The schools programme has progressed successfully, reaching a wide range of age groups with interactive wildlife education.
- Over 630 public events have been delivered, from Pit Stops to Walk and Talks, engaging directly with more than 10,000 people each year in the last few years.
- Engagement of 29,444 people over the course of the project for 5 years
- Walk and Talk events continue across priority sites within the SPA to promote responsible behaviour and reduce disturbance.
- A Mitigation Meetup was hosted, bringing together stakeholders from across England to discuss wildlife protection strategies.
- The Great Kentish Bird Off was coordinated with North Kent Bird Wise, successfully raising awareness and encouraging public engagement.
- Disturbance incidents are recorded by staff and through citizen science, helping to guide responsive project activity.
- The annual photographic competition and touring exhibition have generated consistently high levels of engagement and visibility.
- Bird Wise East Kent has built a strong social media presence with 10,947 followers across platforms.
- The project operates year-round with a dedicated team consisting of one lead officer and two engagement officers.
- The Bird Wise van, with its recognisable wrap, provides a mobile hub for public engagement and education at key sites.
- Surveys are commissioned throughout the SPA, including biannual wader surveys carried out by Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust (SBBOT).



Highlights to date (cont.)

- A dog walking park has been established at Pegwell Bay NNR, supported by dog training and educational initiatives.
- A public consultation at Long Rock led to new signage aimed at reducing disturbance to wildlife.
- Additional protective signage has been installed along the Northern Wall in collaboration with Natural England.



630+
public events delivered

10,000+

people engaged with each
year over the last few years



10,947

followers across digital platforms



Summary of 5 year business plan



Roost Protection and Creation

Establish and safeguard key roosting sites for birds.



Increased Dog Parks along the Coastline

Reduce disturbance to wildlife by providing designated dog areas.



Continuing Monitoring

Ongoing surveys of bird populations, disturbance, and habitat conditions.



Continuing Education

Deliver Pit Stops, Walk & Talk events, talks, community events, Photographic Exhibitions, and Schools, College, and University programmes.



New Graphics

Update vinyls, signage, leaflets, and include messaging such as "Stop Feeding Predators" and roost warnings; continue social media outreach.



Increasing Engagement Officers

Expand team to strengthen local development and community engagement.



Introduction of a Volunteer Scheme

Train and involve the public in surveys and wildlife protection activities.



Protection of Main Roosting Sites and Vulnerable Areas

Create refuges to safeguard sensitive habitats and species.



Education program



Schools

Interactive lessons and activities to teach children about wildlife and bird conservation.



Adult Group Talks

Educational sessions for community groups, local clubs, and organisations.



Kids' Group Talks

Age-appropriate presentations to engage younger audiences in wildlife protection.



Universities and Colleges

Job fairs, talks, and potential student-led surveys to promote conservation careers and research opportunities.



Pit Stops

On-site pop-up events providing hands-on learning experiences and wildlife engagement.



Walk and Talk Events

Guided tours along coastal areas to educate the public on responsible behaviour and habitat protection.



Stall Events

Informative displays at local events, fairs, and festivals to reach a wider audience.



Running of Events

Coordination of major events such as the Photographic Competition and Exhibition to engage and inspire communities.



Savvy Sea Dogs Project

Educational programme focusing on responsible dog walking and protecting coastal wildlife.



User groups



WALKERS

Frequent presence, contributing significantly to bird disturbance.

JOGGERS

Minimal impact, generally stick to promenades.

CYCLISTS

Minimal impact, primarily stick to promenades.

DOG WALKERS

Highest contributor to bird disturbance along the coast.



User groups (cont.)

BAIT DIGGERS

Constant pressure, accessing potential feeding areas.



ANGLERS

Constant pressure on roosting and feeding sites.



WILDLIFE WATCHERS

Potential disturbance if getting too close to species.



User groups (cont.)

POWERED SURFBOARDS

Less frequent than other activities.



JETSKIS

Constant pressure when near coastal sites.



KITE SURFERS

Constant pressure, especially in harsh conditions and winter.



KAYAKS

Potential disturbance, mostly in warm, calm weather.



WINDSURFING

Constant pressure in harsh conditions and winter.

PADDLEBOARDING

Mainly impacts seals; activity occurs in warm, calm weather.

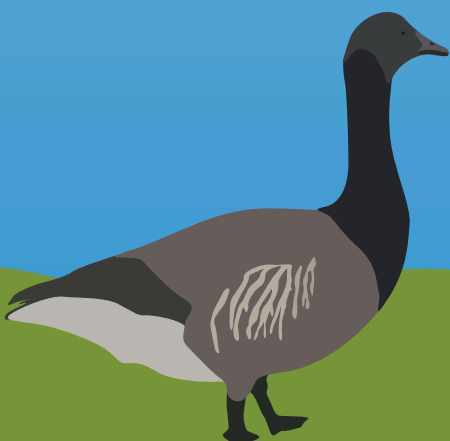


SURFING

Limited to select areas, not frequent.

Digital outreach

- ✓ Increase social media outreach to raise awareness and engagement with the project.
- ✓ Build on previous success, where several posts have achieved viral reach.
- ✓ Continue using key social media networks, including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Threads, along with any other platforms that could effectively support outreach.
- ✓ X (formerly Twitter) is no longer considered effective for project goals and will not be prioritised.
- ✓ Explore additional digital channels such as newsletters, website updates, and interactive online content to further engage the public and stakeholders.



Monitoring and reports



Annual assessment of project numbers, with yearly reports summarising monitoring data, engagement rates, social media activity, and events.



Reports, including Business Reports, Annual Reports, and Monitoring Reports, will be published on the website and accessible via council data portals.



Bird Disturbance Citizen Science reporting will continue, targeting the highest priority sites and expanding public participation.



Officer-led surveys will continue, including Roosting Bird Surveys, Disturbance Reports, Low Tide Surveys, and Breeding Bird Surveys.



Volunteer scheme creation to enable trained members of the public to contribute to ongoing site surveys.



Consultation with environmental consultants for continued surveying, effectiveness assessments, activity monitoring, and bird disturbance evaluations.



Funding

-  Funding is collected from developments within 7.2 km of the Thanet and Sandwich SPA.
-  Tariffs differ between councils: Canterbury City Council averages £569; Thanet District Council averages £350.
-  Stepped tariff structure reflects property size and ensures consistency with the East Kent SAMMS scheme.
-  Tariffs are reviewed annually to ensure sufficient funding for the project.
-  Funds are held in an in-perpetuity fund, invested long-term to allow growth and secure future funding.
-  The project is designed to be self-sustaining, using only annual interest generated; interest levels are regularly reviewed.
-  The annual budget for mitigation activities and in-perpetuity contributions is calculated and agreed by the Bird Wise East Kent Board.
-  Any major projects or additional costs must be approved by the Board before commencing.



Glossary

SPA

Special Protection Area (designated under the Birds Directive for the protection of rare and vulnerable bird species and their habitats).

NNR

National Nature Reserve (designated for nationally important habitats, species, and geology).

LNR

Local Nature Reserve (designated by local authorities for wildlife, education, and community value).

Ramsar

Ramsar Site (a Wetland of International Importance designated under the Ramsar Convention, 1971).

MCZ

Marine Conservation Zone (designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to protect marine species and habitats).

SAC

Special Area of Conservation (designated under the Habitats Directive for the protection of internationally important habitats and species).

SSSI

Site of Special Scientific Interest (national designation protecting the best examples of the UK's flora, fauna, geological, or physiographical features).

