



Jersey Birds

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Jersey has an amazing diversity of habitats from coastal cliffs heathlands and dunes, to marshes and wooded inland valleys. Its strategic position, mild winter climate and extremely wide tidal range act as a magnet to both migrating and wintering birds and, to date, over 300 species have been recorded within the Bailiwick.

100 species of birds have been recorded as breeding in Jersey and these include some species which are scarce, or absent, as breeding birds on the mainland of the United Kingdom.

Birding is best experienced in Jersey in the months from October to March.

Red-billed chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

The beautiful and charismatic 'sea-crow' known as the red-billed chough has a widespread distribution including Europe, North Africa and Asia. A small, separate population lives on the coasts of the British Isles and Brittany. This black bird with its distinctive red bill and legs and its shrill call was once common in Jersey but a loss of habitat and persecution led to its extinction throughout the Channel Islands around 1900.

These highly intelligent, free-wheeling aerobats apparently left Jersey's rugged coasts as cliff top farming methods became less profitable, and thus less common. In the birds' heyday, there would have been hedge-bound grassy fields, grazed by sheep and cattle, and, importantly, a lot less bracken.

Durrell staff ranging from maintenance to bird keepers to conservation biologists have been working extremely hard to re-introduce these incredible birds to Jersey's skies.

More information: <http://wildlife.durrell.org/landingpage/chough-updates/>

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

This small bird is best known from its beautiful melodic song given typically while hovering high in the air: the bird is often invisible against a blue sky. Today the skylark is a scarce resident and common autumn migrant to Jersey, but it was once much more common and visited in large numbers in the winter. In recent years, skylarks have been restricted to open areas where short grass predominates such as Les Landes (principally within the racecourse), scattered sites in Les Mielles (most are in Les Blanche Banques) and at Jersey Airport. In the past, birds bred on the north coast away from Les Landes and in Grouville Bay.

Large numbers of skylarks still migrate through Jersey in autumn and some birds spend the winter on the island. They may be found in farmland on the coast when they migrate, but none stay to breed at these sites anymore.

Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*

The Dartford warbler is a bird of heathland, particularly that dominated by gorse and heather. In Jersey this diminutive warbler is found mainly on gorse covered headlands such as Noirmont and La Lande du Ouest, cliff tops along the north coast (as far east as Les Platons and Jardin d'Olivet, Trinity) and bays including parts of St. Ouen's Bay, L'Ouaisné and Beauport where adequate stands of gorse remain. The majority of pairs are always in the west of the Island and highest numbers are typically found at Les Landes.

The population of Dartford warblers in Jersey fluctuates with cold weather and numbers may crash following severe winters. This natural cycle, however, is often worsened through unsuitable conditions within the gorse habitat. In the 20th Century the population may have regularly fluctuated wildly from almost absent to widespread in suitable places. In recent years the population has risen during increasingly mild winters and through improved gorse management and now seems relatively stable at around 40-45 singing males (100+ birds).

Dartford warblers are very dispersive outside of the breeding season especially as young reared during the year seek out territories of their own. These warblers, particularly juveniles, have been seen in many parts of the Island often in brambles or in overgrown hedgerows that may act as corridors for dispersing birds. The rapid re-colonisation of gorse areas throughout the Channel Islands following regeneration after fire or other local extinction events suggests that this warbler may move freely between the islands at times and even, possibly, between the islands and France (and UK?).

Interestingly the Dartford warbler has often been observed in Jersey in close association with stonechat *Saxicola rubecula*: the warbler often following the chat. The reason for this relationship is unclear but the warbler may benefit from greater vigilance of the bolder stonechat.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubecula*

In Jersey the stonechat is typically a bird of coastal headlands and semi-open spaces including uncultivated cliff tops and bays. Stonechats have historically been considered common and widespread in Jersey; however, numbers typically crashed following cold winters. As recently as the 1980s the bird was still thought of as a familiar sight in many parts of the Island, typically close to the sea. Serious declines were first noted during the mid 1980s following some severe winters but most likely had already begun before weather heightened the problem. Following this period the population has failed to recover and Stonechat. Today there may be less than five breeding pairs in Jersey – all at the coast. The principal sites for Stonechats today are at Les Landes, areas of Les Mielles (especially Les Blanches Banques) and at La Corbière.

Many migrant stonechats probably pass through Jersey each autumn and numbers may still increase dramatically each winter to possibly 100 birds when they may also be found away from typical habitat, foraging in areas such as in farmland and on the beach. It is believed that those birds nesting in Jersey remain here throughout the year.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

In Jersey the yellowhammer is typically a bird of farmland and was considered a resident, occasional migrant and winter visitor. In 1959 this bright yellow bunting was described as common in some years and rare in others, well distributed throughout the Island but commonest above the north coast cliffs. By the 1970s the yellowhammer was described as being rare and in the early 1990s the population was estimated at 50 birds predominantly along the north coast mostly between Crabbé and Bouley Bay. However, by 1998 only 10 singing males could be found on the north coast and the population continued to decline steadily until, in 2005, only one male was singing in Jersey, at Crabbé, where two females were also present but no nest was believed successful. This beautiful bird with its well known song a-little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese has not been found nesting since 2005.

Even when relatively plentiful, the wintering sites of Jersey's yellowhammers were difficult to determine. Birds were seen irregularly in farmland and at coastal sites throughout the winter months and it was considered that they remained on the island, probably unnoticed. Occasional birds seen in flocks of migrant and wintering finches may have been true migrants and local birds may have been joined by wintering birds from elsewhere in Europe. Occasional records from other Channel Islands confirm that the yellowhammer may still visit the Channel Islands and may once again breed if suitable habitat is restored.

Atlantic puffin *Fratercula arctica*

In Jersey the puffin is almost at the southernmost edge of its range, forming part of a distinct English Channel population. There have been marked declines throughout this population during the 20th Century and several colonies have died out altogether. The exact causes of these declines are poorly known and may be varied but probably include declines in food supply during the breeding season as sea temperatures rise. Further predicted global warming is likely to worsen this situation and lead to a general northward shift in the puffin's distribution.

Puffins breed after spending the winter at sea and are seen in Jersey waters from March to early August. Normally they dig burrows in soft soil to nest in but in Jersey the presence of alien predators such as rats, cats and ferrets restricts them to nesting on the cliffs away from these threats. They only occur in the north coast cliffs from Plémont east to Grand Becquet and Douet de la Mer in St Ouen – a stretch of approximately 1.2km of north-facing cliffs.

It is very difficult to estimate numbers of puffins in Jersey as nests are below the cliff top and birds do not stand at burrow entrances. However, from a reported population of 200-300 pairs during 1911-1914 there is now less than 10 pairs.

European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Shags breed on Jersey's coasts and offshore islets but remain on the coasts and in adjacent seas throughout the year. Shags, unlike their relative the cormorant *P. carbo*, never venture onto freshwater and, therefore, rarely fly over land away from the cliff tops. Their diet is predominantly fish, particularly species from mid water and sandy shallows such as sandeels and spratts.

Shags nest on rock ledges and grassy slopes of sea cliffs principally along the north, north west and south west coasts with smaller isolated colonies in the south and east. Sites are

chosen well through inaccessibility to predators including humans. There are large colonies on Les Écréhous where birds nest on the ground or on abandoned buildings.

Until recently considered very common, shags in Jersey did not breed at any island site in 2007 and only one successful nest was recorded in 2008. This situation appears to be mirrored in the other Channel Islands and it is obvious on visiting traditional breeding cliffs in Jersey that there has been a catastrophic decline since 2007. Reports from colonies further north in Europe, however, suggest that this species is faring a lot better than other seabirds so that exact causes of declines in Jersey are unclear.

Cirl Bunting *Emberiza cirlus*

Cirl buntings are resident in Jersey and associated with traditional mixed farming on the south-west coast and in Grouville Bay. Birds nested in gorse and fed in short, open vegetation with territories containing a mosaic of gorse, short vegetation rich in seeds and taller grass with grasshoppers (food for the young). The golf courses at La Moye and in Grouville Bay in recent years held the highest numbers of singing males.

Outside of the breeding season in Jersey, cirl buntings collected in small flocks with other songbirds such as finches and other buntings. Flocks were regularly found in St Ouen's Bay and occasionally elsewhere such as near La Corbière.

Cirl buntings were considered well distributed in Jersey in the 1950s but a survey in 1992 found only 20 males. Since the early 1990s, however, the population entered a steady and dramatic decline with five singing males in 1999, one pair in 2000 and only single Cirl bunting. Drydenbirds in each year 2001-2004. There were no confirmed reports in 2005 and none until first a single male (at Les Landes) and then a pair at Grouville Golf Course were located in 2011. In Grouville the buntings have been provided with supplementary food put out in special feeders throughout the winter to ensure that they remain in good health.

Information sourced from Birds on the Edge, a project funded by Durrell, The States of Jersey Environment Department and Jersey National Trust.

Experience Jersey's birdlife

Jersey Wetlands Centre

The Wetland Centre is perfectly situated overlooking La Mare au Seigneur (St Ouen's Pond) nature reserve and acts as both a state-of-the-art bird hide as well as a wetland interpretation centre.

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The newly opened visitor centre is accessed by a door that opens in to a tunnel through a dune mound. The tunnel then opens out to provide panoramic views of the reed bed and pond. The Wetland Centre's 16 viewing windows afford truly incredible views of the reserve and its wildlife. The viewing windows are located at a range of different heights, offering adults, children and visitors with disabilities a unique perspective from which to bird watch without disturbing the resident waders and waterfowl. A green roof covers the whole facility, enabling the centre to blend in with its surroundings and providing important habitat for native wildlife.

<https://www.nationaltrust.je/project/the-national-trust-for-jersey-wetland-centre/>

Birding Tours with Neil Singleton

Morning, evening and all-day tours

Morning or evening

1 Person - £30

Each extra person - £20

All day

1 Person - £75

Each extra person - £50

(Binoculars are available at £5.00 per tour)

Novice, beginners and experienced birders welcome. Individuals and Groups. People with disabilities catered for. The vehicle is used as a bird hide.

www.birdingjersey.co.uk

Jersey National Park

The Jersey National Park provides visitors with a unique opportunity to enjoy a coastal environment steeped in history, rich in agricultural and natural diversity and bustling with activities that appeal to every interest and age group. Miles of unspoiled beaches and headlands, a number of excellent restaurants and eating places plus a wide choice of recreational activities constantly ensure boundless opportunities and untold benefits, all reached within minutes of each other.

<https://jerseynationalpark.com/>

Jersey Zoo

Encounter some of the world's rarest animals and listen to fascinating keeper talks. Reconnect with nature and come face-to-face with some of the rarest animals on Earth.

Jersey Zoo began as the first ever conservation-themed zoo. 60 years later, Gerald Durrell's animal haven is the natural place to discover some of the world's most incredible creatures. Whether you're after fun, tranquillity, knowledge or a place to soak up the sunshine, this stunning 32-acre park with valleys, woodland and some of the world's rarest animals is the perfect chance to experience 'the jewel in Jersey's crown'. Relax and stay a while or see the best bits in under two hours.

Entry to Jersey Zoo

Adult: £16.50 Senior: £14.50 Student: £14.00 Child: £12.00 Under 3: Free

<https://www.durrell.org/wildlife/visit/>

For further information on any of these experiences please contact product@visitjersey.je