

Community-painted birds arrive at Studland Bay as part of a project to bring important wading birds back to Poole Harbour

This week, eight colourful arty birds will be installed across the popular Shell Bay. These wooden birds have been individually painted by local youth groups and schools, during workshops where participants have the opportunity to learn more about the wading bird species in Poole Harbour.

Shell Bay used to be an important overwintering habitat for a range of special wading birds such as dunlin, sanderling, oystercatcher, ringed and grey plover, and bar-tailed godwit. However, with increased visitor numbers and disturbance in recent decades, their numbers here have fallen to almost zero.

In autumn of 2022, a partnership project between National Trust, Birds of Poole Harbour, the Birds and Recreation Initiative and Dynamic Dunescapes are installing a trial 'Wader Protection Area'. By using fencing at a carefully chosen part of Shell Bay, the aim is to help protect and restore this once productive and important roost site, and welcome wading birds back. The painted birds arriving now aim to raise awareness of the struggles of these beautiful birds and to celebrate this exciting trial before it takes place later this year.

Wading birds travel long distances to rest and feed during the winter months. Poole Harbour is a designated Special Protection Area and provides an important safe space for these wading birds, but they need quiet and undisturbed sites when they arrive. Between September and March, Shell Bay used to offer refuge to between 4,000 and 6,000 individuals. Now only a handful arrive each year.

Shell Bay is a very popular site for visitors and dog walkers. Unfortunately, both can disturb waders as they overwinter. If birds are repeatedly disturbed, they'll abandon favoured roosting sites and not return in following years. It's vital for birds to be able to feed and roost in quiet zones as they need to keep all their energy reserves as high as possible for their long migrations.

The local schools who have rolled up their sleeves and painted these creative birds have enjoyed the experience:

Year 2 at Sandford St Martin's Primary School painted an oystercatcher which they named Oliver:

"Everyone needs a rest after a long journey; people and birds alike. At Sandford, we loved painting this wading bird to help raise awareness of these amazing, hardworking, long-distance travellers. Let's work together to bring them back to Studland and give them space to thrive."

Aquila Class at Linwood School, said:

"The bird is called Steve. We really enjoyed decorating Steve for the National trust and hope that Steve can help raise awareness of the plight of the wading birds. Thanks Steve!"



Across this project, the organisations involved are excited to be pulling together as a partnership to make a positive impact on the Poole Harbour area.

Ria Loveridge, Mitigation Coordinator at Bird and Recreation Initiative, said:

“This is such a great project and shows a simple way for us to share Shell Bay with these birds. Many are internationally threatened species, and by keeping a bit of distance we can really help them thrive whilst we continue to enjoy the beauty of the landscape!”

Julia Galbenu, Dynamic Dunescapes Engagement Officer at National Trust, said:

“It's been really wonderful to involve the local schools and youth groups with this project. Everyone is now buzzing about wading birds, and the hard work and dedication these young artists have put into their arty birds is inspiring. It's their landscape, and they want to be part of the restoration and protection of such a special place!”

Paul Morton, from the Birds of Poole Harbour charity said:

“Getting the new wader protection zone installed this autumn is a big step in the right direction in helping conserve these important areas for roosting waders. In an increasingly busy landscape, there has to be spaces for both us and nature, and although sometimes those areas can overlap, quite often there has to be areas that are handed back to the wildlife, with no disturbance from us.”

This trial will also provide an opportunity to see what species take advantage of these safe spaces and could potentially set a framework for similar installations at other busy sites in Poole Harbour.

Once the fence has been installed, the coastal footpath will remain accessible. Visitors will be able to walk on both sides of the wader fence during most times of the year, but during a high spring tide you may not be able to walk on the seaward side of the fence.

Find out more: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/studland-bay/features/wading-birds-at-studland-bay-and-poole-harbour>

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CONTACT

If you would like to speak with any of the project staff below for quote or media opportunity, please contact Emma Brisdion (emma.brisdion@naturalengland.org.uk) and Jo Atkins 07771 940706 (jo.atkins@nationaltrust.org.uk) to arrange a suitable time.

Available for comment:

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ABOUT US

National Trust

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people: Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley, who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. Today, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we continue to look after places so people and nature can thrive.

The challenges of the coronavirus pandemic have shown this is more important than ever. From finding fresh air and open skies to tracking a bee's flight to a flower; from finding beauty in an exquisite painting or discovering the hidden history of a country house nearby - the places we care for enrich people's lives.

Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline and 500 historic properties, gardens and nature reserves.

The National Trust is for everyone - we were founded for the benefit of the whole nation. We receive on average more than 26.9 million visits each year to the places we care for that have an entry fee, and an estimated 100m visits to the outdoor places that are free of charge. Paying visitors, together with our 5.6 million members and more than 53,000 volunteers, support our work to care for nature, beauty, history. For everyone, for ever.

Dynamic Dunescapes

Dynamic Dunescapes is a partnership project restoring sand dunes across England and Wales for the benefit of wildlife, people and communities, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the EU LIFE Programme. Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

The coastal dunes of England and Wales are internationally important habitats for wildlife, listed as one of the most threatened environments in Europe for biodiversity loss. These dunes are a sanctuary to rare species like natterjack toad and sand lizard. In Dorset, lead partners are National Trust and work is undertaken at Studland Bay. Follow @dynamicdunes on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

