

# Avian Ebb & Flow

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There have been many changes to the bird populations on and along The Fleet Lagoon in the last fifty years and for many differing reasons. Here are some examples....



Perhaps the most conspicuous change has been the northward range expansion by egrets. The 1st Dorset record of Little Egret, now a common sight, was at Abbotsbury in 1940. The 1<sup>st</sup> **Cattle Egret** was seen in 1998 – now a winter roost at the Swannery regularly holds over 100! Last to arrive, the Great White Egret, is becoming a regular sighting.

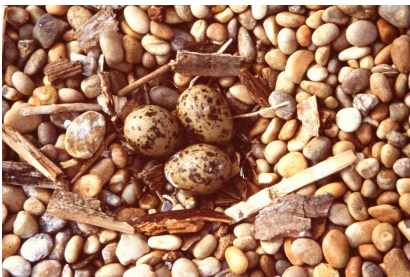
**Cormorants** have been a regular visitor but only relatively recently nesting. They balance their nests on the remains of an old timber platform originally constructed for terns.



Thanks to reintroduction schemes in nearby counties **Great Bustards**, once a common sight 200 years ago, can now be seen most winters in brassica crops by the Fleet and White-tailed Eagles appear frequently over the lagoon.



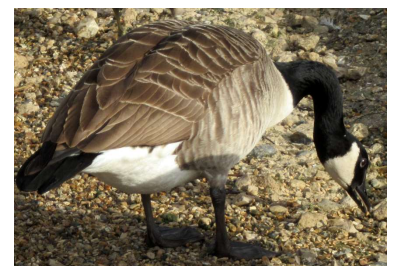
**Black-headed Gulls** started nesting on the Fleet at Abbotsbury in 2016 and now around 30 pairs nest annually. Only one pair of **Mediterranean Gulls** have nested so far, but their wintering population has increased dramatically.



Chesil Bank no longer supports the diversity of breeding birds it did 50 years ago. Once holding several tern colonies, **Common Terns** now only nest on an artificial island at Abbotsbury and the **Little Terns** only nest in a single colony at Ferrybridge. Nesting Ringed Plovers are just about holding on along Chesil but breeding Lapwing and Redshank have been lost on the beach and the Fleet's adjoining saltmarsh and pastures. Thankfully, Oystercatchers have returned as a regular breeding species.



Due to milder winters, some species are not wintering as far south and west. In the last ten years a regular flock of up to 100 **Goldeneye** has ceased to exist, the Scaup flock has dropped and the Smew, once a regular 'cold-snap' duck may never be encountered on the Fleet again!



The Ruddy Duck (an accidental introduction from America) has now been virtually eradicated from the UK, due to its detrimental effect on the native European species. On the contrary the population of the non-native **Canada Goose** is here to stay.

The passerines inhabiting the hinterland of the Fleet have undergone significant population changes too. **Cirl Bunting** was last noted breeding along the Fleet in 1974 but this year, exactly 50 years later, it would appear they have returned. **Corn Buntings** had gone the same way but thankfully they've also come back. Willow Warblers no longer breed and the once common Marsh Tits have completely disappeared. However **Firecrests**, once just a scarce visitor, are now regular breeders.

