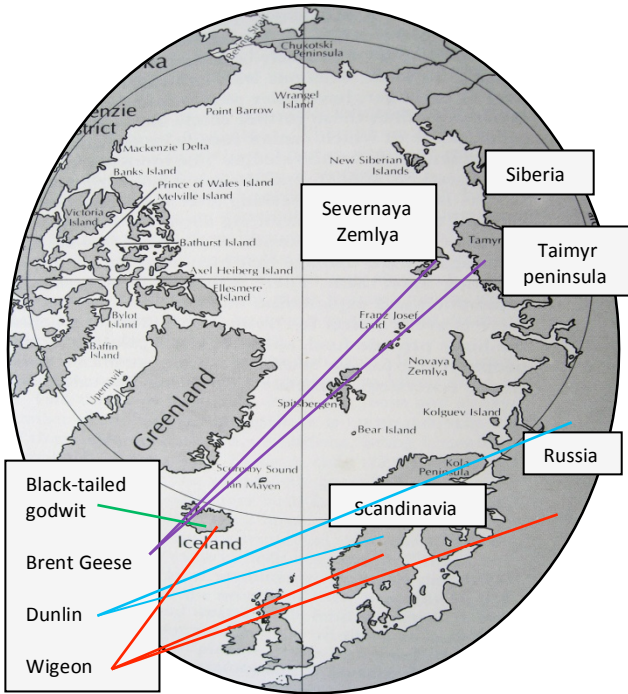


WINTER BIRD MIGRATION

The seasonal ebb and flow around the world that is bird migration, is mind-boggling. We wonder how these frail creatures battle their way over vast distances, facing all kinds of hazards, and marvel at their ability to find their destinations, and sometimes the same nest-site as in previous years. They navigate their routes by using celestial cues from the sun and stars, sensing the earth's magnetic field, following geographical features, and using mental maps. In effect, for successfully completing these very hazardous journeys, migrant birds get an annual return ticket to far-away places which provides year-round summer and plentiful food.

As if life was not already hard enough in winter for the resident birds of Stanpit Marsh, in autumn they are joined by many migrant birds, particularly wildfowl and waders; who have forsaken the barren Arctic regions where they spent the summer, the longer days there having provided extended time for feeding young. Fieldfares and redwings also arrive here, to compete for the hawthorn and holly berries, having escaped from the icy conditions of Scandinavia.

Four migrants are featured here but other birds such as turnstones, grey plovers, and knots also visit the Marsh in winter. Please see additional information on the migration shadowbox, and accompanying text, to learn more.



BRENT GEESE

*Branta bernicla
bernicla*

A flock of around 300 dark-bellied brent geese visits Stanpit Marsh during the winter, arriving from the birds' breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra in October. This journey of around 2,700 miles takes them about 3-4 weeks. Brent geese are noted for their strong efficient flight and can reach 90 km an hour. They fly in family groups within irregular flocks or lines (not in V formation), travelling along the coast mostly at night, stopping off on the way to feed.

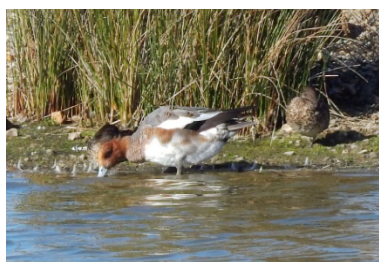
Feeding on eel grass, algae and saltmarsh plants and grasses, they stay on the Marsh till March, when they leave for their long flight back to the Arctic, arriving in June.

They nest in the open along the northern shoreline and islands of Siberia, lining their nests with down and laying 3-5 eggs. Their life expectancy is up to at least 19 years.



BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

Limosa limosa islandica



WIGEON

Anas Penelope

Black-tailed godwits start to leave their summer breeding grounds in lowland areas of Iceland in late July to August. The adults leave first, and the young follow later.

They are tall wading birds, and one of the wader species that flies in a V formation on the migration journey. They usually group together when feeding, probing vigorously into the mud, or soft ground, searching for invertebrates, bi-valve molluscs, various aquatic worms, and aquatic plants. Their heads are often submerged, when feeding in water.

They leave in early spring, arriving back in Iceland in mid April to mid May.

Their nest is a shallow scrape on the ground, well hidden in a tussock in grassy wetland. They lay 3-6 eggs.

Their life expectancy is up to 25 years.

The wigeon is a common dabbling duck, and arrives in October in a fairly large flock, having migrated from their breeding grounds in Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia. They fly in compact groups, or sometimes in a V formation.

They are noisy and sociable birds, feeding together by dabbling and grazing on aquatic plants, grasses and roots.

They leave the Marsh, for their breeding grounds, in March.

They nest amongst thick cover near water, laying 6-12 eggs in a hollow lined with grasses and leaves, and the female's own down feathers.

Their life expectancy is up to 30 years.

DUNLIN

Calidris alpina



Dunlins arrive in autumn, from their breeding grounds along the coasts of Northern Scandinavia and North-east Russia. The females arrive first, having left in July. The males arrive later after caring for the young, and the young arrive in October/November.

The most common of the small waders, and very gregarious, they feed on ragworms, bi-valves, small molluscs and crustaceans, by probing in the shallows. They arrive back in their breeding grounds during April and May.

Nesting in small colonies on marshy ground, they lay 4 eggs in a shallow depression lined with vegetation, concealed in a tussock of grass. This nest is sited within a few metres of the previous year's scrape.

Their life expectancy is up to 19 years.