

SPRING BIRD MIGRATION

Bird migration is truly remarkable. Migrating birds fly vast distances, facing all kinds of hazards, and return to the same destination and sometimes the same nest-site as in previous years. They navigate by using celestial cues, sensing the earth's magnetic field, following geographical features, and using mental maps. Their reason for migrating is availability of food and better conditions for rearing young.

Most Spring migrants arriving on Stanpit Marsh have flown from Africa and Australia, flying along 'flyways' often following mountain ranges, coastlines and rivers, taking advantage of updrafts to avoid large expanses of open water. Light southerly winds and warm temperatures help push early continental migrants to the south coast. Some spring migrants to the Marsh are terns, waders, Reed and Sedge warblers, Chiffchaff, Wheatear and Whitethroat. Passage migrants, e.g. the terns, Wheatear and Common sandpiper (a wader), are birds which stop off for short durations to feed en route.

THE MIGRATION JOURNEY

Preparation

Migration is triggered by lower temperatures, dwindling food supplies, genetic pre-disposition and changing day length. Prior to migration the birds eat more to store fat providing fuel for the flight. Many birds grow bigger flight muscles and some birds moult.

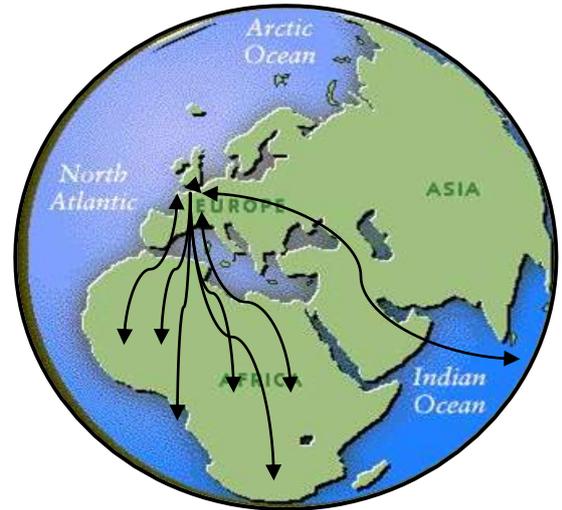
Flight

Spring migrating birds mostly fly in flocks, providing safety in numbers. In general, migrating birds fly at higher altitudes, and long-distance migrants fly higher than short-distance ones.

Most birds fly at night, using less energy in the calmer cooler air and reducing the risk of attack from predators. This allows them to feed during the day at stop-over sites. Some larger birds migrate by day making use of thermals, and swifts and swallows also migrate by day feeding on insects as they fly.

Hazards

Survival rates of migrating birds can be affected by hazards along the route such as exhaustion, collision, starvation, disease, and being hunted.



SOME COMMON SPRING MIGRANTS



Common tern
Sterna hirundo

Little tern
Sterna albifrons

Sandwich tern
Sterna sandvicensis



Common sandpiper
Actitis hypoleucos

Sedge warbler
Acrocephalus
Schoenobaenus

Whitethroat
Sylvia communis



Winter Breeding Grounds

Common tern - coastal subtropical and tropical regions of Africa
Little tern - tropical and subtropical oceans of S. Africa and Australia
Sandwich tern - off western Africa and Arabia
Common sandpiper, warblers, and Whitethroat - central Africa

Distances Flown (Direct route)

Central Africa to UK - 5,844 km / 3,631 m
South Africa to UK - 9,892 km / 6,146 m
Australia to UK - 15,223 km / 9,459 m
Birds flying along 'flyways' would add more miles
Arrivals - most in early April

Habitat

Terns - coastal seas
Reed warblers - reedbeds; Sedge - scrub and marshland vegetation
Whitethroat - scrub and dense vegetation
Common sandpiper - lakes & river banks, and sheltered estuaries

Feeding

Terns - plunge-dive for fish and sand eels
Common sandpiper - various insects, also surface aquatic creatures
Warblers and Whitethroat - insects, and berries in autumn

Nesting

Terns - in dense noisy colonies mainly on shingle beaches or banks.
Nest is a scrape on bare ground. Common passage migrant
Common sandpiper - concealed in vegetation on ground, near water.
Common passage migrant
Reed warbler - weaves nest between two or three reed-stems in reedbeds on the Marsh, where it can be heard singing
Sedge warbler - in ground vegetation woven around plant stems.
Known to nest on the Marsh
Whitethroat - in shrubs. Nests on Crouch Hill and in North Scrub

Departures

Terns - August
Common sandpiper, warblers, and Whitethroat - September/October