



## **A Guide to Commonly Seen Birds of the Bailiwick**

**Updated: November 2025**

## Conservation Status' Explained

### UK Conservation Status ([www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk))

#### The Red List

- Highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action, this may be due to:
  - ◆ Species is globally threatened
  - ◆ Historical population decline in the UK during 1800–1995
  - ◆ Severe (at least 50%) decline in UK breeding population over the last 25 years, or longer-term period (the entire period used for assessments since the first BoCC review, starting in 1969).
  - ◆ Severe (at least 50%) contraction of UK breeding range over the last 25 years, or the longer-term period.

#### The Amber List

- Amber is the next most critical group, with species showing at least one factor:
  - ◆ Species with unfavourable conservation status in Europe (SPEC = Species of European Conservation Concern)
  - ◆ Historical population decline during 1800–1995, but recovering; population size has more than doubled over the last 25 years
  - ◆ Moderate (25-50%) decline in UK breeding population over the last 25 years, or the longer-term period
  - ◆ Moderate (25-50%) contraction of UK breeding range over the last 25 years, or the longer-term period
  - ◆ Moderate (25-50%) decline in the UK non-breeding population over the last 25 years, or the longer-term period
  - ◆ Rare breeder; 1–300 breeding pairs in the UK
  - ◆ Rare non-breeders; less than 900 individuals
  - ◆ Localised; at least 50% of UK breeding or non-breeding population in 10 or fewer sites, but not applied to rare breeders or non-breeders
  - ◆ Internationally important; at least 20% of European breeding or non-breeding population in the UK (NW European and East Atlantic Flyway populations used for non-breeding wildfowl and waders respectively)

#### The Green List

- Species on the green list are the least critical group
- Species that occur regularly in the UK but do not qualify under any or the above criteria

## IUCN Red List of Threatened Species

[www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)

Established in 1964, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species has evolved to become the world's most comprehensive information source on the global extinction risk status of animal, fungus and plant species.

Currently, there are more than 128,500 species on The IUCN Red List, with more than 35,500 species **threatened with extinction**, including 40% of amphibians, 34% of conifers, 33% of reef building corals, 26% of mammals and 14% of birds. The IUCN Red List guides scientific research, showing where and what action needs to be taken to save species from extinction. By providing a wealth of useful information on species, it also helps factor biodiversity needs into decision-making processes.

Species are categorised as:

- Not Evaluated (NE)
- Data Deficient (DD)
- Least Concerned (LC)
- Near Threatened (NT)
- Vulnerable (VU)
- Endangered (EN)
- Critically Endangered (CN)
- Extinct in the Wild (EW)
- Extinct (EX)

On each species page, you will see the IUCN classification, followed by an arrow showing whether the global population trend is increasing (↑), decreasing (↓), stable (→) or unknown (?).

## Atlantic Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*

Conservation Status: **RED**

VU↓



Summer plumage



First-winter plumage

- Unmistakable birds
- Black back and white underparts
- Distinctive black head with large pale cheeks
- Tall, flattened, brightly-coloured bill in the breeding season (summer plumage)
- Comical appearance is heightened by its red and black eye-markings
- Bright orange legs.
- Member of the Auk family, closely related to Guillemots and Razorbills
- During the winter months, the beak becomes smaller and the face a sooty black

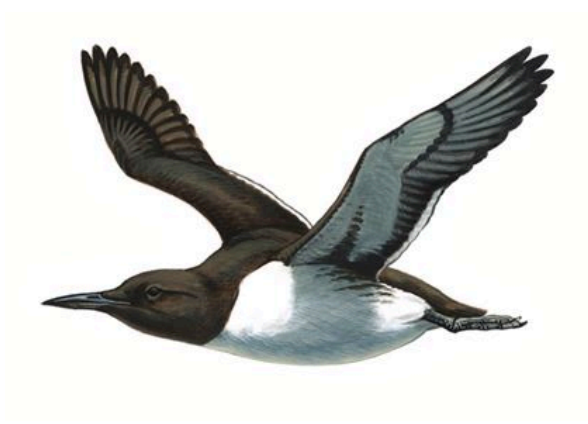
Puffins return to Guernsey to breed between May and July. They nest in burrows on the cliffs of Jethou and Herm. Once the breeding season has finished, they will return to the North Sea and spend the rest of the year at sea. Puffins are most often seen swimming or in flight. Their specially adapted beaks allow them to carry multiple sand eels at one time. In flight, they flap their wings incredibly quickly - 400x per minute and can reach speeds of 55mph!





**Guillemot, a.k.a Common Murre, *Uria aalge*** Conservation Status: *Not Assessed*

LC↑



Summer plumage



Winter plumage

- Slim birds, often thought to look 'penguin like'
- Dark brown body and wings
- Black legs
- Pointed, black, medium thickness and powerful beak
- Member of the Auk family, closely related to Puffins and Razorbills

Guillemots nest of rocks off Sark and the humps, North of Herm. They arrived here to breed between May and July, leaving to spend the rest of the year at sea. These birds are incredible - they can dive up to 180m and defend a tiny territory, extending only a beak length around its nest.

Some Guillemots have a white stripe around and past their eye. This is called the bridled form.



**Razorbill, *Alca torda***

Conservation Status: *Not Assessed*

LC↑



Summer plumage



Winter plumage

- Seen most often in their summer plumage
- Medium-sized seabird
- Black above and white below
- White stripe along beak and edge of wings
- Thick black beak which is deep and blunt (shaped like an old-fashioned razor and much thicker than the guillemots beak)
- Member of the Auk family, closely related to Puffins and Guillemots

Razorbills are very smart looking birds. They arrive here to breed between May and July. They breed alongside the puffins and guillemots of Herm, Jethou and Sark, making small nests on ledges on the cliffs. Like their cousins, they are great divers. The Razorbills are not as numerous as the Puffins and Guillemots in the Bailiwick.



## European Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*

Conservation Status: **RED**

LC↓



Adult, summer plumage



Juvenile

- Often thought of as our typical 'seagull'
- Smaller than the black backed gulls
- Adults have
  - Silver grey wings with black tips
  - Yellow beak with a red spot
  - Yellow legs
- Juvenile birds are mottled brown

The red spot on the yellow bill is pecked at by chicks to encourage the adults to bring them food. A study showed that this is an innate behaviour and chicks will peck at anything that is yellow with a red spot!

Herring gulls are now on the UK Conservation Red List. This could be because of botulism (which gulls are particularly sensitive to), a decrease in the availability of food scavenged from refuse tips (as we change refuse management), less discards from fisheries or competition from other gulls.



## Lesser Black-Backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*

Conservation Status: **AMBER**

LC↑



Adult summer plumage



Juvenile plumage

- Roughly the same size as Herring Gulls, smaller than Great Black Backed Gulls
- They are actually slate grey coloured, not black
- Adult plumage:
  - Slate grey wings
  - Yellow beak with red spot
  - Yellow legs
- Juvenile birds:
  - mottled grey, brown and white (whiter than young Herring Gulls)
  - Black beak

Young and non breeding Lesser black-backed gulls form clubs and all hang out together at breeding colonies.





## Great Black-Backed Gull

Conservation Status: **RED**  
LC ?



Adult Plumage



Juvenile

→ A very large, thick-set black-backed gull (much bigger than Herring gulls and Lesser Black-backed gulls)

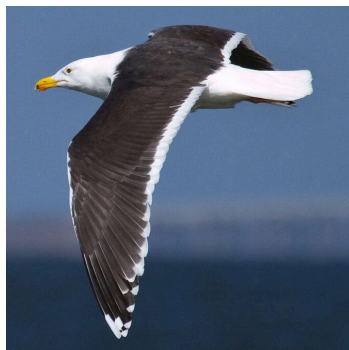
→ Adult plumage:

- Black wings with white chest, neck and head
- Powerful, yellow beak with a red spot
- Pink legs
- Has a heavy flight and can look quite hunched when perched

→ Juvenile plumage:

- Checkered back and pale streaking on chest
- Pale head (paler than the juvenile Lesser black-backed gulls)
- Black beak with pink on base and tip

Black-backs are the bullies of the gull world! They will fight off other gulls and chase them to snatch food.



## Black-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Conservation Status: **AMBER**  
LC ?

*Previously called *Larus ridibundus**



Adult summer plumage

Adult winter plumage

- A small, slight gull
- Summer plumage
  - Head is actually chocolate brown, rather than black
  - Silver grey wings, with black tips seen in flight
  - Pink legs
- Winter plumage
  - White head with a small dark spot behind their eye
  - Mottled brown wings
- Juvenile birds have mottled brown on their wings, back and head; they still have the black tail and edge of flight feathers and white leading edge of wing (seen in flight)

Black-headed gulls are sociable, quarrelsome, noisy birds, usually seen in small groups or flocks. They often gather into larger parties where there is plenty of food or when they are roosting. It is most definitely not a 'seagull' and is found commonly almost anywhere inland.



## European Shag, *Phalacrocorax aristotelis*

Conservation Status: **AMBER**

LC↓



Adult plumage



Juvenile plumage

- Shags are medium sized long-necked birds
- Smaller and slimmer than cormorants
- Characteristic steep forehead
- Breeding season:
  - Dark glossy black/green plumage
  - A prominent crest on the top of their head
- Juveniles:
  - Paler brown
  - Pale chest and front of neck

Often mistaken for Cormorants, they are more graceful looking birds and prefer wilder, more coastal areas. On Guernsey's East coast, we see more Shags than Cormorants. The word 'shag' refers to the shaggy hair or quiff on the bird's heads during the breeding season. Shags lack a waterproof coating on their feathers; while this makes them less buoyant and better divers, it means they have to dry off after swimming and are often seen holding their wings open to dry.



**Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Conservation Status: **GREEN**

LC↑



Adult plumage



Juvenile

→ Compared to the Shag:

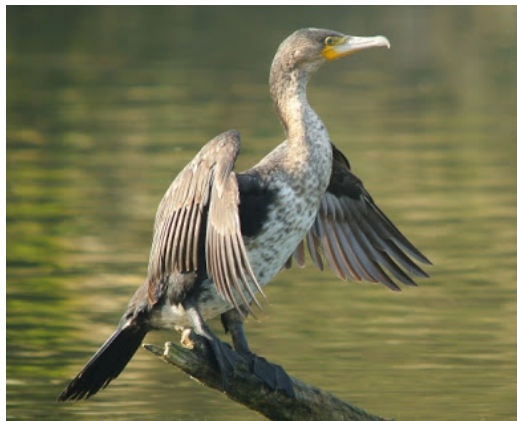
- A stouter, more powerful and hooked beak
- Shallower forehead
- Larger patch of yellow skin around the beak
- Found inland and by the coast, but preferring more shelter spots

→ Adult plumage:

- Black feathers with some green and bronze iridescence
- White patch of feathers on cheek
- Prominent yellow patch around beak

→ Juvenile plumage:

- Can be all brown or showing a paler, white chest
- It takes 2-4 years to mature and during this time they look scruffy due to many molts





**Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus***

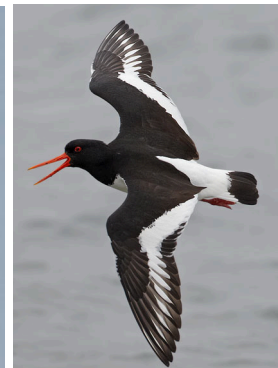
Conservation Status: **AMBER**

**NT↓**



- A stocky, black and white wading bird
- Smartly dressed: black back and head and white chest (looks like he is wearing a suit)
- Long, orange-red bill
- Reddish-pink legs
- Red eyes
- In flight it shows a wide, white wing-stripe, a black tail and a white rump that extends as a 'V' between the wings.
- Their call is a very distinctive, high pitched 'peep peep peep' repeated at various speeds

Oystercatches don't actually eat many oysters, but usually eat cockles and mussels. They can live for 40 years and mate for life. Some oystercatchers do divorce their original partners, but secondary matings do not tend to be as successful at the first one.



**Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres***

Conservation Status: **AMBER**

LC↓



Summer plumage



Winter plumage

- Cute birds with a mottled appearance
- Brown or chestnut and black upperparts
- Brown and white or black and white head pattern,
- White underparts
- Orange legs
- Birds are more colourful and marking more apparent in the breeding season
- Juveniles looks like the wintering birds, but can be more rusty coloured

Turnstones are often seen around the harbour, on the pontoons, slip ways and harbour walls.



## Northern Gannet, *Morus bassanus*

Conservation Status: **AMBER**

LC↑



- Distinctive large birds
- Distinctive flight: slow flaps and long glides, often gliding low over the water
- distinctively shaped with a long neck, long pointed beak and long pointed tail
- Wings are long and pointed
- Adults plumage:
  - Bright white with black wingtips
  - Yellow heads
- Immature plumage
  - Yellow head has developed
  - Black/brown feather starting to be replaced with white
- Juvenile plumage
  - Brown all over

Amazing birds with incredible hunting adaptations. They feed by flying high and circling before plunging into the sea and can dive from 30m. They have no nostrils and spongy spaces in their heads to prevent injury when hitting the water. allow them to detect prey underwater amid the reflected and refracted light where water and air meet. Their eyes have special structural adaptations for plunge-diving and they are able to see well underwater immediately after striking the water.

