

# Charmouth's Birds

Below you will find brief information about some of the birds that you are most likely to see whilst at the foreshore here in Charmouth. Read on for photographs and comments on each of these birds:

*Mallard*

*Moorhen*

*Kingfisher*

*Herring Gull*

*Black-headed Gull*

*Pied Wagtail*

*Rock Pipit*

*Stonechat*

More detailed information on these and many other birds is available from the [RSPB](#), the [British Trust for Ornithology](#) and the [Dorset Wildlife Trust](#) .

If you see a bird at Charmouth that you are unable to identify then please send a photograph to [clerk@charmouthparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@charmouthparishcouncil.gov.uk) and we will ask a local birdwatcher to try to assist you.

## **Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

The Mallard is Britain's most familiar duck and is the duck from which all domestic ducks are descended.

Mallards can be seen in large numbers at Charmouth throughout the year. Other less common duck species do occasionally visit here so it is always worth checking every individual duck in the hope of spotting something rarer.

At the end of the breeding season male Mallards need to replace their old, worn-out feathers with new ones. They do this in a two-stage moulting process during which they are unable to fly and look similar to the brown females before recovering their full breeding plumage about a month later. Look out for eclipse plumage males swimming on the river Char from late Spring onwards.



*Adult Male Mallard*



*Adult Female Mallard*



*Adult Male Mallard in Eclipse Plumage*

### *Did You Know That...?*

*...only the female Mallard makes the familiar loud, raucous repetitive "quacking" sound. The male can only manage a soft, much shorter call. Listen and watch them closely to check for yourself.*

## **Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)**

Moorhens are shy, dark-coloured aquatic birds resident here all year.

They can be seen swimming on the river but more often feeding on the grass or hiding in reeds at the water's edge. They are smaller than the Mallards. They have bright red beaks with a yellow tip and long legs with big feet.

Look out for the bright white patches under their tails when they swim away.



*Adult Moorhen*

## **Kingfisher** (*Alcedo atthis*)

It is always a treat to see a Kingfisher. The bright blue streak as they speed up or down the river Char is an unforgettable experience.

If you are very lucky you may also see them perching on the reeds at the river's edge and making steep, fast dives to catch fish.

Kingfishers do not breed in Charmouth so the best time to see them here is in the winter months. They typically nest further inland making their burrows in the banks of streams or lakes.



*Adult Male Kingfisher*

### *Did You Know That...?*

*...a male Kingfisher's beak is all black but the female's is black on the top and red underneath*

## Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*)

The classic, familiar, “seagull” of the British seaside is properly known as the Herring Gull.

In the summer Herring Gulls nest on many rooftops in Charmouth.

Throughout the year large numbers of Herring Gulls and other gull species roost together overnight on the sea here. They can be seen in the hours before dusk heading out to sea in groups which can vary in size from just three or four individuals to fifty or more. They form large “rafts” of hundreds of gulls. They return ashore and disperse inland every morning after sunrise which can be a spectacular sight if you’re up early.

Herring Gulls take four years to reach maturity. In the summer that they are born their plumage is predominantly brown. In a series of moults each spring and autumn the brown is gradually replaced in stages with the familiar grey, white and black adult plumage.



*Adult Herring Gull*



*Juvenile Herring Gull*



## **Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)**

Black-headed Gulls are smaller and altogether more elegant than Herring Gulls. They can be seen in fields, on the river and at sea for much of the year in Charmouth.

They only have their eponymous black heads in their summer (ie breeding) plumage. In winter their heads are mostly white but with small dark smudges on their cheeks. Not all individual birds change plumage at the same time; some birds may have full black heads as early as February.

Like Herring Gulls, juvenile Black-headed Gulls are predominantly brown, and they too transform into adults by a series of moults in which the brown is replaced by grey, white and black in stages. However Black-headed Gulls reach full adult plumage in the second summer after they are born.



*Black-headed Gulls in Summer Plumage*



*Black-headed Gull in Winter Plumage*

## **Pied Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)**

Pied Wagtails are black and white birds with long tails which they wag enthusiastically.

They are often seen in the car parks and on the beach here at Charmouth constantly flitting around searching for insects to eat.

Pied Wagtails famously roost together in large numbers often in city centres. At dusk the Charmouth birds gather on the beach (where they are well camouflaged against the pebbles in the fading light) and surrounding areas and then take off in groups to fly to their chosen roost site for the night. This may be in the local reeds or sometimes further afield.



*Pied Wagtail*

## **Rock Pipit (*Anthus petrosus*)**

The Rock Pipit is easily overlooked. It is a grey/brown bird with a lighter streaked belly, but it can easily be assumed to be “just a sparrow” by a casual observer.

Rock Pipits can be seen all year round in Charmouth and are always close to the sea. Look in the car park and among the seaweed on the beach as well as on the rocks.

They have a relatively long, thin beak which helps them to forage for food such as insects or small molluscs.



***Rock Pipit***

## **Stonechat** (*Saxicola rubicola*)

Robin-like in size and appearance Stonechats can be seen in and around Charmouth all year round.

Their habit of perching on top of low bushes or long stalks can make them easy to spot even from a distance. They often fly up from their perch (hoping to catch a passing insect) and then return to the same place.

Walking up the slopes to the east of the river following the South West Coast path is a good place to look for them.



*Male Stonechat*



*Female Stonechat*

### *Did You Know That...?*

*...Stonechats get their name from their loud call which sounds just like two stones being knocked together. This is one of the easiest bird calls to learn and recognise.*

### Other Resident Birds

Above we have described just some of the most common birds but there are many other species which you may see here in Charmouth.

Birds such as Robin, Blackbird, House Sparrow, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Goldfinch, Wood Pigeon, Starling, Crow and Jackdaw are all plentiful and familiar to most people.

Other species to look out for here include; Gannets and Cormorants out at sea, Ravens, Buzzards, Kestrels and Peregrine Falcons over the cliffs, Reed Buntings in the reeds and occasional small groups of wading birds such as Dunlin, Sanderling and Ringed Plover feeding on the beach at the shoreline.

### Migrating Birds

Being on the coast, Charmouth is also a very good location to spot migrating birds. In spring our cliff tops are often the first land fall for birds arriving from overseas. Many will stop here briefly to rest and feed before continuing their journeys to other parts of the country.

Similarly in autumn Charmouth can be the departure point for birds who may gather in large numbers whilst waiting for the right weather conditions before heading south over the English Channel.

Species that are typically seen migrating through Charmouth include Swallow, Swift, House Martin, Sand Martin, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Wheatear, Whitethroat and Yellow Wagtail.

Some birds like it here so much they don't go any further. Swifts and House Martins for example have nested in the same locations in the village for a number of years and Reed Warblers can be seen or heard in the reeds in summer.

### *Did You Know That...?*

*...when a Swift swoops under the eaves of a house in Charmouth it may be the first time it has landed anywhere since it left the same roof here the previous year. Swifts are able to eat, sleep, wash and even mate whilst flying and only rarely need to touch ground.*

### Feedback...

...is always welcome and can be made by email to [clerk@charmouthparishcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@charmouthparishcouncil.gov.uk)