

Legend has it that it's been visiting Lewes for years. There have been sightings from Southease all the way up to Barcombe. In January, John glimpsed it vanishing into the murky waters of the River Ouse near Tesco. A few months later, Barry was on his way to work when he encountered the creature hauled out on a pontoon by the Cuilfail cliffs. You'll find 38 species of wild mammal living in or around Lewes. Badgers, foxes, stoats, weasels, shrews, rabbits, hares, moles, voles, dormice, bats, rats, hedgehogs, mice and mink all form the mammalian fauna of a landlocked South Downs town. Yet there's one salty surprise on the list; the Common Seal, an animal that's typically found in Britain's coastal waters 12 kilometres away.



And the seal's certainly a surprise to any Lewes residents who, **Common Seal c Bill Carter** while innocently strolling along the Ouse, **Sussex Wildlife Trust** encounter their local leviathan. I've never seen the legendary beast myself but have received plenty of excited tweets, emails and mobile phone photos from amazed observers who can't believe what they've seen. Throughout history, sailors (without the benefit of smartphones and a Twitter account) have confused seals for mermaids and sea serpents and, as Sussex mammals go, this seal is a real monster.

Common Seals can weigh up to 150 kg; twice the weight of a

Fallow Deer, the second biggest wild mammal in this area (and 50,000 times heavier than the smallest; the Pygmy Shrew). As you'd imagine, on land this blubbery behemoth is about as agile as Peter Ustinov trapped in a sleeping bag but underwater they're as balletic as Baryshnikov, gracefully swimming at speeds of up to 25 mph as they hunt fish, shellfish, squid and octopus.



Common Seal c Hugh Clark
FRPS Sussex Wildlife Trust

It's this quest for food that occasionally leads seals into Sussex rivers such as the Ouse and the Arun as they follow fish migrating upstream. Common Seals breed in Sussex, where there is a colony at Chichester Harbour. It's a sink or swim situation for seal pups born on the sandbanks exposed during the low tides of summer. Their aquatic life starts as the next high tide rolls in and within hours of their birth they're swimming in the Solent alongside their mother. Mother's milk helps them to double their birth weight in just a few weeks. The name 'common' is a bit of a misnomer. In British waters you're three times more likely to see their larger, Roman-nosed relative the Grey Seal. The patterns on each seal's fur are as individual as fingerprints. Keep an eye out when you're next walking by along a Sussex riverbank and see if a seal is giving the river its approval.

Sussex Wildlife Trust is an independent charity caring for wildlife and habitats throughout Sussex. Founded in 1961, we have worked with local people for over half a century to make Sussex richer in wildlife.

We rely on the support of our members to help protect our rich natural heritage. Please consider supporting our work. As a member you will be invited to join Michael Blencowe on our regular wildlife walks and also enjoy free events, discounts on wildlife courses, Wildlife magazine and our Sussex guide book, Discovering Wildlife. It's easy to join online at www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/join or over the phone on 01273 497532.

www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk

RSPB Events for March 2020

PRINSTEAD/NUTBOURNE Tuesday 10 March

Morning Bird Walk on Nutbourne Marsh with Carole Griffiths of the RSPB. Meet end of Prinstead Lane, Map Ref: SZ766051 at 10.00 am. 01243 262833

ARUNDEL Saturday 21 March

Morning Bird Walk around The Dover with David Hart of the RSPB Chichester Local Group. Meet at far end of the lane, Map Ref: SU061064 at 9.30 am 01243 262833

CHICHESTER Thursday 26 March

Illustrated Talk by Ken Panchen on 'Birds of Ethiopia' to the RSPB Chichester Local Group at The Pallant Suite, Masonic Hall, South Pallant, Chichester at 7.30 pm.

Entrance members £2-50/visitors £5-00 01243 262833 wheelchair access

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Chichester Conservancy Volunteers March 2020

EBERNHOE Sunday 1 March

Conservation - Heathland Management on Graffham Common with Graham Pritchard of the Chichester Conservation Volunteers. Meet at 10.00 am 07802 161196

LAVINGTON Sunday 29 March

Conservation – Heathland Management with Richard Wilson of the Chichester Conservation Volunteers on Lavington Common. Meet at 10.00 am. 01243 528056

SUSSEX WILDLIFE TRUST March 2020

CHICHESTER Tuesday 31 March

Illustrated Talk by Bruce Middleton on 'Wildlife Found on our West Sussex Heaths' to the Sussex Wildlife Trust, Friends Meeting House, Priory Road, Chichester at 7.30 pm

Entrance members £3-00/visitors £4 01243 262833 wheelchair access

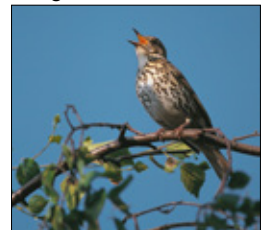
A change in the season at Pagham Harbour & Medmerry

March, officially the first month of spring, brings hope and a sense of anticipation as life begins anew. New growth begins in earnest and there is a feeling of excitement in the air. Our resident male birds become more vocal looking to get ahead of the summer migrants arriving soon. Robins, dunnocks and song thrush find a suitable perch to sing, staking claim to territories and hoping to impress a potential mate. Blue tits, greenfinches and chaffinches appear brighter, having shed their old feathers and replaced them in fresh finery. It is no coincidence that doddier birds have more complex songs than their brighter cousins. Both are ways to impress and use considerable amounts of energy.



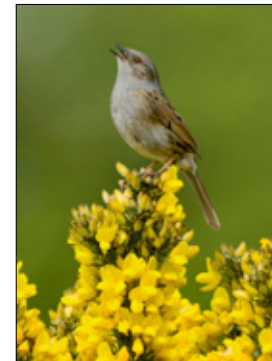
Blue Tit - Louise Greenhorn

Dunnocks feed mainly on the ground and are a regular visitor to gardens. They have streaky brown upperparts and wings, with a blue-grey chest and underparts. About the size of a blackbird, the song thrush has a brown back and wings,

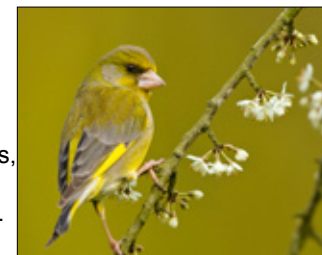


Song Thrush - Chris Gomersall

Male greenfinches are olive-green with brighter backs and a bright yellow patch on the wing, while chaffinch males have blue-grey heads, pink chests and cheeks, a chestnut back and white patches on the wings. Like many birds the females are less colourful.



Dunnock - John Bridges



Greenfinch - Ben Hall

Sand martins and wheatears are the first of our summer migrants to arrive back. The earliest of our terns to return is the sandwich tern, which can often be seen near it's breeding colonies in March and therefore around Church Norton. Terns are typical seabirds but much daintier than gulls, with slender wings and forked tails. The sandwich tern has black

legs and a black bill with a yellow tip. It has a white body, light grey wings and a black cap which forms a crest in the breeding season. Like the sandwich terns, little ringed plovers have spent winter in Africa. These small waders with round head and short stubby bills, feed along the shoreline, especially around freshwater, running a short distance, suddenly pausing to tilt its whole body and peck at prey on the ground. They have a brown back and crown, white underparts, collar and forehead and a distinctive yellow eye-ring against a black eye mask.



Sandwich Tern - Ivan Lang



Little Ringed plover - Ben Hall

These are the vanguard of our summer invasion and a sure sign spring is upon us.

Let's give nature a home

RSPB Pagham Harbour & Medmerry March

Saturday 14 March, Binocular and Telescope Open Day. Come along and try our wide range of binoculars and telescopes and have a chat with our friendly optics experts. Whether you're a complete beginner, an experienced birder or buying as a present, we'll be happy to help.

10am – 4pm, Free event, no need to book

Saturday 28 March, Great British Spring Clean. Join us and the Friends of Pagham Harbour for The Great British Spring Clean, clearing our beaches of litter and making a difference whilst in good company. **Meet 10am at Church Norton car park PO20 9DT. Free**

Sunday 29 March, Bird Watching for Beginners – Pagham Harbour's Birds of Spring. Can you separate your chiffchaffs from your willow warblers? Your sand martins from your house martins and swallows? Would you recognise a wheatear if you saw one? Following the format of our popular Bird Watching for Beginners classes, this workshop focuses on early spring arrivals. Starting with a short theory session, followed by a practical walk on our wonderful reserve, we look at identification through shape,

colour, behaviour, song and habitat, plus discussing ecology and migration.

10am (duration 3 hours) Booking essential £10 per person / £8 RSPB members

Sunday 29 March, Someone to Guide You.

Unsure of what that bird is? Our friendly guides will be at our **Church Norton Hide, RSPB Pagham Harbour, PO20 9DT**, to help you spot and identify the wildlife that you see.

10am – 1pm Drop-in. Free

Check out our website www.rspb.org/paghamharbour for full events program.

RSPB Pagham Harbour & Medmerry Visitor Centre, Selsey Road, Sidlesham PO20 7NE

Email: pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk

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