

A New Club Badge!

Introducing the Sea-watching Badge



Eider – Mark Clements

By Trevor Williams

The introduction of this new badge is intended to incentivise and reward members who spend time sea-watching and recording, on our website, the shorebirds and oceanic species they see off our coastline. But first let's establish what we mean by sea-watching. Here's a brief definition:

'Sea-watching is a specialised form of birding that involves the static observation of seabirds from a coastal vantage point. It's typically done from headlands, piers, or other elevated coastal locations that offer a good view of the sea and migrating bird routes. Sea-watchers look for a variety of seabirds, including shearwaters, petrels, skuas, gulls, terns, and various ducks, divers and waders. Sea-watching helps researchers and birders understand the distribution and movements of seabirds, migration patterns, and the impact of weather and environmental conditions on their populations. It also provides opportunities to spot rare or unusual species. Sea-watchers often use binoculars and telescopes, especially when observing birds at a distance. They need to be familiar with the different species, their flight styles, and how they behave at sea. Sea-watching can be productive at any time of year, but it's often most popular during migration seasons, especially during storms that bring birds closer to the shore.'

How do I earn a badge?

To be awarded a badge you must earn a total of a thousand points, through a combination of time spent sea-watching and species recorded.

You get 10 points for every half-hour spent watching - so typically for a two hour sea-watch you'd earn 40 points towards the total.

Points are also awarded for each of the species on our selected list - see below. 10 points for the easy species, 15 for the more difficult or scarce and 20 points for the rare ones. Points for species are only awarded for the first time you record them - so it does get progressively more challenging to add new birds to your sea-watching list! The most difficult or rare species have deliberately been omitted from this list to avoid the need to complete county rarity description forms.

As a 'one off' bonus you also get 100 points for attending either our annual coordinated sea watch or any of our increasingly frequent pop-up events. You don't however get credited with the time spent observing at that qualifying event. If you do attend more you get points for the time spent of course.

Our testing of the criteria over several months suggests that members who initially attend one of our events should earn around 300 points (depending on season, weather etc) and with a dedicated monthly sea-watch (more if you fancy it!) most members should qualify within approximately 12 - 18 months.

In order to qualify each of your sea-watching sessions will need to be recorded on the club website - giving details of the time spent and species seen. For example: Location - Cromer Pier - Date and Time started - 11/10/2025 - 07.30 - species seen - number - any comments e.g. 'all in winter plumage' and adding a comment - 'during 11/2 hour sea-watch' - which can be simply 'cut and pasted'. Its as simple as that!

Once you think you've qualified for a badge just email us with the details - much the same as you do for a 'green' eco-badge.

The introduction of this badge coincides with this year's **Coordinated Sea-watch Event on Saturday 11th October** where we will have teams at Sheringham Tank, Cromer North Lodge Park, Mundesley and Happisburgh. Any records which predate this will not qualify.

Sea-watching WhatsApp group

If you are likely to be sea-watching on a regular basis you might consider joining the dedicated **NE Norfolk Sea-watching WhatsApp group** - which is also open to non-members along the coast and encourages 'live' reporting to assist gather data for our sea-bird flight speed project.

Top tips for better sea-watching

For more advice about how to get the most out of your sea-watching sessions here is an extract from the recently published 10th Anniversary Commemorative Book:

1. Location, location, location: Choose your sea-watching location with care, preferably a prominent point which extends out from the coast, is easily accessible and provides some form of shelter.
2. Timing is key: Spring and autumn are the best seasons, when there is an on-shore wind. The first two hours after dawn is the optimal time but evenings can be good too.
3. Be prepared: Take all your kit with you, including refreshments as once you're settled you might be there for a couple of hours or more. Use the bathroom before you set off!
4. Wrap up warm: Even on a mild day an on-shore wind can be chilling. Take something to sit on. If you get cold you can't hold your optics still and your concentration goes.
5. Take the right kit: You'll need binoculars to scan and look at birds which are close to the shoreline but a telescope is handy to zoom in on more distant birds. Regularly clean your lenses as you might not notice the accumulation of salt and spray.
6. Know the seascape: Before you start, establish landmarks' or points of reference to help find birds and describe their location to others. Turbine: boats, buoys, crab-pot, f lags are all useful markers.
7. Keep your eyes on the prize: Watch the bird / flock as long as they are in view - you rarely get a second chance. Birds look different as the angle or light changes or they gain or lose height.
8. Look and learn: Concentrate on the key bird features. Study shape and flight styles as groups of birds often behave in distinctive ways. Plumage details can be difficult to see at a distance.
9. Check your ID: Have a reference guide handy as you may not be familiar with features on flying birds, which are different from those of birds at rest e.g. ducks or terns.
10. Keep a log of what you see: Keep records as you watch - time, species, number, direction and age - and make sure you add them to the club website for future reference.



List of qualifying species:

Points for species when first recorded | **Common - 10** | **Scarce - 15** | **Rare – 20**

Avocet	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Arctic Skua	Little Auk
Arctic Tern	Little Egret
Bar-tailed Godwit	Little Gull
Barnacle Goose	Little Ringed Plover
Black Guillemot	Little Tern
Black-headed Gull	Long-tailed Duck
Black-tailed Godwit	Mallard
Brent Goose	Manx Shearwater
Canada Goose	Mediterranean Gull
Cattle Egret	Mediterranean Shearwater
Common Gull	Mute Swan
Common Sandpiper	Oystercatcher
Common Scoter	Pink-footed Goose
Common Tern	Pintail
Cormorant	Pomarine Skua
Curlew	Puffin
Curlew Sandpiper	Purple Sandpiper
Dunlin	Razorbill
Egyptian Goose	Red-breasted Merganser
Eider	Red-necked Grebe
Fulmar	Red-throated Diver
Gadwall	Redshank
Gannet	Ringed Plover
Goldeneye	Sanderling
Goosander	Sandwich Tern
Great Black-backed Gull	Scaup
Great Crested Grebe	Shag
Great Egret	Shelduck
Great Northern Diver	Shoveler
Great Skua	Slavonian Grebe
Greenshank	Sooty Shearwater
Grey Heron	Teal
Greylag	Tufted Duck
Grey Phalarope	Turnstone
Grey Plover	Velvet Scoter
Guillemot	Whimbrel
Herring Gull	White-fronted Goose
Kittiwake	Wigeon
Knot	Woodcock